



Aikaterine:
Identity and Power in Eleventh-Century Byzantium.

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Summary

This thesis is a biographical study of the life of Aikaterine, the Bulgarian-born woman who arrived in Byzantium in 1018 as a prisoner-of-war, and became empress of Byzantium between 1057-1059. It utilises a structural approach influenced by methodologies from the social sciences. In this thesis, the political importance of the link Aikaterine established between the Komnenos family and the Bulgarian family of the Kometopouloi is demonstrated. Furthermore, it is shown that as the first empress to rule after the reigns of Zoe and Theodora and the end of the 'Macedonian' dynasty, Aikaterine's reign was a historically significant bridging period. In addition, Aikaterine is shown to be a politically important and visible actor during the first years of Constantine X's reign. Throughout the thesis, Aikaterine's life is explored as a paradigm for the lives of other women and men in middle Byzantine society and in other comparable medieval societies.

This thesis is composed of six chapters: a prosopographical chapter, four thematic chapters, and a concluding chapter. The thematic chapters are focused upon the analytical categories of identity and power. They are organised as case studies orientated around Aikaterine's life course and targeted towards different subjects in Byzantine and medieval studies. Each chapter discusses how representations of Aikaterine were shaped and reshaped by messages communicated by different groups in Byzantium, to project messages about power. Each chapter also examines how Aikaterine herself was empowered through the shaping of the identities she carried. The findings of each chapter are located within wider scholarly discussions in different areas of Byzantine and medieval studies, with a focus upon women's studies. This thesis is intended as an exemplar which demonstrates the potential for biographical studies to bring about advancements in Byzantine and wider medieval studies. The concluding remarks offer suggestions for the way biographical studies can be further used to advance scholarly understandings of the patterns structuring the lives of people in Byzantium and other medieval societies.

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A note on translations

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. When a previously published translation is used, the name of the translator and the page number in the relevant edition is given in a footnote.

List of Abbreviations

Manuscripts

MGS 02. *Hellas Athêna Ethnikê Bibliothêkê tês Hellados (EBE) Megalê tou Genous Scholê (MΓΣ)* 02.

Numéro diktyon : 6336.

The Writings of Michael Psellos

Chron. *Chronographia*. Ed & German trans. D. R. Reinsch, 2015. Berlin.

OM 5. *Public Proclamation from the Emperor, Lord Constantine Doukas*. Ed. A. R. Littlewood, 1985.

Oratoria Minora, no. 5, 16-18. Leipzig.

Π 1 (or 2, 3 etc.). Signifies the numbered texts in *Epistulae*, 2 vols. Ed. S. Papaioannou, 2019. Berlin.

The Writings of John Skylitzes

Contin. *Continuation of the Chronicle*. Ed. E. Th. Tsolakes, 1968. Thessalonike.

Synop. *Synopsis of Histories*. Ed. H. Thurn, 1973. Berlin.

Other cited sources

ODB. Kazhdan A.P (ed.), 2005 (1990), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Online Version. Oxford.

PBW (2016). Jeffreys M. et. al., 2016. *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*.

PLP. Trapp, E., Beyer, H.V. & Walther, R. (ed. CH. Host), 2001. *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, CD Rom-Version. Vienna.

PMBZ. Lilie, R.J., Ludwig, C., Zielke, B. & Pratsch, T., 2013. *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*.

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Introduction and Methodology

Preface

Compared to most women in eleventh-century Byzantium, evidence for Aikaterine's life is relatively abundant. The primary reason for this is because Aikaterine, who lived between c1016 and c1065, was a Byzantine empress alongside the emperor Isaac I Komnenos for two years between 1057-1059. As Évelyne Patlagean has pointed out, empresses and other female members of the imperial house are consistently more visible in Byzantine source material than non-imperial women, and indeed most non-imperial men.¹ However, there is also a second reason for Aikaterine's visibility in source material. She receives attention in Byzantine narrative histories because she was a descendant of the imperial family of the Kometopouloi (a nickname meaning 'sons of the *Komes*', or 'count') who held power over much of the Balkan region at the turn of the eleventh century, before they were defeated by the Byzantine emperor Basil II (fig. 1).² She appears in the historical record at an early stage in her life because she arrived in Byzantium as a prisoner-of-war and a symbol of Byzantine imperial dominion, before marrying Isaac Komnenos, and therefore enhancing the reputation of the elite Komnenos family. Evidence also survives for Aikaterine's actions at the time of Isaac's abdication and when she was a nun at the Myrelaion monastery from the period after her reign, including an inscription written in her own name in an evangeliary preserved in the National Library of Greece (*Constantinople, Megalê tou Genous Scholê ms. 02*, henceforth *MGS 02*).³

Despite Aikaterine's visibility in source material, she has not attracted much attention amongst modern historians. She was recently noted as a historical figure of interest by Anthony Kaldellis, but her life has never until this thesis been subject to a sustained biographical study.⁴ The only biographical study appears in a short article focusing on *MGS 02*, by Charles Diehl. Although Diehl provided a helpful overview of the source material for her life, his study mostly repeated what was

¹ Patlagean 1987, 592.

² For the name Kometopouloi and the sources where it appears see below, 33. This thesis uses the plural Kometopouloi (Κομητόπουλοι) to identify the family (as opposed to the singular Kometopoulos). This follows the usage of the *ODB* 2005 'Kometopouloi' and reflects how the plural is always used in the Greek and Armenian sources.

³ The full manuscript reference is: *Hellas Athêna Ethnikê Bibliothêkê tês Hellados (EBE) Megalê tou Genous Scholê (MGS) 02*. Numéro diktyon : 6336. For the provenance of the manuscript see below, 55.

⁴ Kaldellis 2019, 235-36. Kaldellis wrote that he knows of only one person to have performed in Roman/Byzantine triumphs as both a prisoner and a victor, the Roman general Ventidius Bassus (first century BC). He incorrectly identified Il. 86-93 of *Letter Π 139* as depicting Aikaterine in a triumph, but she is depicted as a participant in imperial victory in the text (see below, 153-154), so his point still stands.

in the sources, concluding that Aikaterine loved power passionately.⁵ This thesis has two main aims. The first is to provide a comprehensive study of Aikaterine's life utilising a structural approach influenced by methodologies from the social sciences. The second is to use a biographical study of her life to shed light on the lives of other people in eleventh-century Byzantium, and neighbouring societies. Aikaterine deserves a study to herself because she was a significant figure in Byzantine history. Firstly, her marriage to Isaac Komnenos established an important link between the Komnenos family and the imperial family of the Kometopouloi, which greatly impacted the position of the former in the Byzantine social hierarchy. Secondly, she reigned as empress in a transitional period in Byzantine political history, in the aftermath of the end of the two-century-old 'Macedonian' dynasty, and the end of a period of three decades when the imperial rulers were dependent upon ties with the 'Macedonian' empresses Zoe and Theodora for legitimacy. It will be demonstrated in this thesis that for the above two reasons, representations of Aikaterine were important for the Komnenos family, both before and after they attained imperial status, and for the emperor Constantine X Doukas, who succeeded Isaac I. Overall, Aikaterine's reign as Byzantine empress between 1057-1059 formed a crucial bridging period between the reigns of the empresses before and after her. As will be shown in this thesis, the roles she performed as empress were shaped by the legacy of Zoe and Theodora, and in turn influenced the trajectory of Eudokia's reign. Aikaterine's reign is thus positioned at a crucial juncture in Byzantine women's history, and a study of the reign is therefore invaluable for the light it sheds on the histories of Byzantine empresses in the first and second halves of the eleventh century.

In connection with the second major aim of this thesis, Aikaterine also deserves a study to herself because her relatively high visibility in source material means the findings of a biographical study of her life could potentially shed light on the lives of other non-imperial women and men who lived in eleventh-century Byzantium, concerning whom we have less information. A study of Aikaterine's life history is especially promising in this respect, because her status as an imperial Bulgarian woman means that our source material gives attention to her aspects of life before she became an empress, as well as to her reign. Moreover, because Aikaterine carried identities as both a Bulgarian and Byzantine imperial woman it will be possible to use the findings of this study to further understandings of Bulgarian and Byzantine history, as well as the positions of individuals and groups in Byzantium who had been born into non-Byzantine societies. In this way, this thesis aims to contribute to recent efforts to develop a more cross cultural approach to Byzantine Studies.⁶

⁵ Diehl 1922, 243-248.

⁶ Nilsson, I. 2021, November 11, 'A man of war, a man of letters: John Axouch at the Komnenian Court'. *Gustav Karlsson Lectures on Byzantine Culture and Literature 2021*. Swedish Research Institute, Istanbul. The main

This thesis is composed of six chapters. These are a prosopographical chapter, four thematic chapters, and a concluding chapter. Each of the thematic chapters functions as case study of aspects of Aikaterine's life, focused around the analytical categories of identity and power. Each chapter discusses how representations of Aikaterine were shaped and reshaped by messages communicated by different groups in Byzantium, to project messages about power. Each chapter also examines how Aikaterine herself was empowered through the shaping of the identities she carried. Through the thematic chapters, I aim to contribute to scholarly discussions in different areas of Byzantine and medieval studies, with a focus upon women's studies. This thesis is intended as an exemplar which demonstrates the potential for biographical studies to bring about advancements in Byzantine and wider medieval studies. The concluding remarks will offer suggestions for the way biographical studies can be used to further scholarly understandings of Byzantium and other medieval societies.

Biographical methodology

In the past two decades, several significant scholarly contributions to the study of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium have utilised a biographical approach. Notable examples include Catherine Holmes on Basil II (2005), Leonora Neville on Anna Komnene (2016) and Dimitris Krallis on Michael Attaleiates (2019). The choice to utilise a biographical approach in this thesis was influenced by Krallis' proposal that biographical studies are valuable because they facilitate the studies of relationships and interactions which shed light on political, social and cultural dimensions of Byzantine society, which often evade neat academic categorizations.⁷ Beginning with Diehl, biographical studies of Byzantine empresses retained popularity throughout the twentieth century, with notable studies produced by both Kenneth Holum and Lynda Garland.⁸ Studies of empresses combining biographical and thematic approaches have been popular from the turn of the twenty-first century. Examples include Barbara Hill's monograph on eleventh- and twelfth-century imperial women, the study of Theodosian empresses by Anja Busch, David Potter's biography of the empress Theodora and the recent study of late Byzantine empresses by Petra Melichar.⁹

The use of a biographical method for the study of Byzantine women has however been criticised, especially by Liz James.¹⁰ James' criticism is comparable with wider criticism of biography as a genre

theme of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies (2011), was for example 'Byzantium without Borders'. See also: Kaldellis 2019; Durak & Jevtić (eds.) 2019; Walker 2013; Laiou 2012.

⁷ Krallis 2019, 25-26.

⁸ Diehl 1906; Holum 1982; Garland 1999. Another example discussed in chapter five is Talbot's short study of Theodora Palaiologina: Talbot 1992, 295-303.

⁹ Hill 1999; Busch 2015; Potter 2015; Melichar 2019.

¹⁰ James 2001.

which is dated and positivist.¹¹ Conventional biographies often take a narrative form, woven around key biological moments in the life course.¹² However, even biographers of twentieth and twenty-first century figures face the challenge of what Augustine described as the unknowability of another human being.¹³ This difficulty is exacerbated for biographers of early medieval subjects, where the source material is often scarce.¹⁴ Although the source material for Aikaterine is richer than for most individuals in Byzantine society, it is still not detailed enough to support a sustained narrative of her life.¹⁵

In the light of these challenges, the present study uses a biographical model proposed by Pauline Stafford for the study of early medieval lives. Stafford has advocated an approach to biography influenced by methodologies from the social sciences.¹⁶ In her study of two eleventh-century English queens, Emma and Edith, she proposed that although sustained narrative biography of these individuals is not possible, it is possible to examine how structures and frameworks shaped their lives. She argued that the convergence of multiple roles and identities upon individuals is a commonplace of women's history.¹⁷ In a later study, Stafford also called attention to the potential for this form of biography to demonstrate the effectiveness of structures in individual lives. She argued that a biographical approach is valuable because it exposes how different roles and identities became effective by intersecting in different ways through the uniqueness of each individual life.¹⁸

The four thematic chapters in this thesis follow Stafford's approach. The chapters are united with each other through their focus upon the themes of identity and power, which are the principal analytical categories used in this thesis. Each chapter investigates factors shaping and reshaping Aikaterine's identity and capacity to exercise power as an actor situated in wider societal structures. The aim is to examine how structuring factors shaping the lives of Byzantines became effective in Aikaterine's individual life. Because this thesis uses all of the source material available for one individual life, this investigation will yield well-evidenced findings intended to fuel further discussion

¹¹ Bates, Crick & Hamilton 2006, 11.

¹² Prestwich 2010, 326.

¹³ See: Brown 2000, 172, quoting Augustine, *Confessions* 4.14, 22. See further the comments of Nelson 2000, 130.

¹⁴ For the difficulties of writing conventional biographies on medieval subjects: Foot 2011, 3-4.

¹⁵ Holum's comment on biographies on Byzantine Empresses are pertinent: 'Do we know enough about any empress to make the study of a single one advisable, or to write anything like biography, or is the result actually narrative history of a reign with special and somewhat awkward attention to a Theodora, a Sophia, or a Pulcheria?': Holum 2016.

¹⁶ Stafford's methodology bears similarities with the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens, who advocates the study of structures and agents without giving primacy to either. He places knowledgeable and reflexive agents at the centre of his examination of structural processes, proposing agents' actions reproduce structural processes. Giddens 1982, 2-3, 90-92, 281-284. See also below, 7 n. 96.

¹⁷ Stafford 1997, 63-66.

¹⁸ Stafford 2006a, 1-9.

in several areas of Byzantine and medieval studies. Moreover, it will challenge some assumptions made by scholars who have based arguments upon a broader body of evidence. In this way, I aim to build upon a proposal made by Shaun Tougher. He suggested that material relating to the imperial family, more abundant than for other individuals, can be used to shed light on the lives of others in Byzantine society. Tougher highlighted biography as one way of achieving this.¹⁹

This thesis is also influenced by the methodological proposals of Patricia Skinner, who has examined the applicability of the life course as a tool for structuring the lives of women from the past. Skinner argued for wider patterns crossing different societies which distinguished the way medieval women experienced the life course, compared to men. She has further argued that the advantage of organising a study of historical woman around stages of the life course is that it breaks down regional and temporal boundaries which shape many studies of women's history in the medieval period. For these reasons, Skinner proposed, a study orientated around life stages is an effective strategy for thinking about similarities and differences in medieval women's lives in different places and time periods.²⁰

In the light of Skinner's proposals, the ordering of the thematic chapters in this thesis is based upon different stages of Aikaterine's life. This is intended to facilitate the comparison of the findings concerning Aikaterine's life with the lives of other elite, royal and imperial women and men in other times and places. This is important for this thesis because in chapters two, three and four I ask whether methodologies developed during studies of elite women and power in the medieval west can aid the interpretation of evidence relating to Aikaterine, and other women in Byzantine society. In addition, the organisation of this thesis reflects how in Byzantium, like in other medieval societies, women were very often identified and judged by their performance of normative familial roles, which grew out of roles associated with the life course. This aspect of Byzantine society and culture is discussed in detail in the fifth chapter.²¹

Principal analytical categories: Identity and power

In this thesis, I aim to shed light on Aikaterine's life, and the lives of other comparable individuals, through use of two principal analytical categories: identity and power. For analytical clarity, I will now explain what I mean when I use these terms. Throughout the thesis, a basic definition of

¹⁹ Tougher 2013a, 398-399.

²⁰ Skinner 2015, 17, 20, 25-28.

²¹ For observations on the way the roles of English queens grew out of familial roles, linked to the life course: Stafford 1997, 63-66.

identity given by Kathryn Woodward is used. This is that identity is 'a socially recognised position'.²² In other words, identity in this thesis refers to how others see an individual, and how an individual sees themselves. As Woodward pointed out, it is commonly accepted amongst scholars of the social sciences that individuals can have multiple identities. This is the case in Byzantine Studies, where several studies focusing upon the fluidity of identity have been published in the last decade.²³ I also follow Stafford, who as mentioned above, proposed that identities can converge, or intersect, in distinct ways within individual lives. I will discuss further implications of this approach below, when discussing the analytical category, power. Following Woodward, in this thesis important dimensions of Aikaterine's identity are argued to have been her class, her gender and her ethnicity.²⁴ Moreover, identity is approached as being shaped by structural factors, meaning forces beyond the control of the individual. An example of a structural factor is the expectations and assumptions which shaped how Byzantines saw an individual with Aikaterine's class, gender and ethnicity. A further factor was the Byzantine political framework, and the actions of specific groups within this framework, who crafted a particular image of Aikaterine's identity for their own political aims.

I will now turn to the analytical category of power, and the related categories of action and agency. In this thesis, I define action as an individual or group's intervention in the world around them, resulting in their influencing a particular specific situation or process. Action thus has a transformative capacity. Actions are further defined as agentic processes, meaning a contextually embedded action, situated by structural factors. Agents nonetheless have the capacity to exercise their will by choosing from a range of options for action, within the structural context. There are two points to consider here relating to the analytical category of identity discussed above. Firstly, one of the structural processes shaping the range of options open to individuals for action is the convergence of different identities within their lives. The way that different identities combine to marginalise individuals has been examined within studies of intersectionality, and specifically in a Byzantine context by Roland Betancourt.²⁵ Secondly, the range of options open to actors can include reshaping aspects of their identities, which as discussed above, are simultaneously shaped by forces outside of their control.

²² Woodward 2004, 7.

²³ Studies include: Betancourt 2020; Saint-Gullian & Stathakopoulos (eds.) 2012; Herrin & Saint-Gullian (eds.) 2011. The study of identity became popular in Byzantine Studies in the 1990s and there is now a large bibliography. This is summarised by Durak & Jevtić 2019, who discuss studies on the fluidity of identity on page 5.

²⁴ Woodward 2004, 22.

²⁵ Betancourt 2020. The framework of intersectionality was first developed by Crenshaw 1989, 139-167.

In this thesis, Aikaterine is approached as an actor with agentic capacity. By this I mean that she could exercise her will by choosing from a range of choices open to her to act to mediate structuring contexts and negotiate paths to the future.²⁶ I also seek to discuss the specific choices Aikaterine made and the actions which she took, but the limitations of the available evidence means that this is not always possible. For example, Psellos' *Letter* Π 1 (Appendix: Text 1) sheds light on Aikaterine's capacity to choose from a range of options when managing the responses to petitions reaching the imperial court away from Constantinople (analysed in chapter three), but specific evidence for Aikaterine's response to the letter has not survived.

In this study agency is understood as closely linked to power.²⁷ The definition of power utilised is influenced by Stafford. Power is approached as the capability of an individual or group to pursue specific objectives through action, even against the will of others. It can be competitive, where an individual or group has the capability to achieve an objective against the resistance of others. It can also be relational, when it is founded upon a permanent or semi-permanent relationship between two parties. Even if an individual or group fails to achieve their objective, they have still exercised power, their failure does not equate to powerlessness, but rather that they have encountered a stronger power.²⁸

The approach to power in this study is also influenced by the methodology articulated in a volume of essays edited by Heather Tanner, which advocate a 'beyond exceptionalism' model as a paradigm for discussing the power and agency of medieval elite women. This model involves starting with the premise that women in positions of power were 'expected, accepted and routine'.²⁹ Within this volume, several scholars encourage approaching the category of gender as significant, but one within an array of structural factors that determined the ability of women and men in medieval western Europe to exercise power. Charlotte Cartwright for example pointed out that modern historians have often assumed that medieval men held power even when this is not specifically asserted, but that many of the qualities that brought men to power in the eleventh-century west also worked for women. Erin L. Jordan has on the other hand highlighted that women's inability to maintain power in twelfth-century Crusader Antioch stemmed from a complex web of factors. Theresa Earenfight has also called for further considerations of the interplay of gender and other

²⁶ My definition of agency is drawn from the arguments of Emirbayer & Mische 1997 962-1023, especially, 970, 985, 1011-1013. I am also influenced by the structuration theory of Giddens. He notes that the agency of specific actors can have intended and unintended impacts upon subsequent structural processes: Giddens 1982, 5-14, 281-282. See also: Meads 1932. For a definition of agency as the terms and the means by which individuals can exercise their will to leverage power: Collette 2006, 15.

²⁷ See the comment of Giddens 1982, 14-16.

²⁸ Stafford 1997, 161. See also: James 2001, 5-6.

²⁹ Tanner, Gathagan & Hunnecutt 2019, 2.

circumstances, in studies of women's power. This thesis will ask if Aikaterine's power, situated in Byzantine society rather than the medieval west, was potentially embedded in political processes that involved women and men, thereby answering Cartwright's call for historians to stop overlooking women's involvement and power in routine political processes.³⁰

As a final point, Earenfight also argued against categorising power wielded directly through offices as more potent or effective than when it is derived from other sources, such as marriage, maternity, dynastic status and networks of influence. Such an approach, Earenfight proposed, enables scholars of elite women to analyse the way that gender shaped the exercise of power in patriarchal and misogynistic medieval societies, without succumbing to the trap of categorising power as either masculine and effective, or feminine and subordinate.³¹ In this thesis, I follow Earenfight's proposal by utilising a democratic approach to the potential factors empowering Aikaterine, for example approaching her possession of the title empress as one factor empowering her alongside others, including her dynastic reputation and position within the Komnenos family.

Overview of the period and terminology

This thesis uses Aikaterine's biography to shed light on the lives of other women and men in middle-Byzantium. The following brief overview of the politics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is intended to facilitate these comparisons. The overview begins with the reign of Zoe as empress in 1028 and there is a focus on the empresses who reigned before and after Aikaterine. It is also important at this stage to define the terminology used in this thesis to describe the empresses of this period. Elisabeth Bensammar, identified three categories of empress.

Nous avons distingué les cas de régence et de règne souverain de l'impératrice de ceux où l'impératrice fut seulement co-régnante avec l'empereur.³²

Following Bensammar, in this study I identify women as empress sovereign who ruled without an emperor, those who ruled on behalf of a crowned junior emperor as empress regent, and those who ruled alongside an emperor, usually to whom they were married, as empress co-regnant. Empresses will be categorised the first time they are mentioned in each chapter, and for readability will thereafter mostly be described simply as 'empress'.

³⁰ Cartwright 2019, 91-92; Jordan 2019, 242-243; Earenfight 2019, 289.

³¹ Earenfight 2019, 271-293.

³² Bensammar 1976, 244.

Between 1028 and 1056, legitimate rule of the Byzantine Empire was constituted through Zoe and her sister Theodora's statuses as Constantine VIII's daughters, and the last members of the line of succession which extended back to Basil I (r.867-886) and is conventionally described in modern scholarship as the 'Macedonian' dynasty. Zoe married three men who thus became emperors (Romanos III, Michael IV, Constantine IX) and adopted one (Michael V), before her death in 1050. Furthermore, Zoe and Theodora ruled alone as sovereign empresses in 1042. Theodora was an empress co-regnant alongside Constantine IX between 1042 and 1055 and ruled alone as sovereign empress in 1055-56.

Theodora's death signalled the end of the Macedonian dynasty which had ruled since 867 (the longest dynasty of rulers in Byzantine history up to this point). The end of the dynasty meant that potential rulers now looked elsewhere to gain legitimacy. This period has been described by Eric McGeer as a 'power vacuum', and a 'no man's land' between the end of Macedonian rule and the Komnenian takeover.³³ During these years Byzantium also suffered a series of severe military reverses, in the east to the Seljuk Turks and losing their Italian territories in the west to the Normans. It was in this unstable context that during the second half of the eleventh century, a series of claimants to the Byzantine throne attempted to establish legitimate authority as emperors. They were mostly men from powerful Eastern Anatolian families, whose bloodlines are described as highly prestigious (εύγενές) in written sources, but who had never before provided an emperor or empress.³⁴ These families included the Botaneiatas, Bryennoi, Diogenai, Doukai and Komnenoi.³⁵

When Theodora was on her deathbed in August 1056, she crowned a high ranking official, Michael Bringas, who became Michael VI, as emperor. In 1057, Isaac Komnenos and a group of eastern military leaders, including members of the Doukas family, rebelled against Michael. Isaac was victorious and became emperor in the same year, with his wife Aikaterine empress co-regnant. In 1059, Isaac abdicated the throne to his ally Constantine Doukas. Aikaterine was tonsured and died soon after in c1065. The Doukai held imperial power until 1078 but their supremacy was disrupted by the tenure of Romanos IV Diogenes as a co-emperor between 1068-1071, and by several rebellions during the reign of Michael VII Doukas, who reigned between 1071-1078.

In this period, Eudokia Makrembolitissa was empress co-regnant to Constantine X Doukas between 1059-1068, and empress regent, both alone and alongside her husband Romanos IV between 1068-

³³ McGeer 2019, 3. See also, Leidholm 2019, 146.

³⁴ Quote taken from Attaleiates' description of Romanos IV Diogenes: Attaleiates, *History*, B 99, l. 9. Following scholarly convention, I cite Attaleiates' *History* by referring to the page numbers of the Bonn edition (B) of the text.

³⁵ For an analysis of the relationships between powerful families in the tenth and eleventh centuries: Cheynet 1996, 261-286.

1071. Romanos was defeated by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert in August 1071. Then Eudokia was tonsured and exiled to the Piperoudion monastery on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus (which she had founded), but she was able to return to Constantinople in 1078 during the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates. She is last attested as being in Alexios I Komnenos' favour during the early years of his reign.³⁶

Maria 'of Alania', the daughter of the Georgian king Bagrat IV (r.1027-1072) and Borena, the sister of Dorgholeli, the ruler of Ovset'i (Alania), was empress co-regnant alongside Michael VII between 1071-1078.³⁷ The rule of the Doukai was ended by a coup led by Nikephoros III in 1078, when Michael retired to a monastery and Nikephoros married Maria. Nikephoros was himself overthrown in 1081 when Alexios I gained the throne once again for the Komnenoi, in part thanks to the support of the Doukai, secured through Alexios' marriage to Eirene Doukaina, who became empress co-regnant. Alexios managed to secure the succession of his son John II in 1118, bringing about a century of Komnenian rule. At the start of Alexios' reign, Maria left the Great Palace, the imperial centre in Constantinople for the nearby Mangana palace. At some point afterwards she became a nun and is last attested alive in 1103.³⁸

Chapter summary

The first chapter of this thesis offers the first prosopographical overview of Aikaterine's life since Diehl's 1922 article, which is in need of updating. All of the sources for Aikaterine are reviewed alongside each other and basic information is given concerning the chronological outline of her life and the locations to which she can be traced. It will be demonstrated that Aikaterine was an important participant in several important political events in the eleventh century. This chapter also establishes parameters for further discussion of facets of Aikaterine's identity in the thematic chapters. These include her name, ethnicity, and her social status at different stages in her life. In the first chapter, I argue that Aikaterine was perceived in Byzantine society as a Bulgarian imperial woman because she was the daughter of a Kometopouloi ruler. I therefore challenge the recent arguments of Mikto Panov, who has proposed that the Kometopouloi were not widely identified with the First Bulgarian Empire, outside of Byzantine imperial propaganda.

³⁶ Komnene, *Alexiad*, 9.6.

³⁷ Maria is conventionally named with this epithet in modern scholarship, although it does not appear consistently in Byzantine sources. For examples of the epithet 'of Alania' (ἐξ Ἀλανῶν), which must refer to Maria's matriline: Zonaras, *Epitome*, 17.17, l. 7, 18.9, l. 10, 18.21, l. 16. Line numbers cited for Zonaras' *Epitome* are from the Bonn edition of the text. *Cont.*, Ts 178, l. 10.

³⁸ She is attested in the acts of a Georgian Ecclesiastical Council in 1103: Garland 2006a, 100-101.

The second chapter examines structural factors which shaped Aikaterine's overlapping identities as a foreigner, captive, Bulgarian imperial woman and Byzantine elite woman. The focus of the chapter is a divergence in the depiction of Aikaterine's genealogy in Nikephoros Bryennios' *History* and an interpolation of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories*. It is argued that this divergence sheds light on how Aikaterine's overlapping identities were reshaped and deployed to enhance the reputation of her affine relatives, the Komnenos family. It is further argued that links with Aikaterine were crucial for the position of the Komnenos family in the eleventh century, eventually leading to Isaac becoming emperor in 1057. In this chapter, a counter-point is offered to an argument of Nathaniel Leidholm, who has proposed that eleventh-century elite Byzantine women were identified primarily with their natal kin even after marriage. Moreover, there is a discussion of whether gender should be considered alongside a range of structural factors when considering the shaping of medieval women's lives, as has been proposed by E. L. Jordan working within the 'beyond exceptionalism' project.

The key piece of evidence for the third chapter is *Letter* Π 1, addressed by Psellos to Aikaterine when she was empress, in 1059. The focus of this chapter however, is on the evidence for continuities in Aikaterine's power both before and after she became empress. Comparisons are drawn between Π 1 and another letter written by Psellos, Π 255, concerning the elite Byzantine woman Anna Radene. The chapter investigates the overlap in the positions of Aikaterine and Anna Radene and thus aims to shed further light on the power of both as elite women in Byzantine society. The reshaping of Aikaterine's overlapping identities is also investigated as a factor empowering her in the period before she became empress in 1057.

This chapter makes use of the concept of 'duality' to explain Aikaterine's power before and after she became empress. This concept has been developed by scholars of queenship in the medieval west to explain how queens held power as participants in monarchy and as lords and landholders in their own right.³⁹ The chapter also builds upon arguments made by Margaret Mullett concerning Byzantine letter reception and the related arguments of several other scholars of Byzantium concerning the importance of a system of petition and response within the Byzantine political framework.⁴⁰ I aim to show that Aikaterine, Radene and other eleventh-century elite Byzantine women took action within this framework, and that some aspects of their power therefore stemmed from the same factors as Byzantine men. Here once more I engage with arguments developed in the 'beyond exceptionalism' project.

³⁹ Benz 2012, 65-94; Musson 2009, 166-168; Omrod 2009, 8.

⁴⁰ Nilsson, J. 2017, 100-103; Holmes 2010, 146; Macrides 2004, 356; Mullett 1997, 31-42.

Chapter four focuses upon Aikaterine's identity and power as a Byzantine empress and participant in imperial rulership. The chapter argued Aikaterine's two year reign as empress was a key bridging period between the reigns of the last 'Macedonian' empresses Zoe and Theodora before her and that of her successor Eudokia Makrembolitissa, and asks to what extent she was an important and necessary component of the imperial rule exercised between 1057-1059. I foreground evidence showing that it was crucial that Aikaterine as empress was presented as a partner to the emperor Isaac so that the reign appeared to be comparable to the reigns of previous emperors alongside the empresses Zoe and Theodora, who had legitimised their rule. Therefore, light is shed on the continuities to the positions of eleventh-century empresses. Here I challenge arguments made by Barbara Hill. She argued that Zoe and Theodora are 'special cases', and moreover proposed that political power exercised by women in the eleventh century was predicated by a crisis of male authority, meaning that when male authority was restored in the twelfth century, empresses faded into the background.⁴¹ I firstly call for further study of Zoe and Theodora alongside the empresses who succeeded them, and moreover propose that empresses' power in this period was underpinned by continuities in a different way than Hill argued, because their positions were not dependent upon the weakness of the emperor.

The key question underpinning the investigation of this chapter is whether it was necessary for Aikaterine to perform a role in imperial rulership. This question is also influenced by proposals developed in the 'beyond exceptionalism' project. In particular, this chapter makes use of proposals by Nina Verbanaz, who argued that queens of the Salian dynasty in the Holy Roman Empire performed necessary and expected roles which they also shaped and expanded.⁴² Following Verbanaz, I also ask if Aikaterine, and her successor Eudokia, were able to exercise agency by themselves shaping the roles which they were expected to perform as empresses in partnership with the emperor.

This chapter also engages with arguments of previous scholars concerning the reasons for visibility of elite Byzantine women in late eleventh-century source material. Scholars including Alexander Kazhdan, Ann Wharton Epstein and Angeliki Laiou identified the late eleventh century as a period when elite women performed a more visible role in society, because of their importance to a new aristocratic class.⁴³ However, Leonora Neville has recently questioned what developments in the literary source material tells us about processes of change in Byzantine women's history. She suggested the prominence of women in literary sources in the later eleventh century may be

⁴¹ Hill 1999 108, 208-217.

⁴² Verbanaz 2019, 177-198.

⁴³ Kazhdan & Epstein 1985, 101-02; Laiou 1981, 242, 250-52.

connected to changes in literary fashion, rather than social realities.⁴⁴ A key aim of this chapter is to respond to Neville's argument, by demonstrating that visual and literary sources in fact shed light on social, cultural and political developments which converged to render Aikaterine, and other eleventh-century imperial women, visible.

The aim of chapter five is to explain and analyse the significance of Aikaterine's visibility in several sources connected to the period 1059-c1065. In this time, Aikaterine was tonsured and took on the monastic name Xene, following Isaac's abdication in November 1059. Key evidence is provided by an extended depiction of Aikaterine speaking in Psellos' *Chronographia*. Also key are inscriptions written in Aikaterine's own name in MGS 02 and seal BZS.1955.1.5083, which allow us to see Aikaterine's own depiction of who she was, without it being mediated by others. The chapter is composed of three interlinked sections. In the first section it is argued that several texts, including the *Chronographia*, expose a concerted attempt by the new emperor Constantine X Doukas' imperial government to present Aikaterine as a close kinswoman of the Doukas family. Here, by shedding light on a structural factor that shaped Aikaterine's identity, I challenge Neville's assessment that the depiction of Aikaterine's speech in the *Chronographia* cannot be used to assess Aikaterine as a historical individual.⁴⁵ More broadly, the first half of the fifth chapter presents a case study of how a specific group acted to reshape the way that Aikaterine was seen by others, within the parameters established by the norms and expectations linked to facets of Aikaterine's identity.

The second section investigates how Aikaterine sought to present who she was to others in the period after 1059. It therefore provides the most sustained investigation in this thesis of the way that Aikaterine herself perceived and shaped her own identity, and the way that she enacted power in Byzantine society. It is argued that Aikaterine enacted competitive power by taking actions to present herself to others as a Komnene woman, rather than a member of the Doukas family. The key evidence is the evangeliary MGS 02, where Aikaterine is named 'Aikaterine Komnene', the inscription 'Xene Komnene' on BZS.1955.1.5083 and an account in Skylitzes' *Continuation of the Chronicle* of Aikaterine's involvement with commemorations for Isaac, and her eventual burial, at the Stoudios monastery. This section therefore seeks to shed light on how Aikaterine enacted agency and power, within the range of choices open to her in the structural context whereby Byzantine women's identities were telescoped around their relationships with male relatives. There is also a further challenge to Leidholm's argument that eleventh-century Byzantine women predominantly identified with their natal, rather than their affine relatives.

⁴⁴ Neville 2019, 89.

⁴⁵ Neville 2012, 140-150.

A second important factor shaping Aikaterine's power after 1059 was her taking of religious vows and her residence as a nun at the Myrelaion convent in Constantinople. The third section investigates the factors empowering Aikaterine in the period when she was a nun. To do this, a comparative approach is utilised, and for contextualisation the history of Aikaterine at the Myrelaion is compared with other people and places, including the late eleventh-century elite Byzantine women Kale and the Kecharitomene convent (founded c1110). I also engage with the arguments made within the most recent studies on Byzantine monasticism, and Byzantine women's monasticism, especially those produced by Alice Mary-Talbot and Rosemary Morris.⁴⁶ Aikaterine's use of her own resources when she was a nun is investigated, building upon arguments already made by Morris and Talbot. However, it is also asked if imperial women were empowered by a freedom of movement which was considerably greater than previous modern studies of Byzantine female monasticism have allowed. In this respect, I also engage with previous arguments concerning Anna Komnene's relationship with the Kecharitomene convent made by Neville.⁴⁷ Lastly, the sixth chapter consolidates the arguments of the prosopographical and thematic chapters into a final, concluding review.

Principal sources

The first chapter gives a complete overview of the sources for Aikaterine's life. However, several of the principal sources for Aikaterine are texts which contain sophisticated literary elements. These were produced by Psellos, John Skylitzes and Nikephoros Bryennios. It is not possible to use the texts produced by these three writers as historical sources without first engaging with the wider context in which they were written, and their literary aspects. Therefore I here provide an introduction to the modern scholarship conducted in the specialist fields related to these texts, and the challenges involved in approaching them. This is intended to facilitate their usage and interpretation in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

Michael Psellos' Chronographia and Letters

Michael Psellos (b.1018-d.c.1078) held official positions in the Byzantine court at Constantinople between 1042-1074. He was also a teacher and a prolific writer, with 1,176 texts attributed to his name. A complete biography of Psellos is yet to be written but Stratis Papaioannou, Warren Treadgold and Kaldellis have provided overviews.⁴⁸ From 1042 Psellos was an imperial secretary

⁴⁶ Talbot 2019, 53-100; Talbot 2010, 829-841; Morris 2010, 171-192.

⁴⁷ Neville 2016 133-139.

⁴⁸ Papaioannou 2013, 4-14; Treadgold 2013, 272-289; Kaldellis 2006, 3-16.

under Constantine IX Monomachos. He enjoyed the emperor's favour but this was lost in 1054 when he was tonsured and fled to Mount Olympos (modern Uludağ) in Bithynia.⁴⁹ Psellos was however able to return to Constantinople during the reign of Theodora (1055-1056). He remained in the city until his death around 1078.⁵⁰ During these two decades Psellos' access to the imperial court fluctuated, and his status as a monk restricted his movements.⁵¹ This was the period when Aikaterine was empress, and thereafter a nun at the Myrelaion, and when Psellos also produced the first part of the *Chronographia*, and the letters used in this study.

Many studies of eleventh-century Byzantine history rely on the prolific writings of Psellos as key evidence. This thesis is no different in this regard, because Psellos wrote several letters to Aikaterine, depicted her speaking in the *Chronographia* and also depicted her in an oration composed to be spoken by Constantine X titled *Public Proclamation from the Emperor, Lord Constantine Doukas* and numbered 5 in Littlewood's edition of Psellos' minor orations (hereafter *OM* 5).⁵² For this reason it is important to understand Psellos' relationship with Aikaterine, and his wider position between 1057-1059, when she was empress. This topic is further discussed in the first, third, fourth and fifth chapters of this study. The evidence from the letters, especially Π 1 shows that Aikaterine and Psellos knew each other. However, what will also emerge during the course of this study is that their relationship was one of distance and formality. It will be shown that this reflects Psellos' position outside of the inner circle of imperial power during Isaac and Aikaterine's reign. Here, I give an overview of the *Chronographia* and the letters, which are both analysed extensively in several chapters of this thesis. Because only one of Psellos' orations is used as a principal source in this thesis, I will not discuss the provenances of these texts here, but rather in chapters two and five.

The Chronographia

The *Chronographia* is usually divided into two sections by modern scholarship.⁵³ It is a history of imperial politics in Constantinople from the reign of Basil II to Michael VII Doukas. The first section involves seven books, likely written in 1060-1061, each covering the reigns of specific rulers,

⁴⁹ *Chron.*, 5.27, 6.61; Psellos, *Orationes Funèbres*, no. 3, 125-126.

⁵⁰ *Chron.*, 7d.20. Attaleiates, *History*, B 296-297, mentions the death of Michael of Nikomedia in 1078, usually accepted as Psellos: Papaioannou 2013, 13-14 n. 36. Ljubarskij 2004, 58-63, however, argued Psellos was still active in the 1080s.

⁵¹ Bernard 2020, 129.

⁵² *OM* 5, 18, ll. 1-2.

⁵³ Neville 2018, 139.

beginning with Basil and ending with Isaac I (1057-1059).⁵⁴ Warren Treadgold has proposed that Constantine X Doukas was the commissioner of these books.⁵⁵ However, it is also possible the text was written to be first received by one of Psellos' friends, perhaps Constantine Leichoudes, patriarch between 1059-1063.⁵⁶

Despite this uncertainty, it is probable that Psellos anticipated that members of the Doukas family would at some stage be amongst the audience for the first part of the text, or at the very least be aware of its contents. This is because, as Michael Jeffreys has shown, Psellos had a positive relationship both with the emperor and his brother John Doukas in the early 1060s.⁵⁷ The second section covers the reigns of Constantine X himself, Romanos IV Diogenes and Michael VII Doukas. It contains encomiastic elements celebrating the Doukai and may represent an attempt to regain imperial favour later in Michael's reign.⁵⁸ The *Chronographia* is written in a high register of Greek and the complete text survives in only one late twelfth-century manuscript, *Parisinus Graecus* 1712, indicating it was received by a limited audience.⁵⁹ The present study uses the critical edition published by Diether Roderich Reinsch in 2015.

The *Chronographia* is loosely organised and episodic. In keeping with its classicising style, it includes few names and no dates. However, it features vivid character sketches of emperors and empresses and extended accounts of several specific important political events. Psellos often depicts himself as an eye-witness or a participant in these events. Many of the passages in the text seem designed to develop multiple and overlapping literary objectives. Overall, the text is elaborate and sophisticated, but also obscure.⁶⁰ This study therefore approaches with caution Psellos' depictions of Aikaterine and the events in which she was involved. Attempts are made to read the depictions of these characters against the grain in the light of possible wider literary objectives in the text.

⁵⁴ Sykutris 1929/30, 63, and Hussey 1935, 82-83, both dated the composition to 1059-1063. Yet, Isaac I, who according to narrative histories died no later than January 1062, is implied to be alive at *Chron.*, 7.64, so the text must have been composed before this date. For the date of Isaac's death see below, 57 n. 280.

⁵⁵ Treadgold 2013 290-291, identified Constantine as the patron because, he argued, the emperor commissioned another text written by Psellos, the *Concise History*, as a schoolbook for his son Michael, and the *Chronographia* is a continuation of this text.

⁵⁶ Sewter 1966, 15.

⁵⁷ Jeffreys & Lauxtermann 2016 424. Psellos' positive relationship with both Constantine X and John is evident in *Letter* Π 43, where Psellos reassures John Doukas that he need not worry that Constantine's affection for him had cooled.

⁵⁸ Neville 2018, 139.

⁵⁹ A fragment of the text is also contained in *Sinaiticus Graecus* 1117: Reinsch 2015, 18-19.

⁶⁰ See the overview of Treadgold 2013, 289-308.

Letters

A large corpus of letters attributed to Psellos have survived in several Byzantine and post-Byzantine manuscripts. These are texts directed to a specific addressee, designed to convey specific information, or to cultivate the relationship between Psellos and recipient.⁶¹ The corpus is one of several collections of letters attributed to different writers in the middle Byzantine period (843-1204).⁶² The first scholar to attempt to publish the letters in a single edition, Papaioannou, has published 538 texts which he considers to have definite or possible Psellian authorship.⁶³ Amongst these letters, six refer to Aikaterine. One is addressed to her directly and a further four letters addressed to Isaac, and one addressed to Isaac's nephew Theodoros Dokeianos, mention her as a third person. Papaioannou's recent complete published edition marks a turning point in the study of Psellos' letters, which were until this point published in different editions, and sometimes edited unsatisfactorily.⁶⁴ Papaioannou's publication also opens a specific new opportunity to study Aikaterine. In addition to Papaioannou's edition, Michael Jeffreys and Marc Lauxtermann have also published a collected volume on these texts, including summaries of each individual letter, further opening opportunities for advancements in the field.⁶⁵

Very few original Byzantine letters survive from after the eighth century.⁶⁶ In keeping with this pattern, we have no original letters from Psellos, and no manuscripts containing the letters date earlier than the twelfth century.⁶⁷ The manuscripts used by Papaioannou to publish the thirteen letters addressed to or mentioning Aikaterine are L and P. Papaioannou dates both manuscripts to the twelfth century.⁶⁸ In these two collections the Psellian letters appear in coherent groups and are not mixed with non-Psellian texts, or Psellian texts without the typical characteristics of letters. The letters written by Psellos' correspondents are almost never included. Both manuscripts seems to have used multiple smaller and earlier Psellian letter collections.⁶⁹

⁶¹ See the definition of a letter offered by Bauer 2020, 33.

⁶² For the mid-eleventh century letter collection of John Mauropous: Lauxtermann 2016, 89-99. For the late eleventh-century collection of Theophylact of Ohrid: Mullett 1997.

⁶³ Papaioannou 2019, xxxiv-xxxv.

⁶⁴ The two most significant editions were those of Eduard Kurt/Franz Drexler and Konstantinos Sathas. For a summary of the modern editions: Papaioannou 2019, clxiv-cxlv. For the concordance between modern editions: Papaioannou 2019, 987-995.

⁶⁵ Jeffreys, M. & Lauxtermann (eds.) 2016.

⁶⁶ The exceptions are a few texts directed to foreign rulers: Riehle 2020, 2. The reasons that original Byzantine letters have perished is because they were written on materials which perished in the humid climate of most of the empire, in the eleventh century, parchment or oriental paper, and imperial archives in Constantinople were destroyed when Byzantium was conquered: Riehle 2020, 477-478; Papaioannou 2019, xxxv.

⁶⁷ Papaioannou 2019, xlv.

⁶⁸ For these manuscripts: Papaioannou 2019, lvii-lxvii (L), lxxvi-lxxxii (P).

⁶⁹ Papaioannou 2019, xxxix-lv.

Psellos likely wrote his letters himself or dictated them to a student or secretary. In their original form they were carried to the recipient by one of Psellos' associates or servants.⁷⁰ Psellos refers to students and friends who copied his letters to make books from them. This process is opaque, but it is notable that the letter addressed to Aikaterine and the others describing her are addressed to members of the imperial family, perhaps explaining why they were copied down. Later, these collections were copied by the scribes who produced the manuscripts which survive to us today. It is likely that the letters were copied by these later scribes because they were considered epistolary models.

Scholars of Byzantine epistolography have observed that Byzantine letters writers usually composed their letters on the one hand to sustain and develop relationships between writer and addressee, but on the other hand expecting that they might later be read in a gathering of literati or included in a letter collection.⁷¹ Psellos' collection seems to have been written to meet these dual objectives. Many of the letters are replete with sophisticated and allusive rhetorical and literary features but in most there is also a matter of business at hand.⁷² The style of the letters varies greatly suggesting Psellos adapted his writing according to the recipient and the circumstances. A notable feature of the letters Psellos wrote to imperial persons during Isaac's reign is that they often feature clear, undisguised questions addressed to the recipients. A further consistent feature of these letters is that they feature encomiastic passages, meaning passages which praise a specific person. Encomia were also delivered in Byzantium though the medium of poetry or prose speeches.⁷³ Psellos' letters are thus interlinked with texts belonging to other literary genres produced in the milieu of the imperial court. In chapters three and four of this thesis, Psellos' letters are examined extensively for the snapshots which they provide of wider imperial court culture.

Even the most straightforward of Psellos' letters omit references to specific people, places and events. Aspects of this 'de-concretization' may have present in the original letters, because they may have worked in tandem with a message delivered by a letter bearer, who communicated orally the details omitted by the text.⁷⁴ It is also likely that the scribes who copied Psellos' letters, both in the early collections and the surviving manuscripts, removed specific references to people and events, because they were mainly interested in the letters as literary models.

⁷⁰ The letters were likely composed on parchment or oriental paper.

⁷¹ Riehle 2020, 4.

⁷² Bernard 2020, 131.

⁷³ For a more extensive discussion of the definition of encomia see below, 138.

⁷⁴ For letter bearers see below, 90 n. 398.

In part because of the 'de-concretized' aspects of Byzantine letters, in the twentieth century, letters were often viewed with scepticism as sources for historical investigations. Scholars including George Dennis, Cyril Mango and Romilly Jenkins characterised Byzantine letters as primarily rhetorical texts, and emphasised that Byzantine letter writers deliberately obscured references to the historical context in which they wrote.⁷⁵ However, beginning with Mullett's seminal study of Theophylact of Ohrid's letters, produced at the turn of the twentieth century, several scholars have argued that many Byzantine letters should be approached as functional documents, as well as from a literary perspective.⁷⁶ Papaioannou, for example, argued that Byzantine letters:

Were written in order to convey a message of immediate importance and to support the relationship between a writer and his addressee(s) [...] for the purpose of direct and immediate communication.⁷⁷

For this reason, as Michael Jeffreys pointed out, Byzantine letters often include intelligible statements on historical people and situations, and it is therefore possible to draw both historical and literary conclusions from them.⁷⁸

Recently, Alexander Riehle has once more voiced caution about the possibility of using Byzantine letters as sources of biographical information, because of the potential that the texts have been significantly changed in later manuscript collections.⁷⁹ However, in the specific case of Psellos' letters, as Floris Bernard pointed out in the same volume, there are many discrepancies and contradictions between the texts, for example in the opinions expressed by Psellos about various different themes, including rhetoric, philosophy and language.⁸⁰ This suggests that significant aspects of the letters were left as they were by subsequent editors of the texts. In this study therefore, Psellos' letters will be approached as useful sources for biographical study, potentially offering snapshots of the contemporary Byzantine society and politics of which they were a part.

It also important to note that the relatively frequent references to Aikaterine in Psellos' letters are significant in themselves. I suggest that original passages of texts featuring the empress were more likely to be retained by later editors, because as we have already mentioned, the links between a

⁷⁵ Dennis 1977, xix-xx; Mango 1975, 15-16; Jenkins 1963, 45. Later, Dennis however reversed his position: Dennis 1988, 159. For a historiographical overview of Byzantine epistolography in the mid-nineties: Hatlie 1996, 213-248.

⁷⁶ Mullett 1997. See also: Mullett 1981, 75-93.

⁷⁷ Papaioannou 2012, 296.

⁷⁸ Jeffreys 2010, 75.

⁷⁹ Riehle 2020, 490-491.

⁸⁰ Bernard 2020, 128.

letter and an imperial person may have been a reason for its preservation as a copy. This is a further reason why these sources are useful for a biographical study of Aikaterine.

John Skylitzes' Synopsis of Histories and his Continuation of the Chronicle

John Skylitzes held official positions in the Byzantine court and was also a legal scholar and historian. It is beyond doubt that he is the same person as the John the Thrakesian mentioned in legal texts and the histories of Zonaras (mid-twelfth century) and Kedrenos (early twelfth century).⁸¹ In the lemmata accompanying the title of the oldest manuscript of the *Synopsis of Histories* (A, Vind. Hist. Gr. 35) Skylitzes is described as a *Kouropalates*, having formerly been a *Droungarios* of the Watch. The latter position was the most senior in the Byzantine judiciary.⁸² Seibt argued convincingly that Skylitzes was *Droungarios* no earlier than 1084.⁸³ Therefore, the high point of Skylitzes' career in the Byzantine court was in all probability during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos.⁸⁴

The *Synopsis of Histories* and its *Continuation* are histories written in Greek divided into chapters corresponding to the reigns of individual emperors. Aikaterine is visible in the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation*. The *Synopsis* begins in 811 and terminates in 1057. The text is preserved in nine manuscripts dating between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, suggesting it was widely circulated amongst the court circles of which Skylitzes was a part. In five of these manuscripts the text is extended, including a further account of the period between 1057 and 1079.⁸⁵ In modern scholarship this text is called the *Continuation of the Chronicle*. The 'Madrid Skylitzes' manuscript should also be mentioned: *Codex Matrit. Bibl.nat.Vitr.26.2*. This twelfth-century manuscript, containing the *Synopsis* and produced in Sicily, contains 574 miniatures, some of which are referred to during this study.⁸⁶

⁸¹ The most significant evidence is a passage in a commentary on Theodore Balsamon referring to 'Lord John Skylitzes, also known as the Thrakesian': Holmes 2005, 84. Zonaras' *Epitome of Histories* is cited several times in this study. The portion of the text covering the eleventh century follows extensively Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and Psellos *Chronographia*: Neville 2018, 191-199; Treadgold 2013, 388-390, 397. For Kedrenos: Neville 2018, 162-168.

⁸² *Synop.*, Th 1. I cite Skylitzes' *Synopsis* by referring to the page numbers of Hans Thurns' critical edition of the text (Th), upon which the later translations of Flusin and Wortley are based, and in which Thurn's page numbers are also given.

⁸³ Seibt 1976, 81-83.

⁸⁴ For an overview of Skylitzes' career: Holmes 2005 81-87, who also argued that Skylitzes became a *Protovestiaros* (a higher rank than *Kouropalates*) during Alexios' reign, as attested by Kedrenos.

⁸⁵ Flusin 2010, xxx-xxxiii.

⁸⁶ See below, 89-90. For the provenance of the Madrid Skylitzes: Boeck 2015, 32-42; Tsamakda 2002, 15-19, 260-66, 394-97; Wilson 1978, 209-219.

It is not certain when Skylitzes wrote the *Synopsis* or the *Continuation*. Catherine Holmes however argued convincingly that the *Synopsis* was in all probability composed during the reign of Alexios I.⁸⁷ There is no unanimous agreement on the authorship of the *Continuation*, but most modern scholars, including the editor of the text, Eudoxos Tsolakes, think that it was written by Skylitzes after the *Synopsis*, as a supplement to the earlier text.⁸⁸ The date of 1118, when Michael of Diabolis added interpolations to a manuscript containing the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation*, is a *terminus ante quem* for the production of both texts.⁸⁹ Skylitzes' method involved the redaction of earlier Byzantine histories and his *Synopsis* and *Continuation* were likely intended as a primer and aide-mémoire to the longer texts.⁹⁰ Both Skylitzes' texts therefore feature extensive abridgements from previous histories. It is worth noting that the *Synopsis* does not use Psellos' *Chronographia* or Attaleiates' *History* but that these texts are sources for the *Continuation*.⁹¹

Although much of the *Synopsis* repeats the words of previous texts, Holmes has foregrounded evidence that Skylitzes worked towards literary objectives which contributed to the politics of the late eleventh-century Komnenian milieu, impacting the depiction in the *Synopsis* of political and social structures in earlier periods of Byzantine history. She argued that the main audience for this text appears to have been members of the political and social elite at Alexios I Komnenos' court. The main evidence for this is Skylitzes' interest in the genealogy of families who were established at the top of the social hierarchy at this time.⁹² Eric McGeer, who recently translated the *Continuation*, has built upon Holmes' argument to argue that the later text is also embedded in the political and religious context of the late eleventh and early twelfth-century.⁹³ It is notable for example, that Aikaterine is prominent in the *Continuation*, but does not feature in Attaleiates' *History*. The depictions of Aikaterine in both the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation* may therefore have been developed to comment on events and people from the period when Skylitzes wrote. However, it is also possible that depictions of her feature elements of historicity. By reading the *Synopsis* and the

⁸⁷ Holmes 2005, 84-89, 171-239.

⁸⁸ Tsolakis 1968, 115-142; McGeer 2019, 8-10.

⁸⁹ Treadgold 2013, 331, proposed a date of 1092-94 for the *Synopsis* and 1101 for the *Continuation*.

⁹⁰ For Skylitzes' method: McGeer 2019, 4-5; Treadgold 2013, 336-39; Flusin 2010, xii-xxxiii.

⁹¹ Skylitzes' history of the ninth and tenth century combines information from a range of identifiable sources, e.g.: Constantine VII, *The Life of Basil*; Leo the Deacon, *History*, 1.1-10.11. For the eleventh century, the sources are less clear, but Shepard has suggested a biography of the general Katakalon Kekaumenos: Shepard 1992, 171-181. Treadgold 2013 331-32, 35 suggested that Skylitzes' discovery of Attaleiates' *History* and Psellos' *Chronographia* prompted him to write the *Continuation*.

⁹² Holmes 2005, 171-239, who on page 185 also pointed out that the *Synopsis* is often preserved in manuscripts transmitting high style court-based literature, and that the register of Greek of the text renders it appropriate for a well-educated audience.

⁹³ McGeer 2019, 15-17.

Continuation alongside other sources, this study aims to make a judgement on which aspects of the texts shed light on Aikaterine as a historical figure.

The manuscripts containing the *Synopsis* and *Continuation* feature multiple interpolations. Especially important for this thesis is an interpolation to the *Synopsis* in the V (dated by Hans Thurn to the thirteenth century) and U (dated by Thurn to the first half of the fourteenth century) manuscripts.⁹⁴ The interpolation describes Aikaterine as the daughter of the Bulgarian ruler John Vladislav. This interpolation is analysed in detail in chapter two. In a footnote on page Bl. 106v of the U codex, the scribe describes how he used a text produced by Michael, written in 1118.⁹⁵ There is a lacuna in the footnote, and C. de Boer filled in the lacuna with the name Diabolis (modern-day Devoll, in south-eastern Albania). This was an episcopal see dependent on the archbishopric of Ochrid. De Boer therefore identified Michael the bishop of Diabolis as the scribe of an 1118 manuscript, which was in turn copied by the scribe of the U manuscript. De Boer's identification has been widely accepted by subsequent scholars and is followed in this study.

Božidar Prokić first proposed that many of the interpolations in the U manuscript, including the one describing Aikaterine, consisted of new information added by Michael of Diabolis himself, when he produced the 1118 manuscript. Prokić was subsequently followed by Jadran Ferluga and Thurn, whose critical edition of the *Synopsis* is the foundation of subsequent studies of the text. Thurn has further proposed that interpolations produced by Michael of Diabolis were picked up by the writers of other manuscripts.⁹⁶ The main reason to suppose that many of the interpolations were compositions of Michael of Diabolis, is that they frequently contain detailed information about the history and topography of the Balkans, where the see of Diabolis was located. In this thesis, I follow the argument that Michael of Diabolis was the author of many of the interpolations to the U manuscript of the *Synopsis*, and also interpolations in other manuscripts. In chapters one and two, the implications of this for interpretations of Aikaterine's history are discussed.

Nikephoros Bryennios' Material for History

Nikephoros Bryennios (d. 1137) was a member of the imperial Komnenos family through his marriage to Anna Komnene, the historian and daughter of Alexios I, in 1097. His *Material for History*

⁹⁴ Thurn 1973, XXIII, XXVI. Although Wilson 1977, 234, dates U to the twelfth century.

⁹⁵ Thurn 1973, XXVI.

⁹⁶ Prokić 1906, 28-37; Ferluga 1967, 163-170, who built upon Prokić's work by arguing that the interpolations included new additions and information, rather than information from an older manuscript, which had been omitted in U; Thurn 1973, XXXIV.

is of importance to this thesis because it provides an account of Aikaterine's genealogy and marriage to Isaac, and also of the events surrounding Isaac's abdication and Constantine X's succession. These topics are the focus of the second and fifth chapters in the thesis. The Bryennios family was an elite family who held estates in Thrace, around Adrianople. Between 1108 and 1112 Nikephoros Bryennios held the title *Kaisar*, the highest official position in the Byzantine Empire after the emperor. Treadgold pointed out that Bryennios was the highest-ranking Byzantine historian up to his time, apart from Constantine VII.⁹⁷ Narrative histories present Bryennios as sharing a close relationship with his mother-in-law the empress Eirene Doukaina. According to the early thirteenth-century historian Niketas Choniates, Doukaina unsuccessfully attempted to secure Bryennios' succession as emperor in place of her son John II, who succeeded Alexios in 1118.⁹⁸ Neville however, has argued that the evidence for the end of Alexios' reign is ambiguous and therefore the events are difficult to reconstruct. She has stressed therefore that it is unclear to what extent Bryennios was a challenger to John II.⁹⁹ Bryennios died in 1137 during a military campaign in Anatolia.¹⁰⁰

Importantly for this thesis, there is clear evidence that Bryennios, Doukaina, and Anna Komnene gathered together in a space known as a *theatron*. In chapter two, it will be argued that Bryennios' presence in this space influenced the way he wrote his history. The prologue of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* describes how Bryennios returned a draft of his unfinished history to the first-person plural pronoun 'us' (ἡμῖν).¹⁰¹ This group in all probability included Doukaina because she is also described in the prologue of the *Alexiad* as the commissioner of the text. Doukaina also appears to be the wise and intelligent woman addressed in the prologue of Bryennios' history.¹⁰² A purportedly impromptu speech delivered by the twelfth-century man of letters Michael Italikos (numbered 15 in Paul Gautier's edition) also describes Bryennios, Komnene and other imperial women, perhaps Komnene's sisters and her daughter with Bryennios, in the audience at a *theatron* (θέατρον) presided over by Eirene Doukaina. Doukaina is herself described as having taken religious vows. This demonstrates that the speech was delivered after 1118, when she was tonsured, and that this particular *theatron* took place during John II Komnenos' reign.¹⁰³ It is also worth noting that in a

⁹⁷ Treadgold 2013, 344.

⁹⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 4-12. Page numbers from Van Dieten's edition.

⁹⁹ Neville 2016, 91-112.

¹⁰⁰ PBW 2016, Nikephoros no. 117 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/107968/>> (Accessed 02/02/2022).

¹⁰¹ *Alexiad*, P.3.

¹⁰² *Alexiad*, P.3.

¹⁰³ Italikos, *Lettres et Discours*, no. 15, 146, ll. 1-4 – 147, l. 1, 151, l. 24. The unnamed imperial women are identified collectively as *Basilides*. Gautier suggested that the *Basilides* should be identified as Maria, Eudokia and Theodora Komnene, and Anna Komnene's daughter, also named Eirene Doukaina. Anna Komnene herself is addressed separately in the text: Italikos, *Lettres et Discours*, no. 15, 151, ll. 11-12. In the *Alexiad*, Eirene Doukaina, the mother of Anna Komnene, is depicted being tonsured very soon after Alexios I's death in August 1118: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 15.11.

separate letter, numbered 17 by Gautier, Italikos also describes how Bryennios wrote letters to him from a campaign in Anatolia, which he read out loud at a *theatron*.¹⁰⁴

Some modern scholars have argued that the *theatron* in which this group gathered was a specific and clearly defined space. Yet, there is no clear evidence for this in the written sources. Bernard has proposed that the word *theatron* in eleventh-century texts is used to emphasise a competitive element, by implicit comparison with the games of the hippodrome, which is also described as the *theatron*, of a variety of moments and spaces involving rhetorical and literary performances.¹⁰⁵ I argue that it is very likely that references to Doukaina's *theatron* carry the same connotations. The group around Doukaina was therefore likely not linked with a fixed location, rather gathering in a variety of spaces where texts were performed orally and discussed.¹⁰⁶ The evidence cited above suggests that these spaces were dominated by Doukaina's relatives, several of whom identified themselves with the surnames Komnenos and Doukas. Treadgold has suggested that Bryennios' history reflects the views of the recent past which the Bryennios and Doukas families had come to hold.¹⁰⁷ Treadgold's suggestion raises the possibility that in the milieu of Doukaina's *theatron*, individuals from the interlinked Doukas and Komnenos families influenced the perspective which Bryennios adopted when composing his history. The possibility that Bryennios' depiction of Aikaterine's genealogy was also influenced by traditions concerning her history passed down by members of the Komnenos family is a major theme of chapter two.

The only manuscript containing Nikephoros Bryennios' *Material for History* was lost in the eighteenth century. All editions of the text are based upon a transcription made by the Jesuit scholar Pierre Poussines in the mid-seventeenth century, which is widely accepted as an authentic copy of the original manuscript.¹⁰⁸ The text begins with a brief summary of the biographical history of Isaac I and his brother John Komnenos. A reference to Aikaterine as a daughter of Samuel appears in this

¹⁰⁴ Italikos, *Lettres et Discours*, no. 15, 154, ll. 6-14. Bryennios' letters are also described by Italikos in another letter: Italikos, *Lettres et Discours*, no. 16, 152, ll. 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Bernard 2014, 98-99, 165-73, 211-212.

¹⁰⁶ For an argument that the word *theatra* in twelfth-century texts signifies a variety of spaces: Short & Huig 2020, 1-25. See further: Jeffreys, E. 2012, 9-10, Roilos 2006, ch. 4; Mullett 1984, 175, 178-9; Hunger 1975. For a general study literary culture in twelfth-century Byzantium: Magdalino 1993, 335-356.

¹⁰⁷ Treadgold 2013, 350-351.

¹⁰⁸ Before 1590, Pierre du Faur, the first president of the Parliament of Toulouse, received a manuscript copy of the *Alexiad* as a gift. This manuscript, named *Tolasanus* in modern scholarship, was transcribed by Poussines, who noticed an additional long work of history, beginning with a brief summary of Constantine X's reign (1059-1068) and cutting off midway through Nikephoros III's reign (1078-1081) and attached to the fifteen books of the *Alexiad*, and supposed this to be Bryennios' history. Poussines' transcription was most recently published by Gautier in 1975. The supposition that Poussines' text transcribed a history by Bryennios was supported by the discovery in the 1980s of a textual fragment bearing stylistic similarities and titled 'From the first volume (tome) of the history of the *Kaisar* Bryennios, about the Turks'. For a further summary of the manuscript tradition: Neville 2018, 171; Neville 2012, 7-8.

section. The reign of Constantine X and the regency of Eudokia Makrembolitissa are also briefly summarised, including a description of Constantine's interactions with Isaac after Isaac's abdication. Thereafter, the period between 1068 and 1080 is covered in more detail. As we have seen Anna Komnene describes the history as unfinished. Her *Alexiad* uses *the Material for History* as source and is also framed as following on from Bryennios' text. The name of the text derives from a request in the preface that the text be known as 'Material for History' (Υλη ιστορίας).¹⁰⁹

Neville, who has published the most recent monograph on Bryennios' text, offers no firm conclusion on the date when it was commissioned and written. She acknowledged the possibility that the *Material for History* was composed during Alexios' reign but suggested a scenario whereby Bryennios wrote the text over an extended period of time in the 1120s and 1130s, for an audience which included descendants of the Doukas and Bryennios families and may have included Eirene Doukaina and Anna Komnene.¹¹⁰ I argue that it is indeed very likely that Bryennios was writing the *Material for History* in this period. The best reason to date it to this period is that Bryennios died in 1137 and Komnene writes that Bryennios was still composing the text in the last stage of his life. Moreover, if he died whilst writing the *Material for History*, this explains why the text is unfinished. As we have seen, such a dating would also match with the proposal that Bryennios produced the history within the milieu of the *theatron* headed by Doukaina, because there is clear evidence this group was active after 1118.

Summary

The above discussion has introduced the aims of the thesis. An overview of the biographical methodology and definitions of the two principal analytical categories used in this thesis, identity and power, have also been provided. Moreover a brief introduction to the politics of eleventh-century Byzantium has been given, to help the reader situate this study of Aikaterine's life. This introduction also included a note on the terminology used in this thesis for empresses. The key questions and aims of the prosopographical and thematic chapters which constitute this thesis have also been summarised. Lastly, a discussion of approaches of literary texts produced by three key writers has been conducted, to facilitate further analysis in the subsequent chapters. The first

¹⁰⁹ Bryennios, *History*, P.11, 73, ll.10-11. When citing a quote from this text, page and line numbers used from Gautier's edition are given alongside chapter and section numbers.

¹¹⁰ Neville 2012, 176 – 179. Alternatively, Seger 1888, 32-33, argued that the first two books of the text were written during Alexios I's reign, and the third and fourth books thereafter.

chapter of this thesis, focusing on prosopography, will build upon this discussion by providing a summary of all available source material for Aikaterine's life.

Chapter One

Aikaterine's Life: Prosopography and Parameters

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a prosopographical survey of Aikaterine's life using the full range of source material available. Importantly, this is the first such survey since Diehl's 1922 analysis of *MGS* 02, which is in need of updating. Below there is an investigation of Aikaterine's name, her genealogy, her ethnicity, her Bulgarian and Byzantine imperial statuses and her status as a nun in the last years of her life. In the first place, this chapter is intended to yield new findings related to Aikaterine's biographical history. In the second place, the parameters outlined in this chapter underpin further discussion of Aikaterine's identity and her power in the subsequent thematic chapters. This chapter leaves open several questions concerning possibilities raised by the sources, which can only be answered through the closer analysis conducted in the thematic chapters.

Aikaterine's name

I begin with the sources for Aikaterine's name. In the *Continuation*, Skylitzes uses the morphology Aikaterina (Αἰκατερίνα).¹¹¹ An interpolation to the *Synopsis* likely by Michael of Diabolis also names her as Aikaterina.¹¹² This name is sometimes used in modern scholarship.¹¹³ However, other evidence points to the morphology Aikaterine as the most appropriate. The name Aikaterine (Αἰκατερίνη) appears alongside that of Isaac in a 1059 dating inscription on the city walls of the Byzantine city of Chersonesos (located in the suburbs of modern-day Sevastopol in the Crimean peninsula), which marks the building and restoration of the city gates. A sketch of the inscription was published by Vasily Latyshev in 1896 (fig. 2).¹¹⁴ In a fragmentary Greek inscription from 1058, written on the Armenian cathedral of Ani to record its restoration, the name Aikaterine also appears alongside Isaac. The letters AI and TE of Aikaterine's name are still visible, although the

¹¹¹ *Contin.*, Ts 111.7-8. Citations of Skylitzes' *Continuation* refer to the page numbers of Eudoxos Tsolakes' critical edition (Ts), which also appear in McGeer's edition.

¹¹² *Synop.*, Th 492.

¹¹³ Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 58 n. 48.

¹¹⁴ Latyshev 1896, 16-17.

complete morphology is unclear.¹¹⁵ The name Αἰκατερίνης is also used in Psellos' *OM* 5.¹¹⁶ This text was produced when Aikaterine was still alive and describes imperial acclamations proclaiming Aikaterine alongside this emperor. However, the most decisive evidence for the morphology of Aikaterine's name is the source which brings us closest to her own voice, the inscription in *MGS* 02, which names her as Aikaterine (Αἰκατερίνης). It therefore appears most likely that Aikaterine herself used this morphology, which is used in this study, rather than Aikaterina.

Aikaterine's genealogy and the early stages of her life

Skylitzes' *Synopsis* provides evidence for Aikaterine's life at an early stage, when she was presented to Basil II as a captive in a military camp near Ohrid in 1018, alongside other members of her family, and then arrived in Constantinople as a prisoner of war in 1019.¹¹⁷ She was very likely still an infant, perhaps aged around two years old.¹¹⁸ Skylitzes describes how following the death of the last of the Kometopouloi rulers John Vladislav (who had reigned since 1015) in battle outside Dyrrachion in 1018, Basil II set out into Kometopouloi territory with an army. Thereafter over the course of a year several Bulgarian elites submitted to him. Then, Maria became Basil's prisoner, along with six of her daughters and six of her sons, as well as two daughters and five sons of Samuel's son the emperor Gabriel Rodomir, and an illegitimate son of Samuel. According to Skylitzes, Basil II first corresponded with Maria with letters and then received the above-mentioned company as prisoners in a military camp outside of Ohrid, having first plundered the treasury of the palace in the city. Skylitzes writes that Maria was subsequently displayed next to Basil in Kastoria when he received two other daughters of Samuel as prisoners, and then Maria and all of her relatives were sent to Constantinople. As mentioned above, according to Skylitzes, Basil II staged a triumph in Constantinople in 1019, when the prisoners processed in front of him.¹¹⁹

According to an interpolation in the U and V codexes of Skylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories*, Aikaterine was the daughter of John Vladislav. However, Bryennios' history gives a different account of Aikaterine's genealogy. This text, probably written between the 1120s and 1130s and likely commissioned by Bryennios' mother-in-law the empress Eirene Doukaina, identifies Aikaterine as 'the eldest daughter of the Bulgarian emperor, Samuel' (τῇ πρεσβυτέρῃ τῶν βασιλέως Βουλγάρων

¹¹⁵ The inscription is transcribed and translated at: Lauritzen 2007, 261.

¹¹⁶ *OM* 5, 18, ll. 54-57.

¹¹⁷ *Synop.*, Th 359, 365.

¹¹⁸ The dating of Aikaterine's birth can be estimated based upon the date of her marriage, see below, 41.

¹¹⁹ *Synop.*, Th 357-365. Skylitzes also writes that three of Maria's sons arrived later than the other prisoners, having endured a siege. See also: Holmes 2005, 212.

Σαμουήλ θυγατέρων).¹²⁰ Samuel was the uncle of John Vladislav. He was the co-founder and most significant of the Kometopouloi rulers, reigning between c976 and 1015. Scholarly consensus is that John Vladislav was Aikaterine's father. I am in agreement, but will now explain in full the reasons for this identification, which have nowhere been set out in detail.¹²¹ Thereafter, the constitution of Aikaterine's identity as a descendant of the Kometopouloi will be discussed.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the author of the interpolation in the *Synopsis* concerning Aikaterine can be identified as Michael of Diabolis. Although writing at a roughly similar date to Bryennios, Michael's description of Aikaterine's patriline is probably more reliable, because Michael's diocese of Diabolis was located in the area corresponding to the modern-day Albanian municipality of Devoll, close to Lake Prespa on the North Macedonian border. Michael was therefore based in an area near to the old heartlands of the territory of the Kometopouloi, and he seems to have held a strong interest in the history of the region (figs. 3, 4).¹²² Ferluga pointed out that Michael's location in the former Kometopouloi heartlands means that it was likely that he had knowledge of oral traditions regarding the relationship between Samuel and his family and heirs.¹²³ Interpolations in the U manuscript of Skylitzes, which are likely from his hand, also provide unique information concerning the names of other Kometopouloi family members, for example Samuel's daughter Miroslava and Aikaterine's brother Trojan (discussed below).¹²⁴

Further evidence pointing to the accuracy of Michael of Diabolis' identification of Aikaterine as John Vladislav's daughter is also provided by a passage in the main text of Skylitzes' *Synopsis* and John Zonaras' *Epitome*, which identify Aikaterine as the sister of Aaron.¹²⁵ Aaron is also named as the brother-in-law of the emperor Isaac Komnenos in a note on the margin of a manuscript containing the will of Eustathios Boilas.¹²⁶ The identification of Aikaterine as Aaron's sister is significant because he is also named as the son of John Vladislav in the main text of the *Synopsis*. Two interpolations in

¹²⁰ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2, 77, ll. 11-12.

¹²¹ Panov 2019, 102; Kaldellis 2017, 216; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 61; Stephenson 2003, 87; Varzos 1984, 41 n. 6; Mädler 1894, 13. By contrast, Diehl 1922, 245, identified Aikaterine as Samuel's daughter.

¹²² For example, an interpolation to, *Synop.*, Th 409, only transmitted in the U manuscript and therefore very likely to be from the pen of Michael of Diabolis, seems to communicate sympathy for the people of Bulgaria. At line 88, the year 1039 is described as the twenty-first year of the enslavement and subjection of the region: μετὰ εἰκοστὸν πρῶτον ἔτος τῆς αὐτῶν καταδουλώσεως καὶ ὑποταγῆς.

¹²³ Ferluga 1967, 169-170.

¹²⁴ *Synop.*, Th 342, 360.

¹²⁵ *Synop.*, Th 493; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.2, l. 20.

¹²⁶ The note is on folio 158 of manuscript ms. *Coislin* 263 (Paris). The line concerning Aaron reads: 'Ααρῶ(ν) προέδρου (καὶ) αὐτ(α)δέ(λφου) τ(ῆς) αὐγούστης Μεσοποταμίας. It is transcribed in Lemerle 1977, 39, who also discussed the depiction of Aaron at, 41 n. 43. As Lemerle recognised, some readers of the text have preferred a translation of αὐγούστης Μεσοποταμίας as the province 'August Mesopotamia'. However, a translation of brother to the *Augusta* matches with other textual descriptions of Aaron, and is therefore to be preferred. For the alternative translation, and discussion: Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 115-116.

the U manuscript of this text, which are also likely from the hand of Michael of Diabolis, also identify him as the son of John Vladislav.¹²⁷

Lastly, it is possible that the skeleton of Samuel was uncovered in 1960s during excavations of the church of St Achilleios on an island in Lake Prespa. The skeleton was identified as being about seventy years old.¹²⁸ The identity of the skeleton is not certain, but the possibility that it could be Samuel's is raised by a passage in Attaleiates' *History*, which locates Samuel's death at Prespa.¹²⁹ According to Skylitzes two of Samuel's daughters were brought to Constantinople as captives following the defeat of John Vladislav in 1018.¹³⁰ However, the evidence for Samuel's age provided by the skeleton suggests that his daughters were significantly older than Isaac Komnenos, who was probably no more than fifty when he became emperor in 1057 and there was likely born around 1005-1007 at the earliest.¹³¹ It is therefore more likely that Isaac would have married a daughter of John Vladislav.¹³² Taken together, all of this evidence indicates that Aikaterine should be identified as a daughter of John Vladislav. The next chapter further examines why Bryennios presented Aikaterine as Samuel's daughter, and it is explained how this points to Aikaterine's importance for the reputation of the Komnenos family in the eleventh century.

The evidence for Aikaterine's matriline is more patchy. John Vladislav's wife is identified as Maria in Skylitzes' *Synopsis*.¹³³ She is also mentioned by Yahya of Antioch, an Arab Christian historian writing in the first half of the eleventh century, but her name is not given.¹³⁴ Maria's nomenclature gives no certain indication of her matriline or patriline. The only further information is provided by Paisius of Hilandar, writing in the eighteenth century and cited by Nicholas Adontz. Paisius writes that the wife of John Vladislav was Greek and the daughter of a *Magistros*, but as Adontz showed, Paisius confused John Vladislav with John Vladimir, the ruler of Duklja. Adontz further argued that Paisius

¹²⁷ *Synop.*, Th 359, 360 (interpolations), 448 (main text).

¹²⁸ Moutsopoulos 1984, 104-126. See also the full three-volume excavation report: Moutsopoulos 1989.

¹²⁹ Attaleiates, *History*, B 230.

¹³⁰ *Synop.*, Th 363-365.

¹³¹ Mädlar 1894, 13, estimated that Isaac was in his early fifties when he became emperor in 1057 and was therefore born around 1005. Mädlar pointed out that the consistent depiction of Isaac's enemy Michael VI as an elder (γέρων) suggests that Isaac himself was not an old man during the civil war of 1057. This suggests that Bryennios' depiction of Isaac as a juvenile under Basil II's custodianship refers to the later part of this emperor's reign (976-1025), indicating that Isaac was born sometime in the early eleventh-century. I am in agreement with Mädlar's argument, which is also followed by Varzos, who dates Isaac's birth to 1007.

¹³² Varzos 1984, 41 n. 6 & Mädlar 1894, 13, also argued for the identification of Aikaterine as a daughter of John Vladislav based upon the likely age of Samuel's daughters.

¹³³ *Synop.*, Th 357, 360, 364, 365.

¹³⁴ Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, III, 407. For the provenance of this text: Micheau & Troupeau 1997, 5-12.

thought that Maria was a daughter of the Byzantine Asotios, who according to Skylitzes was a *Magistros* and Miroslava, the daughter of Samuel.¹³⁵

Christian Settapani suggested that Maria was a daughter of the Bulgarian emperor Boris II and therefore a granddaughter of the Byzantine imperial woman Maria Lekapena, who married Peter I in 927.¹³⁶ However, there is no conclusive evidence for this hypothesis and the difficulty which John Vladislav had in claiming legitimate rule as a Bulgarian emperor, discussed below, suggests that it is unlikely that he held a tie of kinship through his marriage with Maria with previous Bulgarian emperors. Furthermore, it is also unlikely that Samuel, who slew his brother Aaron and all of his sons except for John Vladislav (who was saved according to Skylitzes by the intercession of Gabriel Rodomir), would have tolerated a marriage linking a descendant of his brother's line with the previous Bulgarian emperors.¹³⁷ Thus in summary, we cannot be sure of Maria's matriline or patriline. Regrettably therefore, discussions of Aikaterine's genealogy in this study must focus upon her patriline.

Before proceeding it is important to acknowledge that another contradiction between Bryennios' history and the interpolations of Michael of Diabolis arises concerning the genealogy of another Maria (d. after 1095), who was also a member of a late eleventh-century elite Byzantine family, and was a descendant of the Kometopouloi. Maria was wife of Andronikos Doukas (b.before 1045 – d. 1077) and mother of the empress Eirene Doukaina (b.c. 1066 - d.c.1138).¹³⁸ Bryennios identifies her father as Trojan, who he says was the son of Samuel. An interpolation to a passage in Skylitzes' *Synopsis* describing the surrender of Maria (wife of John Vladislav) and her children after the death of John Vladislav names one of them as Trojan. It appears in the U manuscript and can therefore be linked with Michael of Diabolis. For the reasons argued above, Michael of Diabolis is also in this instance likely a more accurate witness than Bryennios. It is most probable that Trojan was the son of John Vladislav, not Samuel. Maria married Andronikos Doukas in the mid-eleventh century, before 1066, which places her in the generation of John Vladislav's children.¹³⁹ It is notable that she had the same name as Aikaterine's daughter Maria. The names of both Marias may refer to their grandmother, Maria was the wife of John Vladislav. I return to the parallels between Bryennios' and Michael of Diabolis' accounts of Aikaterine and Maria in the following chapter.

¹³⁵ Adontz 1965, 406; *Synop.*, Th 342.

¹³⁶ Settapani 2006, 282-283.

¹³⁷ *Synop.*, Th 329.

¹³⁸ Polemis 1968, 55-59 (Andronikos), 70-74 (Eirene).

¹³⁹ For a summary of the scholarship on Maria's genealogy: Gautier 1975, 218-219 n.7. See also: Kouropou & Vannier 2005, 52. Skoulatos 1980, 192-193, follows Bryennios. For the date of Maria's marriage: Polemis, 1968, 58.

The imperial status and ethnic identity of Aikaterine and the Kometopouloi

Having drawn conclusions on Aikaterine's patriline I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the imperial status and ethnic identity of the dynasty from which she was descended. As mentioned above, this line of rulers is nicknamed the Kometopouloi in Byzantine and other eastern sources, and they are conventionally named as such in modern scholarship.¹⁴⁰ The Kometopouloi ruled a territory corresponding roughly to modern day Albania, North Macedonia, northern Greece and southern Bulgaria, with the heartlands around Ohrid and Lake Prespa between c976 and 1018 (fig. 3).¹⁴¹ These were the western territories of the former First Bulgarian Empire.

Several modern scholars have perceived links between the Kometopouloi and the First Bulgarian Empire, founded in the late seventh century south of the Danube delta and by which the time it fell in 971 was a Christian state stretching north to the Carpathian mountains and east to the Black Sea.¹⁴² However, other scholars dispute these connections. These arguments are connected to wider political and nationalist arguments involving actors from the modern-day states Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The most recent example of a study disputing these links is that of Mikto Panov, published in 2019. Panov argued that Samuel proclaimed himself emperor but that he did not link his rule with the First Bulgarian Empire. Rather, Panov argued, the links between Samuel's state and that of the First Bulgarian Empire derive from Byzantine propaganda, designed to present his state as having unlawfully existed upon Bulgarian territory, which was rightfully imperial.¹⁴³ Below, in response to Panov's argument, I argue that Byzantine references to the state of the Kometopouloi as Bulgarian were in fact a response to the way the Kometopouloi presented themselves. My argument is intended to develop as clear as possible an impression of how Aikaterine's ethnicity and societal status was perceived in Byzantium after her arrival in 1018.

¹⁴⁰ For examples of the usage of Kometopouloi see in modern scholarship: Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, and the publications listed below, n. 141. For Greek and eastern accounts see below, 33 n. 145.

¹⁴¹ Panov 2019, 72; Holmes 2005, 398.

¹⁴² On the identity and history of the Kometopouloi see: Adontz 1965, 347–407; Seibt 1975, 65–100; Fine 1991, 189–199; Pirivatrić 1997 (English summary, 199–210); Stephenson 2003, 11–31; Holmes 2005, 490–91; Kaldellis 2017, 82–83. The First Bulgarian Empire was a multi-ethnic state founded by Turkic-Bulgar nomads and also including different Slavic tribes and Greek speaking descendants of the old Roman population. Roman culture and Greek language was prominent throughout its history. From 865 the Bulgarian ruling class was Christian, and from 869–70 there was an autonomous church headed by an archbishop of Bulgaria: Whittow 1996, 274–280, 297; Fine 1991, 94–188. The Bulgarian Empire was overcome by the Kievan Rus in 969, who used the emperor Boris II as a puppet. The Byzantines invaded in 971, defeated the Rus, and annexed the eastern territories of the Bulgarian Empire including the capital Preslav (modern-day Great Preslav): Kaldellis 2017, 68–74.

¹⁴³ Panov 2019, 390–394. Panov's arguments rest upon reading multiple sources against the grain, for example the sustained discussion of Yahya of Antioch's *Chronicle*, the French chronicle of Ademar of Chabannes and Psellos' *Chronographia*, Michael Attaleiates' *History*, Kekaumenos' *Strategikon*, the *Life of Achilles* of Larissa and Skylitzes' *Synopsis* (89–99), and his discussion of the Bitola inscription (370 n. 85).

In this thesis, it is argued that when Aikaterine and the other descendants of the Kometopouloi arrived in Byzantium, they were perceived by Byzantines as a foreign group. This builds upon Kaldellis' argument for the existence of a majority ethnic group in the Byzantine Empire characterised by a shared sense of Roman identity. Kaldellis highlighted that on the one hand it was possible for outsiders, for example individuals or groups who physically entered the Byzantine Empire from outside of its borders, or those who became part of the Byzantine Empire having been conquered, to join this group by assimilation. The process of assimilation included participation in Byzantine institutions (e.g. the imperial court) and the adoption of cultural norms including the wearing of specific clothing and the usage of the Greek language. However, unassimilated outsiders to the Byzantine ethnic group were, Kaldellis argued, perceived to be 'foreign' (*xenos*). As examples, Kaldellis highlighted how Byzantine sources including letters composed by the Byzantine Theophylact, archbishop of Ohrid between 1088/89 – after 1126, and the letters of Gregorios Antiochos from after 1173, describe the Bulgarian population as different to the Byzantines, showing that Bulgarians were perceived to be foreigners. During this discussion, Kaldellis drew attention to Aikaterine as a specific example of a Bulgarian foreigner who assimilated to Byzantine norms, when she became empress.¹⁴⁴

The name Kometopouloi (Κομητόπουλοι) means 'sons of the *Komes*' (count). They were four brothers named Samuel, Aaron, David and Moses. Aaron was the father of John Vladislav, and therefore grandfather of Aikaterine. Their father is named as Nikolas and identified as a *Komes* (count), and Skylitzes names their mother as Ripseme (fig. 1).¹⁴⁵ Little source material has survived from within their state, other than some proto-Bulgar inscriptions, meaning we must mostly rely on Byzantine and other eastern sources. These texts contradict one another and even themselves. Partly for these reasons, the basic characteristics of their rule and their state remain contested in modern scholarship.

¹⁴⁴ Kaldellis 2019, especially 3-11, 38-80, 123-154. Kaldellis also drew attention to Bulgarian inscriptions distinguishing Bulgarians from Byzantines: 234-235. For a specific discussion of Aikaterine: 235-236. Kaldellis' discussion of Byzantine perceptions of Bulgarians built on his earlier survey in Kaldellis 2013, 126-139, discussing Gregorios' letters extensively. For a further survey: Stephenson 1999, 245-257. For Theophylact's attitude to Bulgarians: Mullett 1997, 266-277. Examples from Theophylact include Theophylact, *Lettres*, 145 ll. 34-41 (no. 5), 485 ll. 34-35 (no. 96). When citing this text page, line and letter numbers are given from Gautier's edition.

¹⁴⁵ Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, II 418, Stephen of Taron, *Universal History*, 3.22-24 (using the Armenian name *Komsajagk*), *Synop.*, Th 255-6, 328-30 (Ripseme is mentioned at 328). A stone with a Cyrillic inscription was discovered in the village of German (north-western Greece) in 1880, dating to 992-993. The inscription states that the stone is a tombstone for Samuel's father, mother and brother. Nikolas and David are named in the inscription but there is a lacuna where Samuel's mother is named. The provenance of the inscription is disputed. For a translation and discussion see Stephenson 2003, 15-16 ns. 14 & 15. See also: Panov 2019, 281-284.

Nikolas seems to have been a member of the elite in the western Bulgarian territories. The Armenian historian Stephen of Taron claims the Kometopouloi came from the district of Derjan in Armenia and gives a confused account of their defection from a Byzantine army deployed in the Balkans.¹⁴⁶ The etymology of the name Ripseme, a popular Armenian name, suggests a strong possibility that the Kometopouloi possessed Armenian lineage through their matriline.¹⁴⁷ Samuel inflicted a major defeat on the Byzantines in 986 at the battle of Trajan's Gates, when the Byzantine imperial regalia was captured.¹⁴⁸ David, Moses and Aaron were dead by 988, leaving Samuel as the sole ruler.¹⁴⁹ Romanos, the son of the Bulgarian Emperor Peter II may have been a junior co-ruler alongside Samuel until c1004.¹⁵⁰ In the north Samuel gained control of the old Bulgarian capital Preslav (although the Byzantines regained the city in 1000/01) and in the south he led raids towards Corinth.¹⁵¹ Samuel's army probably engaged in incessant warfare with the Byzantines until 1014, when he died after a Byzantine victory at the Battle of Kleidion.¹⁵² Samuel was succeeded by his son Gabriel Rodomir, who was assassinated in 1015 by John Vladislav, Aikaterine's father.¹⁵³ John claimed to be Samuel's successor, but as Stephenson has argued, was never able to dominate all of the former magnates of Samuel's state.¹⁵⁴ After John's death in 1018, these elites surrendered to Basil II, bringing about a conclusive Byzantine victory.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁶ Stephen of Taron, *Universal History*, 3.24.

¹⁴⁷ The martyrdom of Saint Ripseme is associated with the conversion to Christianity of the Armenian king Tiridates III at the turn of the fourth century: Pogossian 2003, 359-362.

¹⁴⁸ Leo the Deacon, *History*, 10.8; *Synop.*, Th 330-331; Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, II, 419.

¹⁴⁹ For the deaths of Samuel's brothers see the main text and interpolations of *Synop.*, 329-330, and the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, 336. Ed Šišić. Samuel put Aaron to death either in 13 June 987 or 988: Stephenson 2003, 15; Seibt 1975, 90-94. Holmes 2005, 491, emphasizes the difficulty reconstructing events in the Balkans between 971-986.

¹⁵⁰ Romanos' role is attested by Skylitzes and Yahya of Antioch. Both texts describe him escaping the Byzantines in 976. Yahya describes him as a ruler of the Bulgarians before his death as a prisoner of the Byzantines in 997, Skylitzes says that he was castrated and thus ineligible to be Bulgarian ruler, and depicts him as a governor of Skopje, who handed over the town to the Byzantines in return for court titles in 1004. Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, II, 418, 446; *Synop.*, Th 329, 346. Scholarly consensus is that Romanos was either a junior co-ruler or a puppet ruler, whilst Samuel held real power. It remains unclear when Romanos died. Fine 1991, 189-191, provides a clear and concise analysis of the source material and modern historiography. For a more recent study: Kaldellis 2017, 82-83.

¹⁵¹ Stephenson 2003, 14 n. 10, 16. Kaldellis points that it is likely Preslav was taken soon after Trajan's Gates: Kaldellis 2017, 96. *Synop.*, Th 343-344, attests that the city was recaptured by the Byzantines in 1000/01. Samuel's raids into the Peloponnese (where his soldiers are described as Bulgarians) are attested in the, *Life of St Nikon*, 2-7. Ed. Sullivan.

¹⁵² The key evidence for this period is a single line in *Synop.*, Th 348-349 which describes incessant warfare before the decisive Byzantine victory at Kleidion. Stephenson 2000, 69-71, argued that there was peace between 1004 and 1014. However I am more convinced by the arguments of Holmes 2005, 498-500 and Kaldellis 2017, 157, that Skylitzes is summarising a more detailed account of a protracted period of warfare.

¹⁵³ *Synop.*, Th 349-350.

¹⁵⁴ Stephenson 2003, 30-31.

¹⁵⁵ *Synop.*, 360; Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, III, 431; Holmes 2005, 500-501.

Simeon, who reigned over the First Bulgarian Empire between 893-927 used the title *Basileus*, or emperor, which may have been recognised by the Byzantines.¹⁵⁶ His successor Peter and afterwards Boris II were recognised by the Byzantines as emperors.¹⁵⁷ The Bulgarian emperors were the only rulers recognised as such by the Byzantines other than the Holy Roman emperors in northern Europe.¹⁵⁸ I argue that Samuel and his successors presented their rule as a continuation of the rule of the Bulgarian emperors and that Byzantines understood this but did not officially acknowledge his position. This had significant implications for Aikaterine's status in Byzantine society.

There are several pieces of evidence supporting this argument. Firstly, Yahya of Antioch writes that Samuel took the title emperor (*Basileus*) in 997.¹⁵⁹ Secondly, there is the evidence of a Cyrillic inscription, dating to John Vladislav's reign, possibly 1014/15, written to mark the strengthening of a fortress and discovered in Bitola in North Macedonia. It is worth including in full because it provides key evidence for the way Aikaterine's father represented himself. It has been translated by Stephenson as follows:

[In the year 1015/6(?) this fortress was] built anew by John, emperor of the Bulgarians, with the help and prayers of our Virgin Mary and through the representation of the twelve supreme apostles. This fortress was constructed as a haven for the salvation of the Bulgarians. The fortress of Bitola was started on 20 October, and was completed in the month of... This emperor was Bulgarian by birth, grandson of..., son of Aaron, who is [brother to] S[amuel, the emperor] ... where they took... And this same tsar in the year 6522 [i.e. 1014-15] from the beginning of the world...¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ This is securely attested by a seal of Simeon: For this and a summary of scholarship on whether he was crowned by the Byzantine patriarch in 913 and recognised by the Byzantines as emperor in 925: Fine 1991, 144-148, 155-156. See further: Whittow 1996, 289-292.

¹⁵⁷ Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R 90 (The page numbers of Reiske's edition (R) are used when citing the *Book of Ceremonies*). This occurred after Peter married Romanos I's granddaughter Maria in 929: Fine 1991, 161; Whittow 1996, 292-293.

¹⁵⁸ Whittow 1996, 292.

¹⁵⁹ Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, II, 446. Yahya links Samuel's assumption of the *Basileus* title to Romanos' death, but it is not certain when he died: see above, 34, n. 150.

¹⁶⁰ Stephenson 2003, 29-30. See also: Holmes 2005, 56-57 n. 94. The Bitola inscription, which was discovered after the demolition of a mosque in the 1956, is widely accepted as authentic. This is because of the circumstances of its discovery and its epigraphical and paleographical qualities: Stephenson 2003, 30 n. 70. Stephenson rejects aspects of the transcription of Zaimov 1977, 194-204, including Zaimov's identification of a date of 1015/16. An argument has been made for a later date. The relevant historiography is summarized by Panov 2019, 370 n. 85. The appearance in the inscription of the name 'John' and 'the son of Aaron' however provides strong evidence that it was produced during John Vladislav's reign.

Stephenson notes that this inscription indicates that John Vladislav's legitimacy was not accepted by all of Samuel's former magnates.¹⁶¹ The emphasis in the inscription that John Vladislav was 'Bulgarian by birth' also hints that his claim to be emperor of the Bulgarians was disputed by groups within the state which he ruled, as mentioned above. However, what should be underlined is that this inscription shows Aikaterine's father claiming the title of emperor of the Bulgarians.

The next piece of evidence is the depiction in the *Synopsis* of the triumphal celebrations enacted by Basil in Constantinople in 1019, when he wore a crown of victory, and displayed booty and human captives, including Aikaterine and her mother Maria.¹⁶² The depiction of this display in the *Synopsis* bears similarities to the depictions in Leo the Deacon's *History* and an earlier account in the *Synopsis* of ceremonies enacted by the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes in 971, when Boris II ceremonially surrendered his imperial regalia during a triumph in Constantinople.¹⁶³ The similarities raise the possibility that Basil II's triumphal celebrations were consciously designed to replicate those of Tzimiskes, therefore depicting his victory as building upon what his predecessor had achieved in 971, by conclusively bringing about the subjugation of the Bulgarian state.

It seems likely that the Byzantines never officially acknowledged the imperial status of the Kometopouloi, officially upholding the narrative that the Bulgarian emperors had surrendered their imperial status during the triumph of 971. Evidence for this is provided by the second of three charters issued in c1020 by Basil II, in which the emperor outlined how the ecclesiastical structure of the province of Bulgaria would be organised following the Byzantine subjugation of the territory. When describing the previous ecclesiastical arrangements, Peter is referred to as an emperor, but Samuel, explicitly, is not:

[...] as under the Emperor Peter and Samuel [...]

[...] ἄς ὑπὸ Πέτρου τοῦ Βασιλέως καὶ τοῦ Σαμουήλ [...]¹⁶⁴

Kaldellis argued that Samuel and his successors were regarded by the Byzantines as usurpers because they perceived that the Bulgarian Empire had ended when Boris II surrendered his regalia in 971.¹⁶⁵ However, there is evidence that Byzantine perceptions of the Kometopouloi were more

¹⁶¹ Stephenson 2003, 30. Pirivatrić 1997, 183, 209, argued that the inscription is written to stress that the social elite were upholders of the tradition of the Bulgarian Empire.

¹⁶² *Synop.*, Th 364-365; Holmes 2005, 500. McCormack 1986, 203, pointed out that women normally only appeared in Byzantine triumphs as captives.

¹⁶³ Leo the Deacon, *History*, 9.12; *Synop.*, Th 310. Both Prinzing and Stephenson have argued convincingly that a Byzantine silk tapestry named the Gunthertuch depicts Tzimiskes' triumph, and was produced to mark it: Prinzing 1993, 218-31; Stephenson 2003, 63-65.

¹⁶⁴ Gelzer (ed.) 1893, 44 l.16. For these charters: Stephenson 2000, 75.

¹⁶⁵ Kaldellis 2017, 72.

nuanced than Kaldellis allows. The abovementioned parallels between textual depictions of the triumphs of John Tzimiskes and Basil II suggest that the rule of the Kometopouloi was perceived as one of continuation from the First Bulgarian Empire, although the Byzantines never officially acknowledged Samuel's title. A further hint at Byzantine awareness that the Kometopouloi presented their power as imperial is provided by verses composed by the late tenth-century poet John Geometres. Verses in a poem titled 'About the Bulgarians' and numbered 282, 31 in Cramer's edition read:

Dance for joy and clap your hands, Bulgarian tribes,
take and hold scepters and the stemma and the purple,
the scarlet [...]
he will strip off your clothes and will hold your necks and feet in long planks and pillories [...]
σκιρτᾶτε καὶ κροτεῖτε, φύλα Βουλγάρων,
καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ τὸ στέμμα καὶ τὴν πορφύραν
κρατεῖτε καὶ φορεῖτε, καὶ φοινικίδας [...]
μεταμφιάσει καὶ ζύλοις τοὺς αὐχένας
μακροῖς συνέξει καὶ κυφῶσι τοὺς πόδας [...]¹⁶⁶

The dating of this poem is disputed. However, on the basis of the reference to 'scepters [...] stemma and the purple', Emile van Opstall, Maria Tomadaki and Marc Lauxtermann argue that these lines most likely to refer to Samuel's coronation as emperor and donning of imperial regalia in 997, as described by Yahya of Antioch.¹⁶⁷ If this assessment of the poem is correct, then although the text sheds light on an awareness amongst Byzantines of Samuel's claimed status as emperor of the Bulgarians, the tone of the verses at the same time implies that it was perceived to be illegitimate. This reinforces the impression that the Byzantines knew that Samuel and his successors claims to be emperors of the Bulgarians, but this was not officially acknowledged within Byzantium.

¹⁶⁶ Trans. M. Jeffreys, in Poppe 1976, 214. The Greek text used is edited by Cramer and revised by Scheidweiler. Van Opstall numbered the poem 29 but did not publish a complete edition of the text within her edition of Geometres' poems.

¹⁶⁷ Van Opstall & Tomadaki 2019, 192; Lauxtermann 1997, 373. For Yahya's description see above, 35 n. 159. Pirivatrić 1997, 166-167, argued that the poem refers to the loss of imperial regalia in the battle of the Gate of Trajan in 986. For an overview of the scholarship and an argument that the text should be dated to 970: Panov 2019, 48-55.

There is also later evidence that the Byzantines perceived there to be connections between the Kometopouloi rulers and imperial status. After 1019, Aikaterine's brothers received court titles, discussed below. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos writes that during the 1030s, John Vladislav's sons, apart from Alousianos, were allowed to advise the emperor.¹⁶⁸ This suggests that Aikaterine and her relatives were presented alongside successive Byzantine emperors as embodied symbols of Byzantine imperial dominion, further suggesting that they were perceived as the descendants of a subjugated imperial line.

When composing a series of encomiastic questions addressed to Aikaterine, now empress, in *Letter* Π 1 (text 1) Psellos described her as having 'possessed the blood of *basileia* through her family'.¹⁶⁹ Writing a time further removed from Basil's conflict with the Kometopouloi, Psellos expressed explicitly what had been perceived in Basil II's reign although not officially acknowledged. Aikaterine was a woman born into a family with convincing connections to imperial status. In the *Synopsis*, Skylitzes also describes how Basil II captured the 'the palaces of the *Basileia* of Bulgaria' (τὰ βασιλεία τῶν βασιλέων ἱδρυντο βουλγαρίας) at Ohrid, where the Kometopouloi rulers had kept their treasure and regalia.¹⁷⁰ This line most likely refers to the fortress constructed by Samuel in the city.¹⁷¹ It is notable that phrase τὰ βασιλεία is often used to describe the Great Palace in Constantinople in Byzantine narrative histories.¹⁷² This suggests that Skylitzes perceived that fortress at Ohrid was comparable as an imperial centre of the Bulgarians to the Great Palace in Constantinople, the imperial centre of the Byzantines.

Still later in the twelfth-century *Alexiad*, Komnene writes that the name of the town of Megalopolis was changed to Great Pristhlava (modern-day Great Preslav) in the time after Mokros, 'the emperor of the Bulgarians' (ὁ τῶν βουλγάρων βασιλεὺς) and after Samuel 'the last of the Bulgar dynasty'. Samuel is thereby placed in a line of Bulgarian emperors.¹⁷³ Komnene's fellow historian and husband Bryennios furthermore names Samuel 'the Bulgarian emperor'.¹⁷⁴ Like Psellos in the mid-eleventh century, it seems that by the twelfth century Komnene and Bryennios, who were both imperial persons, could more easily acknowledge the imperial status of the Kometopouloi rulers. This seems not to have been possible in the early eleventh century, when memories of war between Byzantium

¹⁶⁸ *Chron.*, 4.46.

¹⁶⁹ ἡ καὶ ἐκ γένους βασιλείον αἷμα λαχοῦσα: Π 1, l. 19. For detailed analysis of this passage see below, 103-106.

¹⁷⁰ *Synop.*, Th 358-359.

¹⁷¹ For the fortress see below, 75

¹⁷² See for example: Attaleiates, *History*, B 59; *Chron.*, 4.3; *Synop.*, Th 374, l. 26.

¹⁷³ ὁ τῶν βουλγάρων βασιλεὺς, Σαμουήλ ὁ τελευταῖος τῆς Βουλγαρικῆς δυναστείας: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 7.3.4. The name Mokros appears to be an agrammatic version of the name Krum (Krumos), the ruler of the Bulgarians between 802-814. See: Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 124-125; Reinsch 2001, 241 n. 49.

¹⁷⁴ τὸν βασιλέα βουλγάρων τὸν Σαμουήλ: Bryennios, 3.6, 219, ll. 19-20.

and Kometopouloi were still recent. It is notable here that Samuel, rather than Gabriel Rodomir or John Vladislav, is identified by Komnene as the last emperor. This points to a difference in the way Samuel was remembered compared to his two successors. In the second chapter it will be shown how this turn impacted the way that Aikaterine's genealogy was remembered in twelfth-century Byzantium.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Aikaterine's Kometopouloi ancestors themselves claimed to be successors of the former Bulgarian emperors, and this claim was not an invention of the Byzantines, as Panov argued. Claiming to be successors to the former Bulgarian emperors was an effective means for the Kometopouloi to present their power in the Balkans as legitimate.¹⁷⁵ As Stephenson has argued, the Bitola inscription suggests that their claim to legitimately wield the imperial power of the Bulgarian state was not universally accepted amongst their own magnates. However, on the other hand they were in Byzantium perceived to be an imperial family who were the continuators of the Bulgarian ruling class, who had ruled the last vestige of the Bulgarian Empire. This was of great significance because by 1019 the Byzantines had only acknowledged the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire and the Bulgarian Empire as emperors.

The status of the Kometopouloi was not officially acknowledged during Basil II's reign, and was only directly acknowledged by later generations of Byzantines. Yet, successive emperors, including Basil II, referred to the status of the Kometopouloi to construct their own messages about power. The way Basil II presented his own power can be seen through his epitaph, which describes himself as emperor and 'great overlord of the world'.¹⁷⁶ This matches with other statements about imperial power, for example the preface of the *Book of Ceremonies*, which presents imperial power at the head of the terrestrial order, as the closest reflection of heavenly power in the physical world.¹⁷⁷ As Magdalino pointed out, this idea was made tangible and visible through ceremony.¹⁷⁸ Holmes has pointed out how triumphal processions were frequently used in Byzantium to enact ritualized humiliation of the defeated, including for example the devesting of royal insignia, which in turn visualised Byzantine dominion.¹⁷⁹ When Aikaterine and her relatives were presented in conquered territories alongside Basil II as prisoners of war, and then presented in a triumphal procession

¹⁷⁵ See the comments of Kaldellis 2017, 82, who quotes Fine 1991, 191: 'what is important is that Samuil called his state Bulgarian; furthermore, Byzantine sources called it Bulgarian also and treat Samuil as a ruler continuing the former Bulgarian state'.

¹⁷⁶ γῆς μέγαν βασιλέα. Trans. Lauxtermann 2003, 237.

¹⁷⁷ Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R5; Magdalino 1993, 237. See also, for example, how the speaker addresses Constantine IX Monomachos as the 'mightiest ruler of the whole earth' (ὦ κράτιστε γῆς ὅλης ἀναξ) in Psellos, *Poemata*, no. 17, 248, l. 326.

¹⁷⁸ Magdalino 1993, 247.

¹⁷⁹ Holmes 2010, 140.

through Constantinople, their bodies were appropriated to visualise the Byzantine dominion over a former imperial power, thereby communicating tangibly the pre-eminence of Basil II's imperial power in the world order. The subsequent chapters will further examine Aikaterine's importance as a symbol for the power of different groups in Byzantine society, and the resulting reshaping of her identities.

Aikaterine's betrothal and marriage to Isaac Komnenos

The only account of Aikaterine's betrothal to Isaac appears in Bryennios' history. Neville wrote that Basil II is depicted in this text as the instigator of Aikaterine's marriage to Isaac.¹⁸⁰ Yet, the first line of the passage describing the betrothals of Isaac and his younger brother John, who married Anna Dalassene, does not in fact refer to any specific person who instigated the matches. It reads 'since there was a need for brilliant marriages to distinguish the *genos*'.¹⁸¹ It is therefore unclear from the text if Aikaterine's betrothal and marriage took place during Basil II's reign.

It should be noted that the description of the betrothal is a part of a longer account of Isaac and John's upbringing, beginning with a story about how Isaac and his brother John were taken into Basil II's care, because their father Manuel Komnenos, one of Basil's generals, had died.¹⁸² In the *Synopsis*, Skylitzes also mentions several other marriages arranged by Basil II between defeated elite Balkan families, who had been loyal to Samuel, and members of the Byzantine elite.¹⁸³ Yahya of Antioch also describes how Basil's policy following the defeat of John Vladislav was to 'marry Roman sons to Bulgarian daughters, and Bulgarian sons to Roman daughters' to end the animosity between the two peoples.¹⁸⁴ One of the marriages mentioned in the *Synopsis* was between an unnamed sister of

¹⁸⁰ Neville 2012, 76.

¹⁸¹ Ἐπεὶ δὲ γάμων ἔδει λαμπρῶν τοῖς οὕτω τὸ γένος περιφάνεσι: Bryennios, 1.2, 77, l.10. For John's marriage to Anna Dalassene, 180. For prosopographical studies of Isaac and John: Varzos 1984, 41-47, 50-57. Isaac also had a sister, who was probably the wife of Michael Dokeianos and mother of Theodoros Dokeianos, who was prominent in Isaac's reign: Varzos 1984, 47-49. For a definition of *genos*, see below, 62-65.

¹⁸² Bryennios, *History*, 1.1-2.

¹⁸³ *Synop.*, Th 342, describes how Miroslava, the daughter of Samuel, raised the status of her Byzantine husband Asotios. According to Skylitzes, the couple were married in Bulgaria around 997, but Asotios was awarded the title *Magistros* by Basil II, when he fled back to Roman territory. Miroslava was also recognised as a belted patrician. *Synop.*, Th. 366, describes how the widow of the *archon* of Sirmium was married to one of the Constantinopolitan notables.

¹⁸⁴ Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, III, 407. Trans. Stephenson 2003, 36. For an analysis of Basil's policy of marrying Bulgarian elites to Byzantines: Kaldellis 2019, 235-236. See also: Panov 2019, 90. It is worth noting that the betrothal had a precedent in the history of relations between Byzantium and the imperial Bulgarian family of the tenth century. In 929, Maria, the daughter of the Byzantine co-emperor Christopher Lekapenos, married the Bulgarian Emperor Peter (see above, 31.). Leo the Deacon, *History*, 5.3, 5.6, also describes female Bulgarian children who were sent to Constantinople in 968-969 and betrothed to the infant emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII.

Aikaterine and the Byzantine Romanos Kourkouas.¹⁸⁵ The betrothal of Aikaterine to the family of one of Basil's generals is therefore very likely to have been arranged by Basil II at some point between 1018 and 1025. This would have matched the emperor's policy towards other members of Aikaterine's family and other defeated Balkan families, rewarding the Komnenos family for the deceased Manuel's service, thereby encouraging their continued loyalty.¹⁸⁶

Bryennios' omission of an emperor's name may be linked to his knowledge that the marriage was in fact joined after 1025, either during the reign of Constantine VIII or Romanos III Argyros. Bryennios may have avoided referring to this information explicitly, because his objective in this passage is to associate the Komnenos family with the prestige of Basil II's reign.¹⁸⁷ A marriage date after 1025 is corroborated by Varzos' estimations of the probable birthdates of Aikaterine and Isaac's children. He estimated that their son Manuel, who died before the beginning of Isaac's reign, was likely born around 1030. He proposed a date of 1034 for the birth of Manuel's sister Maria, who as we have noted, may have been named after her grandmother, Aikaterine's mother.¹⁸⁸ Thus, although it is not certain, it is possible that Aikaterine was betrothed to Isaac between 1018 and 1025, but that her marriage was not joined until around 1028/1029.

As noted above, Mädlar and Varzos estimated that Isaac was born in 1005-1007, meaning he would have been eighteen in 1025.¹⁸⁹ The date of Aikaterine's birth is not attested, as is often the case in source material for early medieval individuals.¹⁹⁰ However, if the marriage with Isaac was joined in 1028/1029 it would suggest that before 1028, Aikaterine was younger than twelve, the typical age of

¹⁸⁵ *Synop.*, Th 372. She is described as a sister of Prousianos, who was Aikaterine's brother. Romanos Kourkouas is described as her husband in Constantine VIII's reign (1025-1028), and the marriage was therefore very likely to have been joined in Basil's reign.

¹⁸⁶ Isaac's younger brother, John, was at this time also married to Anna Dalassene, who was from the powerful Dalassenos family. According to Bryennios, the betrothal took place at around the same time that Isaac was betrothed to Aikaterine: Bryennios, *History*, 1.2. The fact that Aikaterine was betrothed to the elder of the Komnenos brothers indicates that it was more important to the Komnenoi to establish ties of kinship with the former Bulgarian imperial family than with the Dalassenoi. The Dalassenoi also gave the Komnenoi connections to a previous ruling family, but these were less direct than those provided by Aikaterine. Cheynet & Vannier, who have published an authoritative prosopographical study on the Dalassenos family, thought it was possible that a woman named Helen, who was married to Constantine, the son of the emperor Romanos Lekapenos (r.920-944), but died very soon after the marriage, was a Dalassena. This was because Skylitzes identifies Helen's mother as Adrian, from the Armeniakon theme. The name Adrian is attested amongst later Dalassenoi and Zonaras describes Constantine Dalassenos, who was considered as a candidate to marry Zoe, as originating from the same theme: *Synop.*, Th 228-229, Zonaras, *Epitome*, 17.10, Cheynet & Vannier 1986, 75-76.

¹⁸⁷ For perceptions of Basil II's reign as a 'heroic age' during the reign of Alexios I: McGeer 2019, 11; Holmes 2005, 235, whose argument is further discussed below.

¹⁸⁸ Varzos 1984, 58-59.

¹⁸⁹ See above, 30 n. 131.

¹⁹⁰ Stafford 2006a, 102.

marriage for Byzantine girls.¹⁹¹ Therefore, as proposed above, it is possible that Aikaterine was born around 1016. However, even if Aikaterine married Isaac a few years earlier, around the end of Basil II's reign, it would still be likely that she was a young child when she arrived in Constantinople. We can be more confident therefore in proposing that she was born sometime in the second decade of the eleventh century.

The period between Aikaterine's marriage to Isaac and her reign as empress (c1028/29-1057)

The source material for Aikaterine's life between her marriage to Isaac and his rebellion in 1057 is scarce. However, it is possible to piece together some aspects of the history of Aikaterine and her family through an examination of Isaac's career, and those of her natal relatives. Sphragistic evidence shows that Isaac was at some point before 1057 *Doux* of Iberia and *Doux* of Vaspukuran, and that he held several court titles, the highest of which was *Magistros*.¹⁹² At some point he was appointed *Domestikos* of the Schools of the East but was dismissed from this position in 1055/56 by Theodora.¹⁹³ Skylitzes attests that Isaac possessed a household (*oikos*) in the town of Kastamon in Paphlagonia.¹⁹⁴ Based upon Isaac's court title and his military appointments in eastern Anatolia, it is likely that he possessed other substantial properties both in and outside Constantinople, and that Aikaterine had access to these properties.

Given Isaac's military responsibilities, Aikaterine probably administered properties in his absence. Anton Mokhov and Karina Kapsalykova have identified a group of fourteen seals which were used by wives of Byzantine provincial military leaders in the tenth and eleventh centuries and which help shed light on Aikaterine's position. Reading these seals alongside the Grottaferrata text of *Digenis Akrites* they have argued that the survival of these seals shows that these women were engaged in administrative activities.¹⁹⁵ There are no seals bearing Aikaterine's name which survive to us, but

¹⁹¹ ODB 2005, 'Marriage'.

¹⁹² PBW 2016, Isaakios no. 1. <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/107447/>> (Accessed 04/02/2022).

¹⁹³ Varzos 1984, 42; Kaldellis 2017, 216.

¹⁹⁴ *Synop.*, Th 489. This place is mentioned by Bryennios, who associates it with Isaac's father, Manuel: Bryennios, *History*, 2.26.

¹⁹⁵ Mokhov & Kapsalykova 2017, 300-310. The manuscript of the Grottaferrata version of *Digenes Akritas* dates to c1300, but aspects of the content of the text appear to be reflective of social practices in Anatolia from the tenth century onwards. Elizabeth Jeffreys has proposed a scenario whereby the written version of *Digenes* was created in twelfth-century Constantinople, from earlier oral traditions. For the provenance of *Digenes*: Jeffreys, E. 1998, xiii-lxii. Passages within the text describe a woman, named the *Strategissa*, who seems to manage estates whilst her male relatives are away on a military frontier: *Digenes Akritas*, G, 1, ll. 49-81. The *Cadaster of Thebes* (a land register produced in the second half of the eleventh century), presents several women, described as *Despoina*, managing property independently. It is likely these women are widows but that they gained administrative experience during their husband's lifetimes. The Greek text is published at, Svoronos 1959, 11-19.

Mokhov and Kapsalykova's argument nonetheless sheds light on how in the period, elite women such as Aikaterine regularly performed administrative roles. Aikaterine likely also possessed feminized court titles which were equivalent to those her husband held, and therefore performed in ceremonial in Constantinople at least periodically.¹⁹⁶

There is evidence that Aikaterine always had at least one natal relative who was pre-eminent in the Byzantine social hierarchy between c1018 and 1057. This is because one result of Basil II's policy of arranging marriages between Byzantines and the descendants of the Kometopouloi was that the latter became incorporated into the Byzantine elite. According to Skylitzes, Aikaterine's mother Maria was elevated to the rank of *Zoste Patrikia* (Girded Lady-Patrician) after 1018. *Zoste Patrikia* is listed amongst the first class of title-holders in the tenth-century *Escorial Taktikon*. Cheynet pointed out that the other court titles in this class, such as *Kaisar* and *Nobelissimos*, were normally only held by one person at a time, but that the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies* indicates that at least two *Zoste* could participate in court ceremony alongside one another.¹⁹⁷ Maria may have held the title and participated in court ceremony alongside Miroslava, a daughter of Samuel who, according to Skylitzes, had been made *Zoste* by Basil II around 997, after she and her husband Asotios had switched allegiance to Byzantium.¹⁹⁸

Maria was forced to retire to a monastery in 1029, during the reign of Romanos III Argyros, when her son, Prousianos was accused of conspiring against the emperor alongside Theodora, the daughter of Constantine VIII and future empress.¹⁹⁹ The only information on Aikaterine's sisters in this period is a statement made by Skylitzes that Romanos Kourkouas, who was married to one of them, was blinded by Constantine VIII for plotting against him (fig. 1). It is possible that Aikaterine's sister was involved in this plotting. Kourkouas was probably older than Isaac, which suggests that Aikaterine's sister was older than her too.²⁰⁰ The description of Aikaterine as older than her sisters by Bryennios is therefore unlikely to be accurate and may be connected to Aikaterine's importance as a symbol of prestige for the Komnenos family, analysed in the next chapter.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ For women's court titles, and the ceremonies performed by female dignitaries: Kazhdan & McCormick 1997, 182-185.

¹⁹⁷ Cheynet 2000, 180; *Book of Ceremonies*, R 596. *Escorial Taktikon*, 263, ll. 1-8. Ed Oikonomides. See also ODB 2005, 'Zoste Patrikia'; Guillard 1971, 269-275.

¹⁹⁸ *Synop.*, Th 342-343.

¹⁹⁹ *Synop.*, Th 376. Prousianos is described as a son of John Vladislav at, *Synop.*, Th 359.

²⁰⁰ *Synop.*, Th 372. The fact that Romanos Kourkouas performed a leading role in a conspiracy during Constantine VIII's reign suggests that he was older than Isaac, who was probably between eighteen and twenty-one in the reign.

²⁰¹ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2.

The sources yield more information on Aikaterine's brothers, in part due to the extensive attention which Skylitzes gives to the Bulgarian royal family.²⁰² As mentioned above, three of her brothers, Prousianos, Alousianos and Aaron, are attested with court titles and military offices.²⁰³ According to Bryennios, a fourth brother, Trojan (who Bryennios also describes as a child of Samuel) married a woman with ties of kinship to the Kontostephanos, Aballantes and Phokas families and had a daughter, Maria, who was the mother of the empress Eirene Doukaina.²⁰⁴ An interpolation in the U manuscript, which was likely added by Michael Diabolis mentions a fifth brother, Rodomir, and a further interpolation in the E manuscript of the *Synopsis*, mentions a sixth brother, Clement. However, there is no further information on Rodomir or Clement's lives.²⁰⁵ According to Skylitzes, Prousianos became *Magistros* and *Strategos* of the Boukellarion theme but was tonsured and blinded in 1029 after the accusations that he plotted against Romanos III Argyros. A tomb inscription in Bulgarian found in Michalovce (eastern Slovakia), then part of the Kingdom of Hungary, reads:

Here rests Presian [born] in the year 6505 (AD 996/997), [who] died in the year 6569 (AD 1060/1061).²⁰⁶

Although the provenance of the inscription is disputed, it suggests that Prousianos may have migrated to the Kingdom of Hungary at some time after 1029.²⁰⁷ Psellos writes that during the 1030s, Aikaterine's brothers, with the exception of Alousianos, were honoured at the imperial court and allowed to advise the emperor.²⁰⁸ Since Prousianos had been blinded and tonsured by this time, Psellos must have meant Aaron, Trojan and possibly Clement. Skylitzes describes how Alousianos was *Strategos* of Theodosiopolis, near modern-day Erzurum in eastern Turkey, during the reign of Michael IV.²⁰⁹ However, he participated in the Balkan rebellion of Peter Deljan in 1040-41, although he managed to negotiate repatriation to Byzantium in 1041, and recognition as *Magistros*.²¹⁰ It has been suggested that Alousianos acted as a Byzantine agent during these events, because he undermined Peter Deljan's leadership.²¹¹ Aaron remained loyal to successive Byzantine emperors and held several military offices and court titles, eventually becoming *Magistros*. Aaron's positions

²⁰² For Skylitzes' focus on the Bulgarian royal family, likely connected to the prominence of their descendants at the court of Alexios I: Holmes 2005, 211-16.

²⁰³ Prousianos is described as a son of John Vladislav at, *Synop.*, Th 359. According to the *Continuation*, one of Alousianos' daughters was the first wife of the future emperor Romanos Diogenes: *Contin.*, Ts 134.

²⁰⁴ Bryennios, 3.6.

²⁰⁵ *Synop.*, Th 360.

²⁰⁶ Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 19. Trans. Tăpkova-Zaimova & Murdzhev.

²⁰⁷ For an overview of the literature concerning the inscription: Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 19.

²⁰⁸ *Chron.*, 4.46. He writes that Alousianos was denied access to the court in 1040, which was exceptional.

²⁰⁹ *Synop.*, Th 413.

²¹⁰ *Synop.*, Th 414; *Chron.*, 4.45-50.

²¹¹ Palaiet 2015, 248; Fine 1991, 205-206.

were predominantly in east Anatolia. He is named in a seal as *Doux* of Ani and Iberia and he is described by Skylitzes as the *archon* of Vaskupuran in 1048.²¹² Notably, in 1057 Aaron remained loyal to Michael VI and opposed Isaac and therefore his sister. He nonetheless continued to hold high rank during both Isaac and Constantine X's reign.²¹³

This prosopographical overview shows that Aikaterine was consistently connected to a network of relatives in Byzantium between her arrival in Constantinople in 1018 and Isaac's rebellion in 1057. Frederick Lauritzen also proposed that Aikaterine and Michael Psellos were acquaintances in the 1030s and 1040s. Lauritzen's proposal is based on Psellos' assertion that he knew Alousianos but did not recognise him when they bumped into each other in Constantinople during Peter Deljan's rebellion. Lauritzen argued therefore that Psellos knew Alousianos' family, including Aikaterine, but did not know Alousianos personally.²¹⁴ The suggestion is possible, but there is no certain evidence to support it.

What emerges more clearly from this prosopographical overview is evidence of tension and conflict between the Byzantine emperor and Aikaterine's relatives. Two of Aikaterine's brothers, and perhaps her mother and at least one of her sisters, were involved in conspiracy and resistance to Byzantine imperial power. A related point is the location of Aikaterine and her relatives in the first half of the eleventh century. Although Aikaterine's relatives were assigned military offices, these were in Asia Minor, far from their Balkan homelands. Aikaterine's marriage into the Komnenos family, whose power base was in Kastamon in Paphlagonia (in the Armeniakon theme), matches with this pattern. The resettlement of Aikaterine and her family members in parts of the Byzantine Empire far from their homelands can be characterised as displacement. It was intended to reduce the likelihood that they would provoke resistance to imperial rule in the Balkans and matches with a long-term Byzantine policy, enacted towards other peoples such as the Armenians.²¹⁵

The civil war of 1057

According to several narrative histories, in Easter 1057, a group of military leaders including Isaac, who possessed links to Asia Minor, were provoked to rebel by the emperor Michael VI's refusal to award them promotions when they came to Constantinople. The evidence for these events have

²¹² *PBW* (2016), Aaron no. 101 < <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/106209/> > (Accessed 04/02/2022); *Synop.*, Th 448.

²¹³ For Aaron's career: Lemerle 1977, 41.

²¹⁴ Lauritzen 2007, 261; *Chron.*, 4.47.

²¹⁵ For state-coerced resettlement of populations between 600-1204: Stouraitis 2020, 153-158.

been investigated thoroughly by several scholars, most notably Yukio Nezu and Koichi Inoue. A comprehensive summary of source material and scholarship on the rebellion is also provided by Georgios Leveniotis.²¹⁶ However, Aikaterine's role in the rebellion has until now received no attention in modern scholarship. According to Attaleiates and Skylitzes, Bryennios joined the rebellion but was quickly arrested and blinded.²¹⁷ Both texts tell us that the rebel leaders then acted quickly and acclaimed Isaac as emperor. According to Skylitzes, the rebels gathered at Isaac's household at Kastamon in Paphlagonia. They then moved to a plain named Gounaria and assembled soldiers from the region, where Isaac was acclaimed on June 8. They fortified this place and remained there for some time, probably around one to two months, before marching for Nicaea, where they won a decisive battle over Michael VI in mid to late August.²¹⁸ Isaac arrived in Constantinople on August 31 and was crowned on September 1.²¹⁹

In the *Synopsis* and the *Continuation* Skylitzes gives two direct references to Aikaterine's location during the rebellion. In the *Synopsis* Isaac is depicted sending his wife and personal wealth to the fortress of Pemolissa (modern day Osmanlık, 500km east of Istanbul), under the protection of his brother John. The *Continuation* depicts Aikaterine journey from Pemolissa to Constantinople to be crowned soon after Isaac arrived in the city in August 1057. Aikaterine's name is added in the interpolation to the *Synopsis* of Michael of Diabolis discussed above.²²⁰ According to the *Synopsis*, Isaac sent Aikaterine to Pemolissa when the rebel army departed from Gounaria.²²¹ Skylitzes' account of the end of Constantine IX Monomachos' reign and of Theodora's reign is lacking in detail but his depiction of the period between Easter 1057 and Isaac's entrance into Constantinople occupies 17 pages of Thurn's critical edition. This implies that Skylitzes had access to abundant information for this period. Shepard has proposed that his source was a laudatory biography or autobiography of Katakalon Kekaumenos, one of the rebel leaders.²²² Skylitzes' account of Aikaterine's departure for Pemolissa begins with a description of Kekaumenos' arrival at Gounaria. This suggests that his information derives from the source identified by Shepard. In summary,

²¹⁶ Nezu 2006, 41-60; Inoue 1993, 268-278; Leveniotis 2020, 37-65. The rebellion was led by men from the Argyroi, Botaneiatas, Bourtzai, Doukai, Kekaumenoi and Skleroi: *Chron.*, 7.3-4; *Synop.*, Th 483, 486-87, adds that the rebels were bound by oath.

²¹⁷ *Synop.*, Th 487-88; *Contin.*, Ts 103.

²¹⁸ Attaleiates, *History*, B 54-55; *Synop.*, Th 489. Attaleiates writes that the place where the battle was fought had two names: Polemon and Hades. Vogt 1923, 117-118, gave a date of 20th August for the battle, but did not cite his sources. Psellos' account of the embassy sent by Michael VI to Isaac implies there was a short time frame between the battle and Isaac's arrival in Constantinople on 31st August: *Chron.*, 7.11-43.

²¹⁹ Shepard 1977, 22-30

²²⁰ *Contin.*, Ts 103; *Synop.*, Th 492. According to Psellos, John re-joined Isaac's army before it arrived in Constantinople: *Chron.*, 7.22.

²²¹ *Synop.*, Th 492.

²²² Shepard 1992, 171-181.

Skylitzes appears to have been able to pinpoint Aikaterine's movement to Pemolissa, when Isaac's army departed from Nicaea because of the quality of his source material for this period.

It can be inferred from the *Synopsis* that Aikaterine was present at the fortified camp in Gounaria, between Isaac's acclamation as emperor in early June and the departure of the army for Nicaea. This has received no attention in modern scholarship. Skylitzes depicts Aikaterine in a passive role, with responsibility for her safety being transferred from Isaac to John. However, the possibility that she was present in Gounaria invites consideration of the extent of her visibility and power in this space. The possibility is further raised that she acted as empress co-regnant here from the time of Isaac's acclamation on June 8.

Aikaterine as empress co-regnant

Skylitzes' *Continuation* and Zonaras' *Epitome* present Aikaterine's arrival in Constantinople and coronation as *Augousta* taking place quickly after her husband reached the capital, so in early September.²²³ The so-called *Kodin-Chronik* (numbered 14 in Peter Schreiner's edition of Byzantine short chronicles) a short chronicle which appears in a number of manuscripts from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, but which may have been composed in the thirteenth century, gives a date of 4 September for the beginning of Aikaterine's reign alongside Isaac.²²⁴ Although it is possible Aikaterine acted as empress co-regnant with the rebel army, it makes sense to date the beginning of her tenure to this period. This was when Michael VI surrendered and Isaac took possession of the imperial centre, the Great Palace. Isaac was at this time recognised by the population in Constantinople as emperor and Aikaterine's position as empress was affirmed by her coronation and reception of the *Augousta* title.²²⁵ This title brought with it a crown, a visible marker of imperial status, and was linked with specific roles in the regular ceremonial of the imperial court. These included participation in ceremonies alongside the emperor and also the headship of separate ceremonies involving female dignitaries, who were mostly wives of male court dignitaries.²²⁶ According to the *Book of Ceremonies*, an empress customarily received her *Augousta* crown from

²²³ *Contin.*, Ts 103; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.4, ll. 6-8.

²²⁴ Schreiner (ed.) 1975, 143, no. 71. For the manuscript tradition: 121-125. The chronicles numbered 15, 16 and 17 by Schreiner also give a date of 4 September for the beginning of Isaac's reign, but they do not mention Aikaterine, see: Schreiner 1977, 150-151.

²²⁵ Shepard 1977, 22-30.

²²⁶ Hill 1999, 102; Kazhdan & McCormick 1997, 182-185. For an example of a ceremony on Palm Sunday performed by the empress alongside the emperor, and involving male courtiers: Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R 176-177. For middle-Byzantine court ceremonies in general: Featherstone 2015, 587-608.

the hands of the emperor, implying that her power derived from his.²²⁷ However, it will be argued in the fourth chapter of this thesis that in the eleventh century more emphasis was placed in imperial culture upon empresses' roles as partners of the emperor in the exercise of imperial power, rather than upon their status as his subject.

Aikaterine was empress until the abdication of her husband in November 1059. The major events between these dates were firstly Isaac's conflict with the patriarch Michael Keroularios, which resulted in Isaac arresting Keroularios in November 1058. The patriarch died in exile in January 1059, before he could be tried.²²⁸ Secondly, Isaac led a campaign against an alliance of Hungarians and Pechenegs in the later summer and autumn of 1059, just before he abdicated. This campaign was conducted principally in the area Sredets (modern-day Sofia) which had once been part of the territory ruled by Aikaterine's father, John Vladislav. Isaac negotiated peace with the Hungarians and secured the submission of the Pecheneg leaders except for one, Selte, who was defeated in battle. However, the army suffered losses in a storm during the return to Constantinople, dated by Skylitzes to September 24th.²²⁹ Much of the evidence for Aikaterine's history in this period is connected to this military campaign and is discussed in detail in the fourth chapter.

The court was the imperial centre. Kazhdan & McCormick stated that at the centre of the court was the figure of the emperor, and the fundamental characteristic of court society was physical proximity to this person.²³⁰ In this study, their definition will be expanded by showing how Byzantine imperial rule was a complementary form of governance involving the emperors' female and male relatives. I am influenced by a similar definition of monarchy in the medieval west, given by Katrin Sijursen.²³¹ The demographics of the court were fluid. Courtiers (who all took part in regular ceremonial) included state bureaucrats, military commanders, eunuchs, and members of foreign royal families. A large group of these courtiers, perhaps around 2000, were members of the Senate.²³² In all probability Aikaterine already had experience of the imperial court from the time she arrived in Constantinople in 1019 because her mother Maria held the court title *Zoste Patrikia*. Later, as the wife of a high-ranking military commander, Aikaterine would have partaken in ceremonies involving the wives of male title holders.

²²⁷ Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R203. The same theme is evident in the ninth-century collection of laws named the *Basilika*, which states that the *Augousta* is subject to the laws, whereas the emperor is not: *Basilicorum*, II.6.1.

²²⁸ Attaleiates, *History*, B 64-66; *Chron.*, 7.65; *Contin.*, Ts 104-105.

²²⁹ Kaldellis 2017, 222-223; *Contin.* Ts 107; Attaleiates, *History*, B 66-68; *Chron.*, 7.67-70.

²³⁰ Kazhdan & McCormick 1997, 167. .

²³¹ Sijursen 2019, 139.

²³² Following the calculation of Kazhdan & McCormick 1997, 175.

The court was both embedded in Constantinople, but separate from the rest of the city, and with its own rules.²³³ It was closely linked with the space of the Great Palace, often described in Byzantine Greek texts as ‘the palaces’ (τὰ βασιλεια), an agglomeration of palatial structures, walled off from the rest of the city, descending the first hill of Constantinople to the shore of the Bosphorus (fig. 5).²³⁴ It was important for emperors to be in control of this space for their power to be accepted as legitimate, and it can thus be characterised as an imperial centre. It was also possible for the court to be located in other places in Constantinople, or outside the city. When present in the imperial court in and outside the Great Palace, Aikaterine would have been accompanied by an entourage of eunuchs, and female and male servants, slaves and courtiers.²³⁵

Beyond the court, Aikaterine was, as empress integrated into the fabric of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Most members of the city’s diverse and multi-ethnic population were not permitted to go into the Great Palace.²³⁶ Therefore, their main interactions with the emperor and empress were when they left their palace and entered the city. These movements into the city occurred regularly throughout the year, were often integrated with formal ecclesiastical occasions, and always involved ceremonial display.²³⁷ It is important to recognise that whilst Aikaterine was visible in Constantinople, most of the population would have only seen her, as well as the emperor, on at most a handful of occasions. She would have appeared to onlookers from a distance and in a formal guise, as an image of imperial power.²³⁸

Regrettably, there is an absence of numismatic or other visual sources for Aikaterine’s life in this period. By contrast, Aikaterine’s successor Eudokia Makrembolitissa is depicted as empress co-regnant in multiple visual sources.²³⁹ It should be noted however that only a few silver issues, and no bronze folles, from Isaac’s reign have survived. It is possible therefore that Aikaterine was depicted

²³³ Krallis 2019, 122, 255.

²³⁴ Herrin 2013, 163-164. For the Greek name: *Chron.*, 5.1-2; *Contin.*, 108.10-11. Much of the specifics of the spatial organisation and daily rhythms of the Great Palace are opaque to us, in part because only a small fragment of the site has been excavated. However, at the time of the submission of this thesis, excavations and restorations led by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality were being conducted at the site of the Boukoleon Palace.

²³⁵ Herrin 2013a, 226-228.

²³⁶ Herrin 2013, 165.

²³⁷ Berger 2001, 77. Aikaterine was likely visible in the hippodrome, which was connected to the Great Palace. She would have also appeared in the Hagia Sophia, and imperial processions conducted between the Great Palace and this church, as well as other processions conducted along the Mese, the main thoroughfare in Constantinople, involving visits to churches nearby this street. Alongside other members of the imperial family and the court, Aikaterine would have also been visible to the wider population when she travelled by boat to formal occasions at sites including the Mangana and the Blachernae churches.

²³⁸ Liutprand of Cremona recounts a telling anecdote in which the city guards in Constantinople are depicted as being unable to recognise the emperor Leo VI, and pointed out that it would be impossible to do so, because he has only ever seen the emperor from afar during public processions: Liutprand, *Antapodosis*, 1.11.

²³⁹ See below, 161 n. 647.

on coins struck during Isaac's reign, which have been lost to us.²⁴⁰ However it seems more likely that Aikaterine was not depicted on any coins issued during the reign. This is because no empress co-regent had been depicted in numismatic iconography since Eudokia Ingerina in Basil I's reign (867-886), and this coin seems to have been a special issue and was therefore unusual anyway.²⁴¹

Nonetheless, there is much more evidence for the two years of Aikaterine's life when she was empress co-regnant than for the four previous decades. She is named with the *Augousta* title, alongside Isaac, in dating inscriptions associated with the restoration of the Great Cathedral in Ani and in Chersonesos, which have been discussed above.²⁴² There are six letters written by Psellos mentioning Aikaterine which have survived to us. In part because a complete edition of Psellos' letters was not available until Papaioannou's recent publication, these texts have thus far received limited analysis in modern scholarship. However they form the backbone of evidence for the analysis of Aikaterine's position as empress co-regnant in this thesis. Four of the six, *Letters* Π 138, 140 and 139 (addressed to Isaac), and Π 40 (addressed to Isaac's nephew Theodoros Dokeianos), contain specific references to Isaac's military campaign in the later summer and autumn of 1059, and so can be dated to this period.

Aikaterine is described in Π 138, 140 and 139 and Π 40 as present in Constantinople. In Π 138, written at the start of the campaign, Psellos describes Aikaterine's presence in Constantinople as comforting. Π 140 is written during the campaign. Psellos states that he is not well informed but nonetheless describes how he received news of a victory, when he immediately rushed to inform Aikaterine. Π 139 celebrates victory in the campaign and recognises Aikaterine's contribution through the vigils she held alongside her daughter Maria before an icon of the Virgin. Π 40 depicts Aikaterine comforting the female relatives of Isaac's nephew and close confidant Theodore Dokeianos, following the death of this man's father-in-law during the campaign.²⁴³ These letters bear comparison to a passage in Skylitzes' *Continuation*, which provides further evidence for Aikaterine's visibility in Constantinople. This depicts Aikaterine acting as a joint-restorer of the Church of St John Prodromos at the monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople, with Isaac.²⁴⁴ Because the reign was only two years and two months, it is likely that the involvement of Isaac and Aikaterine with the Stoudios began soon after Isaac's accession in 1057. The nature and significance of their involvement with the Stoudios is the starting point for the argument of the fourth chapter of this thesis.

²⁴⁰ Grierson 1973, 760. Eudokia was the first empress co-regnant who had been depicted on silver or copper coins for some four centuries, since Martina, the wife of Heraclius, in 629.

²⁴¹ Grierson 1973, 481, 489.

²⁴² Bensammar 1976, 273 n. 10; Lauritzen 2007, 261.

²⁴³ See the summaries of Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 243 (Π 138), 333-334 (Π 140), 369-370 (Π 40), 389-390 (Π 139).

²⁴⁴ *Contin.*, 110. For St John Prodromos, see below, 118-128.

By contrast to the four abovementioned letters, Psellos' Π 1 and Π 142 contains no specific references to dateable events (although the title of Π 142 does). For this reason I will now discuss the possible dates when these two letters were composed. This discussion is important because in both letters Aikaterine appears to be outside of Constantinople, and it is therefore imperative to establish whether her visibility in these texts potentially sheds light on patterns for the entire period when she was empress co-regnant, or only upon specific moments. The method underpinning this discussion will involve the use of dateable events mentioned by the letters, as well as their position in the manuscripts L and P.

In Π 1, Aikaterine is addressed directly. Psellos writes that he misses Aikaterine's presence in Constantinople alongside Isaac, who is described as engaged in administrative business, although the text also contains a reference to him hunting.²⁴⁵ Psellos asks after Aikaterine and the emperor but appears uncertain that she will reply because he frames her potential answer as an act of favour.²⁴⁶ He describes Aikaterine as *Basilis* and *Despoina* (meaning mistress) and presents her as a junior partner in Isaac's reign.²⁴⁷ Using references to Psalm 44, Psellos praises Aikaterine's Kometopouloi ancestry, which he presents as imperial, whilst also celebrating her status as Byzantine empress. This aspect of the letter is examined in detail in the third chapter.

In Π 142, addressed to Isaac, the emperor and empress are both described as absent from the capital. Aikaterine's absence from Constantinople is implied by the words 'having been deprived of the light of the moon'.²⁴⁸ In several manuscripts, including the later twelfth-century P, the title of Π 142 describes Isaac as on campaign (ἐν ταξειδίῳ ὄντα). For this reason, Jeffreys dates this letter to the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign.²⁴⁹ However, the title of the letter in the earliest manuscript, L, also does not mention a military campaign. Furthermore, the information provided in the text about Aikaterine's absence from Constantinople does not match with Psellos' other letters which mention the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign, where she is always depicted as present in Constantinople. This raises the possibility that Π 142 might have been addressed to Isaac either before or after the campaign, when he and Aikaterine were outside of Constantinople for other reasons.

Papaioannou suggested that both Π 1 and Π 142 were composed after the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign, between October and November 1059.²⁵⁰ Three pieces of evidence support Papaioannou's suggestion. Firstly, Psellos and Attaleiates (followed by Skylitzes) describe how Isaac

²⁴⁵ Π 1 ll. 35-38.

²⁴⁶ Π 1 ll. 13-34.

²⁴⁷ LSJ, s.v., "δέσποινα".

²⁴⁸ ἐστερημένοι καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς σελήνης αὐγῶν. Isaac is also referred to as the Sun: Π 142 ll.1-5.

²⁴⁹ Π 142; Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 313-314. Jeffreys does not assign Π 1 with a specific date within Isaac's reign.

²⁵⁰ Papaioannou 2019, 1, 383.

spent his time hunting outside of Constantinople between his return from the 1059 campaign in September/October and his illness in November of that year. Psellos specifies that Isaac was based in an imperial lodge and Attaleiates writes that Isaac was located on the east shore of the Bosphorus.²⁵¹ Both Π 1 and Π 142 feature references to hunting, but also mention that Isaac was conducting administrative business.²⁵² Secondly, Π 1 and Π 142, alongside *Letter* Π 251 written to the *Protonotorios* of the *Dromos* Sagmatas, appear at the end of the cluster of letters associated with Isaac's reign in L.²⁵³ Papaioannou proposed that this cluster is linked to a collection made by Psellos himself, or one of his letter bearers.²⁵⁴ It is possible that the compiler of the original collection ordered them chronologically. In this case, the fact that in L both Π 1 and Π 142 are located after the letters written during the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign, would suggest that they were composed in October and November 1059.²⁵⁵ The opening lines of Π 142 also suggest this date. Psellos writes that Isaac has been absent from the capital for a long time.²⁵⁶ It is possible that he here refers to Isaac's swift departure from Constantinople following his return from the military campaign.

Thus, several factors point to the composition of Π 1 and Π 142 between October and November 1059, suggesting Aikaterine was on the east shore of the Bosphorus at this time. However, the evidence that the letters were composed in this period is not conclusive. For example, Psellos writes that Isaac visited this imperial lodge multiple times during his reign, which means the letters could have been sent to him here on another occasion. Moreover, Psellos' reference to his letter bearer in Π 1 who is described as his 'usual [...] monk' suggests that Aikaterine was already familiar with this person, which in turn suggests that this letter was not the first time Psellos had corresponded with Aikaterine when she was absent from the city.²⁵⁷ This further raises the likelihood that Aikaterine and Isaac left Constantinople together regularly and for various reasons during the reign, suggesting Aikaterine's presence alongside Isaac outside of Constantinople was routine. Here it is worth once more referring to the methodology advocated by Tanner et. al., which encourages us to view as routine women's presence in a power centre, for example the court of an emperor outside of Constantinople.²⁵⁸ From this perspective, it seems likely that Aikaterine travelled to the eastern

²⁵¹ βασιλειος τοῦτον καταγωγή αὐτοῦ: *Chron.*, 7.73, 676, l. 18 (page and line numbers from Reinsch's edition). In this section, Psellos also specifies the location on the east shore of the Bosphorus. See also: Attaleiates, *History*, B 68-69; *Contin.*, 108.

²⁵² Π 1, ll. 35-38; Π 142 ll. 56-68.

²⁵³ Papaioannou 2019, lii.

²⁵⁴ Papaioannou 2019, li.

²⁵⁵ *Letter* Π 143 is also included within the cluster of letters referring to the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign. It features no specific references to the campaign but could well have been written then.

²⁵⁶ ὅτι τηλικαύτην κατεκρίθημεν νύκτα πολυήμερον. Π 142 ll. 3-4.

²⁵⁷ Ἐπὶ τούτῳ οὖν καὶ τὸν συνήθη πρὸς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν ἐξαπέστειλα μοναχόν: Π 1, ll. 12-13.

²⁵⁸ Tanner, Gathagan & Hunneycutt 2019, 2.

shore of the Bosphorus alongside Isaac multiple times between 1057 and 1059, and likely travelled to other places within the vicinity of Constantinople on multiple occasions throughout Isaac's reign.

Narrative histories present Isaac's abdication of the throne to Constantine X taking place soon after the 1059 military campaign. According to several Byzantine short chronicles, Isaac abdicated on 21-22 November.²⁵⁹ Aikaterine's involvement in the abdication is depicted in two narrative histories, the *Continuation* and the *Chronographia*. The *Continuation* includes a brief account of how Aikaterine encouraged Isaac to go through with his plan to become a monk at the Stoudios monastery.²⁶⁰ In the *Chronographia*, Psellos on the other hand depicts Aikaterine as initially resistant to Isaac's abdication. In the last passages of the first section of the *Chronographia*, she is depicted delivering an extended speech exhorting Isaac not to give up the throne. The close links between the *Chronographia* and the Doukai rulers who succeeded Isaac, examined in the previous chapter, hint that the depiction of Aikaterine may be connected to propaganda justifying the power of the Doukai. This possibility is central to the argument of chapter five.

To return to Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine's speech, the passage is notable because she is one of only a few women or men to be depicted delivering a speech in the text. Aikaterine is then rebuked by Isaac.²⁶¹ The speech and Isaac's response have been analysed from a gendered perspective by Leonora Neville and her analysis will be further discussed in the fifth chapter.²⁶² Significantly, in the next passage of the *Chronographia*, Aikaterine insists that Isaac choose the person who serves him most closely, who will therefore continue to honour Isaac, and be like a son to Aikaterine. In response, Isaac sends for Constantine Doukas to replace him as emperor.²⁶³ This passage therefore presents Aikaterine as the instigator of Constantine's appointment as Isaac's successor. It was not however analysed by Neville in her examination of Aikaterine's speech, and part of chapter five will attempt to address this absence.

Soon afterwards, in the *Chronographia* there is a depiction of occasion described as a formal opening to Constantine's reign.²⁶⁴ Psellos writes that on this occasion Isaac gave a speech before an audience including Isaac's own family, servants and allies. In the speech Isaac charges Constantine to protect Aikaterine and their daughter Maria, as well as his brother John and his nephew.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ See, Schreiner 1977, 150-152.

²⁶⁰ *Contin.*, 108-109.

²⁶¹ *Chron.*, 7.79-82.

²⁶² Neville 2012, 140-50.

²⁶³ *Chron.*, 7.83.

²⁶⁴ τὰ μὲν οὖν τοῦ κράτους τῷ ἀνδρὶ προοίμια, τοιαῦτα: *Chron.*, 7.90, 696, 6-7.

²⁶⁵ *Chron.*, 7.89-91. The nephew could be John's eldest son Manuel, but is perhaps more likely to be Theodoros Dokeianos, who is addressed by Psellos in a letter, where he is described as close to Isaac: Π 41, ll. 8-9. See further: Varzos 1984, 59-61.

Alongside the *Chronographia* we should also consider *OM* 5, an imperial proclamation speech for Constantine X composed by Psellos. This text may have been read aloud by Constantine. Within the text it is mentioned that Aikaterine's name was included before Constantine's in the first imperial acclamations in the themes. According to the text, she was described as 'Great *Basilissa*' (μεγάλης βασιλίσσης).²⁶⁶

Psellos' texts point towards Aikaterine's political significance during Constantine's succession, but further conclusions on her role require an in-depth analysis of the two texts, to which we will subsequently turn in this study. As Neville has shown, it is difficult to use the passage in the *Chronographia* as a window upon Aikaterine as a historical figure, not least because the speech which she gives appears to be modelled on earlier texts, including the depiction of Theodora's speech during the Nika Riots in Procopius' *Wars*.²⁶⁷ In the fifth chapter I will analyse the depiction of Aikaterine in the *Chronographia*, alongside the imperial acclamation composed by Psellos to develop conclusions on Aikaterine's role in Isaac's abdication and Constantine's succession. It will be argued that these texts point towards the visibility of links between Aikaterine and Constantine X, which justified the power of the new emperor and presented him as a continuator of Isaac's rule.

Aikaterine as former empress and nun

Several written sources attest that Aikaterine, her daughter Maria, and Isaac were tonsured after the emperor's abdication. Skylitzes writes that Aikaterine took the name Xene and lived as a nun alongside Maria at the Myrelaion women's monastery, whilst Isaac took up residence in the Stoudios monastery.²⁶⁸ There are contradictory accounts about when Aikaterine became a nun. *OM* 5, discussed above, tells a story that soon after Isaac abdicated and became a monk in the Stoudios (in November 1059), Aikaterine expressed a desire to take on the habit (μεταμφιάσασθαι). According to *OM* 5, Constantine tried to persuade Aikaterine to remain a laywoman, but was unsuccessful.²⁶⁹ By contrast, the mid-twelfth century historian Michael Glykas writes that Aikaterine first lived alongside the religious community at the Myrelaion, before getting tonsured after Isaac's death, which was between 1060 and early 1062.²⁷⁰ In the fifth chapter, Psellos' story about Constantine's efforts to dissuade Aikaterine from taking the habit will be shown to be questionable, and likely a part of a

²⁶⁶ *OM* 5, 18, ll. 54-55. Psellos' focus upon Isaac's resignation and Constantine's succession indicates that the speech was given at an early date in Constantine's reign.

²⁶⁷ Neville 2012, 142-45; Procopius, *Wars*, 1.24.

²⁶⁸ *Contin.*, Ts. 108-109; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.7, l. 8.

²⁶⁹ *OM* 5, 18, ll. 47-57. Ed. Littlewood.

²⁷⁰ Glykas, *Annales*, 604, ll.1-9 (Page and line numbers from the Bonn edition). For Glykas: Neville 2018, 205-209; Treadgold 2013, 403-07, who suggested the history was written around 1170.

program of imperial propaganda. However, the basic fact of Aikaterine's tonsure seems unlikely to be fabricated in a text composed so soon after Isaac's abdication, especially as the speech was probably composed to be delivered in a public setting by Constantine X. It is best therefore to follow Psellos and date Aikaterine's tonsure and entrance into the Myrelaion convent to the period soon after Isaac's abdication in 1059.

Aikaterine's status as a nun in this period and her monastic name are also attested by an inscription, identified by Diehl as written in an eleventh-century hand, on the last folio of the manuscript of the evangeliary *MGS* 02. When Diehl saw the manuscript it was preserved in the library of the school of the Phanar Greek Orthodox College in Istanbul, but it is now in the National Library of Greece.²⁷¹ This manuscript is composed of 262 folios and the text of the Gospels is written on two columns. When Diehl saw it, it was illustrated by four full folio miniatures representing the four evangelists seated against a gold background (fig. 6), but three of these folios were subsequently removed and are now preserved in separate locations from the main manuscript.²⁷² The inscription gives a date of March 1063 and describes how the evangeliary was gifted by the nun Xene, formerly known as the Basilis Aikaterine Komnene, to the monastery of the Holy Trinity on the Halki island in the Princes Archipelago (the modern-day Heybeliada island).²⁷³ It is possible that Aikaterine either wrote the inscription or directed its production.

Seal BZS.1955.1.5083 in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection also bears an inscription on the reverse reading 'Theotokos, help Xene Komnene, nun' (Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ξένη μοναχῆ τῇ Κομνηνῇ) (fig. 7). The obverse depicts a bust of the Orans Virgin with a medallion of Christ before her. It is dated to the eleventh century in the online Dumbarton Oaks catalogue and identified as belonging to Aikaterine.²⁷⁴ However, Vitalien Laurent, who previously published the seal and also dated it to the eleventh century, argued that it was used by the *Kouropalatissa* Theodora Komnene, the sister of Alexios Komnenos, who also took the monastic name Xene when she was tonsured in c1075 (before Alexios became emperor). Laurent argued that the modest presentation of this seal was befitting of a non-imperial woman. He also pointed out a second seal also depicting the Orans Virgin and a medallion of Christ, which bears an inscription reading 'Theotokos, help the Kouropalatissa Xene

²⁷¹ For the full reference to the manuscript see above, 1 n. 3. For the acquisition history of the manuscript: Lowden 2003, 246.

²⁷² Diehl 1922, 243-244. Diehl also discussed the manuscript, with images, in a subsequent article: Diehl 1927, 3-9. The folios with the depictions of the evangelists Luke and Matthew are preserved in the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the folio depicting Mark, along with the incipit page of Matthew's Gospel, is in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum: Lowden 2003, 246.

²⁷³ The inscription is transcribed and translated by Diehl 1922, 244, who first connected the document with Aikaterine. The name Xene is also attested in *Contin.*, 110, l. 6, and Glykas, *Annales*, 604, ll. 8-9.

²⁷⁴ DO, *Online Seals Collection*, no. BZS.1955.1.5083 <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.5083>> (Accessed 25/02/2022).

Komnene, nun' (Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ξένη μοναχῇ κουροπαλατίσση τῇ Κομνηνῇ), and which was therefore certainly the seal of Theodora.²⁷⁵ The difference between this inscription and the inscription on BZS.1955.1.5083, which makes no mention of the *Kouropalitissa* title, suggests that the two seals were possessed by different people. In relation to this point, it should also be noted that the Orans Virgin with a medallion of Christ is commonly depicted on eleventh-century seals, and so the appearance of this design on both seals does not necessarily indicate that they were possessed by one person.²⁷⁶

Laurent's argument that seal BZS.1955.1.5083 must have been the seal of a non-imperial woman also does not hold up given that there are other eleventh- and twelfth-century seals with a relatively simple design which were used by women from the imperial family. These include seals possessed by Anna Dalassene and a seal of Eirene Doukaina.²⁷⁷ It is possible that if seal BZS.1955.1.5083 was not possessed by Theodora Komnene, then it was the seal of the Komnenian empress Piroska-Eirene, who also took the name Xene when she was tonsured in 1134. However, Piroska-Eirene was tonsured on her death bed, and so probably did not have time to issue a sealed document.²⁷⁸ Therefore Aikaterine is the best candidate to have possessed this seal, and for this reason I follow the identification of the Dumbarton Oaks catalogue in this study.

MGS 02 and seal BZS.1955.1.5083 bring us closest to Aikaterine's own voice. It is significant that Aikaterine chose the name Xene, which was also adopted by her niece Maria, daughter of Trojan, when she became a nun. On the one hand, Xene was commonly chosen as a monastic name amongst Byzantine nuns. It honoured the Blessed Xene, a Roman patrician named Eusebia (fifth century), who had taken that name when she became a nun. However, one meaning of the name Xene is 'foreign woman' and this points to Aikaterine's own ongoing perception that even after reigning as empress, her ties to her natal family, the Bulgarian Kometopouloi, were still a significant

²⁷⁵ Laurent 1965, 300-301.

²⁷⁶ There are many examples in Laurent 1965, including, 284-299, nos. 1442, 1446, 1456, 1464, 1465, 1468, 1471, 1472.

²⁷⁷ Anna Dalassene: DO, *Online Seal Collection*, nos. BZS.1947.2.1125, BZS.1958.106.402, BZS.1951.31.5.518 <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals#b_start=0&c2=Anna+Dalassene+nun+mother+of+the+emperor> (Accessed 25/02/2022); Eirene Doukaina: DO, *Online Seals Collection*, no. BZS.1955.1.4561

<<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4561>> (Accessed 25/02/2022).

²⁷⁸ Piroska-Eirene's tonsure shortly before her death in Bithynia is described in Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, 230, ll. 21-25. Ed. Hörandner. For an overview for the sources for Piroska-Eirene's tonsure: Kotzabassi 2013, 159 n. 30.

aspect of her identity, and that she still perceived herself as to some extent an outsider in Byzantine society.²⁷⁹ The significance of Aikaterine's use of the name Xene is further discussed in chapter two.

Skylitzes also depicts Aikaterine acting as a patron when she became a nun. His description of her patronage is included in a passage about her death. Skylitzes adds that before her death Aikaterine arranged an annual commemoration for Isaac and invited all of the members of the monastic community at the Stoudios monastery. Skylitzes does not say where the commemorations took place, but the most likely location is at the Stoudios monastery itself, where, according to the twelfth-century historian Michael Glykas, Isaac was also buried, after he had died at some point between 1060 and early 1062.²⁸⁰ The text also describes how Aikaterine stipulated that the gifts donated on the occasion should be doubled when she perceived her own death was near. The text also depicts her speaking with the *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios to arrange the doubling of gifts to the monastery. This person was likely either Michael Mermentoulos, who is attested as *hegoumenos* in 1048 and 1066, or Kosmas, who is attested as *hegoumenos* in 1075.²⁸¹ There is however little further information on these individuals. According to Skylitzes, Aikaterine was also buried in the Stoudios monastery.²⁸² It is likely that both Aikaterine and her husband were buried in the church of St John Prodromos, which, according to Skylitzes, they had restored together. The evidence for Aikaterine's involvement with the commemoration ceremonies for Isaac at the Stoudios also raises the question of how far she was secluded as a nun at the Myrelaion. Answers to this question will be offered in the fifth chapter.

Considering the evidence from Skylitzes' *Continuation*, it is possible that Aikaterine's donation to the evangeliary to the monastery of the Holy Trinity was made alongside her doubling of the donations to the Stoudios monastery. However, the date of Aikaterine's death is not certain. The date is listed on *Prosopography of the Byzantine World* as 1063, but with low certainty.²⁸³ She cannot have died before March 1063. This is the date when she donated the evangeliary MGS 02. Because there is no mention of Aikaterine in narrative histories covering the period after Constantine X's reign (1059-

²⁷⁹ LSJ, s.v., "ξένη". The usage and range of meanings communicated by the name Xene is discussed by Kotzabassi 2013, 139 n. 30.

²⁸⁰ Glykas, *Annales*, 604, l. 8. Attaleiates, *History*, B 69, writes that Isaac was a monk for a period shorter than his two year and two month reign before he died, suggesting his death was no later than January 1062. Bryennios, *History*, 1.5, writes that Isaac died one year after his reign, whilst the short chronicle numbered 15 in Schreiner's edition describes how Isaac lived for only 6 months and ten days after his abdication: Schreiner (ed.) 1975, 160, no. 16. Varzos 1984, 43, suggested Isaac died in 1060, whilst Kaldellis & Krallis 2012, 600 n. 128, suggested a specific date of 31st May, 1060.

²⁸¹ Janin 1969, 433. The only further information we have is in *Synop.*, Th 433, where Michael Mermentoulos is depicted successfully resisting Patriarch Michael Keroularios' attempt to remove St. Theodore the Stoudite from the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*.

²⁸² *Contin.*, Ts 110.

²⁸³ PBW (2016), Aikaterine no. 101 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/106226/>> (Accessed 07/02/2022).

23rd May 1067), even though the Komnenos family and her sister-in-law Anna Dalassene are described as important political actors in the period 1067-1071, it is likely that she died before 1067. In the *Continuation*, the annual commemorations which Aikaterine is organised for Isaac are described having been arranged in the ‘as usual and in the customary way’, apart from her doubling of gifts.²⁸⁴ This suggests that Skylitzes thought that Aikaterine was involved with several annual commemoration ceremonies, indicating that she died several years after the date of Isaac’s death between 1060 and 1062. For this reason I suggest that the approximate date of Aikaterine’s death was 1065.

Lauritzen has suggested that there is a reference to Aikaterine in a poem composed by Psellos numbered 20 in Westerink’s edition. The poem is titled ‘In the tomb of the Emperor Isaac’. It ends with the following lines:

The light of Christ disperses the evening light,
Deeming worthy the house of the Father alone
Having received the entreaties of the mother and friend.
το φως δ' ὁ Χριστός φως ἀνέσπερον νέμει
σκηνῆς τε θείας ἄξιοι μονοτρόπως
μητρός δεήσεις καὶ φίλου δεδεγμένος.²⁸⁵

The lines are a reference to the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist standing on either side of the crucified Christ. This scene was depicted in the Gospel of John, and images of Mary and John the Baptist with their hands extended towards Christ were depicted in Byzantine icons. This scene was described by the Byzantines with the word *Deēsis*.²⁸⁶ Westerink suggested that the reference to the ‘friend’ may be to the patriarch Constantine Leichoudes. Building upon this suggestion, Lauritzen further suggested that this is a reference to Aikaterine and Leichoudes.²⁸⁷ In this scenario, the lines could be a reference to their physical appearance at Isaac’s funeral, or one of the commemoration ceremonies. This raises the possibility that *Poem* 20 is an occasional composition, which was performed by Psellos at Isaac’s funeral, or during one of the commemoration services. There is however no decisive evidence that the poem refers to either Aikaterine or Leichoudes, or that it was delivered as an occasional piece. It is also possible that the lines refer to an icon which was visible

²⁸⁴ μὲν συνήθως καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐτήσια [...]: *Contin.*, Ts 110, ll. 9-10.

²⁸⁵ Psellos, *Poemata*, no. 20, 258, ll. 10-12.

²⁸⁶ *ODB* 2005, ‘Deesis’; Cutler 1987, 145-154, especially 147.

²⁸⁷ Lauritzen 2017, 154.

near Isaac's tomb and therefore the poem was not necessarily delivered at the funeral or a commemoration ceremony.

In the eventuality that *Poem* 20 was delivered at a formal ceremony, I suggest that it is most likely to have been delivered at the funeral, rather than a subsequent commemoration ceremony. I suggest this because, as we will see, Psellos was a member of the emperor Constantine X Doukas' inner circle and Skylitzes makes no mention of the emperor's presence at the commemorations for Isaac. In chapter five it will be argued that the commemorations were occasions organised by Aikaterine to resist the reshaping of her identity by the imperial Doukas regime, which included Psellos, who was therefore unlikely to have been present on these occasions.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to give a coherent prosopographical overview of Aikaterine's life to establish key parameters for the subsequent thematic chapters in this thesis. I began by discussing evidence for Aikaterine's name. Thereafter this chapter has thoroughly examined the evidence for her genealogy. This included a more thorough demonstration of why Aikaterine was John Vladislav's daughter than in previous scholarship. There has also been a discussion of the ethnic and imperial identities of the family of the Kometopouloi of which Aikaterine was a part. I argue that the Kometopouloi rulers claimed to be imperial and Bulgarian, and that they and their relatives, including Aikaterine, were perceived in this way in Byzantium, although this was not officially acknowledged by the Byzantine emperor. Here I have challenged Panov's recent argument that the Kometopouloi did not present their rule as continuous from the previous emperors of the First Bulgarian Empire.

This chapter has offered a discussion of key prosopographical information relating to Aikaterine's life. This includes the date of her marriage to Isaac (c1028/29), the positions of her relatives, and her location during the 1057 rebellion. Thereafter, an outline of her reign as empress has been given. Finally, I have discussed Aikaterine's locations and movement in the period of her life when she was a nun, and the date of her death, likely in the 1060s. This chapter has filled a gap in prosopographical scholarship by discussing all of the sources for Aikaterine's life alongside one another. Previous scholarly arguments have therefore been more thoroughly supported, and other arguments and assumptions have been challenged. Whilst this chapter has provided the framework for the subsequent case studies of aspects of Aikaterine's life in this thesis, several questions about

Aikaterine's life have been left open. Answers to these questions will be provided through the investigations conducted in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two

Memories of Aikaterine in Byzantium and the Reshaping of her Identity

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the convergence of Aikaterine's overlapping identities as a foreigner, prisoner, Bulgarian imperial woman and elite Byzantine wife. Below I examine Aikaterine's roles and identities as daughter of the Bulgarian emperor John Vladislav and wife of Isaac Komnenos before 1057 when she became empress, when she was in her early forties. I ask how Aikaterine's roles and identities as daughter of a family of rulers who claimed imperial status and who were foreign to Byzantium on the one hand, and member through marriage of an elite Byzantine family on the other, elided during the period between her marriage in c1025 and 1057. It is discussed how the overlap of Aikaterine's identities enhanced the reputation of her affine relatives, the Komnenos family, but also potentially empowered Aikaterine herself.

Counter-points are also offered to the argument of Leidholm, who has proposed that elite women were identified primarily with their natal kin even after marriage and that in fact middle Byzantine concepts of extended family excluded affine relationships established by marriage.²⁸⁸ Aikaterine's individual case study will shed light on a more nuanced picture. Her identity as a descendant of the Kometopouloi will be shown to have remained significant after her marriage, but it will also be demonstrated that it was reshaped to benefit the reputation of her husband's Komnenos family. This argument builds upon a suggestion of John Carr, that Aikaterine's marriage to Isaac confirmed the position of the Komnenoi amongst the highest status families in Byzantium.²⁸⁹ The process will be shown to have significantly altered memories of Aikaterine's genealogy by the turn of the twelfth century, demonstrating the mutability of Aikaterine's identities through time.²⁹⁰

A further point raised in this chapter builds on the recent arguments made by the 'beyond exceptionalism' project, especially E.L. Jordan, which encourages an approach considering gender as one of a complex web of factors which shaped medieval women's lives.²⁹¹ It will be shown that some

²⁸⁸ Leidholm 2019, 120-22

²⁸⁹ Carr 2018, 57.

²⁹⁰ For a comparable study of changing perceptions through time of the identities of a tenth-century portrait group depicting Nikephoros II and Theophano: Jones 2017, 99-103.

²⁹¹ Jordan 2019, 242-243.

of the factors which led to the reshaping of Aikaterine's identities in the period 1025-1057 were also present in the lives of individual men, providing an example of how the use of multiple categories and approaches can shed light on an individual historical woman's life. Overall, this chapter is intended as a paradigm shedding light on the structures which shaped the lives of individual women and foreigners in elite families in Byzantium and other medieval societies, and their position as situated actors within these structures.

Although Aikaterine's tenure as empress co-regnant and her life as a nun lasted in total only six years, we have far more information for this short last period of her life than the preceding years. This matches with a wider pattern, whereby non-imperial women are less visible in Byzantine sources. Indeed, Évelyne Patlagean has observed that non-imperial women receive limited coverage in Byzantine texts and are in fact almost never identified by their first name in texts from the tenth and eleventh centuries, but rather their relational status to other men, unless they are related to an emperor.²⁹² For this reason, the following discussion of Aikaterine as an imperial Bulgarian daughter and member through marriage of an elite Byzantine family will draw upon scarcer source material than the subsequent analysis of her history as empress.

Terminology

To begin it is important to discuss the terminology describing familial relationships, used in recent scholarship. The Byzantines did not use a Greek word equivalent to the modern English term family but did use the term *oikos* to refer to the household, whose members included slaves and servants.²⁹³ In the eleventh century the word *genos* and several other terms founded upon this root word begins to appear frequently in written sources, often being used to highlight the illustriousness of individuals' genealogies. In this century nearly every aristocratic family was linked with a heritable surname, as well as many families from lower in the social strata. Overall, family names are used much more frequently in the eleventh century than in any earlier period.²⁹⁴

Leidholm has argued that two ways of thinking about family relations can be identified in Byzantine texts dating from the tenth to thirteenth centuries. The first is described with the word *oikos* and includes individuals who were linked together by their presence in the space of the household.²⁹⁵ An example appears in a passage in the *Synopsis* describing how Michael VI was proclaimed emperor in

²⁹² Patlagean 1987, 592.

²⁹³ Tougher 2013a, 397-398.

²⁹⁴ Leidholm 2019, 118; Kazhdan 1997, 90-112.

²⁹⁵ Leidholm 2019, 35.

1056, the now deceased Constantine IX Monomachos' cousin Theodosios responded angrily, gathering members of his household (*oikos*), as well as dependants, slaves and acquaintances.²⁹⁶ Further examples appear in passages of the eleventh-century advisory text conventionally named the *Strategikon* and attributed to Kekaumenos. The term *oikos* is repeatedly used in this text to refer to a set of relationships.²⁹⁷

Leidholm outlined a second conception of family relations in Byzantine texts from the tenth to thirteenth centuries which includes groups of individuals linked by blood to roughly the seventh degree of consanguinity, often described with a family name. He demonstrates that during this period, the word *genos* is used consistently in different texts to describe this sort of family relationship. Therefore, he argued, one of the definitions of *genos* in this period is that of a kin group comprising living individuals and their ancestors, joined by ties of blood given further coherence by a collective family reputation. Building upon earlier observations made by Kaldellis, Leidholm also recognised *genos* was a flexible term which could express a variety of meanings connected to notions of biological relationship. Other potential meanings included for example a nation or people, a group linked by their biological sex (e.g. women or men), or a category in Aristotelian systems (in Leidholm's words 'that under which a species is ordered'). Leidholm analysed several texts to build his argument. He discusses in most detail passages from the *Peira* of Eustathios Romaios (mid-eleventh century), Nikephoros Blemmydes' *Epitome Logica* (1260) and Demetrios Chomatenos' *Ponemata Diaphora* (mid-thirteenth century).²⁹⁸

This thesis follows several parts of Leidholm's argument concerning middle Byzantine conceptions of family relations, and the use of the term *genos*. However, I take issue with a specific aspect of his argument focusing on relationships between elite women and their affine relatives. Leidholm and Cheynet have both pointed out that the surnames used by elite women in the eleventh century tend to be shared with their natal relatives. Leidholm stated that 'at least from the eleventh century, women seldom, if ever, bore the surname of their husband'.²⁹⁹ Examples include women comparable to Aikaterine, who were also descended from families outside of Byzantium.³⁰⁰ Building

²⁹⁶ *Synop.*, Th 481.

²⁹⁷ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 40, ll. 3-7, 60, ll. 28-29, 78, ll. 16-18. Page numbers and lines are taken from Wassiliowsky & Jernstedt's edition, which are also used in Roueché's 2013 online edition.

²⁹⁸ Leidholm 2019, 13-35; Kaldellis 2008, 88-89. See also: Page 2008, 41.

²⁹⁹ Leidholm 2019, 120-121; Cheynet 2008, 602.

³⁰⁰ Examples include two eleventh-century seals of women from the Nestongos family, former subjects of the Kometopouloi who ruled Sirmion and were assimilated into Byzantine society after the Byzantine victory. The first, published by Cheynet reads 'Maria, patrician and daughter of [Aaron?] Nestongos': Cheynet 2008, 602. The second reads the nun Xene of the Nestongos: DO, *Online Seals Collection*, no. BZS.1958.106.1935 <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.1935>> (Accessed 06/01/2022). It is argued by Seibt 2016, 67 no. 1541, to be of the daughter of the last Nestongos ruler of Sirmion. See also:

upon this observation, and further highlighting that legal sources differentiate between blood relatives and affine relatives, Leidholm explicitly excluded the relationship between husband and wife from his definition of *genos*, which he contends, was conceived as based exclusively on natal relationships.³⁰¹

I do not follow Leidholm's proposal that Byzantine ideas about the extended family excluded affine relationships established by marriage. This definition does not work when applied to the sources for Aikaterine as an individual. The clearest evidence for this is the name that Aikaterine used. The source which brings us closest to Aikaterine's own voice, the dedicatory inscription in MGS 02, presents her as the empress Aikaterine Komnene, a member of the Komnenos family (Αἰκατερίνης Βασιλίσσης τῆς Κομνηνῆς).³⁰² Similarly, seal BZS.1955.1.5083, which was most likely possessed by Aikaterine bears an inscription reading 'Theotokos, help Xene Komnene, nun' (Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ξένη μοναχῇ τῇ Κομνηνῇ).³⁰³ Further evidence is provided in the part of the *Chronographia* which describes Isaac's abdication. Psellos twice describes Aikaterine, her daughter Maria, Isaac's brother John and his two nephews, Konstostephanos and Theodoros, collectively as Isaac's *genos*. Psellos therefore seems to have perceived Aikaterine and Isaac's natal relatives as belonging to the same extended family.³⁰⁴ Indeed, in this thesis it is argued that the Doukas family and their supporters (including Psellos) went to great lengths to emphasise that Aikaterine's relationship with Isaac changed when they were both tonsured in late 1059/1060, showing that her relationship with her husband was perceived to be of primary importance for her identity before this date. In summary, it is not possible to argue convincingly that Aikaterine was perceived to be outside of the Komnenos family after her marriage to Isaac.³⁰⁵

Laurent 1972, 283-284 no. 2014. A third example from the eleventh or twelfth centuries was possessed by a descendant of the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty and reads 'Maria, daughter of Gagik of Ani': DO, *Online Seals Collection*, no. BZS.1958.106.1935 <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.5639>> (Accessed 06/01/2022).

³⁰¹ Leidholm 2019, 120-122. He also contends that the limitation by the twelfth century of legal marriage to partners within the seventh degree of consanguinity may be used as a rough indicator for the limits of the *genos*: 31-32, 35.

³⁰² Ed. Diehl 1922, 244.

³⁰³ DO, *Online Seals Collection*, no. BZS.1955.1.5083 <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.5083>> (Accessed 25/02/2022).

³⁰⁴ *Chron.*, 7.79-80.

³⁰⁵ A further counter example to Leidholm's argument is found in the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene monastery. Leidholm asserts that the *typikon* restricted the leadership of the community to Doukaina's *genos*, by which he means her natal female relatives: Leidholm 2019, 58. However, as also noted by Hero 2000, 655, the *typikon* prescribes that the Protectress of the convent should be a direct female descendant, but thereafter a descendant of Doukaina's daughters-in-law if the direct female line fails. For this passage of the *typikon*: Gautier 1985, 145, ll. 2235-2254. All subsequent line references to the *typikon* refer to Gautier's edition.

On the other hand, there is evidence that Aikaterine continued to be identified with her natal ancestors after her marriage to Isaac. Key evidence is provided by *Letter Π 1*, mentioned above and analysed at length below, where Psellos simultaneously refers to the two types of imperium (*basileia*) which Aikaterine possessed through her descent from the Kometopouloi and through her marriage to Isaac, in a passage which also refers to the royal woman married to a king in Psalm 44.³⁰⁶ Further evidence is provided by description of Aikaterine's ancestry in Bryennios' *History*, which is the focus of the present chapter. In this text, Aikaterine's relationship with Samuel is foregrounded.³⁰⁷ Aikaterine is therefore depicted in this text as a carrier of multiple identities, a member through birth of the Kometopouloi and through marriage of the Komnenos family. Thus, in this thesis, the extended families of which Aikaterine was a part are therefore approached as groups made up of people joined by ties of blood and marriage.

In Byzantine sources, women typically become visible when they are married. This pattern is also evident in the sources from other medieval societies, as pointed out by Stafford.³⁰⁸ Aikaterine however is an exception to this pattern because she enters the story told to us by sources before her marriage. In the *Synopsis*, Skylitzes depicts Aikaterine's mother Maria, six of her daughters and six of her sons, entering Constantinople as prisoners. As discussed in the previous chapter, Skylitzes' understanding that Aikaterine was one of those prisoners is confirmed by the reference in the *Continuation* to Isaac's description of Aikaterine as a 'slave' (δούλην) before her marriage to him.³⁰⁹ Aikaterine's appearance in the *Synopsis* even before she became Isaac's wife points to the significance in eleventh-century Byzantium of her identity as a woman born into the family of the Kometopouloi, members of which had presented themselves as emperors of Bulgaria. Beginning with the depiction of Aikaterine in the *Continuation*, I now examine how this identity was reshaped and refigured when Aikaterine married Isaac and became recognised as part of the Komnenos family.

Bulgarian imperial daughter and Komnenian wife

The *Continuation* is an appropriate source with which to begin because a passage in this text sheds light on the importance in Byzantium of Aikaterine's identity as a foreign imperial woman and moreover provides a specific example how structural factors worked to shape Aikaterine's individual

³⁰⁶ Π 1, ll. 19-20. For analysis see below, 105-106.

³⁰⁷ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2.

³⁰⁸ Stafford 2006a, 102.

³⁰⁹ *Contin.*, Ts 111, l. 5.

life. Thereafter, below, the focus shifts to Bryennios' *History* to discuss how Aikaterine's natal identity was reshaped following her marriage. In the last lines of the account of Isaac Komnenos' reign in the *Continuation*, Skylitzes, writing at the turn of the twelfth century, depicts an exchange between Aikaterine and Isaac:

In a jest about his wife he said that where before she had been a slave, he had now emancipated her [...] The empress Aikaterine said that nothing strange had befallen her in exchanging one kingdom for another.

Ἐπισκώπτων δὲ τῇ γυναικὶ ἔλεγε δούλην μὲν εἶναι πρότερον, νῦν δὲ ἡλευθερωθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ [...] Ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς Αἰκατερίνα μηδὲν ξένον ἐπ' αὐτῇ γεγενῆσθαι βασιλείαν βασιλείας ἀλλαξαμένη.³¹⁰

McGeer has interpreted these sayings as character sketches. He noted a connection with Psellos' *Historia Syntomos* where there are several sayings which depict the character of specific emperors (*apophthegmata*). McGeer suggested Skylitzes might have been inspired by this text.³¹¹ The sayings in the *Continuation* indeed summarise Aikaterine's life, by presenting her life as an accumulation of roles and identities. They succinctly condense her life history around five overlapping roles and identities: a foreigner, a captive, an imperial daughter, the wife of an emperor, and therefore an empress, and a nun. The sayings furthermore provide an example of how in Byzantine texts and images, women's identities are telescoped around normative familial or monastic roles.³¹² They exemplify the significance of these roles as structural factors, in other words 'norms, practices and scripts' shaping the lives of individual women.³¹³

It is notable here that Skylitzes only makes use of sayings to conclude his accounts of Isaac's reign and Constantine X's reign, whereas Psellos uses *apophthegmata* consistently throughout his *Historia*. This implies that Skylitzes perceived that Isaac's marriage to Aikaterine was of great significance, and that he perhaps used a literary device which he learnt about in Psellos' *Historia* to foreground the importance of the marriage to Isaac's history. McGeer observed that the Greek ξένον, from the adjective *xenos* meaning 'strange' or 'foreign' contains a pun on Aikaterine's monastic name Xene (Ξένη), which itself translated into English as 'foreign woman'.³¹⁴ This draws

³¹⁰ *Contin.*, Ts 111.4-8. Trans McGeer, 53.

³¹¹ McGeer 2019, 22.

³¹² See Macrides 2008, 658, for the point that monastic life provided the only serious alternative to family ties, and was patterned on familial roles.

³¹³ Quote from Stafford 2006a, 107. See further, Betancourt 2020, 1-18.

³¹⁴ McGeer 2019, 53 n. 41. For the definition of Xene, see above, 56-57 n. 279.

further attention to the significance of Aikaterine's arrival in Constantinople as both a foreigner and a captive.

The saying attributed to Isaac, recounting how he emancipated Aikaterine from slavery through his marriage to her, points to the reason that Skylitzes perceived the marriage was important for understanding Isaac's status. When read alongside the saying attributed to Aikaterine the text gives the impression that through Isaac's marriage to his wife, he achieved dominion over the foreign kingdom of which she was originally a part. Here the relationship between Aikaterine and Isaac appears asymmetrical, the sayings communicate the impression that through marriage her husband's status was enhanced. Aikaterine's status as an imperial daughter was superseded by her status as the wife of Isaac, and so the imperial family of the Kometopouloi from which she was descended could be presented as having been superseded by the aristocratic Komnenos family which she joined, thereby contributing greatly to their reputation.

Overall, this passage points to Skylitzes' understanding of the importance of Aikaterine's status as a foreign imperial woman for the history of the Komnenos family to which she was linked. It has already been mentioned how this passage exemplifies the significance of normative familial or monastic roles as structural factors shaping the lives of individual women. Aikaterine's saying also foregrounds the liminality stemming from her movement from outside to inside Byzantine society. The mention of her 'exchange' (ἀλλαξάμενη) of kingdoms as a key aspect of her identity shows that she was not perceived as completely within Byzantine society after her death, at the turn of the twelfth century when Skylitzes wrote. This is further confirmed by the appearance of an ethnic marker in Bryennios' *History*, written in the twelfth century. He calls Aikaterine 'the eldest daughter of the Bulgarian emperor, Samuel, Aikaterine by name' (τῇ πρεσβυτέρῃ τῶν βασιλέως Βουλγάρων Σαμουήλ θυγατέρων Αἰκατερίνα ὄνομα).³¹⁵ The elision of Aikaterine's identities as a foreigner and a Byzantine also features in an encomiastic text addressed by Psellos towards her during her lifetime. This is *Letter* Π 1, examined in more detail in the next two chapters. Lines 17-21 read:

Herewith I enquire of your mightiness. How goes it
with the truthful empress, who has been decked out in many colours by the golden tassels
of nobility, she who possessed the blood of *basileia* through her family
and then having won a glorious victory took hold of a greater *basileia*?
How goes it with the living light?

³¹⁵ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2, 77, ll. 11-13.

Ἐπειτα δὴ καὶ περὶ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους πυνθάνομαι: Πῶς ἔχει ἡ
τε ὡς ἀληθῶς βασιλὶς, ἡ χρυσοῖς κροσσωτοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν περιβε-
-βλημένη, πεποικιλμένη, ἡ καὶ ἐκ γένους βασιλῆιον αἷμα λαχοῦσα,
καὶ κρεῖττονι αὐθις βασιλείᾳ τὴν προλαβοῦσαν νικήσασα εὐκλειαν;
Πῶς ἔχεις ἡ φωσφόρος ζωή;

Like in the *Continuation*, Aikaterine's identity is in this text also telescoped around two sets of juxtaposed categories: daughter/wife and foreigner/Byzantine. The question is therefore raised of how Aikaterine's position was structured at the intersection of these categories. To answer this question I turn to Bryennios' *History*, which describes how the Komnenos family needed a brilliant marriage because of the high status of their *genos* (τὸ γένος περιφάνει) and so it was therefore arranged for Isaac to be betrothed to Aikaterine, the eldest daughter of Samuel.³¹⁶ Here, as has been discussed, Bryennios contradicts the interpolations in V (thirteenth century) and U (fourteenth century) manuscripts of Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, which describe Aikaterine as the daughter of Samuel's nephew John Vladislav.³¹⁷ Bryennios also identifies another person, Maria, sometimes called Maria 'of Bulgaria' by modern scholars, as the daughter of Trojan and the granddaughter of Samuel.³¹⁸ As Tăpkova-Zaimova and Panov both point out, scholarly consensus is that Trojan was in fact the son of John Vladislav (fig. 1).³¹⁹ Maria was the mother of Eirene Doukaina, husband of Alexios I Komnenos, and the wife of Andronikos Doukas, she was therefore a significant figure for the genealogical history of the Komnenos and Doukas at the time Bryennios composed his *History*. Below Bryennios' depiction of Maria will be further examined because, as will be shown, it sheds light on the reasons for his depiction of Aikaterine in the text.

It has been argued in this thesis that the information transmitted in the interpolations to the Skylitzes manuscripts, which was likely added by Michael of Diabolis when he produced the U manuscript, is most likely to be accurate, which raises the specific question of why Bryennios gives a different account of Aikaterine's lineage. Neville has proposed an answer to this question. She suggested that Bryennios himself fabricated Aikaterine's close relationship with Samuel.³²⁰ Panov also argued that Bryennios fabricated the tie. He proposed that Bryennios did so to undermine

³¹⁶ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2, 77, l. 10.

³¹⁷ *Synop.*, Ts 492.

³¹⁸ Bryennios, *History*, 3.6. For modern uses of the name Maria 'of Bulgaria' see for example: Leidholm 2019, 127; Kouropou & Vannier 2005, 52; Mullett 1997, 364.

³¹⁹ Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 126; Panov 2019, 102.

³²⁰ Neville 2012, 76. Neville refrains from a concrete conclusion on which of Michael of Diabolis or Bryennios' accounts is more accurate.

claims made during the rebellion of George Vojteh in 1072, that one of the leaders, Bodin, was descended from Samuel. The rebellion was defeated by Bryennios' ancestor and is also described in the text.³²¹ Panov also proposed that Bryennios aimed to raise the prestige of the Komnenos family to which he was joined by marriage, and to naturalise Byzantine claims to hegemony in the Balkans. Panov further linked the reference in the history with a wider tendency amongst members of the Byzantine aristocracy to stress their links to Samuel, to counter the claims of rebels in the Balkans during the eleventh century, such as Peter Delyan in 1040-41.³²² I will build upon Panov's argument by proposing that Bryennios' description of Aikaterine's genealogy should indeed be located within a wider cultural and political context. However, I will depart from Panov by arguing that rather than being a deliberate fabrication, Bryennios' account is most likely influenced by a tradition which had arisen in the eleventh century, stressing the connections between the Komnenos family and Samuel, through Aikaterine. In this chapter, it will be argued therefore that the divergence between Bryennios' *History* and the interpolations to the *Synopsis* points to Aikaterine's importance for the reputation of the Komnenos family in the eleventh century.

Reshaping Aikaterine's genealogy

The provenance of Bryennios' *History* is key to understanding Aikaterine's association with Samuel in the text. Neville has demonstrated that the history was very likely produced in the 1120s and 30s.³²³ Above, in the introduction, it was argued that Bryennios was an active participant in *theatra*, presided over by his mother-in-law Eirene Doukaina and also attended by his wife Anna Komnene and other individuals who identified themselves with the surname Komnenos or Doukas. The main evidence for this is a reference to a collective group involving Bryennios, Komnene and Doukaina in the prologue of Komnene's *Alexiad*, and a speech and a letter produced by Michael Italikos. The speech depicts Doukaina at the head of a *theatron* where Bryennios is also present, whilst the letter describes how Bryennios also wrote letters which were read aloud in a *theatron*. These gatherings appear to have taken place in a variety of spaces, to have involved the discussion and performance of texts, and to have been formative for Bryennios' intellectual development.³²⁴

It is thus possible that in these spaces, Bryennios' understanding of Aikaterine's genealogy was influenced by a tradition passed down amongst members of the Komnenos family, which

³²¹ Bryennios, *History*, 3.1-3.

³²² Panov 2019, 102-106.

³²³ Neville 2012, 176-179.

³²⁴ See above, 23-24.

emphasised Aikaterine's connection to Samuel. We should bear in mind here the fluidity of family terminology in the Greek language. For example, the word *παππος* (πάππος) functions as a general term for a recent ancestor.³²⁵ The use of fluid terminology such as this word, which may have been used to describe Aikaterine's connections to Samuel, therefore presents a possible method whereby her genealogical ties with her great-uncle were foregrounded, later giving rise to an identification of her as Samuel's daughter.

Wider evidence points to the development of a tradition connecting Aikaterine to Samuel, through use of fluid family terminology. Holmes has demonstrated that it is highly likely that mid- to late eleventh-century historians, including Attaleiates and Skylitzes, bolstered the prestige of military families contemporary to them, by recounting their ancestors' contributions to Basil II's military victories.³²⁶ Holmes argued that these histories were produced within a context of competition between different aristocratic families and points to the end of the Macedonian dynasty in 1056 as a turning point which induced this competition. She argued that links between aristocratic families and the military successes of Basil II's reign were 'routinely manipulated by the rival families in the service of dynastic prestige and promotion'.³²⁷ Although Samuel was an enemy of Byzantium in this period, this presents a possible context in which the Komnenos family would have been encouraged to promote a tradition associating Aikaterine with him. Holmes' reference to the works of two history writers is also telling; it is possible that comparable literary performances in Komnenian households were occasions when Aikaterine's links to Samuel were foregrounded.

It is probable that the competitive context described by Holmes developed earlier in the eleventh century. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos depicts Isaac recounting witty sayings of Basil II.³²⁸ Psellos' writing here seems to reflect the tone of Isaac's reign, when imperial propaganda may have evoked memories of Basil II, showing the prestige which was associated with this emperor's reign.³²⁹ This indicates that Basil II's joint reign alongside his brother Constantine VIII (976-1025) was already by the mid-eleventh century remembered as a high point in Byzantine history. The work of Holmes and, earlier, Stephen Kamer, sheds light on how, during Basil II's joint reign with Constantine VIII, several Byzantine military leaders born outside of the highest rung of the Byzantine aristocracy achieved

³²⁵ LSJ, s.v., 'πάππος'; Roueché 2013.

³²⁶ Holmes 2005, 235; Attaleiates, *History*, B 229 -236; *Synop.*, Th. 361-363, 365-366. For perceptions of Basil II's reign as a 'heroic age' during the reign of Alexios I: McGeer 2019, 11.

³²⁷ Holmes 2005, 235-236.

³²⁸ *Chron.*, 7.76. For an analysis of this depiction of Isaac: Garland 1999, 332-333. She suggested on the one hand that Psellos may wish to link together in his *Chronographia* two emperors whom he perceives as 'military' rulers, and on the other hand that Basil's jokes may have been remembered in army circles.

³²⁹ Stephenson 2003, 86-87, suggested that the innovative depiction of Isaac on gold coins, which broke from imperial tradition by showing the emperor holding an unsheathed sword, may have been designed to promise a return to the military success of Basil's reign (see also below, 112 n. 467).

high military office.³³⁰ Many of the leaders of the rebellion against Michael VI in 1057, led by Isaac, held positions of high military command. Many of them were sons of the men who had gained military promotions under Basil II and Constantine VIII. In line with developments in nomenclature in the eleventh century, many of them used surnames which linked them with their ancestors (fig. 8). Aspects of imperial culture during Isaac's reign, further discussed below and in the next chapter of this thesis, raises the possibility that these individuals were by the mid-eleventh century already actively promoting the period when their fathers had achieved high military office as a golden age of military success.

Arguments by Neville and Leidholm, with which I am in agreement, indicate that this was in fact likely to have been the case. Neville has argued that public perception had a role in creating social status in middle Byzantium, both in Constantinople and the provinces. Leidholm built upon Neville's study by arguing that 'reputation formed one of the basic components of status' in middle Byzantium. He describes a 'politics of reputation' in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium, arguing that because the nobility did not acquire strong legal backing, elite families relied upon their reputation to justify their social status. Aspects of their reputation included the virtues displayed by their members and the prestige of their genealogical connections. Leidholm argued members felt a duty to maintain, disseminate and enhance the reputation of their family name, which could ebb and flow at different times and amongst different audiences.³³¹

A passage in the late eleventh-century advisory text, the *Strategikon*, facilitates a further examination of how ties established through marriages, such as that between Aikaterine and Isaac, may have been used by different families to enhance their reputation. The latest editor of this text, Charlotte Roueché, has identified Katakalon Kekaumenos, one of the leaders of the 1057 rebellion, as the most likely author.³³² Therefore, although it is of a later provenance, the text potentially sheds light on attitudes to Basil's reign earlier in the eleventh century. In the first place, Basil II is cited several times as a model military leader.³³³ Secondly, a passage of the text telescopes in on a specific event during Basil II's reign, when a Bulgarian commander, who is named as Demetrios Polemarchios (possibly a Greek translation of a Bulgarian name), captured Servia from the Byzantine general Magerinos. As well as naming the two actors, the author emphasises that his mother was Demetrios Polemarchios' daughter.³³⁴ This woman married into the Kekaumenos family after 1018, pointing to a wider integration in this period of the Bulgarian and Byzantine elite, beyond the descendants of

³³⁰ Holmes 2003, 35-69; Kamer 1987. See also the comments of Leidholm 2019, 5.

³³¹ Neville 2004, 78-83; Leidholm 2019, 111-128. Quotes at 112, 118.

³³² Roueché 2013.

³³³ See for example the account of Basil's victory at Kleidion in 1014: Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 18, ll. 8 –11.

³³⁴ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 28, l. 32 – 29, l. 23.

the Kometopouloi.³³⁵ Demetrios Polemarchios is presented as a model military commander in the text, and this is an example of how the deeds of Basil II's enemies, the elite of the Bulgarian Empire ruled by the Kometopouloi, were also extolled by later Byzantines, to bolster their families' reputations.

This framework explains in part why Aikaterine's genealogy was important for the Komnenos family. But the specific question remains of why Aikaterine was linked to Samuel, rather than to her father. On the one hand, in the *Synopsis* both Samuel and John Vladislav are prominent figures in the narrative of Basil II's reign. Gabriel Rodomir by contrast, is mentioned only briefly.³³⁶ John Vladislav's visibility is connected to Skylitzes' detailed coverage of the years 1014-1018. Holmes argued that Skylitzes covers this period in detail to depict the histories of the Bulgarian imperial family, including Aikaterine, who became the ancestors of members of his late eleventh-century audience, having surrendered to Basil at the end of the war and marrying into Byzantine society.³³⁷

However, although John Vladislav's visibility in the text is on a par with Samuel, this does not necessarily indicate that he was remembered as a comparable figure to his uncle. Indeed, evidence outside of Skylitzes' *Synopsis* indicates that memories of Samuel carried greater prestige than those of his two successors. The earliest evidence suggesting this is the second of the three charters issued by Basil II in c1020, outlining how the ecclesiastical structure of Bulgaria would be organised following the Byzantine victory. Although as we have discussed, Samuel's imperial title is not acknowledged in the charter, it is significant that he is named alongside the Emperor Peter I.³³⁸ Neither Gabriel Rodomir nor John Vladislav is mentioned. This suggests that the Byzantine government perceived that it was most effective to refer to Samuel's reign to establish a precedent for ecclesiastical organisation. Supporting evidence that memories of Samuel carried greater prestige than those of his successors in Byzantium is also provided by Yahya of Antioch (writing in the first half of the eleventh century), who confuses Gabriel Rodomir for a servant (*gulam*) of Samuel and gives John Vladislav the name of his father Aaron.³³⁹

Psellos' and Skylitzes' accounts of the rebellion of Peter Delyan in 1040-41 should also be considered. Skylitzes writes that Peter claimed to be a son of Gabriel Rodomir and therefore a grandson of Samuel, but places greater emphasis upon Peter's claim to be descended from Samuel.³⁴⁰ Psellos does not mention Gabriel Rodomir, but rather mentions Peter's claim to be

³³⁵ A further example is that of the Nestongos family. See above, 63-64 n. 300.

³³⁶ *Synop.*, Th 339-357.

³³⁷ Holmes 2005, 211-214.

³³⁸ See above, 36.

³³⁹ Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, III, 407.

³⁴⁰ *Synop.*, Th. 409-410.

connected to Samuel and his brother Aaron.³⁴¹ Psellos was a contemporary to these events and it is possible that his emphasis here is reflective of the way that the rebels themselves constructed an image of legitimate power. The reason both the Byzantine government and later rebels against Byzantine dominion stressed connections to Samuel as a source of precedence and legitimacy is in all probability because, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Samuel's successors were not accepted as legitimate by all of his former magnates. In connection to this point Stephenson has argued that it is significant that the text of the Bitola Inscription focuses upon how John Vladislav's rule is legitimised by his bloodline, emphasising that he is 'Bulgarian by Birth' and 'the son of Aaron'. Stephenson argued that this suggests John Vladislav thought that he needed to justify his legitimacy to his subjects, in turn indicating that he was not universally accepted as Samuel's successor.³⁴² This possibility provides a first explanation for why Aikaterine's genealogy was reshaped, to link her more closely to Samuel than her father John.

It is also noteworthy that Kekaumenos acknowledged Samuel's military acumen, suggesting that in the generations after Basil II's death, he was remembered as this emperor's most dangerous external enemy.³⁴³ This is logical because Samuel was in power for some thirty-eight years, whereas John Vladislav only ruled for three years. Here we should also consider Stephenson's argument that the account of the Battle of Kleidion which appears in Skylitzes *Synopsis*, where Basil is depicted blinding 15,000 Bulgarians, provoking Samuel to have a heart attack and die, is connected to a popular story that was widely known in the Balkans and Greece by at the latest 1050.³⁴⁴ Stephenson argued that the details of this story were exaggerated as they entered the popular imagination, and its appearance is connected to Basil's representation of himself as a ferocious ruler.³⁴⁵ It is also possible that an exaggerated story about the Battle of Kleidion arose because Samuel was perceived to be a highly significant historical figure, and it was therefore perceived to be fitting to tell a story explaining his death, depicting events on an epic scale. This story therefore points to perceptions that Samuel was remembered as Basil's most dangerous enemy. This provides a second explanation for why Aikaterine's genealogy was reshaped, to link her more closely to Samuel than her father John.

Later, in the twelfth-century *Alexiad*, in a digression in the text explaining the name of Great Pristhlava (modern day Great Preslav), Samuel is described as 'the last of the Bulgar dynasty', and

³⁴¹ ἐπεὶ τοῦτο ἦδει πατριὸν τε καὶ νόμιμον, εἰς τὸν Σαμουὴλ ἐκείνον· καὶ τὸν τούτου ἀδελφὸν Ἀαρών: *Chron.*, 4.40, 220, ll. 14-15.

³⁴² Stephenson 2003, 29-30.

³⁴³ *Synop.*, Th 339-349.

³⁴⁴ *Synop.*, Th 348-349.

³⁴⁵ Stephenson 2003, 4.

does not mention Gabriel Rodomir or John Vladislav.³⁴⁶ Why did Komnene mention Samuel and not Gabriel Rodomir and John Vladislav, and why did she identify Samuel as the last of the Bulgarian rulers? An answer to this question can aid our investigation of why Aikaterine's genealogy is presented differently by Michael of Diabolis and Komnene's fellow twelfth-century historian (and husband) Bryennios, with whom she participated in Doukaina's *theatron*. There is no compelling evidence that Komnene was aware of Michael of Diabolis' interpolated manuscript of Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, which describe Aikaterine's genealogy. However, she was in all probability aware of at least one version of the *Synopsis*, because the manuscript tradition shows that it was popular in the twelfth century. Therefore, it is very likely Komnene had access to information about Gabriel Rodomir and John Vladislav.

Panov linked Komnene's statement to his argument that Bryennios deliberately misrepresented Aikaterine's genealogy.³⁴⁷ However, I argue that this passage of the *Alexiad* in fact sheds light on the way that built environments shaped memories of Samuel and his Kometopouloi successors. Samuel's name appears in the *Alexiad* in a passage which explains the history of Great Preslav. Although Samuel's building of a fortress in Ohrid suggests he might not have spent much time in Great Preslav, he had nonetheless ruled this city between c986 and 1000/01 unlike Gabriel Rodomir or John Vladislav.³⁴⁸ This explains why Komnene mentions Samuel, and not his successors. Preslav had been the capital of the Bulgarian state since 893.³⁴⁹ The built environment featured a monumental rotunda church built in c900 and distinctive ceramic tile decorations, which may have influenced similar decorations in Constantinople.³⁵⁰ It is here worth noting the significance of Preslav later, in c1190. At this time, the brothers Asen and Peter presented themselves as rulers of a Second Bulgarian Empire. To substantiate their claims, they captured Preslav from the Byzantines and established it alongside Trnovo as one of the centres of their state.³⁵¹ This demonstrates the ongoing significance of this city in the eleventh and twelfth century as a dormant imperial centre.

It has been established that on the one hand neither Samuel or his successors were officially recognised as imperial by the Byzantines, but on the other hand there is good evidence that members of the Byzantine elite and wider population perceived that they were associated with this status. Samuel's connections to imperial status may however have been remembered in a different way to those of his successors, because of his links with the Bulgarian imperial centre at Preslav. The

³⁴⁶ *Alexiad*, 7.3.

³⁴⁷ Panov 2019, 104-105.

³⁴⁸ For the date when Samuel captured Preslav, see above, 34 n. 151.

³⁴⁹ Fine 1991, 106.

³⁵⁰ *ODB* 2005, 'Preslav, Great'.

³⁵¹ Fine 1994, 15-16.

foregrounding of Samuel's imperial status through the built environment appear to have meant that by the twelfth century he was remembered as imperial whereas his successors were not, as is implied by Komnene's statement that Samuel was the last of the Bulgarian rulers. I argue therefore that changes in the way the Kometopouloi were remembered by the twelfth century provides a more likely explanation for the content of this passage in the *Alexiad*, rather than it being a deliberate misrepresentation on Komnene's part.

When considering the importance of physical spaces for memories of Aikaterine's ancestors, it is important to highlight also the importance of monumental building projects associated with Samuel in cities conquered by the Byzantines. These included the building of the monumental church of St Achilleios at Prespa, which was used by Theophylact of Ohrid to host at least one provincial synod. Mullett has suggested Theophylact was motivated to use the church to host the synod because of the prestige of its association with Samuel, who as discussed above, may have been buried there.³⁵² Also linked fortress at Ohrid (described by Skylitzes using language drawing an implicit comparison with the Great Palace in Constantinople) as well as a large basilica in the same city, where Samuel had relocated the patriarchate of Bulgaria (fig. 9).³⁵³ The sight of these buildings would have further concretised memories of Samuel's imperial status. Aspects of the physical environment in the Balkans therefore posthumously visualised Samuel's imperial status, providing a possible motive for the Komnenos family to highlight their links to Samuel through Aikaterine, rather than to her father John Vladislav. By associating themselves closely with Samuel through their ties of affinity with Aikaterine, members of the Komnenos family could appropriate memories of Samuel's imperial status to enhance their own reputation. The reshaping of Aikaterine's genealogical history appears therefore to have been interlinked with aspects of the physical environment of the conquered Balkan landscape of the eleventh-century Byzantine Empire. In some respects, this is unsurprising, because, as we have seen, Aikaterine first became visible in Byzantine society in 1018 as a symbol of Byzantine dominion.

The reputation of the Komnenos family

I now consider specifically the reputation of the Komnenos family in the early eleventh century. Bryennios asserts that the unnamed emperor who arranged for Aikaterine's betrothal to Isaac held

³⁵² For references to the synod: Theophylact, *Lettres*, 235 ll. 34-37 (no. 31), 527 ll. 6-9 (no. 108). For a further reference to St Achilleios: Theophylact, *Lettres*, 415 l. 17 (no. 78). For Mullett's suggestion: Mullett 1997, 237-239.

³⁵³ Panov 2019, 14-15. *Synop.*, Th 358-359, ll. 14-15: 'the palaces of the *Basileia* of Bulgaria' (τὰ βασιλεία τῶν βασιλέων ἱδρυντο βουλγαρίας). For further discussion see above, 38.

the Komnenos lineage (*genos*) in high esteem. However, Isaac's father, Manuel (b.c.955-960-d.c.1020), does not seem to have begun his career in the highest rank of Byzantine society because he is the first person attested with the family name Komnenos. Claudia Ludwig argued that we should approach Byzantine careers at court and in the military during the tenth century as the result of processes involving larger familial networks.³⁵⁴ It is unlikely that Manuel was born into obscurity. Indeed, Manuel was probably related to the Erotikoi, who served Constantine VII and Nikephoros Phokas. Yet, the reason that Manuel was rewarded senior court dignities seems to have been the fact of his loyal military service to Basil II, rather than his lineage, suggesting that in this period his social status increased substantially.³⁵⁵ As we have noted, the betrothal between Aikaterine and Isaac was likely a reward to the Komnenos family for the deceased Manuel's service, thereby encouraging their continued loyalty.

We have noted the problems with firmly dating the marriage between Aikaterine and Isaac to Basil's reign. However, whether or not the marriage took place in Basil's reign itself, it must have significantly enhanced the prestige of the Komnenos family by connecting them with a descendant of the Kometopouloi, who were associated with imperial status. This match was therefore of great importance for the family. As we have noted, Skylitzes demonstrates a sustained interest in the genealogy of the descendants of the Kometopouloi. Holmes observed that Skylitzes provides a particularly detailed description of the surrender of the Bulgarian imperial family to Basil II in 1018. She suggested that some members of Skylitzes' late eleventh century audience were elite Byzantine families who were intensely interested in their own connections to the descendants of the Kometopouloi, through the marriages that Basil II had arranged.³⁵⁶ Holmes' suggestion once more reinforces a point already discussed, that members of the Komnenos family emphasised their kinship

³⁵⁴ Ludwig 2013, 242.

³⁵⁵ Manuel is named Komnenos by Bryennios, *History*, 1.1, 75, l. 1. The titles he held seem to have been *Patrician*, *Anthypatos* and *Vestes*: *PMBZ*: Manuel 24885 <<https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ27039/html>> (Accessed 25/02/2022). Anna Komnene describes Manuel as *Strategos Autokrator* of the East, but this title is an anachronism: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 11.1.6. Komnene also describes Manuel as having led the defence of Nicaea against Bardas Skleros, during the latter's revolt of 976-79. A certain Manuel is also described leading the defence of Nicaea by Skylitzes at, *Synop.*, Th 323 and Zonaras, *Epitome*, 17.5, ll. 34-36, but this man is given the surname Erotikos. There is no agreement amongst modern scholars about why Skylitzes and Zonaras use the name Erotikos. Varzos suggested that Manuel's father was named Isaac, and that Manuel held the name Komnenos through his patriline, and Erotikos through his matriline: Varzos 1984, 37-38. Cheynet noted the activities of a certain Nikephoros Erotikos in 969, mentioned by Leo the Deacon, *History*, 5.3, (who seems to have been the son-in-law of Theophilos, eparch for Constantine VII) and suggested that Skylitzes was trying to associate the Komnenoi with an older family: Cheynet 2010, 306 n.42. *Synop*, Th 355, also describes a *Protospatharios* Nikephoros Komnenos, who Varzos thought was Manuel's brother: *PMBZ* (2013): Nikephoros 25676 <<https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ27830/html>> (Accessed 27/02/2022); Varzos 1984, 39-40. Elena Koytcheva's argument that Manuel Komnenos should not be associated with the Erotikoi is to me unconvincing: Koytcheva 2014, 89-99.

³⁵⁶ Holmes 2005, 211-212; *Synop.*, 357, 359-60.

with Aikaterine within a competitive environment, because several families whose scions had married either descendants of the Kometopouloi or other members of the Bulgarian elite (including for example, the Kourkouas family who became the affine relatives of Aikaterine's sister, and the Kekaumenoi) used these connections to uphold their own status.

Given the importance of the match, it is probable that the Komnenos family emphasised the prestige of Aikaterine's genealogy from the time of the betrothal. Here, evidence for Aikaterine's name is telling. Between the tenth to twelfth centuries, several foreign women who were betrothed to imperial or elite Byzantine men were given a new Greek name after the betrothal. This was a sign of their incorporation within Byzantine society.³⁵⁷ There is no evidence however that Aikaterine's name was changed when she was betrothed to Isaac Komnenos. In fact, variants of the name Ekaterina are common in modern Slavic languages, including Bulgarian and Macedonian.³⁵⁸ Therefore, it is possible that the Greek name Aikaterine is a transliteration of her birth-name.³⁵⁹ Isaac and his Komnenos relatives may have chosen for Aikaterine not to be renamed because her existing name drew attention to her descent from the line of Kometopouloi rulers. The possibility that Aikaterine was not renamed when she was betrothed to Isaac is thus indicative that the ties of kinship which she established between her natal family and her affine relatives were of immediate significance to the Komnenoi.

In Basil II's charters and an analysis of the built environment in the Balkans we encountered compelling evidence that Samuel was already remembered differently than his nephew John in the 1020s, when the betrothal was made. For this reason, within the competitive context proposed by Holmes, which we have connected to the first half of the eleventh century, the Komnenos family were in all probability motivated from the time of Aikaterine's betrothal to Isaac to focus upon her descent from Samuel. It is likely that members of the Komnenos family used fluid family terminology to emphasise Aikaterine's descent from Samuel, to maximise the prestige which they gained from their own association with her.

In summary, in the context of the patterns discussed above, I argue that Bryennios' association of Aikaterine with Samuel, rather than John Vladislav, was in all probability rooted in a longer-term effort by the Komnenos family to maximise the prestige garnered from her links with the

³⁵⁷ Hilsdale 2005, 460. Examples are the French Bertha-Eudokia (who arrived in Byzantium in c944), the Norman Olympias-Helena (c1076), Piroska-Eirene (1104) and Bertha-Eirene (1143).

³⁵⁸ Fatková 2018, 41

³⁵⁹ Some of Aikaterine's relatives are attested with two names, one of which is Greek and the other Slavic, for example, John Vladislav and Gabriel Rodomir. Aikaterine may have likewise had alternative Greek and Slavic names before she came to Byzantium. See Pirivatrić 1997, 208-209, emphasising that the non-Greek names were Slavic, not Bulgarian.

Kometopouloi rulers, and the imperial status with which this family were associated. The evidence discussed in this chapter points to the likelihood that Bryennios was not the first to foreground Aikaterine's links with Samuel, rather than her father John Vladislav. Rather it is more likely that the Komnenos family did this from soon after Aikaterine's betrothal to Isaac, with the result that precise memories of her patriline had become blurred by the time that Bryennios wrote, likely in the 1120s and 30s. This resulted a century later in Bryennios' identification of her as Samuel's daughter.

Until 1057, Aikaterine's links with the Bulgarian imperial family, and the promotion of this status by the Komnenos family, seems connected to Isaac and his younger brother John's prominence in elite Byzantine society. Sphragistic evidence shows that before 1057, Isaac had been appointed as *Katepan* of Iberia, *Katepan* of Vaspourakan and *Stratopedarch* of the East.³⁶⁰ According to the *Chronographia*, in 1057, Isaac was *Doux* of Antioch.³⁶¹ In the passage of the *Chronographia* which describes Psellos' delegation to Isaac's rebel army in 1057, John is also described as *Doux*, but Psellos does not give a more specific title. The same passage describes the prestige of the long line of ancestors in John's *genos*.³⁶² This passage falls within the first section of the *Chronographia*, which Psellos likely completed around 1060-1061.³⁶³ We have already discussed evidence that Aikaterine was linked with the Komnenos *genos*, including by Psellos himself. That Psellos could plausibly associate the Komnenos family with a prestigious and ancient lineage further indicates that this family had since 1025 enhanced their own status by promoting their own associations with the Kometopouloi through Aikaterine. Here, the association of the Komnenoi with Aikaterine was also complemented by John's marriage to Anna, from the Dalassenos family.³⁶⁴

A question which remains to be asked in this chapter is how far Aikaterine contributed to the process of reshaping her natal identity, or whether her importance for the Komnenos family gave her power. Although there is not enough source material to answer this question conclusively, the monastic name taken by Aikaterine, Xene (Ξένη) provides telling evidence. As mentioned above, the name communicated a meaning which translates into English 'foreign woman', it also evoked a religious person's separation from the world. Kotzabassi has suggested that the reason that the Hungarian-born Byzantine empress Piroška-Eirene took the name Xene was because it referred to

³⁶⁰ PBW (2016), Isaakios no. 1 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/107447/>> (Accessed 24/02/2022).

³⁶¹ *Chron.*, 7.3.

³⁶² ὁ Δοῦξ Ἰωάννης, ὃς δὴ πόρρωθεν καὶ ἐκ προγόνων τὸ γενναῖον καὶ σταθιρὸν ἐκεκλήρωτο: *Chron.*, 7.22, 602, ll. 3-5.

³⁶³ See above, 16 n. 54.

³⁶⁴ Bryennios, *History*, 1.2. For the Dalassenos family: Cheynet & Vannier 1986, 75-76.

her identity as a member of a foreign royal family.³⁶⁵ It is possible that likewise Aikaterine took the name Xene because it recalled her identity as a Bulgarian imperial woman.

It should also be noted that in the inscriptions in *MGS* 02 and on seal BZS.1955.1.5083, which bring us close to Aikaterine's own voice, she uses the name Komnenos alongside her monastic name Xene. In the fifth chapter it will be argued that Aikaterine used these inscriptions as a means of crafting a public image of her affinity to the Komnenos family, to enact competitive power and resist the claims of the new imperial Doukas regime. By juxtaposing her name Xene with Komnenos in inscriptions, Aikaterine may have aimed to draw attention to how the Komnenos family held ties through her to another imperial dynasty, something which the Doukai lacked. Thus, it appears that in at least one instance, Aikaterine was herself empowered by enhancement of the Komnenos family's reputation through the ties to the Kometopouloi which she had established through her marriage to Isaac. In the next chapter we will also analyse further evidence that Aikaterine's overlapping identities were a source of power for her in the period before she became empress in 1057. What this evidence suggests is that Aikaterine herself may have been a participant in the promotion of ties between the Kometopouloi and Komnenos families, which ultimately resulting in the blurring of memories of her patriline.

Above we have considered evidence for how Aikaterine's identity as a Bulgarian imperial woman contributed to the reputation of members of the Komnenos family in the eleventh century. This has come to light through Bryennios' identification of her as Samuel's daughter. Crucially we have demonstrated the beginning of this process within Aikaterine's own lifetime. What can be said is that Aikaterine retained her identity as member of the Bulgarian imperial family after she married Isaac, but her identity as a daughter of John Vladislav was distorted because of the reputation of her great-uncle Samuel. Aikaterine's history thus provides a paradigm for how the convergence of multiple identities structured an individual life. The findings of this chapter therefore reinforce a point made by Stafford concerning the value of biography for the study of medieval lives. Stafford in 2006 argued that through a biographical study, the examination of the convergence of multiple structures and roles within individual life sheds light on their 'possibilities, ambiguities and contradictions'.³⁶⁶ In the following section and the conclusion, I will further examine the different possibilities and contradictions elicited by the convergence of Aikaterine's identities as a Bulgarian imperial woman by birth and a member through marriage of an elite Byzantine family, as well as similar patterns evident in the lives of her relatives.

³⁶⁵ Kotzabassi 2013, 139 n. 30.

³⁶⁶ Stafford 2006a, 109.

Trojan and his daughter Maria, factors shaping the lives of women and men.

In the *History*, Bryennios also identifies the grandfather of Maria 'of Bulgaria' (and therefore great-grandfather of Eirene Doukaina) as Samuel, rather than John Vladislav.³⁶⁷ I will now consider Bryennios' depiction of Trojan's and Maria's genealogies in more detail, because it sheds light on how factors shaping Aikaterine's identity were also present in the lives of her brothers. An interesting point raised here is that Eirene Doukaina was Maria's daughter. As commissioner of the *History* and president of the *theatron* in which Bryennios participated, Doukaina therefore appears to have had an active role in the reshaping of memories of her own matriline.

Bryennios however notes that Maria's father Trojan married a woman from the Kontostephanos, Aballantes and Phokas families. The links which Bryennios foregrounds between Trojan's affine relatives and three elite Byzantine families suggests that this family group made active attempts to develop their own reputation through presentations of their genealogy. It is possible therefore that after Trojan's marriage his affine relatives laid stress upon his descent from Samuel and that the Doukas family also did this when his daughter Maria married into their family. After her mother's death in c1095, Eirene Doukaina and her husband Alexios may have considered it advantageous to continue this tradition by encouraging the presentation of Trojan, her mother's father, as the son of Samuel, rather than John Vladislav. Possible occasions for this include the *theatron* over which she presided, discussed above.

As is the case with Aikaterine, it is unclear when the reshaping of Trojan and Maria's genealogy became explicit. Reassessments of Alexios I's reign have highlighted this emperor's vulnerability to conspiracy and rebellion. Alexios was furthermore preoccupied with the military campaigns in the Balkans in the 1090s. Holmes argued that Skylitzes' *Synopsis* is written to encourage commitment amongst the Byzantine elite to Alexios' Balkan campaigns.³⁶⁸ Around the time of Maria's death in 1095, the emphasis of a genealogical connection between the empress Doukaina and Samuel could have been used to boost the emperor's popularity in the Balkans and help him achieve his objectives in the region. It is possible that for the same reasons Aikaterine became explicitly presented as Samuel's daughter in Alexios' reign, although this is not certain. It is however clear that Aikaterine, her niece Maria and her brother Trojan were all subject to a process during the eleventh century whereby their genealogical history became blurred. This highlights how processes of assimilation in Byzantine society foregrounded by Kaldellis could result in the loss and distortion of individual identities. It indicates that Aikaterine's brothers were also vulnerable to having their histories and

³⁶⁷ Bryennios, *History*, 3.6.

³⁶⁸ Holmes 2005, 220-236. See also: Cheynet 1996, 362, 368.

identities reshaped when they arrived in Constantinople and married into Byzantine families. They, alongside their sisters, also arrived as prisoners, and as foreigners and they were therefore also potentially in a marginalised position.

Thus, the process whereby Aikaterine's identities were reshaped to bolster the reputation of the Komnenos family appears to be comparable to similar processes involving other descendants of the Kometopouloi family, both women and men. Because of her entrance into Byzantium as a prisoner and a foreigner, Aikaterine's position was aligned with that of her brothers. A further hint towards the parallels between the histories in Byzantium of the female and male descendants of this dynasty is shown by the twelfth-century interpolations of Michael of Diabolis. In his analysis of Michael of Diabolis' interpolations Ferluga argued 'the way in which the additions and corrections are made shows that they were inserted by someone who introduced new facts and better variants into the text with the aim of enriching it with reliable information and correct forms'.³⁶⁹ From the findings of this chapter it appears that one of Michael of Diabolis' goals as an interpolator appears to have been to restore accurate memories of the genealogy of the Kometopouloi line, suggesting that he perceived that memories of many of them had been reshaped and lost. To this end, he mentions Aikaterine, as well as other female and male relatives.³⁷⁰

One of the goals of the recent 'beyond exceptionalism' project led by Heather Tanner, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, is to encourage scholars to approach women as potentially being empowered by the factors which could also give men power. Within the volume edited by Tanner in 2019, this argument was made most clearly by Jordan in her study of political culture and powerful women in twelfth-century Antioch, where she argued that a complex web of factors rendered women and men powerful and powerless.³⁷¹ This case study has reinforced the argument made by Jordan. The factors which contributed to the reshaping of Aikaterine's identities did not always stem from gender alone. In this case, Aikaterine's position is comparable with her uncle Trojan. For both figures, the intersection of their identities as a foreigner, a captive and a descendant of a family with imperial associations appear to have caused perceptions and memories of her own life history to be reshaped and ultimately distorted.

Gender is an important analytical category for Aikaterine's life history and will be further examined in this thesis, with the most sustained discussion in the fifth chapter. For example Byzantine

³⁶⁹ Ferluga 1967, 169.

³⁷⁰ For example, the interpolation at *Synop.*, Th 409, mentions Gabriel Rodomir's two wives, the daughter of the Kral of Hungary, and Eirene of Larissa. The interpolation at *Synop.*, Th 360, lists all of Maria and John Vladislav's male children.

³⁷¹ Jordan 2019, 242-243.

conceptions of appropriate female and male roles within marriage, and the consistent telescoping of female identities around reproductive roles, are factors connected to gender which must have distinguished Aikaterine's experience from her male relatives. I return to these themes in subsequent chapters. For now, I note that the findings of this chapter shed light on the importance for women's historians of recognising structuring factors in the lives of historical women which cross over gender boundaries. These findings discourage the use of gender as a single category for the biographical study of historical women. Rather, they encourage an examination of gender alongside other approaches, and a consideration of how these different factors intersected to shape individual lives, as advocated by Tanner et. al.³⁷²

Conclusion

To conclude, this case study of Aikaterine's overlapping identities has in the first place offered a new explanation for divergences in the accounts of her genealogy in Bryennios' *History* and the interpolations of Skylitzes' *Synopsis*. It has been argued that Bryennios identified Aikaterine as Samuel's daughter because in the eleventh century, her affine Komnenos relatives had foregrounded her links with her great-uncle Samuel, rather than her father John Vladislav. This resulted in a distortion of her natal identity. Secondly, this chapter has offered a counter example to the argument of Leidholm concerning links between married elite women and their affine kin in eleventh-century Byzantium. Leidholm argued that in the tenth through to the twelfth centuries the strength of identification between adult married women and their natal *genos* had the potential to disrupt the harmony of a marital relationship.³⁷³ Aikaterine is an example of a woman who continued to be identified with her natal kin after marriage, but this identity was remoulded to serve the needs of her husband's family. Therefore, what we see in the case of Aikaterine contradicts Leidholm's argument. Aikaterine continued to carry an identity which linked her to her natal relatives, but her marriage to Isaac disrupted and changed this identity, to the extent that in Constantinople, accurate memories of her patriline had been lost by the twelfth century.

Above, it has been argued that perceptions and memories of the genealogy of Aikaterine's niece Maria were also changed because of her marriage into the Doukas family. Interestingly, there is no evidence that Maria used the surname Doukas, unlike Aikaterine, who did use the surname Komnenos. In this chapter it was pointed out that there are many examples of elite women in eleventh-century Byzantium who foregrounded their natal identity in their seals, including women

³⁷² Tanner et. al. 2019, 7.

³⁷³ Leidholm 2019, 120-22.

descended from foreign families.³⁷⁴ Leidholm drew attention to these naming practices as evidence to support his argument, but the findings of this chapter suggest that that evidence from nomenclature does not tell the whole story. Presentations and perceptions of other elite women's natal identities may have changed after they joined a new family through marriage, even if these women did not use the same surname as their affine relatives. A question for further research is whether elite women who entered Byzantium as foreigners, such as Aikaterine, were identified in different ways with their natal and affine kin than elite women who were born into the majority Byzantine ethnic group outlined by Kaldellis. It should also be noted that arguments similar to that of Leidholm have been made by scholars of other medieval societies. For example, Amy Livingstone has also noted the persistence of ties between elite women and their natal kin after marriage, in her study of noble families in the Loire region of France between 1000-1200.³⁷⁵ For this reason, I suggest the findings of this chapter can fuel further discussions on medieval women's identities both in Byzantium and in other medieval societies.

Thirdly, this chapter has shed light on the parallels between the convergence of Aikaterine's identities as a wife to a Komnenos man and daughter of a Kometopouloi ruler, and processes evident in the lives of her brothers. The natal identities of both female and male descendants of the Kometopouloi were appropriated and reshaped during the eleventh century in Byzantium. This sheds light on how both the identities of Aikaterine and her brothers were vulnerable to being distorted or lost. This should encourage us to approach Aikaterine's life and those of other individual medieval women through the examination of a web of factors, rather than giving one analytical category priority over others. I suggest that elsewhere in the Balkans, Aikaterine's natal identity seems to have been remembered more accurately. It is possible that Michael of Diabolis, when interpolating Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, may have been prompted to add information on Aikaterine's genealogy because he was aware that her lineage had become misremembered in Constantinople.

At the conclusion of this chapter, it must be acknowledged that although light has been shed on an important structuring process for Aikaterine's life history, she has for the most part thus far remained opaque as a historical individual. It has however been suggested that the evidence from the names which Aikaterine used as a nun, 'Xene Komnene' indicate that the elision of her identities as descendant of the Kometopouloi and a member of the Komnenos family became a source of power for her. It appears that within the context of a 'politics of reputation' in eleventh-century Byzantium, Aikaterine also benefited and made use of the enhanced reputation of the Komnenos

³⁷⁴ See above, 62-63 n. 300.

³⁷⁵ Livingstone 2010, 51.

family to enact power, even though the appropriation of her identity to benefit the Komnenoi caused memories of genealogy to be eventually distorted. The following chapters analyse further evidence that Aikaterine exercised competitive and relational power and offer further examinations of whether the elision of her Kometopouloi and Komnenoi identities were a source of power for her.

Chapter Three

Petitioning, Intercession and Action

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on factors which empowered Aikaterine both before and after she became empress in 1057. I define power as competitive or relational, following the definitions of Stafford discussed in the introduction. A significant part of this chapter involves an examination of source material relating to Aikaterine's reign as empress for the light it sheds on Aikaterine's power before she became an imperial Byzantine woman. This will fill a lacuna in her biography and serve as an exemplar for how source material concerning imperial women can be used as a paradigm to further the study of non-imperial elite Byzantine women. This answers the call of Tougher to utilise biographical studies of imperial women to advance understandings of the histories of other women in Byzantine society.³⁷⁶

In this chapter there is an examination of Aikaterine's integration into the Byzantine political system as a recipient of and respondent to petitions. Following Carolyn Collette, petitioners are defined as individuals or groups who make requests of an addressee who has more power than themselves.³⁷⁷ The argument below is influenced by a group of scholars including Collette, who all argued that queens in the late medieval west were integral to monarchy and the wider political framework as intercessors.³⁷⁸ This chapter includes a discussion of the ways in which as empress Aikaterine was imbedded in Byzantine politics as an intercessor. However, I go further by considering how the evidence for Aikaterine's imperial career points to the ways she had also exercised power as recipient and respondent to positions when she was an aristocratic woman, before she gained imperial status.

It will be argued that Aikaterine's position as empress featured aspects of 'duality', because her power was not entirely dependent on her imperial status, but also related to her bloodline and familial connections. The concept of 'duality' in medieval queenship has been developed by scholars of the medieval west. Lisa Benz, W. Mark Ormrod and Anthony Musson have drawn attention to the 'duality' of later medieval English queens' positions, on the one hand as participants in monarchy

³⁷⁶ Tougher 2013a, 399.

³⁷⁷ Collette 2006, 106 n. 19.

³⁷⁸ Geaman 2019, 67-85; Collette 2006, 99-122; Ormrod 2004, 175; Musson 2009, 156-172. See also Cartwright 2019, 91-112, who argued more broadly that the power of women should be approached as a regular aspect of politics in the medieval west.

and on the other as landholders and founts of good lordship in their own right.³⁷⁹ This chapter aims to demonstrate the appropriateness of this concept for analyses of the positions of Byzantine empresses. Lastly, this chapter responds to a call for more systematic study of petition in Byzantium made by Macrides in 2004, which has since only been partly met.³⁸⁰

Although this chapter is influenced by scholarship on the medieval west, it must be acknowledged that there is a greater amount of evidence for the actions of late medieval queens than is available for Aikaterine. For example, studies of the fourteenth-century queen Anne of England are enriched by the documentary material provided by the *Calendar of Patent Rolls*. We have no comparable documentary evidence for Aikaterine as empress. However, Aikaterine's visibility in the letters of Psellos provides an opportunity to see her in action and thus examine women's power outside of the lens of narrative histories, which for reasons of genre, obscure the actions of women.³⁸¹ Aikaterine's visibility in these letters has never been analysed in depth. As already discussed, Papaioannou's recent edition of Psellos' letters now provides a new opportunity to do so and this moreover opens new possibilities to test whether advancements made in other fields of women's history, where source material is more abundant, can aid understandings of the power of Byzantine women. In this chapter, the evidence of the letters will be used to develop new arguments about Aikaterine's biographical history, and about the history of Byzantine elite women more broadly.

The text of principal importance for the argument is Psellos' *Letter* Π 1. This letter is of special significance because it is addressed to Aikaterine directly and therefore sheds direct light on her active role as a letter recipient. Mullett proposed the relationship between writer and recipient must be treated as central to the composition and reception of Byzantine letters.³⁸² *Letter* Π 1 therefore promises to yield fruitful evidence on the recipient Aikaterine's relationship and interactions with one of the imperial courtiers, Psellos. The letter sheds light on multiple aspects of Aikaterine's integration into the Byzantine political system. Below, through a comparison with another Psellian letter, Π 255, which concerns an elite Byzantine woman named Anna Radene, I will demonstrate that there was overlap between Aikaterine's capacity to exercise power as empress, and the power of other elite women.

³⁷⁹ Benz 2012, 65-94; Ormrod 2009, 8; Musson 2009, 166-168.

³⁸⁰ Macrides 2004, 356.

³⁸¹ Neville 2016, 21.

³⁸² Mullett 1997, 18.

Letter Π 1

Letter Π 1 (text 1) was in all probability sent between September and October 1059. This means that when she received the letter, Aikaterine was likely located not in the Great Palace, but in the imperial lodgings on the east side of the Bosphorus, described in the *Chronographia* and by Attaleiates.³⁸³ In the opening of the letter Psellos writes using encomiastic language that he cannot bear it when Aikaterine and Isaac are away from Constantinople, where he wishes to see them constantly (1-9). He states that he has chosen to correspond with Aikaterine through letters as a consolation, since it is not possible to converse with either her or Isaac in person. Aikaterine and Isaac are described collectively with the phrase 'since there is no longer any other way to be acquainted with your [plural] might' (10-12).³⁸⁴ Psellos then mentions that he has sent his 'usual [...] monk' to deliver the letter. He asserts that he will be bold by asking after the empress' and emperor's current circumstances (12-13). Then using encomiastic language, a series of questions are directed to Aikaterine about how she and Isaac are faring (14-21). Psellos writes that Aikaterine should not be surprised that he repeatedly asks for favours from her, and he offers his obeisance as recompense (21-24). With further encomiastic language, Psellos prays for answers from Aikaterine or the emperor (25-34). Psellos asks Aikaterine to encourage Isaac to allow himself to enjoy some leisure. He mentions that he had heard Isaac was away from the city to conduct administrative business, rather than to hunt and writes that the emperor should stay consistent to his disposition (35-38).³⁸⁵ He closes the letter by wishing that Aikaterine and Isaac will long rule over the Romans (38-40).

Before proceeding to analyse the letter in more detail, I consider evidence for the position of the sender, Psellos, during Isaac's reign. Psellos himself was promoted from *Vestarches* to the position of *Proedros* in this period.³⁸⁶ Furthermore, he composed a polemical letter condemning Michael Keroularios, in all probability linked to the trial of the patriarch, organised by Isaac in Thrace in late 1058 or early 1059.³⁸⁷ Indeed, Psellos tacitly acknowledges his involvement in drawing up

³⁸³ *Chron.*, 7.73-74; Attaleiates, *History*, B 68-69.

³⁸⁴ Μηκέτι οὐδ' δυνάμενος ἄλλως πως συνεῖναι τῷ κράτει ὑμῶν.

³⁸⁵ It is ambiguous whether Psellos is referring to Isaac's administrative activities (described in the previous line) when urging him stay consistent to his disposition ('Ὅμως ἐχέσθω τοῦ ἡθους), or his urging Aikaterine to encourage Isaac to enjoy some leisure. Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 365, interprets the phrase as referring to Isaac's administrative activities and I am inclined to agree with him.

³⁸⁶ Psellos is attested with the following court titles: *Vestes*, *Vestarches*, *Proedros* and *Protoproedros*. He also held a series of unusual personal titles: For an overview of Psellos' titles: Jeffreys, M. 2016a, 426.

³⁸⁷ Π 111. The letter is translated in Kaldellis & Polemis 2015, 37-48. An introduction is also given on pages 14-16, 37; Papaioannou 2013, 153. Kaldellis 2017, 221, suggests that the letter was composed as a writing exercise, and was never delivered.

accusations against Keroularios in a memorial speech which he composed in Constantine X's reign.³⁸⁸ This suggests that he was in favour at Isaac's court, and had access to the emperor. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos links this promotion to a close personal relationship with this emperor, which he presents as beginning when he delivered a powerful speech before Isaac, as an ambassador on behalf of Michael VI.³⁸⁹

However, as Michael Jeffreys points out, the letters which Psellos wrote to Aikaterine and Isaac, as well as Isaac's nephews Theodore Dokeianos and Kontostephanos, present a different picture. To these we may add his letters addressed to the *Protonotarios* of the *Dromos Sagmatas*, recently dated to Isaac's reign by Papaioannou. As discussed above, several of the letters were composed during the military campaign in late summer and autumn in 1059. Others, including Π 1 and Π 142 were in all probability sent between October and November 1059. The only evidence that any of these recipients themselves sent letters to Psellos is a reference to a perfunctory response from Isaac in Π 137, and a reference to a request made by Dokeianos in Π 40, which is analysed below.³⁹⁰ In these letters Psellos admits several times that he is poorly informed about Isaac's activities, expresses uncertainty about how the emperor will view his letters, and requests to be given more access to the emperor. The letters consistently express hope that the recipients, including Aikaterine and Isaac, will reply.

Here a passage in *Letter* Π 252, one of two letters addressed to Sagmatas, is telling. Psellos describes how just when he catches Sagmatas, he slips always, and excludes Psellos with the 'imperial curtain'.³⁹¹ Although Papaioannou dated Psellos' other letter to Sagmatas to October – November 1059, he did not give this letter a specific date. However, this reference suggests that it should be dated to Isaac's reign.³⁹² It once more points to Psellos' position outside of the inner circle of the imperial government, contradicting his depiction of his position in the *Chronographia*. We can therefore identify an objective of these letters as being more intimate and more consistent access to the imperial family and the imperial servants within their inner circle.

I now turn to lines 21-24 of Π 1:

Do not be amazed, if I make requests from you often and

³⁸⁸ Psellos, *Orationes Funèbres*, no. 1, 65-66.

³⁸⁹ *Chron.*, 7.41-42.

³⁹⁰ Π 137, ll. 1-10; Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 269.

³⁹¹ ἐντὸς τῶν ἀδύτων γίνῃ, κάμῃ διείργεις τῷ βασιλείῳ καταπετάσματι: Π 252, ll. 11-12.

³⁹² Papaioannou dates the first (Π 251) to October-November 1059 during Isaac's reign on the basis of hunting references in the text: Papaioannou 2019, 623.

repeatedly. For the countless good favours emanating from your mightiness

(your gentle gaze, your goodwill, your lordly disposition)

I offer a little in return, these inquiries and my obeisance.

Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης, εἰ πολλάκις

ἐπανερωτῶ· μυρίων γὰρ ἀγαθῶν παρὰ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους τυχών

(προσηνοῦς θέας, εὐμενείας, δεσποτικῆς διαθέσεως), μικρὰν

εἰσάγω ἀντίδοσιν, τὴν ἐρώτησιν ταύτην καὶ τὴν προσκύνησιν.³⁹³

The passage implies that the main purpose of Π 1 is to request a favour from Aikaterine. It is located immediately after a series of questions asking after Aikaterine and Isaac, further analysed below.

This suggests that the favour Psellos requests is merely that Aikaterine answer his letter. Thus, in our only example of direct correspondence between Psellos and Aikaterine the relationship between the two emerges as asymmetric and distant. Psellos' objective thus appears to be to establish greater access to the empress, and in turn the emperor. Psellos' objective can be more specifically described as the establishment of *parrhesia* (παρρησία) with Aikaterine and Isaac. Here I follow the English definition of this Greek word offered by Michael Jeffreys. Jeffreys used the word *parrhesia* to describe the kind of access to the powerful which Psellos repeatedly depicts himself as enjoying in the *Chronographia*, but which is sometimes absent in other texts composed by Psellos, such as the letters from Isaac's reign. Jeffreys defined *parrhesia* as 'access to the powerful and open and convincing address of them'.³⁹⁴

Having established the parameters of Aikaterine's relationship with Psellos, and the objective of the letter, we can now proceed to an analysis of how she may have received Π 1. An understanding of how the letter was received is aided by Mullett's study of miniatures from the twelfth-century Madrid Skylitzes manuscript, which was produced following a Constantinopolitan prototype. Mullett showed how twenty of the miniatures illustrating the manuscript present the reception of letters in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium as a multi-stage process involving elements of performance, ceremony and private reading. The content of letters written during this period also shows that they were often bound up with a paraphernalia of gifts potentially including incense,

³⁹³ Π 1 ll. 21-24.

³⁹⁴ Jeffreys, M. 2010, 74. Mary Garrison, who has studied early medieval Latin translations of *parrhesia*, also writes that the concept is 'closest in modern parlance to the cluster of ideas associated with "speaking truth to power"': Garrison 2010, 149. For a broad study of the rhetoric of free speech in early medieval western Europe: Van Renswoude 2019.

foodstuffs or books.³⁹⁵ In Π 143 Psellos refers to gifts which he had sent to Isaac, and it is thus possible that Π 1 was bound up with gifts for Aikaterine.³⁹⁶

As Mullett acknowledged, it is difficult to identify with precision the process whereby Byzantine letters were received. However, the Madrid Skylitzes and some of the late eleventh-century letters of Theophylact of Ohrid analysed by Mullett present the first stage of reception as public and formal (fig. 10).³⁹⁷ There is a consensus amongst modern scholars of Byzantine epistolography, including Bernard and Mullett, that at this stage the letter bearer performed a preeminent role by communicating an oral message which complemented the letter.³⁹⁸ There is evidence for this within the text of Π 1 because Psellos opens a series of questions about the empress and emperor's current circumstances by stating that he has sent his 'usual [...] monk' to deliver the letter.³⁹⁹ This appears to be a cue for the bearer to elaborate upon the questions which follow.⁴⁰⁰ Mullett acknowledged that it is unclear who read the text and whether this reading was in a public or private space. The reader may have been the bearer, a member of the recipient's entourage, or the recipient herself.⁴⁰¹ Bernard also suggested that there were few set rules or protocols for the reception of Byzantine letters.⁴⁰² In this case the setting outside of Constantinople, likely in or around an imperial hunting lodge near the Bosphorus, must have impacted the ceremony surrounding the reception of the letter.

In the case of Π 1 the appearance of a cue for the bearer to speak hints that parts of the text were read in tandem with a complementary oral communication, during Aikaterine's initial reception of the letter. Furthermore, Π 143, written by Psellos to Isaac's nephew Kontostephanos refers to the recipient's own letters being performed in the presence of both Psellos and the emperor, suggesting that letters were read aloud in Isaac's court.⁴⁰³ Thus, despite the gaps in our knowledge of Byzantine epistolary communication, there is enough evidence to suggest that Π 1 was read aloud in some form before a gathered audience, during a formal reception process. Those who were in all

³⁹⁵ Mullett 1997, 31-42; 1989, 172. For examples, see: Tsamakda 2002, fig. 29 (fol. 19va), fig. 30 (fol. 19vb), fig. 184 (fol. 75v), fig. 190 (fol. 78a), fig. 487 (fol. 205r). For gifts: Bernard 2020, 311-313.

³⁹⁶ Π 40 ll. 51-57. For examples of letters bound with gifts addressed to the empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa: Π 153, 154.

³⁹⁷ Mullett 1997, 37-38.

³⁹⁸ For a summary of the debate in modern scholarship: Bernard 2020, 309. An example shedding light on the role of letter bearers is provided in the *Life* of St Lazaros of Galesion. Lazaros is depicted issuing instructions to a letter bearer named Kosmas concerning messages he should deliver to the emperor Constantine IX: Gregory the Cellarer, *Life of Lazaros*, 575-576, ch. 221. Page and chapter numbers are from the edition in *Acta Sanctorum Novembris* 3.

³⁹⁹ Π ll. 12-13: Ἐπὶ τούτῳ οὖν καὶ τὸν συνήθη πρὸς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν ἐξαπέστειλα μοναχόν.

⁴⁰⁰ For the appearance of cues for the bearer to speak in Byzantine letters: Mullett 1997, 34.

⁴⁰¹ Mullett 1997, 39.

⁴⁰² Bernard 2020, 313.

⁴⁰³ Π 143, ll. 17-23

probability present for the letter reception were Aikaterine herself and her entourage, who can be classified as itinerant members of the imperial court. The language in the text can for this reason be linked to the formal, ceremonial culture of the court. This point will be examined in more detail below.

Psellos' statement that he is sending his 'usual monk' is significant because it implies that when she was away from Constantinople, Aikaterine routinely received letters requesting access to the imperial government from Psellos. The statement in lines 21-22 that Aikaterine should not be surprised if Psellos makes multiple requests of her also seem to have been written to address the fact that this was not the first time Psellos had requested a favour from Aikaterine. As we have already pointed out, Psellos does not seem to have held a position of special favour in this period. Therefore, it is most likely that others, whose letters have not been preserved, also petitioned Aikaterine for access to the imperial government, both orally and through writing. The multi-stage process of reception evident in Π 1 would have also taken place when other letters were delivered to Aikaterine. It is significant that in Π 1 Psellos does not express an expectation that Isaac will be present when the letter is received by Aikaterine. This points to the high likelihood that Aikaterine was on a regular base visible separately from Isaac, when she received letters addressed to her in formal contexts outside of Constantinople.

Here we should note Psellos' statement that he is writing to Aikaterine since he can no longer communicate with her by other means (ll. 10-12), which implies that in different circumstances he could address her in person. Psellos' inability to address Aikaterine in this way has here been caused by Aikaterine's departure from Constantinople. We have established that the objective of Π 1 is to establish a greater degree of *parrhesia* between Psellos and Aikaterine and Isaac. The letter can be characterised as a petition in the sense that it includes a request that Aikaterine do Psellos a favour, by replying to him, or influencing the emperor to reply. The letter therefore implies that Aikaterine also received oral petitions for access to imperial government in person when she was present in Constantinople. Thus, it is likely that Aikaterine was also visible in Constantinople as a recipient of petitions for access to government, either delivered orally, or semi-orally through a letter.

Aikaterine's power as a recipient of petitions and an intercessor

What does Aikaterine's regular reception of petitions for access to the inner circles of imperial government show about her role within Byzantine imperial rulership and the wider Byzantine political system? The present investigation of this question is problematised, but also rendered

important, by the lack of systematic study of petition in medieval Byzantium, as observed by Macrides.⁴⁰⁴ However, scholarship on networks in the eleventh century, conducted by Mullet and Bernard, as well as advancements in the study of intercession in the medieval west, can help provide an answer. It will now be demonstrated that Π 1 sheds light on Aikaterine's contributions to imperial rulership, but also on her power before she became empress in 1057. Above, we saw how Aikaterine's overlapping identities contributed to the reputation and power of the Komnenos family. However, it was recognised that we had not assessed Aikaterine's individual capacity to exercise power. Through Π 1 and comparative sources, including Psellos' *Letter* Π 255 written to Anna Radene, Aikaterine's power both before and after she became empress will now be assessed.

The fact that Psellos directed a petition towards Aikaterine, which moreover appears to have been one of a series of requests, shows that she was perceived as influential and therefore potentially politically powerful. In the words of Geaman, in her study of the intercessory role of the fourteenth-century Queen of England Anne of Bohemia, 'there was no reason to ask a politically powerless person a favour'.⁴⁰⁵ The contents of Π 1 therefore foreground a site of agency and power for Aikaterine, and suggest that others also approached her for favours. Moreover, as already touched upon, it is clear in Π 1 that Psellos is far from certain that Aikaterine will reply. This act is itself framed as a favour. This shows that Aikaterine possessed power. Following her reception of Π 1 she must have chosen whether to respond to Psellos directly, or to intervene by attempting to influence the emperor or another imperial person to correspond with him, or to ignore him. As we have discussed Psellos also likely composed Π 142, addressed to Isaac, around the same time as Π 1. One of Aikaterine's specific options following her reception of Π 1 could therefore have been to influence Isaac to respond to Π 142. In summary, although no other petitions addressed directly to Aikaterine survive, it appears very likely she received petitions regularly and that when receiving them she frequently had the opportunities to exercise agency. On these occasions she would have chosen from a range of options comparable to those we have linked with Π 1, for example by intervening directly, or influencing another powerful person to act on her behalf.

It is possible to make a further point about Aikaterine's authority through reference to two passages in the *Chronographia*. The first depicts Basil II as unusual because he dictated responses to petitions to imperial secretaries word-for-word. In the second Psellos describes how Isaac, on the other hand delegated more responsibility to his secretaries for the composition of legal documents.⁴⁰⁶ These passages suggest that when choosing how to respond to a petition Aikaterine would have likely also

⁴⁰⁴ Macrides 2004, 356.

⁴⁰⁵ Geaman 2019, 78.

⁴⁰⁶ *Chron.*, 1.30, 7.49.

guided any written response to Π 1 and that this would have required her to exercise authority by issuing directions to imperial secretaries. This supposition is supported by line 25 of Π 1 which reads ‘may answers come to me by your hand’ indicating that Psellos expected that it was at least possible that Aikaterine would be directly involved in a response to his letter.⁴⁰⁷

What were the precedents for Aikaterine’s position of power? An examination of the connections between Aikaterine’s power and expectations and understandings of the roles of empresses in Byzantine political culture can shed light on the answer to this question. In Π 1, Psellos articulates an expectation that Aikaterine could potentially influence Isaac to respond to him. On the one hand Aikaterine’s role as intercessor with the emperor should be connected with her visibility as an imperial partner to Isaac, a topic discussed extensively in the next chapter. There was also a precedent for female intercession with the emperor in early Byzantium, evident in Julian’s *Speech of Thanks to Eusebia*, a panegyric designed to persuade Julian’s audience that Eusebia, wife of Constantius II (r.337-361) excelled in roles expected of imperial women. The speech shows imperial women were expected to perform an intercessory role because it celebrates how Eusebia influenced Constantius to award high offices to her own relatives and friends, and saved several men from her husband’s punishment by encouraging him to be merciful.⁴⁰⁸

The position of empress was associated with the position of the Virgin Mary as queen of heaven from the fifth century onwards and this naturalised her intercessory role. Iconography depicting Mary showed her wearing similar regalia to empresses and she was addressed with identical terminology in prayers and in the liturgy, for example with the title *Basilissa*.⁴⁰⁹ Mary appeared prominently as an intercessor in Byzantine visual imagery and texts, for example in depictions of the Deēsis. As discussed above, a notable eleventh-century example of a literary depiction of the Deēsis is Psellos’ *Poem* 20, composed for the occasion of Isaac’s funeral.⁴¹⁰ Another example, from the twelfth century, is the prologue of the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene monastery, produced by the empress Eirene Doukaina, which features an extended celebration of Mary’s intercessory role. The focus upon Mary as an intercessor in a document produced by an empress is telling. It sheds light on how the pre-eminent intercessory role of Mary, the queen of heaven, provided sanction for the intercessory acts of her worldly counterpart, the Byzantine empress.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Γένοιτο οὖν μοι αἱ ἀποκρίσεις σου δεξιαί.

⁴⁰⁸ Julian, *Oration* 3, 114b-121c. For Julian’s audience: James 2012, 54. See also: Tougher 1998, 595-599.

⁴⁰⁹ This has been discussed by Herrin 2013a, 169-174 & Angelova 2014, 250-259. I am unconvinced by the argument of James 2001, 14 & 143, that iconographic and linguistic parallels with Mary were structurally unimportant for the position of empresses, other than Pulcheria.

⁴¹⁰ Psellos, *Poemata*, no. 20, 258, ll. 10-12.

⁴¹¹ Doukaina, *Typikon*, 19-29, ll. 1-173. Ed. Gautier.

Confirmation of the acknowledged role of eleventh-century imperial women as intercessors is provided by a long poem, also composed by Psellos, for the *Sebaste* Maria Skleraina, the lover of the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos. In her assessment of the poem, Laiou argued that it was written to present Monomachos and Skleraina's relationship as a legitimate union.⁴¹² Elsewhere I have argued that Skleraina and Monomachos aimed to craft an image of their relationship as conventional to imperial norms, through patronage of the Mangana site in Constantinople.⁴¹³ Therefore, Skleraina is most probably portrayed in Psellos' *Verses* as matching expectations of imperial female behaviour. In the text Psellos sketches a speech delivered by Maria (an *ethopoia*). Central to the speech are a series of petitions on behalf of her relatives, directed towards Monomachos.⁴¹⁴ This affirms that in the middle Byzantine period, imperial women continued to be expected to act as intercessors with the emperor.⁴¹⁵

The expectation evident in Π 1 that Aikaterine could potentially intercede with Isaac on Psellos' behalf was therefore founded upon precedents and expectations of female imperial behaviour in Byzantine political culture. But how far was Aikaterine's role as a recipient of, and respondent to petitions reserved for her as empress? This consideration furthermore raises the question of how far Aikaterine's power was gendered. It is important at this stage to consider Papaioannou's argument that Π 1 should be grouped within a cluster of Psellian letters in manuscript L. He identifies this group as Π 1; 40 and 41 (addressed to Dokeianos, nephew of Isaac); 138, 139 and 142 (addressed to Isaac); 143 (addressed to Kontostephanos, nephew of Isaac) and 251 (addressed to Sagmatas).⁴¹⁶ Papaioannou dated this group to the period August to November 1059. He also assigned a date of August – September 1059 to Π 390, written by Psellos to an imperial secretary. Above I have argued that Π 252, also addressed to Sagmatas, should be dated to Isaac's reign. I have furthermore agreed with Papaioannou's proposed dating of Π 1 and 142.

In the cluster of letters, Psellos consistently attempts to establish or maintain *parrhesia* with the recipient, and enquires about Isaac, sometimes asking undisguisedly about whether he is in the emperor's favour. Psellos therefore appears to have addressed Π 1 to Aikaterine as part of a concerted effort during the last months of 1059 to establish correspondence with members of the inner circle of imperial government. The cluster of Psellian letters also fits within a broader pattern. In the first place it can be linked with other Psellian letters addressed to Isaac, including Π 140 and

⁴¹² Laiou 1992, 99.

⁴¹³ Short 2021, 9-54.

⁴¹⁴ Psellos, *Poemata*, no. 17, 250-251, ll. 387-422 especially ll. 407-412.

⁴¹⁵ It is also worth noting that in the twelfth-century *Alexiad* Anna Komnene celebrates her mother's successful petition for Alexios I to moderate his punishment of Michael Anemas in 1103: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 12.6.

⁴¹⁶ Papaioannou 2019, lii.

141. Beyond this, hundreds of letters are attributed to Psellos and about half make requests of the correspondents or refer to requests made or carried out.⁴¹⁷ In the words of Bernard, 'Psellos' letters establish, maintain and exploit an impressive social network that includes individuals from all levels of society'. As Bernard further observed, the majority of Psellos' correspondents are male civil officials.⁴¹⁸ As a recipient of *Letter Π 1* Aikaterine was therefore integrated into a framework of petition, response and intervention underpinned by personal relationships and practised by both women and men.

Aikaterine's position bears comparison to that of imperial women in other networks which have been observed by modern scholars. Comparable examples are the former empress Maria 'of Alania' and Aikaterine's niece Maria 'of Bulgaria', whom Mullett located in the late eleventh-century network of Theophylact of Ohrid, based on their presence in his letter collection.⁴¹⁹ Aikaterine's integration as a recipient of petitions within a political framework involving both women and men also bears comparison with the positions of late medieval western European queens, as recently highlighted by several scholars.⁴²⁰ This indicates that the proposals made by the scholars of the medieval west working within the 'beyond exceptionalism' project, arguing that women exercised power on a regular and widely accepted basis, can also help us to understand the power of elite Byzantine women in the eleventh century.⁴²¹ This proposal is further examined below.

Since Macrides' call for more systematic study of petition in Byzantium, Holmes, Neville and Jonas Nilsson, in a recent doctoral thesis, have characterised petition as an integral part of the tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine political system. They have drawn attention to evidence that in this period there were a high volume of petitions involving supplicants and recipients from the whole Byzantine social spectrum.⁴²² Holmes has further suggested that the weight of petitions directed to Constantinople from the provinces may have provoked emperors to develop a more extensive bureaucracy. Holmes identified one of the main objectives of petitions to the imperial centre as the attainment of favourable documents authenticated by the emperor or an imperial representative.⁴²³ In connection to Holmes' point about the volume of petitions directed to the imperial centre, Morris has shed light on the importance between the tenth and twelfth centuries of the role of the master

⁴¹⁷ Nilsson, J. 2017, 32.

⁴¹⁸ Bernard 2020, 129; Bernard 2016, 21.

⁴¹⁹ Mullett 1997, 364.

⁴²⁰ Geaman 2019, 67-85; Musson 2009, 156-172; Collette 2006, 99-122.

⁴²¹ Tanner et. al. 2019.

⁴²² Nilsson, J. 2017, 101 -103

⁴²³ Holmes 2010, 146.

of petitions (*Epi Tōn Deêseōn*). This person received petitions before deciding whether to bring them to the attention of the emperor, and also recommended to the emperor how he should respond.⁴²⁴

On the other hand, Neville argued that at all levels of Byzantine society, the act of petitioning took place in disputes of all kind, involving diverse higher authorities. As Neville put it, the acquisition of imperial support was undoubtedly most effective, but ‘supplicants sought the help of the most powerful people they could reasonably expect to take an interest in their problems’.⁴²⁵ Modes of petition included addressing a recipient orally, either directly or through a representative, or through a letter.⁴²⁶ Through extensive analysis of Psellos’ letters, Nilsson has also reaffirmed that requesting and carrying out of favours often operated on a less formal level and did not necessarily reach the emperor. For example, Psellos’ letters show that he intervened on behalf of supplicants from across Byzantine society in a multitude of contexts. These included attempts to sway the outcome of judicial disputes and to request fiscal favours.⁴²⁷ The findings of Holmes, Neville and Nilsson therefore indicate that Aikaterine’s reception of Π 1 should be located not only within the specific context of late 1059, but in a wider culture of supplication which was integral to middle Byzantine political society.

Π 255

Here a comparison with between Π 1 and another of Psellos’ letters, Π 255 (Appendix: Text 2) is telling. This letter is directed towards the *Krites* (judge) of the Aegean. Papaioannou identifies the recipient of the letter as Nikolaos Skleros, to whom Psellos directed a further sixteen letters.⁴²⁸ The letter is dated by Jeffreys to between 1054 and 1060/61.⁴²⁹ It concerns the monastery of Homonia, which belonged to Anna, who is named as the sister of Radenos and identified as *Zoste Patrikia*. The purpose of the letter is to request that Skleros ignores an individual who is claiming possession of

⁴²⁴ Morris 2004, 125-140. Nystazopoulou-Pélékidou 2004, 105-124, also examined the terminology in petitions about legal disputes directed towards the imperial centre, and the replies to these petitions.

⁴²⁵ Neville 2004, 149. Morris 1995, 109-110, also discusses the roles of monasteries and monastic leaders as intercessors between rural communities and representatives of the Byzantine government.

⁴²⁶ An interesting example of the complexities and unpredictability of petitioning by letter appears in the *Life* of St Lazaros of Galesion. The text depicts a confused account of a series of embassies sent from Galesion to Constantine IX towards the end of Lazaros’ life. It appears that representatives from Galesion were sent to Constantinople with a letter, aiming to petition the emperor to confirm Lazaros’ possession of Galesion. The emperor instead ordered Lazaros to move to another foundation, Bessai. Lazaros subsequently refused to do this: Gregory the Cellarer, *Life of Lazaros*, 575-576, chs. 221-223, 584-586, chs. 245-248. For a fuller analysis: Greenwood 2000, 41-48.

⁴²⁷ Nilsson, J. 2017, 84-103.

⁴²⁸ They are numbered Π 255-272 by Papaioannou.

⁴²⁹ Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 199. Cheynet 2000, 183, dates the letter to 1070, but Jeffreys argument based upon the date of the retirement of Skleros is more convincing.

Honorina in opposition to Anna Radene. We do not know what the outcome of the letter was. However, the text nonetheless sheds light on Radene's power and the overlap between her position and that of Aikaterine when receiving Π 1.

Anna Radene is unattested outside of this letter.⁴³⁰ Her *Zoste Patrikia* title is attested between the period c830 and c1100. It was received independently unlike most other titles held by women, which were feminized versions of those held by their husbands.⁴³¹ We also know that the Radenos family was prominent in Constantinople in the eleventh century. They were related to the family of the emperor Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028-1034) and they furthermore provided an eparch of Constantinople in 1081.⁴³² There are also seals of Eirene Radene, also a *Zoste Patrikia*, and Zoe Radene, who was a *Protoproedrisa*, which are dated to the second half of the eleventh century.⁴³³

A seal of Eirene Radene was found near to the city known in the modern-day as Afyonkarahisar in centre-west Asia Minor.⁴³⁴ On the other hand, another Anna Radene is depicted in a donor portrait, dated to the twelfth century, with her husband Theodore Lemniotes and the Virgin Mary, in the church of Saints Anargyroi in Kastoria.⁴³⁵ Incidentally, the iconography of the donor portrait is similar to the depiction of Piroos-Eirene, John II Komnenos and the Virgin Mary in Hagia Sophia, illustrating cultural overlaps between elite and imperial Byzantine women.⁴³⁶ The Radene family are thus attested both in the eastern and western regions of the Byzantine Empire, so it is unclear where Anna Radene was located. However, Skleros' occupation as judge of the Aegean suggests that Radene too was based in western Asia Minor. In the letter, Psellos is petitioning Nikolaos Skleros on Radene's behalf. Radene is therefore in a different position to Aikaterine in Π 1, but Π 255 nonetheless provides a comparative example of a woman integrated within the Byzantine political framework, of which petitioning was an integral part.

Before analysing further how Radene is described in Π 255 I summarise the text as a whole. In the letter, Psellos begins by stressing the bonds of friendship which he shares with Skleros (ll. 1-12). Thereafter, he asks a favour for the estate-managers of the Homonia monastery (13-16). Psellos then describes how the Homonia monastery is possessed by Anna Radene and asserts that Skleros can increase Psellos' standing with her (16-20). Psellos then relates that another man has made a

⁴³⁰ Cheynet 2000, 183-184.

⁴³¹ Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R 257-61. For studies of the title: Cheynet 2000, 179-188; ODB 2005, 'Zoste Patrikia'.

⁴³² Cheynet 2000, 183; Cheynet 2008, 183.

⁴³³ Wassiliou & Seibt 2004, 44.

⁴³⁴ Cheynet 2004, 190.

⁴³⁵ For the date: Pelekanidēs and Chatzēdakēs 1985, 28. Given that Byzantine children were often named after their grandparents, it is possible that this Anna Radene is the granddaughter of her namesake in Π 255

⁴³⁶ Pelekanidēs and Chatzēdakēs 1985, 39.

claim to ownership of Homonia (20-22). He makes a request that Skleros reject these claims (Ἀπαιτήσας οὖν καὶ ταῦτα, ἀπότισον τοῖς ἀφαιρεθεῖσι) (22-23). Psellos once more asserts that if Skleros does this, he will build credit with Radene. He adds that he will gain honour rather than erotic credit (οὐχ ἵνα ἐρωτικὸς ταύτῃ ὀφθείῃν, ἀλλὰ φιλότιμος ἄνευ ἔρωτος) (23-25).

In lines 16-20, Radene is described as follows:

The monastery is possessed by the mistress, the *Zoste* and
Lady Anna, the sister of Radenos. She is long acquainted to me
through her association and intimacy with the Monomachos *genos*.
Make me more esteemed by the woman, a light request,
bringing great honour in exchange.

ἡ δὲ μονὴ δεσπότην ἔλαχε τὴν ζωστήν τὴν
κυρὰν Ἀνναν, τὴν ἀδελφὴν τοῦ Ῥαδηνοῦ· αὕτη δὲ ὑκείωταί μοι ἐξ
ἀρχαίας πρὸς τὸ τοῦ Μονομάχου γένος συνηθείας καὶ ὁμιλίας.
Ποίησον οὖν με πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα σεμνότερον, ἐλαφρᾶς
ἀξιώσεως, μεγάλην τιμὴν ἀντικαταλλαπτόμενος.

Psellos mentions Radene's title (*Zoste*) and describes her as '*Despotis*' meaning 'mistress' (δεσπότην) and 'lady' (τὴν κυρὰν). He also describes her familial connections by foregrounding that she is the sister of a Radenos. Psellos further highlights Radene's association with the Monomachos *genos*, whose members included the emperor Constantine IX. Her links with the Monomachoi, with whom Psellos also claims to be associated, are presented as deep-rooted. This depiction of Radene's overlapping identities is clearly designed to emphasise to Skleros the benefits of allegiance with her.

An argument made by Leidholm can aid a deeper understanding of how Psellos' description of Radene empowered Radene herself. Leidholm argued that in the eleventh century family names functioned in a similar way to titles, to communicate a message that individuals possessed a series of latent attributes linked with specific family groups, legitimising high social status and acting as a source of authority. It is telling that Psellos' juxtaposition of Radene's title with two family names bears parallels to a passage in Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, highlighted by Leidholm, describing how Michael VI honoured his nephew simultaneously with the title Duke of Antioch and the family name

Ouranos.⁴³⁷ This suggests that Radene's power stemmed from the same factors determining the power and authority wielded by men.

Neville's foregrounding of the fluid and informal nature of authority in tenth-and eleventh-century Byzantine provincial society is also informative. She argued that the ability to act was connected to a range of overlapping factors, including wealth, ability to exercise force, connections with powerful people, and the ability to win the support of others.⁴³⁸ This is evident in Π 255. The *Zostai Patrikiai* acted as 'ladies of honour' to the empress and therefore appeared in close proximity to her during imperial ceremony.⁴³⁹ In Π 255 Radene's title thus communicates her proximity to imperial authority. The foregrounding of her familial connections to the aristocratic Radenos family, and her association with the Monomachoi simultaneously imply that she has natural attributes justifying high social status which could potentially encourage people to support her, and also that she can potentially call on powerful relatives to help achieve her objectives.

In this letter we see evidence for Radene's capability to exercise competitive power, defined by Stafford as involving the capability to take action even 'where our desires come up against those of others'.⁴⁴⁰ At some point before the production of the letter, Radene was able to influence Psellos to act on her behalf to defend her claim to the monastery of Homonia against the will of another actor. This shows that women could take part in a similar way to men in the political culture of petition outlined by Holmes, Neville and Nilsson. Radene could influence others to act on her behalf. Her elevated status, constituted according to Π 255 by the intersection of her title and her familial ties and associations, was a valuable commodity. It appears to have influenced Psellos to act, and Psellos also appears to have expected that he would influence Skleros' response to his petition by mentioning Radene's involvement and describing her title and familial connections. Π 255 thus sheds light on how the intersection of Radene's title and familial ties empowered her to potentially achieve specific objectives.

It is interesting here that Psellos writes on Radene's behalf. One possible reason for this is that it may have been perceived as more appropriate for two men, Psellos and Skleros, to correspond with one another than for Radene to address Skleros directly. However, although most epistolary correspondents from eleventh-century Byzantium are male there is evidence that women also regularly communicated with letters. For example, in Π 1 Psellos demonstrates an expectation that a direct reply from Aikaterine as a potential outcome of her reception of the letter. Moreover, there

⁴³⁷ Leidholm 2019, 111-135; *Synop.*, Th 483.

⁴³⁸ Neville 2004, 156.

⁴³⁹ *ODB* 2005, 'Zoste Patrikia'.

⁴⁴⁰ Stafford 1997, 161.

are several hundred lead seals which were used by Byzantine women. Seals were used to authenticate signatures, or as a counter-signature when issuing a document. The integrity of a folded letter was also assured with a seal, and they were also used to secure bundles of documents and attached gifts.⁴⁴¹ Many of the seals belonging to women are from the eleventh century, characterised by Cheynet as a turning point for women's usages of seals. As Cheynet further points out the seals were all in the possession of women who appear to have been a part of the high aristocracy. On the one hand, they are far less numerous than the 60-70,000 Byzantine seals belonging to men.⁴⁴² However, Cheynet and Mokhov & Kapsalykova both propose that these women's seals show that elite women issued administrative documents and sent letters to manage family relations and the administration of households and estates.⁴⁴³ However, the evidence examined in this chapter for the integration of women within the political system of petition and redress indicates that these seals could have also accompanied letters written by women which either petitioned or otherwise sought to influence others or responded to a supplication. Undoubtedly men were more frequent correspondents within this political framework, but I propose that elite women were also integrated within it, and therefore composed letters for a wider range of reasons than either Cheynet or Mokhov & Kapsalykova allow.

This suggests there may be another reason why Psellos acts on behalf of Radene in Π 255. We should note here that there are seventeen Psellian letters directed towards Skleros. Therefore, the most likely explanation for why Psellos wrote on Radene's behalf is because Psellos already had a well-established relationship with Skleros, based on the exchange of mutual favours.⁴⁴⁴ We do not know the outcome resulting from Skleros' reception of Π 255. However, we can tell that by influencing Psellos to write on her behalf, Radene was able to tap into Psellos' and Skleros' relationship, to maximise the chance that she would successfully achieve her objective of protecting her ownership of the Homonia monastery. It is possible that in other contexts, Radene addressed correspondents directly. Π 255 therefore provides a clear example on the potential for women to exercise power within the framework of Byzantine politics by acting to achieve specific objectives.

The comparative example of Π 255 reinforces the point that Aikaterine had more options to intervene when responding to petitions than only influencing the emperor. Radene's title and familial connections to multiple aristocratic families were resources which empowered her and which she used to achieve specific outcomes. In Π 1 Psellos appears to perceive a direct reply from

⁴⁴¹ *ODB* 2005, 'Seals and Sealings'.

⁴⁴² Cheynet 2008, 175-183.

⁴⁴³ Cheynet 2008, 188-190; Mokhov & Kapsalykova 2017, 300, 307-308.

⁴⁴⁴ Four letters, Π 268, 269, 270 and 271, for example, show Psellos attempting to lobby Constantine X to arrange the retirement of Skleros; Jeffreys, M. 2016a, 433, Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 188-190.

Aikaterine as a satisfactory outcome resulting from the sending of the letter. The evidence in Π 255 which shows how Radene's title and family empowered her helps us to explain why a direct reply from Aikaterine in Π 1 was so valuable for Psellos. It suggests that the intersection of Aikaterine's identities as empress, Bulgarian imperial woman, and a relative of multiple aristocratic Byzantine families was likewise a package of valuable commodities which she could utilise to achieve specific objectives. Influencing the emperor to act was one action which was open to Aikaterine, as Π 1 implies. But our comparison with Radene suggests that Aikaterine's overlapping identities were a resource which could enable her to act in other ways, without needing to rely upon the emperor acting on her behalf.

Further evidence from lead seals for Aikaterine's power

It useful to consider further the evidence of lead seals which accompanied letters. Several scholars, including Holmes, Leidholm and Stephenson have remarked upon the importance of lead seals for visualising the credentials of a letter sender.⁴⁴⁵ As discussed in the first chapter, one seal (BZS.1955.1.5083) which was most likely in the possession of Aikaterine has survived to us. It was issued after 1059, when she was a nun, and it bears an inscription naming her Xene Komnene. Earlier in her life, Aikaterine would have also used personalised seals when issuing documents and sending letters as a non-imperial elite woman before 1057, and as empress between 1057-1059. The seals of other empresses and elite women from the eleventh century can aid understandings of what Aikaterine's earlier seals would have looked like. Cheynet compiled a list of forty-five eleventh-century seals belonging to women, which display family names. The seals often communicate a multi-layered message about these women's identities, because court titles (for example (*Kouropalatissa* or *Magistrissa*) and family names are often inscribed together.⁴⁴⁶ As Leidholm has pointed out, and as was discussed in the previous chapter, the family names which appear often connect women to their natal relatives.

The reception of a document bearing Aikaterine's seal during the visible letter receptions outlined by Mullett would have also communicated a multi-layered message. We see in *Letter* Π 255 that an association with the Monomachos family was a source of power for both Radene and Psellos. The appearance of one of Aikaterine's imperial titles on a lead seal would have demonstrated the proximity of the recipient to the Byzantine government, but the appearance of Aikaterine's name on the seal would also have associated the recipient, in the eyes of viewers, with the families to which

⁴⁴⁵ Holmes 2010, 142; Leidholm 2019, 128-132; Stephenson 1994, 187-211.

⁴⁴⁶ Cheynet 2008, 179-181.

Aikaterine was linked. This included on the one hand the Komnenos family. Yet, as was established in the previous chapter, Aikaterine's connections to the Kometopouloi were well known in Byzantium, and thus the appearance of Aikaterine's name on seals would have also invoked an association with this dynasty, even if she used the name Komnenos, as she did on seal BZS.1955.1.5083 and dedicatory inscription in *MGS 02*.⁴⁴⁷ It is likely that the appearance of Aikaterine's name on seals would have moreover invoked her genealogical connections with Samuel, which we have argued the Komnenos family promoted from the 1020s onwards. In the previous chapter, it was argued that Aikaterine deliberately drew attention to the ties of kinship between the Komnenos family and the Kometopouloi by juxtaposing the names Xene and Komnene on the inscription on seal BZS.1955.1.5083. This possibility suggests that by 1059 Aikaterine was experienced in the use of seals to craft a public image which drew attention both to her imperial titles (between 1057-1059) the court titles she held before 1057, and the prestige of her genealogy and ties of kinship.⁴⁴⁸

The above factors explain why Psellos frames a reply from Aikaterine as a favour. His visible reception of a letter from Aikaterine would have demonstrated that he was associated with her. This would have in turn bolstered his own reputation. The link with Aikaterine would have naturalised Psellos' high status in Byzantine society and encouraged others to support him. The boost to Psellos' reputation could potentially empower him to achieve certain objectives, such as those outlined by Nilsson. Therefore, although in the case of Π 1 Aikaterine's own objectives are opaque, it is evident that any letter she wrote in reply was of great value to Psellos. A site of power for Aikaterine has thus been identified. A link with her was a source of reputation and power. There is no reason to doubt that in this and other instances Aikaterine utilised her own reputation as a tool to achieve specific objectives within the framework of Byzantine political culture.

Above, it has been established that there were factors which empowered Aikaterine as empress to which other elite women did not have access. The acknowledged role of eleventh-century imperial women as intercessors enabled her to intervene directly to pursue specific actions, as Π 1 demonstrates. However, a point that has emerged here is that familial reputations were a source of power for elite women alongside titles, and that this may have been the case even for empresses. A

⁴⁴⁷ Sphragistic evidence in fact suggests that it is unlikely Aikaterine used the name Komnenos on her imperial seals. As Cheynet points out, the seals of Eirene Doukaina (r.1081-1118) are the earliest seals where a Byzantine Empress displays her name: Cheynet 2008, 182 n. 77. There is no evidence that Aikaterine's successors Maria of "Alania" and Eudokia Makrembolitissa displayed their family name on seals which they used when they were empresses, suggesting no precedent for this practice was established during Aikaterine's reign.

⁴⁴⁸ For Aikaterine's likely court titles, 41-42 n. 193.

comparison between Π 1 and Π 255 therefore foregrounds continuities between the positions of empresses and other elite women. The parallels between the two letters demonstrate that both groups shared some of the same tools which they could use to enact power in Byzantine politics. Π 1 sheds light on multiple avenues through which Aikaterine could exercise power within the Byzantine political system, where petitioning was an integral part. Some of these overlap with the factors shaping the position and power of Anna Radene in Π 255. This indicates that when she became empress, aspects of the way Aikaterine wielded power were continuous from the period between her marriage to Isaac, and her husband's acclamation in 1057.

Here there is a parallel between the factors which shaped Aikaterine's power and the findings of scholars of queenship in the medieval west. As I have noted, several scholars in this field emphasise the 'duality' of later medieval English queens' positions, as participants in monarchy on the one hand, but also as landholders and founts of good lordship in their own right.⁴⁴⁹ The duality of Aikaterine's position, which has emerged in this chapter, raises the broader point that it should be possible to use sources for imperial women as paradigms for broader studies of elite women's power in middle Byzantium.

Depictions of Aikaterine's bloodline in imperial culture

In Aikaterine's case, the duality of her position as empress stemmed from the ongoing importance of her genealogical reputation as a factor underpinning her integration into Byzantine politics, and empowering her to act. To further develop the argument of this chapter, I now examine in more detail how Π 1 and supporting sources show that Aikaterine's genealogical ties to the Kometopouloi were visible during Isaac's reign. It will be shown how Aikaterine's reputation was a source of legitimacy for Isaac I in this period. It will also be argued that the visibility of Aikaterine's bloodline in the period 1057 to 1059 shows that her reputation was already well established before she became empress. This provides more evidence that there were continuities between the factors empowering her before and after 1057. This examination of Π 1 will thus shed further light on Aikaterine's biographical history and moreover reinforce the point that studies of imperial women can function as paradigms for the wider study of elite women in Byzantium.

In Π 1, references to Aikaterine's bloodline are concentrated in the questions directed towards her. These questions are clustered together between lines 17 and 22 of the text, immediately following a question about Isaac (14-16). The segment as a whole follows the cue for the bearer to speak (10-

⁴⁴⁹ Benz 2012, 65-94; Ormrod 2009, 8; Musson 2009, 166-168.

12), which suggests that these questions may have been read aloud and complemented by an oral performance. Lines 17-22 read:

Herewith I enquire of your mightiness. How goes it
with the truthful empress, who has been decked out in many colours by the golden tassels
of nobility, she who possessed the blood of *basileia* through her family
and then having won a glorious victory took hold of a greater *basileia*?
How goes it with the living light?
Ἐπειτα δὴ καὶ περὶ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους πυνθάνομαι: Πῶς ἔχει ἡ
τε ὡς ἀληθῶς βασιλὶς, ἡ χρυσοῖς κροσσωτοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν περιβε-
-βλημένη, πεποικιλμένη, ἡ καὶ ἐκ γένους βασιλῆιον αἷμα λαχοῦσα,
καὶ κρείττονι αὐθις βασιλείᾳ τὴν προλαβοῦσαν νικήσασα εὐκλειαν;
Πῶς ἔχεις ἡ φωσφόρος ζωή;

It has been established that the objective of Π 1 is to persuade Aikaterine to reply to Psellos, or to grant him access to the emperor. Lines 17-22 can therefore be characterised as combining elements of panegyric and petition. I begin with a note of caution. Ruth Macrides points out that a combination of panegyric and petition is characteristic of twelfth-century literature.⁴⁵⁰ Considering the observations of Riehle about the possibility of changes to Byzantine letters in later manuscript collections, one must accept that the combination of panegyric and petition Π 1 is possibly reflective of the twelfth-century milieu when the two earliest manuscripts (L and P) containing this letter were produced.⁴⁵¹ On the other hand, as discussed above, it is likely that Aikaterine's imperial status was one of the reasons that Π 1 was copied in later editions. For this reason, I argue, it is likely that original passages of text describing her were retained by later editors.

It is noteworthy that similar words attributed to Aikaterine appear in the *Continuation*. Skylitzes seems to have written this passage as a character sketch and so the words are possibly inspired by similar sayings which appear in Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*. The saying reads:

The empress Aikaterine said that nothing strange had befallen her

⁴⁵⁰ Macrides 2004, 369.

⁴⁵¹ Riehle 2020, 490-491.

in exchanging one kingdom for another.

Ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς Αἰκατερίνα μηδὲν ξένον ἐπ’ αὐτῇ

γεγενῆσθαι βασιλείαν βασιλείας ἀλλαξαμένη.⁴⁵²

The composition of the *Continuation* at the turn of the twelfth century likely predates the twelfth-century manuscripts, as well as the Komnenian texts noted by Macrides.⁴⁵³ The close parallels between the *Continuation* and Π 1 indicate that the encomiastic language describing Aikaterine’s overlapping identities as Bulgarian imperial woman and Byzantine empress co-regnant is connected to an eleventh-century context, rather than being a later product of the twelfth century. These similarities also indicate that lines 17-22 were part of the original text, rather than being added when the letter was written down as part of later twelfth-century manuscript collections. The following analysis will foreground intertextual connections between Π 1 and other Psellian works which further suggest that lines 17-22 should be located in a mid-eleventh century context.

I now analyse lines 17-22 in more detail. Psellos’ use of light imagery to describe Aikaterine in line 22 matches with a long tradition of imperial propaganda. Light imagery is frequently used as a metaphor to describe imperial persons in encomiastic texts from different periods of Byzantine history.⁴⁵⁴ However the description of Aikaterine used in the preceding question is more unconventional and personalised because it engages directly with her overlapping identities as a daughter of a Bulgarian ruler and Byzantine empress co-regnant through marriage to a Byzantine emperor.

The phrase ‘who has been decked out in many colours by the golden tassels of nobility’ (ἡ χρυσοῖς κροσσωτοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν περιβεβλημένη, πεποικιλμένη) is based upon Psalm 44.14: ‘of a king’s daughter – all her glory is within, decked out with golden tassels, in many colours’ (πᾶσα ἡ δόξα αὐτῆς θυγατρὸς βασιλέως ἔσωθεν ἐν κροσσωτοῖς χρυσοῖς περιβεβλημένη πεποικιλμένη).⁴⁵⁵ Psalm 44.14 is also quoted directly in Psellos’ *Encomium for a Monk Nikolaos*. The subject was the *hegoumenos* of the Monastery of the Beautiful Source on Mount Olympos, who possibly died in 1054, with the text perhaps written in 1055, when Psellos was on Olympos.⁴⁵⁶ In this text Psellos uses the lines to describe the appearance of the Theotokos in a vision to Nikolaos. This is a pivotal

⁴⁵² *Contin.*, Ts 111, ll. 7-8. Trans. McGeer, 53.

⁴⁵³ See above, 21-22.

⁴⁵⁴ Angelov 2007, 80.

⁴⁵⁵ Psalm 44.14. Trans. Pietersma, 569. This line is noted by Garland, who however does not draw attention to the connection with Psalm 44: Garland 1994, 36-37.

⁴⁵⁶ Barber, Jenkins & Papaioannou 2017, 340-342.

moment in the text, because the vision prompts the monk to build the Monastery of the Beautiful Source.⁴⁵⁷

Lines 11 to 16 of Psalm 44 describe a woman born into a royal family who has left her father's house to marry another king. The lines of the psalm offer her consolation and encouragement. When composing his letter for Aikaterine, Psellos may have recalled his use of the lines in an important passage in his earlier *Encomium for Nikolaos* and perceived their appropriateness for Bulgarian imperial woman who had become a Byzantine empress. This further indicates that these lines were an original Psellian composition. The reference to the psalm is not explicit, which suggests Psellos expected that Aikaterine would herself make the connection to the psalm and recognise the parallels with her own story, when hearing or reading the letter. This hints that Aikaterine was accustomed to hearing and reading references to her bloodline within encomiastic performances and texts directed towards her.

In Π 1 the reference to Psalm 44 leads into the more direct statement in lines 19-20 that Aikaterine amplified the glory which she possessed through birth by marrying into a greater royal institution, the Byzantine *basileia*. The evocation of Psalm 44, where a woman born into royalty is encouraged to forget her father's house in favour of that of her betrothed, and the more direct summary of Aikaterine's biography in lines 19-20 complement one another. Panov comments that in Π 1 Psellos does not reveal Aikaterine's origins, whilst celebrating her royal lineage.⁴⁵⁸ However, the combination of the oblique reference to Psalm 44 and the summary of Aikaterine's life history in fact work to foreground her genealogical connections with the Kometopouloi. The reason that Aikaterine's parents are not named may be because Psellos aimed to foreground Aikaterine's links with her great-uncle Samuel, rather than John Vladislav, for the reasons discussed in the previous chapter. Together the two references enable Psellos to celebrate Aikaterine's bloodline without departing from the norms of Byzantine encomia, which upheld the status of the Byzantine emperor at the head of a theoretical hierarchy of rulers.⁴⁵⁹

There is a similarity between lines 19-20 of Π 1 and lines 87-88 of *Letter* Π 139, addressed to Isaac, further analysed in more detail in the next chapter. In the letter, Psellos celebrates news of success in the 1059 campaign against the Hungarians and the Pechenegs. Here he mentions the prayers for

⁴⁵⁷ Psellos, *Orationes Funèbres*, no. 10, 232, ll. 29-31.

⁴⁵⁸ Panov 2019, 104-105.

⁴⁵⁹ For the theoretical supremacy of the Byzantine emperor: Oikonomides 2005. For the supremacy of the emperor, including depictions of him as the foremost Christian ruler on earth, as an element of encomia: Dennis 1997, 135, 139-140.

victory which Aikaterine had offered in the capital, describing her as the *Basilis* and glory of womankind. These lines read:

For the empress, the great glory and
ornament of the *genos* of women, has been through this with you.
συνδιηγωνίσατο γάρ σοι τοῦτον καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς, τὸ μέγα
τοῦ γυναικείου γένους ἄγαλμα καὶ καλλώπισμα.⁴⁶⁰

Psellos' use of the noun *genos* (γένος) is noteworthy. In the previous chapter the flexibility of the word *genos* was discussed. Here the word *genos* functions primarily to describe women as a single category, including people with a common biological sex, of which, Psellos claims, Aikaterine is the foremost member. However, I argue that the word *genos* here carries a secondary meaning. I suggest that its appearance reminds the reader that Aikaterine's membership of the Komnenos *genos* on the one hand, but also the *genos* of the Kometopouloi from which she was descended were important aspects of her identity. It thus appears that in both Π 1 and Π 139, Aikaterine's high status is described with encomiastic language which foregrounds and celebrates her imperial bloodline. When Aikaterine is introduced into the text of the *Chronographia* Psellos immediately gives the following description of her:

[...] And the empress (she was a most extraordinary woman,
descended from the highest nobility and not one to shirk
from great acts of piety).
καὶ ἥ τε βασιλὶς (θαυμάσιόν τι χρῆμα γυναικῶν αὐτῇ·
καὶ εὐγενείας τὰ πρῶτα· καὶ οὐδενὶ παραχωροῦσα
τῆς μείζονος ἀρετῆς)⁴⁶¹

In this text, Aikaterine's bloodline is foregrounded and presented as being of high significance, as well as her position as empress. Therefore, in three texts we see that Psellos consistently presents Aikaterine's lineage as of great importance, as well as her imperial title. Was the foregrounding of Aikaterine's overlapping identities as imperial Bulgarian woman and Byzantine empress an invention of Psellos or is it reflective of wider court culture? Here it is helpful to refer to Michael Jeffreys' proposal that one of Psellos' specific aims when writing Π 139 and 140 was to be made a regular

⁴⁶⁰ Π 139 ll. 87-88.

⁴⁶¹ *Chron.*, 7.79, 682, ll. 15-17.

encomiast for Isaac. This is because in both texts he highlights how he does not have enough information on the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign to compose a more detailed encomium for the emperor.⁴⁶²

Jeffreys' argument is plausible, because this aim would have helped Psellos achieve his broader goal of establishing himself within the inner circle of imperial power, as discussed above. It is possible that Psellos had this aim in mind when he composed panegyric in Π 1, as well as Π 139. Above, I discussed evidence from Π 1 and 143 suggesting Psellos' letters to Aikaterine were read aloud before a gathered audience of itinerant courtiers, like other letters which reached the imperial court. In these circumstances, given Psellos' probable aim of becoming a regular encomiast for Isaac, it is likely he responded to and developed encomiastic imagery which he had already encountered when present amongst audiences for encomiastic performances, including verses, epideictic speeches and letters read aloud at the imperial court.

In Π 1, the use of Psalm 44 to foreground Aikaterine's overlapping identities as a descendant of the Kometopouloi and Byzantine empress seems to have been Psellos' own invention, in which he built upon his reference to the same psalm in his *Encomium for the Monk Nikolaos*. However, our knowledge of Psellos' aims in his letters suggests that depictions of Aikaterine's story, and her overlapping identities, were already an important part of court culture. Psellos' foregrounding of the illustriousness of Aikaterine's genealogy are likely therefore to be reflective of the language used in other encomiastic performances at Isaac's court. Encomiastic performances delivered at the imperial court during Isaac's reign are discussed in more detail in the following chapter. For now, I observe that the content of Π 1 suggests the telling of the story about how Aikaterine was born into the family of the Kometopouloi, who had claimed imperial status as rulers of the Bulgarian Empire, and how she entered Byzantium and subsequently married Isaac Komnenos, were prominent within court culture.⁴⁶³ In Π 1 Psellos developed his own distinct way of presenting this story.

The significance of Aikaterine's lineage for Isaac's reign can be in part explained as a means of naturalising the power of the imperial government headed by Isaac. Isaac was the first emperor for some two centuries whose position was not legitimised by a connection with the 'Macedonian' dynasty begun by Basil I in 867. In the *Chronographia*, Psellos writes to justify and naturalise Constantine X Doukas' succession from Isaac in late 1059. Tellingly, he claims that in 1057 many

⁴⁶² Jeffreys, M. 2010, 81; Π 139 ll. 14-17; Π 140 ll. 5-20.

⁴⁶³ The foregrounding of Aikaterine's lineage within the court culture raises the possibility that she was a cultural mediator, whose presence at the imperial court meant that objects linked to the Kometopouloi dynasty, for example items of dress or jewellery, were visible within the court setting. Regrettably however there is no direct evidence for this.

people wanted Constantine to be named as leader of the rebellion and acclaimed as emperor, rather than Isaac because his ancestry was more noble.⁴⁶⁴ Psellos' claim reflects attitudes to power and legitimacy around the time of Isaac's reign. Constantine's genealogy was not as prestigious as Psellos claims.⁴⁶⁵ However, the leaders of the rebellion of 1057 had included members of prominent families including the Argyroi and the Skleroi.⁴⁶⁶ Both these families had strong connections to previous rulers. For example, the two sons of Basil Argyros were the nephews of the emperor Romanos III Argyros.⁴⁶⁷ McGeer argued that Isaac was acclaimed emperor by the other leaders of the rebellion because he was aged around fifty and lacked a direct male heir, meaning that one of them could hope to quickly succeed him.⁴⁶⁸ It is probable that Isaac and his inner circle were aware that the leaders of the 1057 rebellion might seek to challenge his position, and one way that one of them might do this is by claiming that their ties to previous rulers, even if they were from outside of Byzantium, made them more appropriate as emperor than Isaac.

It is most likely therefore that Aikaterine's genealogical connections with the Kometopouloi were of great importance for the presentation of imperial power between 1057-1059. They helped to naturalise Isaac's position as the first emperor in two centuries without a tie to the Macedonian dynasty, by providing him with a link to another line of imperial rulers, those of the Bulgarian Empire. Furthermore, Aikaterine's reputation helped to explain why Isaac, rather than one of the other rebel leaders of 1057, had been acclaimed emperor. Encomiastic celebrations of Aikaterine's bloodline helped to negate the arguments of potential challengers to the throne, who might hope to gain supporters to conspire or rebel against the imperial government by claiming their nobility was of a higher order than that of the current ruling class.

The prominence of depictions of Aikaterine's bloodline and her history in imperial court culture between 1057 and 1059 points backwards to the way Aikaterine's reputation was presented and perceived before she became empress. The use of her story as a tool to legitimise the power of the ruling class suggests that her reputation was in all probability well-established by 1057. The likelihood that Aikaterine's bloodline was renowned in Byzantium before she became empress

⁴⁶⁴ *Chron.*, 7.88.

⁴⁶⁵ See below, 176 n. 702.

⁴⁶⁶ Also involved were members of the Botaneiatai, Bourtzai, Doukai and Kekaumenoi: *Chron.*, 7.3-4; *Synop.*, 483, 486-87. Skylitzes adds that the rebels were bound by oath.

⁴⁶⁷ *PBW* (2016): Basileios 104 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/106754/>> (Accessed 27/02/2022). The Skleroi were connected by marriage to John I Tzimiskes and Romanos III Argyros. Constantine IX Monomachos' second wife was a Skleraina, and he had also taken Maria Skleraina as a lover between c1035 and 1044: Short 2021, 11-12.

⁴⁶⁸ McGeer 2019, 48 n. 34.

reinforces the impression that there were continuities in the factors underpinning her power before and after 1057.

In this chapter it has been argued that the prestige of Aikaterine's bloodline was a factor which potentially empowered her as an individual by giving her options to act within the Byzantine political system. It has been argued that the factors empowering Aikaterine which are evident in Π 1 were not all linked to her position as empress. From Π 1 it is evident that her power is also founded upon her genealogical reputation, which was also a factor before 1057. Thus, before Aikaterine became empress, her reputation as a woman born into an imperial family, evident in the sources produced when she was Byzantine empress, would have empowered her. Like Radene in Π 255, before 1057 Aikaterine could have acted directly to achieve specific objectives, or influenced others to act on her behalf, because a visible association with her allowed individuals to claim links with the elite Komnenos family, and the family of the Kometopouloi.

The findings of this chapter lend further weight to the argument of the previous chapter, that the Komnenos family promoted their connections with Aikaterine and the Kometopouloi from soon after her marriage to Isaac. In the previous chapter it was shown how Aikaterine's natal identity was reshaped, resulting in Bryennios identifying her as Samuel's daughter. It was argued that this was in all probability linked with an effort by the Komnenoi to maximise the potential of their links with Aikaterine to enhance their own reputation, by foregrounding her genealogical connections with her great-uncle Samuel, rather than her paternal tie with John Vladislav. However, in both this and the previous chapters it was also suggested that Aikaterine depicted herself as Xene Komnene on seal BZS.1955.1.5083 to simultaneously draw attention to her links to both the Kometopouloi and the Komnenos family, indicating that she was empowered by the elision of her natal and affine identities.

Whilst seal BZS.1955.1.5083 provided only a snapshot of Aikaterine's power, the findings of this chapter have shed further light on the usage of lead seals, and the wider practices relating to letter reception of which they were a part, as a site of power for Aikaterine. In the previous chapter, it was argued that memories of Samuel carried greater prestige than his successors, and that his imperial status was more clearly foregrounded through the built environment in former Kometopouloi territories. The findings of this chapter further demonstrate how Aikaterine was potentially empowered by the foregrounding of her genealogical connections with Samuel. Focusing memories of the Kometopouloi rulers upon Samuel rather than John Vladislav must have strengthened the imperial reputation of the family amongst eleventh-century Byzantines, at the same time as enhancing the reputation of the Komnenoi. The enhancement of the reputation of these two

families, with whom Aikaterine was identified, further increased the value for other actors of establishing a link with her, potentially providing Aikaterine with more opportunities to utilise her own overlapping identities as a resource to pursue objectives. In the period before 1057, Aikaterine appears therefore to have been empowered by the process whereby her overlapping identities as a member of the family of the Kometopouloi and Komnenos family elided.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated the duality of Aikaterine's power as it appears in Π 1, which was not only underpinned by her position as empress but also by the reputation of her Kometopouloi bloodline and her membership of the Komnenos family. This conclusion has been achieved by a comparison between Π 1 and Π 255, which depicts the power of the elite woman Anna Radene. The overlap between the positions of Aikaterine in Π 1 and Radene in Π 255 demonstrate that some of the factors which underpinned the integration of empresses into the Byzantine political system were shared by other non-imperial Byzantine women. It has therefore been possible to shed light on aspects of Aikaterine's power before she gained imperial status in 1057. Secondly, this chapter has shown that, as Tougher has proposed, it is possible to utilise a biographical study of an imperial woman, such as Aikaterine, as a paradigm to develop understandings of the positions of other elite Byzantine women, who are less visible in the source material. Finally, the similarities between Aikaterine and Radene demonstrate that, whilst politically active men are attested much more frequently than women in our source material, women were not debarred from the Byzantine political system because of their gender, and moreover performed socially sanctioned and regularised roles within a system of petition and response, which routinely opened opportunities for them to exercise power. A point made in the previous chapter, which built upon the argument of Jordan, is hereby reinforced. This is that the analytical category of gender should not automatically be given priority over other factors shaping the lives of individual medieval women, including class and status. Their histories can be thereby effectively approached as resulting from a web of overlapping factors.

Chapter Four

After Zoe and Theodora: Imperial Collegiality and Power

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine further how Aikaterine's role as Byzantine empress between 1057-1059 rendered her visible and empowered her. Overall in this chapter it will be shown that in multiple spaces imperial power was consistently presented as plural between 1057-1059, jointly exercised by Aikaterine, alongside Isaac. Within the analysis of this chapter it will be asked how far Aikaterine was expected to participate in the enactment of imperial rulership in Byzantium. This approach builds on advancements in queenship studies in the medieval west. Above all, this involves an investigation of whether imperial rulership in this period involved collaboration between different figures and whether as empress it was necessary that Aikaterine was one of the figures who contributed. The method of investigation involves an interdisciplinary approach, combining a study of architectural and written sources for the built environment in Constantinople with a philological analysis of letters, speeches and narrative histories.

Thus far, the importance of Aikaterine's Kometopouloi bloodline has been a focal point of discussion. It has been seen that Aikaterine's connections to this foreign imperial family empowered her as an elite woman. It has also been shown that the story of her imprisonment during the last phase of Basil II's war with the Bulgarian Empire, and her subsequent marriage to Isaac Komnenos, continued to be told in the imperial court, when she was empress. However, in this chapter I consider another facet of Aikaterine's visibility as empress between 1057-1059. Aikaterine's appearance as a partner and colleague of the emperor Isaac through building projects, encomia, and physical performances will be discussed. It will be demonstrated how the public image of Isaac and Aikaterine as emperor and empress was imbedded in patterns in imperial culture which developed in the tenth century and gathered apace in the first half of the eleventh century. In this chapter, it will be shown that the appearance of Aikaterine and Isaac as imperial partners communicated that the reign was comparable to, and continuous from, those of previous imperial rulers. For this reason, a close analysis of Aikaterine's history can shed light on the positions of other empresses in the middle Byzantine period between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Therefore, whereas the previous chapter approached Aikaterine's history as a paradigm for the study of Byzantine elite women more broadly, here it will be asked how her history sheds light on the roles of imperial Byzantine women specifically.

Significantly, Aikaterine was the first empress to reign after the ‘Macedonian’ empresses Zoe and Theodora between 1028-1056, who as last descendants of the Macedonian dynasty had legitimised the rule of successive emperors. This chapter aims to show how, although very short, Aikaterine’s reign as empress was a crucial period linking the reigns of Zoe and Theodora with those of empresses of the later eleventh century, including Aikaterine’s successor Eudokia Makrembolitissa (r.1060-1072), and that it was thus an important period in Byzantine women’s history. It will be argued that aspects of Aikaterine’s public image were connected to the roles performed by Zoe and Theodora before her, because it was necessary to present imperial power in 1057-1059 as continuous from previous reigns in living memory. In this chapter I aim to shed light on how precedents established during Zoe and Theodora’s reigns shaped the reigns of Aikaterine, and her successor Eudokia Makrembolitissa. This is important because scholars including Hill and Garland have emphasised the differences between Zoe and Theodora on the one hand and Eudokia Makrembolitissa on the other, rather than focusing on continuities.⁴⁶⁹ This chapter therefore offers a reassessment of both Zoe and Theodora’s and Eudokia Makrembolitissa’s significance and place in Byzantine women’s history, in particular countering the arguments of Hill, who presented Zoe and Theodora as ‘special cases’, and Neville, who attributed an increase in imperial women’s visibility in the mid-eleventh century written sources to changes in literary culture alone.⁴⁷⁰

Aikaterine's husband Isaac was the first emperor in two centuries who was unable to claim a direct link with the Macedonian dynasty to legitimise his power. The reign therefore stands at a turning point in the political history of Byzantium. Moreover, Isaac had come to power through a violent and disruptive civil war. In her seminal study of Byzantine political ideology, H       Ahrweiler shed light on how Byzantine emperors were continuously expected to present their power and their actions as maintaining the established order, or *taxis*.⁴⁷¹ Both Attaleiates and Skylitzes suggest that some of Isaac's contemporaries questioned whether it was appropriate for him to be emperor, because of the circumstances whereby he had come to power, including loss of life during the civil war.⁴⁷² Psellos' *Letter* Π 140, also includes a reference to the emperor's awareness of the circulation of texts critical of his reign.⁴⁷³ This all suggests that criticisms of Isaac's reign existed and that he was motivated to counter them by presenting aspects of his reign as conventional and continuous from previous rulers. Below, I highlight examples where Isaac's power appears to have been presented as

⁴⁶⁹ Hill 1999, 66; Garland 1999, 179.

⁴⁷⁰ Hill 1999, Neville 2019, 89.

⁴⁷¹ Ahrweiler 1975, 141. See also: *ODB* 2005, 'Empress'. For the ongoing relevance of Ahrweiler's study: Magdalino 2016, 26.

⁴⁷² Attaleiates, *History*, B 69-70; *Contin.*, 109.

⁴⁷³ τῶν λοιδόρων γραμματίων ὑπεριδών: Π 140. l. 58.

comparable to that of previous rulers, and it is shown how Aikaterine was central to this public image.⁴⁷⁴ The argument builds upon a point made by Morris, who has highlighted specific examples where middle Byzantine emperors, including usurping emperors, sought to use patronage of monasteries to craft a public image presenting their power as continuous from that of previous rulers, and therefore legitimate.⁴⁷⁵ Overall, further light will be shed on expectations concerning legitimate imperial power in the mid-eleventh century, and the norms for Aikaterine and other Byzantine empresses within this framework.

This chapter examines Aikaterine's visibility in stages. The first stage examines representations of Aikaterine as an imperial colleague to Isaac in the built environment before a broad audience who viewed the Constantinopolitan cityscape. It will be shown how the presentation of Aikaterine as a partner to Isaac in the Constantinopolitan cityscape through patronage of St John Prodromos at the Stoudios monastery visualised the reign as continuing established imperial tradition. Secondly, I discuss representations of Aikaterine as an imperial colleague to Isaac in encomiastic performances in the imperial court. Thirdly I discuss the evidence for her physical performances as empress in Constantinople during the Hungarian-Pecheneg campaign in 1059. I close the chapter by discussing an example of action taken by Aikaterine's successor Eudokia Makrembolitissa, which demonstrates that the visibility of empresses as imperial partners in this period, including Aikaterine, opened space for them to act.

Wider studies of medieval rulership and women in power

Significant advancements in the study of how medieval rulership was collective have been made by scholars of medieval and early-modern western Europe. Eric Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, includes a proposal that the Crown should be characterised as a 'composite body, an aggregate of the king and those responsible for maintaining the inalienable rights of the Crown and the kingdom'.⁴⁷⁶ Kantorowicz did not consider the roles of queens or royal women within this corporate group. However, since the turn of the twenty-first century several scholars of queenship in the high

⁴⁷⁴ Previous studies of Isaac as emperor have focused predominantly upon administrative and military aspects of the reign: Böhm, M. 2018, 136-142; Kaldellis 2017, 219-222; Mokhov, A. 2012, 52-60; Krallis 2009, 169-190. There has been less discussion of the way his imperial power was presented. Studies in this area include short discussions of representations of Isaac on his *histanena* as full-bodied, with military costume and with a sword: Penna & Morrison 2014, 33-34; Morrison 2013, 82; Kaldellis 2017, 219.

⁴⁷⁵ Morris 1995, 139-141. Examples she highlighted include how John Tzimiskes (r. 969-976) continued the donations to the Lavra on Athos of Nikephoros II Phokas, whom he had overthrown, and how after Romanos IV was overthrown by Michael VII (r.1072-1078), the latter confirmed chrysobulls issued for the Nea Mone on Chios by Romanos.

⁴⁷⁶ Kantorowicz 2016 (1957), 381.

and late medieval period in the west, including Earenfight and Joanna Laynesmith have proposed that, although the position of king was privileged, queens performed roles integral to collective medieval rulership.⁴⁷⁷

There have also been important arguments on the collegiality of Byzantine imperial rulership. Several scholars have proposed that between the fourth and ninth centuries, partnership between emperor and empress was an integral aspect of imperial rule. In 1981, Sabine MacCormack proposed that from the sixth century the virtues of the empress were presented regularly in imperial culture as supplementing, clarifying and exalting those of the emperor.⁴⁷⁸ Holum argued in 1989 that the empresses of the Theodosian dynasty were accepted as participants in the monarchy, because they possessed 'authentic imperial dominion'.⁴⁷⁹ In 2001, James also built upon Kantorowicz's proposal to argue that Byzantine empresses between the fourth and ninth centuries performed an official and visible role within the political body of the Byzantine political hierarchy and that this required careful negotiation of their personal female bodies, which were not normally associated with images of power. James argued that empresses in these centuries derived power both from personal influence with the emperor and their hierarchical standing, which involved an official duty of automatically filling in for the emperor if he was incapacitated.⁴⁸⁰ In 2015, Busch drew attention to the corporate character of the Byzantine monarchy in the fourth and fifth centuries. She argued that Theodosian empresses performed a necessary role generating acceptance for imperial rulership and their appearance as partners to the emperor was therefore an important part of imperial culture in the period.⁴⁸¹

Angelova has also argued that in the early Byzantine period imperial authority was regularly presented as a partnership between emperor and empress. She argued that between the fourth and sixth centuries developments in Christian thought and Christian expressions of power led to the expansion of empresses' prerogatives and the attributes which they shared with the emperor, shaping a discourse on imperial power which stated that imperial rule was appropriately exercised collaboratively between emperor and empress. Angelova moreover emphasised that the positions of empresses and emperors were rooted in 'deep continuities' with the earlier Roman empire,

⁴⁷⁷ Earenfight 2007, 1-21; Laynesmith 2004, especially 1-27, 262-266.

⁴⁷⁸ MacCormack 1981, 263-264.

⁴⁷⁹ Holum 1989, 3.

⁴⁸⁰ James 2001, summarised at 27-29 and in the conclusion 164-166. Herrin also shed light on the cultural heritage, the imperial precedents and variety of visual models which empowered Byzantine empresses in the fourth to ninth centuries: Herrin 2013a, 162, 185.

⁴⁸¹ Aspects of imperial women's roles discussed by Busch include their appearance in coins and inscriptions, their appearance in public ceremonial, their exercise of patronage and their public deportment: Busch 2015, 17-18, 213-230.

including the collaborative involvement of imperial women and men as 'sacred founders' of the built environment.⁴⁸² In a short essay Harries also argued that the Christianisation of the imperial family in the fourth century caused the public image of the family to be redeveloped as united and piously active. Harries proposed that new opportunities therefore opened for imperial women to craft their own public roles through innovative forms of religious patronage, highlighting as an example Constantina's dedication of a basilica in Rome to the saint Agnes and her use of the language of triumph normally associated with men in the dedicatory inscription.⁴⁸³

By contrast, studies on imperial women in the middle Byzantine period have not focused on continuities in their roles as partners to the emperor to the same extent. Hill, James & Dion Smythe co-authored a chapter demonstrating convincingly that the empress Zoe was an heir, channel of power and a legitimiser in the period 1028-1050. However, they did not link her position to those of the empresses who came before or after her. On the other hand, Smythe published a short study which grouped empresses in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as empresses-regent, empresses-consort and empresses-manquées and pointed out that bureaucracy and ceremonial provided the framework for empresses' power in Byzantium.⁴⁸⁴ This chapter will build upon Smythe's point by shedding light on hitherto unnoticed continuities in imperial culture which shaped the reigns of successive empresses in the eleventh century. In her 1999 monograph Hill also located imperial women's power in the eleventh and twelfth centuries within a structural framework. However, she concluded that the political power exercised by women in the eleventh century was predicated by a crisis of male authority, rather than being structured by other factors which did not depend on the weakness of the emperor. According to Hill, when male authority was restored by the Komnenian emperors in the twelfth century, imperial women became less politically important and were pushed once more into the background.⁴⁸⁵ In this chapter I aim to redress a gap in the scholarship on the collegiality of Byzantine rule in the middle period, by shedding light on continuities shaping the reigns of empresses which were not dependent upon the weakness of emperors. Hill also highlighted how Zoe and Theodora were 'special cases' because of their status as the last descendants of the Macedonian dynasty, whereas this chapter aims to show that in many respects, the reigns of Aikaterine and her successor Eudokia were shaped by developments during Zoe and Theodora's reigns.

⁴⁸² Angelova 2014, summarised in the conclusion 261-275.

⁴⁸³ Harries 2014, 206-213.

⁴⁸⁴ Smythe 1997, 141-152.

⁴⁸⁵ Hill 1999, 108, 208-217.

More recently, an analysis of the extent to which middle Byzantine empresses shared attributes of power with emperors was conducted in a 2015 study of numismatic iconography published by James. Here she detects significant changes in numismatic iconography depicting imperial women after the year 804. She argued that in this period, empresses appeared on coins with similar attributes to emperors and accompanied by divine figures, therefore contributing to a presentation of the imperial power of specific rulers as natural, and God-given.⁴⁸⁶ James therefore highlighted a continuity in the representation of middle Byzantine empresses as partners to the emperor, but she focuses only on the numismatic sources, meaning that there is a need for further investigation of other media where middle Byzantine empresses potentially appeared as partners to the emperor. These include the built environment, encomia and physical performances, which are the focus of this chapter.

Returning to scholarship on the medieval west, recent advancements on women and power have built upon the above-mentioned studies highlighting the corporate character of monarchy to shed light on the frequency by which royal women appear as necessary components of the medieval governing fabric, even when their positions were not underpinned by law.⁴⁸⁷ In particular, the arguments of Tanner et. al., have challenged notions that medieval queens played little role in governance. Utilising a methodology which recognises a dynamic connection between culture and power they emphasise that royal women regularly performed necessary and expected roles contributing to non-institutional methods of governing, and frame this as a crucial line of investigation in women's studies. These included ritual and emotional performances and intercession.⁴⁸⁸ For example, Nina Verbanaz argued that queens of the Salian dynasty, who ruled first Germany and then the Holy Roman Empire between 1024 and 1125, performed necessary and expected roles which they also shaped and expanded.⁴⁸⁹ Verbanaz's approach bears similarity to Harries' argument (noted above) that Constantinian women carved out new roles for themselves through patronage of the built environment.

Holmes has pointed out that in middle Byzantium, visual, performed and material media were prominent means of conducting government. The written word was also important, as Holmes recognises and as is discussed below, for both institutional and non-institutional methods of governance.⁴⁹⁰ Therefore, the methodology of Tanner et. al. promises to have relevance for the

⁴⁸⁶ She pointed out that this contrasts to images of empresses in the early Byzantine period, which were used as personifications of domestic virtues connected to the wellbeing of the state: James 2015, 189-192.

⁴⁸⁷ Tanner et. al. 2019, 9; Verbanaz 2019, 177-197.

⁴⁸⁸ Tanner et. al. 2019, 6.

⁴⁸⁹ Verbanaz 2019, 177-197, especially 178.

⁴⁹⁰ Holmes 2010, 137-148.

study of empresses and power in middle Byzantium. Busch has fruitfully conducted a similar line of investigation for the early period, but such an analysis has yet to be done on the position of an empress in the middle period. This chapter therefore asks whether as a middle Byzantine empress Aikaterine performed necessary roles, potentially connected to non-institutional methods of governing. A study of Aikaterine's role of empress is especially relevant here because she had no male heir; her son Manuel died before Isaac's acclamation in 1057. It is therefore possible to see clearly which aspects of Aikaterine's role were distinct from the role of child-bearer of a dynastic heir.⁴⁹¹

Aikaterine and Isaac's joint patronage of St John Prodromos at the Stoudios.

This analysis of Aikaterine's and Isaac's roles as partners in the exercise of imperial power, between their arrival in Constantinople in August 1057 and Isaac's abdication in November 1059, begins with an examination of Aikaterine's visibility as an imperial colleague in the built environment. The starting point is the account in Skylitzes' *Continuation* of Aikaterine's and Isaac's joint restoration of the Church of St John Prodromos at the monastery of Stoudios, alongside wider written, material and architectural evidence for the appearance of the church, and its alignment with St Mary Peribleptos. By placing material evidence at the forefront of the following analysis, I draw upon the method proposed by Angelova. She argued that women's contributions to imperial co-founding and co-sponsorship are obscured by narrative histories, because of the conventions of genre and the priorities of the male writers, but can be found by prioritising material evidence.⁴⁹²

At the end of the account of Isaac's reign in Skylitzes' *Continuation*, Aikaterine's death and her burial in the cemetery of the Stoudios monastery, are recorded. The passage reads as follows:

She died, having requested in the meantime that she be buried among the monks in the cemetery of the Stoudios monastery. She and the emperor, both of them, had beautified the all holy Church of the Prodromos. It would be a Herculean task to describe and go through this in detail.

τετελευτήκει γὰρ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἀξιώσασα ταφῆναι σὺν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν τῷ

⁴⁹¹ James 2001, 101-104, 119-124, 128, argued that early Byzantine empresses made contributions to governance which made them necessary for imperial rulership separately from their roles as child-bearers of dynastic heirs. Through Aikaterine's history it is possible to test James' hypothesis in the middle-Byzantine period.

⁴⁹² Angelova 2014, 164-172, 183-202, 261-275.

κοιμητηρίῳ τῆς τοῦ Στουδίου μονῆς. Κατεκόσμησαν δὲ καὶ ἀμφότεροι, αὐτὴ τε καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς, τὸν πάνσεπτον τοῦ Προδρόμου ναόν, ᾧ καταλέγειν καὶ κατὰ λεπτὸν διεξιέναι ἄθλος Ἡράκλειος.⁴⁹³

To examine this passage in detail, it is necessary to consider the context in which Skylitzes wrote in the late eleventh century. As discussed in chapter two, Holmes argued convincingly that several features of the *Synopsis* are linked to the literary, social and political contexts of the first two decades of Alexios I's rule.⁴⁹⁴ McGeer built upon Holmes' argument to argue that the *Continuation* is also embedded in the political and religious context of the late eleventh century and early twelfth century. McGeer argued that Skylitzes aimed to rehabilitate Isaac's reputation amongst his late eleventh and early twelfth century audience by emphasising the piety which the former emperor displayed after his abdication. McGeer also suggested that the depiction of Isaac as pious may have been influenced by the speeches of the Patriarch of Antioch, John Oxeites, delivered in 1091. These speeches called for Alexios to repent for the injustices of his reign. Skylitzes may therefore have intended the representation in the *Continuation* of Isaac as a penitent figure to be an example for Isaac's nephew, Alexios, to follow.

McGeer's identification of a key literary objective in Skylitzes' text raises the possibility that the textual representation of Aikaterine as pious is designed to reflect upon and amplify the depiction of her husband's piety. This brings into question the usefulness of the text for an assessment of the historicity of Aikaterine's connection with the Stoudios, and the church of St John Prodromos there. In the *Continuation*, the reference to Isaac's and Aikaterine's embellishment of St John Prodromos during their reign could be seen to develop Skylitzes' depiction of the piety of both figures after Isaac's abdication.⁴⁹⁵ We here face a methodological problem highlighted in previous studies of late antique and Byzantine women. When approaching representations of Constantinian women in textual sources, James has noticed their use as 'vehicles... to highlight the worth of the men around

⁴⁹³ *Contin.*, Ts 110, ll. 15-19. Trans. McGeer, 53.

⁴⁹⁴ Holmes 2005, 172-238.

⁴⁹⁵ McGeer 2019, 15-17. He pointed out a link between Skylitzes' text and Dalassene through Skylitzes' reference to Isaac's dedication of the church of the protomartyr Thekla: *Contin.*, Ts 107. In the *Alexiad*, Komnene describes this church as Dalassene's regular place of worship: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.24. Skylitzes' reference to a place where Dalassene regularly performed acts of piety hints that a key objective of the text is to draw parallels between the reverence displayed by Dalassene and the pious actions of Aikaterine, also a female member of the Komnenos family. Skylitzes' reference in the *Continuation* to Aikaterine and Maria's retreat to the Myrelaion may also be designed to meet the same literary objective, because Dalassene held a *sekretion* linked with the convent: Oikonomides 1980/81, 245 n.58; Janin 1969, 352.

them'. She has proposed therefore that texts be read 'for what they tell us about these women as signs and stories, ciphers commenting on the men around them'.⁴⁹⁶

James has stressed how textual depictions of women were used to shed light on male figures both within and outside texts. However, there is also a further possibility that Aikaterine's piety is also foregrounded in the text to reflect upon the piety of women in the Komnenos family in the late eleventh century, namely Anna Dalassene. McGeer highlighted the possible importance of Anna Dalassene for Skylitzes' depiction of Isaac's reign and the aftermath.⁴⁹⁷ Dalassene was given the court title *Despoina* and thus held a position in the court hierarchy from the beginning of her son Alexios I's reign in 1081 until at least 1095.⁴⁹⁸ There is evidence that in this period, she acted as empress regent, even though her son had reached his majority.⁴⁹⁹ She was also tonsured and appears to have fostered a reputation for piety. This must have naturalised Dalassene's position in the court hierarchy, especially when she acted as empress regent, which was unusual because Alexios had reached his majority.⁵⁰⁰ One objective of the *Continuation* may have been to contribute to Dalassene's image by depicting Aikaterine as pious in order to present piety as a latent trait held by women who were part of the extended Komnenos family.

In response to James' argument, Tougher pointed out that the existence of textual representations of specific women used for a narrative end shows that these women were worth writing about, and were therefore potentially historically significant. He encourages continued questioning of these accounts, to glean historical information.⁵⁰¹ Following the approach advocated by Tougher, Skylitzes' account of Aikaterine's burial provides key evidence helping to allay doubts of the potential historicity of Skylitzes' depiction of her links with St John Prodromos at the Stoudios. This account of

⁴⁹⁶ James 2013, 112.

⁴⁹⁷ McGeer 2019, 14-15.

⁴⁹⁸ Garland 2007. Dalassene's *Despoina* title is described in Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.2. For this word, which was more frequently employed as a relational term signifying authority than as a court title: Bensammar 1976, 284-288. Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.24, l.10, writes that Dalassene withdrew from the palace when she sensed that Alexios resented her power. Komnene indicates that Dalassene still held her position at the court in 1095, because she describes how in this year she ordered the blinding of the rebel pseudo-Leo Diogenes, without consulting Alexios: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 7.4. See also: Runciman 1949, 517-24.

⁴⁹⁹ Dalassene's position is shown by a letter likely written by Pope Victor III in 1086/87, which addresses 'empress A.' ('A. imperatrici augustae') and concerns excessive exactions by Byzantine officials upon Latin pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre. For a transcription of the letter, and the identification of Dalassene: Cowdrey 1992, 42-48. It is also shown in the *Alexiad*, where Komnene transcribes a chrysobull, which if accurate, shows that Dalassene acted like an empress regent by governing Constantinople when her son Alexios was on military campaigns: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.6. See also: Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.21, l.6.

⁵⁰⁰ Dalassene's monastic vocation is described in several seals (see McGeer 2019, fig. 2). Her vocation is linked to her imperial status. For example, three seals dating from Alexios I's reign describe her as a nun (μοναχῆ) and mother (μητρί) of the emperor, 55 n. 271.

⁵⁰¹ Tougher 2020, 213-215.

the location of Aikaterine's burial place stands out because the burial places of Aikaterine's successors, Eudokia Makrembolitissa and then Maria 'of Alania', who also died when they were former empresses, are not attested in narrative histories. The twelfth-century historian Michael Glykas attests that Isaac was also buried at the Stoudios.⁵⁰² It is unlikely that Skylitzes risked fabricating the location of Aikaterine's burial place because it is improbable that the location was unknown by her relatives at the imperial court when Skylitzes wrote, including her nephew Alexios I, and Anna Dalassene. Skylitzes' statement that Aikaterine was buried at the Stoudios therefore provides us with a concrete link between her and the site. It is worth noting here too that Glykas' depiction of Isaac's burial at the Stoudios likewise sheds light on a concrete link between Isaac and the site. Also of relevance is the depiction in Bryennios' history of Isaac and his brother John Komnenos' education at the Stoudios monastery.⁵⁰³ This suggests that Isaac continued to be well acknowledged as associated with the Stoudios in the twelfth century.

Skylitzes' use of the phrase 'it would be a Herculean task to describe and go through this in detail' is also telling. As McGeer notes, Skylitzes repeats similar phrases six times in the *Synopsis*.⁵⁰⁴ These phrases appear in different contexts, to describe figures involved with imperial government or the governance of the patriarchate both positively and negatively.⁵⁰⁵ Given the diversity of contexts in which the phrase appears in Skylitzes' texts, the most likely explanation for the function of these phrases in the *Synopsis*, is that they are markers informing Skylitzes' audience that he is substantially abridging his source material. The appearance of the phrase in the *Continuation* therefore indicates that Skylitzes had access to a good amount of information on Aikaterine and Isaac's adornment (Κατεκόσμησαν) of St John Prodromos, suggesting their involvement with the church was widely attested in Constantinople at the turn of the twelfth century. This provides further encouragement that Skylitzes' description of Aikaterine and Isaac as patrons of the church is accurate. Although it appears to work to rehabilitate Isaac's reputation, and to contribute to Dalassene's public image, it does not seem to have been invented.

Skylitzes' reference thus indicates that certain aspects of the architecture of St John Prodromos continued to be well acknowledged as linked with Aikaterine and Isaac at the turn of the twelfth century. This in turn suggests that their involvement with the site was an important aspect of the presentation of their reign in 1057-1059. What can this tell us about the way the power of the

⁵⁰² Glykas, *Annals*, 604, l.8. The following chapter examines in more detail Aikaterine's links with the Stoudios as former empress, and her burial at the site.

⁵⁰³ Bryennios, *History*, 1.1.

⁵⁰⁴ McGeer 2019, 53 n. 40.

⁵⁰⁵ *Synop.*, Th 231, 243, 274, 408, 476, 483.

imperial pair was presented in this period? To answer this question, I begin with an overview of the church and its location. St John Prodromos was one of the oldest churches in Constantinople, having been established in either c454 or 463. The structure of the basilica, which was made into the imrahor Camii mosque during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512), has survived to the modern day. It is however substantially damaged, having fallen into ruin after an earthquake in 1894.⁵⁰⁶ The most detailed overview, plan and sections of the site are provided by Ebersolt and Thiers.⁵⁰⁷ It is a large three aisled two-storey basilica of square proportions. The nave and side aisles (the naos) are preceded by a narthex and porticoed atrium to the west and a single apse to the east. Galleries were located above the aisles and narthex. There is also a small crypt underneath the sanctuary. Thomas Mathews estimated that the site was in total 54.94m long and 26.30m wide.⁵⁰⁸

The church was in the southwest of medieval Constantinople, in the Psamathia region (the modern-day Samatya quarter of Istanbul). It was close to the Golden Gate, the main ceremonial entrance into Constantinople, and was located alongside the Mese, the main ceremonial route between the Theodosian land walls and the Great Palace (fig. 5). The Mese was moreover the main thoroughfare through the city.⁵⁰⁹ Nearby, about 800m to the north on the same road, also in the Psamathia, stood the church of St Mary Peribleptos founded between 1028-1034. Below it will be argued that Romanos III and Zoe were presented as joint founders of this site.⁵¹⁰ St John Prodromos was also located in an elevated position on a slope, about 150m away from the Marmara Sea Walls. It was therefore visible to traffic in the Marmara Sea. The prominence of the church in cityscape for viewers looking at Constantinople from the sea is suggested in an illustration from the late tenth-century *Menologion* of Basil II (fig. 11). The site surrounding the church, including the monastery of Stoudios to which the church was attached, was extensive.⁵¹¹

The Stoudios monastery was a major religious centre. It had performed a significant role as a bastion of iconodule support, maintaining an independent position against the emperor and patriarch during the iconoclastic disputes of the eighth and ninth centuries.⁵¹² In the ninth century it had also been a

⁵⁰⁶ Miller 2000, 69-70. The structure was also previously damaged by a fire in 1792. At the turn of the twentieth century the roof fell due to snowfall: Van Millingen 1974 (1912), 49; Mathews 1976, 143. For the conversion into a mosque: Janin 1969, 438.

⁵⁰⁷ Ebersolt & Thiers 1979 (1913), pl. 1-4; Plans of the church were also drawn up by Van Millingen 1974 (1912), 56-61; Mathews 1971, 22, 24.

⁵⁰⁸ Mathews 1971, 20-21.

⁵⁰⁹ ODB 2005, 'Mesazon'.

⁵¹⁰ Van Millingen 1974 (1912), 35. For Romanos III's foundation of the church: *Chron.*, 3.15-16. For evidence for Zoe's involvement in the foundation see below, 131-132.

⁵¹¹ Janin 1969, 439.

⁵¹² ODB 2005, 'Stoudios Monastery'.

centre of intellectual activity, with a prominent scriptorium.⁵¹³ The rule for the Stoudios established by its *hegoumenos* Theodore (b.759 - d.826) was widely disseminated and was by the mid-eleventh century used in monasteries on Mount Athos, in Byzantine Italy and in Kiev.⁵¹⁴ In living memory the Stoudios had supplied the patriarch of Constantinople, Alexios Stoudios (1025-1043), as well as the patriarch Antony III (974-979). Miller, observing that monks from the Stoudios conducted important missions for emperors during the tenth century, argued that it was an imperial monastery from c900, although this is nowhere explicitly attested.⁵¹⁵ On the other hand, members of the community seem to have still occasionally voiced opposition to the actions of imperial persons. According to an interpolation to Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, the monk Niketas Stethatos, a member of the Stoudios community, was a leading critic of Constantine IX's relationship with Maria Skleraina between 1042 and c1046.⁵¹⁶ Whether or not this reference is accurate, the insertion of this interpolation attests to the ongoing reputation of the Stoudios during the eleventh century and early twelfth century as a major player in imperial politics.

Material evidence from the site allows yields more evidence for the nature of Aikaterine and Isaac's contributions to St John Prodromos, beyond the short description of their embellishment of the building provided by Skylitzes. In 1907-1908 an investigation of the church conducted by the Russian Archaeological Institute uncovered parts of an opus sectile church floor in the naos paved with pieces of marble inlaid with figures of animals and scenes from classical mythology.⁵¹⁷ Parts of the floor are still visible today, although they lie in a state of abandonment (fig. 12). It is constructed from red and green porphyry, serpentine, white and coloured (mostly yellow) marbles. The most recent survey of the floor was conducted by Esra Kudde and Zeynep Ahunbay.⁵¹⁸ The floor bears technical and stylistic similarities to that of the Pantokrator monastery (built between 1118 and c1136), as well as the Katholikon of Hosios Loukas and the lost pavement of the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea. Kudde and Ahunbay have also highlighted stylistic connections between the floor and others produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries outside of Byzantium, including Palermo Cathedral and Saint Maria in Trastevere in Rome. Because of the similarities with the Pantokrator, Arthur Megaw suggested an attribution of the floor at St John Prodromos to the renovations of Isaac (he does not mention Aikaterine) in the mid-eleventh century, and he was

⁵¹³ Lemerle 1986, 137-146.

⁵¹⁴ Miller 2000, 88.

⁵¹⁵ Miller 2000, 69.

⁵¹⁶ *Synop*, Th 434.

⁵¹⁷ Panchenko 1909, 136-52; 1911, 250-257; 1912, 1-359; Van Millingen 1974 (1912), 53.

⁵¹⁸ Kudde & Ahunbay 2016, 36-61. For another recent survey: Barstanti 2011, 87-98.

followed by Mathews, who is amongst several scholars (including most recently Kudde and Ahunbay) who have argued for a date in the second half of the eleventh century.⁵¹⁹

Elizabeth Ettinghausen also highlighted the fragments of ceramic wall tiles which were found in great number at the site during the 1907-1908 investigation, and which are now preserved at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. She suggested that these were used to adorn smaller architectural forms, possibly church furniture, because the fragments appear in a range of sizes and shapes, but only a small amount of them are flat plaques. The tiles feature stylized floral motifs and geometric patterns. Recurring forms include the palmette, rosette and egg-and-dart motifs (fig. 13). Ettinghausen noted stylistic connections with other tiles from finds at other sites in Istanbul dating between the ninth and twelfth centuries. For this reason, she dated the tiles at St John Prodromos to this period, and moreover argued that there was a central place of manufacture, connected to all the finds. Finally, Ettinghausen proposed that Skylitzes' depiction of Aikaterine and Isaac's embellishment of the church refers to the addition of these ceramic tiles.⁵²⁰

Making note of Ettinghausen's proposals, Mathews has also suggested that the wall tiles may have been added to St John Prodromos at the same time as the opus sectile pavement.⁵²¹ It is possible therefore that Aikaterine's and Isaac's development of the church involved the addition of both features of the building. On the other hand, either the opus sectile pavement or the ceramic tiles could have been added as part of another renovation. However, the addition of either of these features would have amounted to a major renovation of the church. The only other major renovation of St John Prodromos attested, besides that linked with Aikaterine and Isaac, was conducted in 1293. Ettinghausen pointed out that it is unlikely that the tiles were added to the church at this later date, because they bear stylistic connections to finds at other sites during the middle Byzantine period.⁵²²

Taken together the following three factors are telling for the date of the pavement and tiles: firstly Ettinghausen's observations concerning the tiles, secondly the stylistic connections between the pavement at St John Prodromos and examples from the eleventh and twelfth centuries such as the

⁵¹⁹ Megaw 1963, 339; Mathews 1971, 23; Kudde & Ahunbay 2016, 39-41. A list of scholars who have argued for a date in the second half of the eleventh century and a discussion of Hosios Loukas and the church of the Dormition is provided by Barstanti 2011, 96. For the date of the Pantokrator: Janin 1969, 515; Jeffreys, M. 2019, 108. An alternative argument dating the pavement to the thirteenth century was made by Schweinfurth 1953, 489-500, but is not widely accepted.

⁵²⁰ Ettinghausen 1954, 79-88, especially 85, 87. She also noted that another renovation took place in the thirteenth century, but that stylistic evidence from the tiles suggests they were produced earlier than this date.

⁵²¹ Mathews 1976, 144.

⁵²² Ettinghausen 1954, 87.

Pantokrator which suggest it was made in this period, and the absence of any attestation for another major restoration of the church between the tenth to twelfth centuries. In addition, both features match closely with Skylitzes' description of Aikaterine's and Isaac's 'beautification' (κατεκόσμησαν) of the church. Thus, all available evidence points to the opus sectile pavement and wall tiles of St John Prodromos as having been added to the church by Aikaterine and Isaac, as part of their major renovation of the church between 1057-1059. Both architectural features should therefore be linked to Aikaterine and Isaac with more certainty than previous scholars have suggested. As Ettinghausen proposed, it is likely that Aikaterine's and Isaac's initiation of the renovation of St John Prodromos involved liaising with a central place of manufacture, which had also been involved in the renovation of other churches in Constantinople.⁵²³

Who were the audience who would have viewed the features of the church, linked with Aikaterine and Isaac? St John Prodromos was a monastic church, attached to the all-male Stoudios community. Marinis argued that members of the opposite sex were only very rarely allowed into monastic churches. Talbot also pointed out that following the principle of *abaton* meant that a male monastery was off limits to women. However, as Talbot acknowledged, exceptions were often made for women making pilgrimages, or attending services for feast days.⁵²⁴ This is shown in for example the mid-eleventh century *Life* of the pillar saint Lazaros of Galesion, which depicts women regularly visiting Lazaros, although his pillar was within a monastic community.⁵²⁵ Further, as will be argued in the following chapter, it is likely Aikaterine visited the Stoudios for a series of special occasions, to commemorate Isaac's death. From this evidence, I suggest those present in the Stoudios would most likely have been male, however it is possible that women may have had access to some areas of the site for purposes of pilgrimage. The central function of the church was as a site where the liturgy of the Byzantine church was enacted. This included services based around the sacraments, feast and saints' days, and vigils.⁵²⁶ A letter written in the mid-eleventh century by Niketas Stethatos of the Stoudios describes the presence of priests, deacons, members of the monastic community and lay people in the church during the portion of the Divine Liturgy of Chrysostom called the anaphora.⁵²⁷

⁵²³ Ettinghausen 1954, 85.

⁵²⁴ Marinis 2014, 54; Talbot 2019, 81. Justinianic legislation also prohibited nuns from visiting male monasteries and vice versa.

⁵²⁵ Gregory the Cellarer, *Life of Lazaros*, 527, chs. 56-57, 532-533, ch. 75, 538, ch. 95, 543, ch. 117. As Greenfield pointed out, the frequency of female visitors to Lazaros appears to have attracted criticism from some neighbouring villagers and monks: Greenfield 2002, 217 n. 21. See also: Talbot 2019, 103.

⁵²⁶ Marinis 2014, 10.

⁵²⁷ Stethatos, *Opusculs et lettres*, no. 8, 284, ll. 12-19. The Divine Liturgy of Chrysostom was the most significant service in the liturgy was in the eleventh century. It was celebrated on Saturdays, Sundays and feast days: Marinis 2014, 19.

From this letter it is clear that lay people were positioned further back in the naos, at a distance from the sanctuary.

Vasileios Marinis described churches in Constantinople as ‘the focus of social and religious life’.⁵²⁸ A vivid account produced by Psellos of the public recital of a saint’s *Life* in the Chalkoprateia Virgin, a church near Hagia Sophia, shows how Constantinopolitan churches were often the focal points for lively and crowded gatherings. The Chalkoprateia was not a monastic church, but as Papaioannou pointed out, public recitals of saints’ *Lives* took place in monastic and non-monastic churches alike.⁵²⁹ Psellos describes every corner of the church as being full with a rowdy, jostling crowd, gathered to listen to a reading delivered by the monk John Kroustoulas. He adds that the appearance of the large crowd caused him to think that an emperor, or an empress was present.⁵³⁰

Psellos’ account highlights how both monastic and non-monastic churches in Constantinople were the sites of considerable non-liturgical activity. It is likely that regular public events, such as the reading of saints’ *Lives*, were staged in the church. It is also evident that a substantial numbers of pilgrims visited St John Prodromos. The mid-tenth century *Book of Ceremonies* and the Russian traveller Stephen of Novgorod (writing after 1200) attest to the presence of a relic of the head of St John the Baptist in St John Prodromos. Stephen of Novgorod also wrote that the basilica held the incorrupt bodies of the former hegoumenos St Theodore and his brother St Joseph.⁵³¹ The translation of these two bodies has been dated in modern scholarship to the ninth century.⁵³² These two sources show that the head of St John the Baptist accompanied by other relics, was likely present in the church during the eleventh century. Majeska identified the Stoudios monastic complex as a major destination of pilgrimage in the city in the twelfth century.⁵³³ If, as is likely, relics in the church of St John Prodromos were present in the eleventh century, the Stoudios and its church must have been a focal point for pilgrims in this period too.

The *Book of Ceremonies* furthermore describes an annual ceremony in St John Prodromos on 29th August involving the gathered imperial court.⁵³⁴ The church was therefore seen regularly by a wide audience, ranging from members of the imperial court to pilgrims from outside of Constantinople. The renovations introduced by Aikaterine and Isaac would have thus been viewed by a wide segment of the population, including lay people, some of whom were pilgrims and others imperial

⁵²⁸ Marinis 2014, 99.

⁵²⁹ Papaioannou 2017, 218.

⁵³⁰ Psellos, *Encomium for Ioannes Kroustoulas*, 224-225, ll. 1-43. Trans. Papaioannou.

⁵³¹ Janin 1969, 435; Majeska 1984, 286.

⁵³² Marinis 2014, 85-86.

⁵³³ Majeska 2002, 98.

⁵³⁴ This was the feast day of the beheading of St John the Baptist: *ODB* 2005, ‘John the Baptist’.

courtiers. The highly probable connection between Aikaterine and Isaac and the opus sectile pavement in the naos, which was accessible to lay people, suggests their renovations were designed to be viewed by as broad an audience as possible. It is here worth referring to the depiction of Stephen of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople in 1348/1349: 'the floor of the church is quite amazing as if set with pearls; no painter could paint like that'.⁵³⁵ This account suggests the opus sectile floor was one of the most striking and memorable features of the building observable to visitors. Given the strong possibility that Aikaterine and Isaac oversaw the production of the floor, we have here testimony of how their embellishment of the church impacted viewers of the site.

Comparable churches in Constantinople, which were also renovated or founded by empresses and emperors in partnership, feature visible records of the imperial couples' actions. Three churches founded during Justinian's reign provide examples. In St Sergius and Bacchus, an inscription on a ground-level entablature surrounding the nave of the church associates the sixth century emperor and empress Justinian and Theodora with the building.⁵³⁶ Monograms on capitals in this church read 'of Justinian', 'of the *Basileus*' and 'of Theodora'. Bardill argued that monograms inscribed with 'of the Augusta' were also visible in St Sergius and Bacchus and that the monograms describing Justinian and Theodora were juxtaposed. Moreover, he pointed out that in the entablature in the same church Justinian's and Theodora's names appear to have been purposefully depicted opposite each other in the parts of the entablature in south and north of the nave.⁵³⁷ All of the four types of monograms mentioned above, including 'of the *Augousta*' are also visible in Hagia Eirene.⁵³⁸ Monograms reading 'of the Basileus Justinian' and 'of the *Augousta* Theodora' are also inscribed on capitals in Hagia Sophia. They were also named in a dedicatory inscription on the altar of the church and a joint cruciform monogram inscribed on the templon screen.⁵³⁹

In Hagia Sophia two well-known donor mosaics also present two other imperial couples cooperating in their patronage of the church. The earlier eleventh-century mosaic depicts Constantine IX and wife the empress Zoe flanking a seated Pantokrator (fig. 14). The second twelfth-century mosaic shows John II Komnenos and Piroška-Eirene flanking an image of the Virgin Mary. In both, the

⁵³⁵ Trans. Majeska 1984, 284.

⁵³⁶ Angelova 2014, 168-169; Janin 1969, 225. I follow Bardill's argument that St Sergius and Bacchus was built between 532-535, rather than Croke's proposal that the building of the church was begun at an earlier date, possibly before 527. See Bardill 2017, 62-130, which includes an overview of previous arguments concerning the dating of the church and Croke 2006, 25-63.

⁵³⁷ Bardill 2017, 77-81, 88-91. The entablature is transcribed and translated with a floorplan showing its position at, Bardill 2017, 87-89.

⁵³⁸ Angelova 2014, 168; Janin 1969, 106.

⁵³⁹ Garipzanov 2018, 180-182; Angelova 2014, 167-172, 222. For evidence that contemporaries perceived Justinian and Theodora as joint founders of Hagia Sophia: Unterweger 2014, 106-108.

emperor offers an ἀποκόμβιον (purse) and the empress presents a document, which probably represents a privilege to the Church. The mosaic of Constantine IX also seems to have been plastered over a previous mosaic depicting the emperor and first husband of Zoe, Romanos III (r. 1028-1034), so Constantine IX therefore probably replicated an original donation to the St Sophia made by Romanos and Zoe.⁵⁴⁰ Judging from this evidence, it is very likely that Aikaterine and Isaac were named in inscriptions within St John Prodromos, which associated them with specific architectural features at the site. Given the location of the features linked with them, it is probable that inscriptions were in parts of the church visible to a broad audience. It is possible too that Aikaterine and Isaac's contributions to the church were attested in a donor mosaic comparable to those still visible in Hagia Sophia. Epigraphy and imagery visible in the building of St John Prodromos, linking Aikaterine and Isaac with specific architectural features, were in all probability one of the sources for Skylitzes' depiction of their embellishment of the church.

For viewers looking at the interior of St John Prodromos, the combination of specific architectural features with epigraphic or visual markers identifying Aikaterine and Isaac as patrons would have presented an image of Aikaterine and Isaac's power. What message did this image communicate about the nature of the power wielded by the empress and emperor? The key to answering this question is the proximity of St John Prodromos and St Mary Peribleptos.

The image of Isaac and Aikaterine projected through the alignment of St John Prodromos and St Mary Peribleptos

Because Isaac's reign as emperor and Aikaterine's reign as empress was only two years, it is clear that their embellishment of St John Prodromos was enacted quickly, very likely in the first year of the reign. This in turn suggests that their joint patronage of the church was of great importance for the crafting of an image of the reign. Ahrweiler's point about how imperial power was expected in Byzantium to be presented as a continuation of the established order helps to explain why it was so important for the empress and emperor to renovate the church together. Also relevant is Magdalino's case study of Basil I's program of building and renovation, including the founding of the Nea Ekklesia church between 876-880. Magdalino highlighted how Basil I's building program was presented as both imitating and surpassing the imperial building programs of the sixth century, the

⁵⁴⁰ Demonstrated by Whittemore 1942, 17-20. See further: Oikonomides 1978; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1992, 241-257. *Synop.*, Th 477 describes how Monomachos augmented the revenue of St Sophia so that the liturgy could be celebrated there every day. This was similar to the donation by Romanos III of a supplementary annual income of 80 *litrai* to St Sophia also described by *Synop.*, Th 375.

last period when there was an extensive church building program in Constantinople. Aikaterine and Isaac's renovation of St John Prodromos was likewise comparable to the actions of previous imperial couples.⁵⁴¹ In particular, it paralleled the image of Zoe and Romanos III as joint founders at St Mary Peribleptos, only 800m to the north.

Key here are the observations of Mullett and James that in medieval Constantinople, acts of founding, refounding and artistic patronage in monasteries and churches appear to have not been perceived as very different activities. Refounding was not clearly defined: it could involve the overhaul of a monastic community or the rebuilding of a church but could also be limited to the embellishment of a building. In the words of Mullett: 'someone who donates a mosaic is just as much a *ktetor* [founder or patron] as someone who rebuilds from the bottom to the top'.⁵⁴² Moreover, the act of refounding was not perceived as a lesser action than founding, in fact, it could potentially be more prestigious, because it allowed the refounder to link her or himself with prestigious historical people and events.⁵⁴³

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, several modern studies have highlighted the importance of presentations of emperors and empresses in imperial partnership during the early Byzantine period. Epigrams visible in the eleventh century which linked Justinian and Theodora with several churches in Constantinople have also been discussed. Furthermore, passages in the late tenth-century *Patria* describes several imperial figures as joint founders and renovators of churches. This text is a collection of notes and anecdotes about the buildings and statues in Constantinople.⁵⁴⁴ It mentions several emperors and empresses as having together founded or renovated specific buildings. These include Marcianos (r.450-457) and Pulcheria, Anastasios (r. 491-518) and Ariadne, and Justin II (r.565-578) and Sophia.⁵⁴⁵ The evidence in the *Patria* shows that Byzantines in the middle period were aware that previous rulers had acted together to found or renovate churches in Constantinople.

Memories of the joint actions of previous emperors and empresses to develop the built environment in Constantinople functioned therefore as a precedent for Aikaterine and Isaac's renovation of St John Prodromos. However, I argue that we should look to more recent developments in imperial

⁵⁴¹ Magdalino 1987, 52-55, 63.

⁵⁴² Mullett 2007, 371. For a definition of *ktetor*: ODB 2005, 'Ktetor'.

⁵⁴³ Mullett 2007, 378; James 2014, 70. For commentary on the difficulty of defining the process of founding itself: Mullett 2007, 5-13.

⁵⁴⁴ The *Patria* was compiled in 989/90 but redacted in the late eleventh century. For the provenance of the *Patria*: Berger 2013, vii-xxi.

⁵⁴⁵ For Marcianos and Pulcheria: *Patria*, 3.2. For Justin II and Sophia as joint founders: 3.47. For Anastasios and Ariadne: 3.55. See further: James 2014, 69-72.

culture to fully explain the actions of the empress and emperor and their choice of St John Prodromos as the site of their patronage. Firstly, Aikaterine and Isaac's actions match with a pattern evident in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries whereby imperial persons regularly founded large-scale monastic foundations in Constantinople, outside of the imperial centre of the Great Palace, following the abeyance in large-scale imperial building activity between the sixth and ninth centuries. These foundations had varied buildings with wide-ranging functions and a rich endowment. Magdalino identified the reign of Romanos I (921-945), as a turning point in this process. This emperor was involved namely with the foundation of the Myrelaion, and the renovation and the expansion of the Manuel monastery, and the restoration of the *lousma* of the Theotokos at the Neorion.⁵⁴⁶ Mango described the appearance of these 'great imperial abbeys' as a new phase in the development of the built environment in Constantinople.⁵⁴⁷

The multi-faceted nature of these foundations opened space for multiple imperial actors to engage in processes of founding or refounding. The presentation of emperors and empresses as imperial partners was not a new phenomenon in the tenth century. For example, Kotsis pointed out that traditional double coronation images depicting imperial couples present the power and authority of the empress as equal to that of the emperor.⁵⁴⁸ I argue however that changes in patterns of imperial involvement with the built environment between the tenth and twelfth centuries opened a space for empresses to more regularly appear as an imperial colleague in the Constantinopolitan cityscape, by enacting imperial munificence in partnership with the emperor on a consistent basis. This is exemplified by the actions of the empress Helena Lekapena (r.919 - 959, d.961), who expanded the site of the Petrion in north-eastern Constantinople. She is attested in *Theophanes Continuatus* to have expanded the site by adding a hospital and old people's home to the convent of St Euphemia which was founded by Basil I. The same passage in the text presents her collaborating with her husband Constantine VII in the provision of land, privileges and revenue for the site.⁵⁴⁹ Between Helena's death and the beginning of Romanos III's reign as emperor in 1028, alongside his wife the *Augousta* Zoe, there is an abeyance of evidence for imperial women's patronage of churches or

⁵⁴⁶ Magdalino 1996, 75, who also highlighted Romanos' involvement with the monastery of Piperatos, the location of which is unattested.

⁵⁴⁷ Mango 1992, 473. See also: Mullett 2007, 366-370.

⁵⁴⁸ Kotsis 2012, 26.

⁵⁴⁹ *Theophanes Continuatus*, 458-459 (page numbers from the Bonn edition). Sullivan gives the following translation of the passage: 'Although the *augousta* Helena was worn out with illness, the ruler who loved the good did not yield in his attitude and affection for her, but in every respect he fulfilled her wishes. For the *augousta* asked that, regarding the hostel and home for the elderly recently constructed by her in the Old Petrin and called the house of Helena that the ruler formally define its estates and chrysobulls and expenses, a request which the *Porphyrogennetos* fulfilled with joy.' For a brief analysis and Basil I's founding of St Euphemia: Magdalino 1996, 73. See also: *PMBZ*: Helene 2257.
<<https://www.degruyter.com/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ24727/html>> (Accessed 11/02/2022).

monasteries.⁵⁵⁰ However, Magdalino argued that it is likely that the pattern of imperial involvement in monastic foundations was sustained in this period. Therefore, it is possible Helena Lekapena's successors Anastasia-Theophano and Helena, daughter of Alypius, acted as joint founders and refounders alongside emperors, but that the evidence is now lost to us.⁵⁵¹

Aspects of the built environment from the period 1028-1055 consistently present imperial rule as a partnership between empress and emperor and this can also help explain Aikaterine and Isaac's patronage of the Stoudios.⁵⁵² For example, in the above-mentioned donor mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Zoe is depicted acting alongside Constantine IX. As discussed, this mosaic had previously depicted her alongside Romanos III. The fifteenth-century Spanish ambassador of Henry III of Castile, Ruy González de Clavijo also describes a prominent portrait of an emperor and empress flanking an image of the Virgin Mary at the left-hand side of the church of St Mary Peribleptos (meaning 'Celebrated'), close to the entrance of the building. Clavijo does not name either the emperor or empress. However, he names Romanos III as the occupier of a tomb, which was located in the north arm of the ambulatory. On the other hand, Clavijo describes thirty cities and castles at the foot of the image of the Virgin with the emperor and the empress. He says that he was told these were donated to the church by Romanos III.⁵⁵³

According to Psellos, Romanos III founded St Mary Peribleptos with an attached monastery.⁵⁵⁴ Mango suggested that the mosaic described by Clavijo was a donor mosaic depicting Romanos III alongside Zoe.⁵⁵⁵ He was followed by Magdalino, who identified Romanos and Zoe as the founders of the monastery.⁵⁵⁶ Sophia Kalopissi-Verti on the other hand argued the mosaic was produced after the Byzantines retook Constantinople from the Latins in 1261.⁵⁵⁷ Mabi Angar has recently carried out an extensive analysis of Clavijo's description of the mosaic. She pointed out earlier precedents in Byzantine art for the depiction of numerous cities and buildings in one piece. Therefore, she

⁵⁵⁰ Demirtiken 2019, 176.

⁵⁵¹ Magdalino 1996, 74.

⁵⁵² Demirtiken 2019, 176, pointed out that there is an abeyance of evidence for imperial women's patronage of churches or monasteries between the death of Helena Lekapena in 961 and the beginning of Zoe's reign as *Augousta* in 1028. However, Magdalino argued that it is likely that the pattern of imperial involvement in monastic foundations was sustained in this period. Therefore, it is possible Helena Lekapena's successors Anastasia-Theophano and Helena, daughter of Alypius, acted as joint founders and refounders, but that the evidence is now lost to us: Magdalino 1996, 74.

⁵⁵³ Clavijo, *Embassy*, 64-65 (page numbers from Strange's translation). For the location of Romanos' tomb: Mango 1986, 217-218; Marinis 2014, 63.

⁵⁵⁴ *Chron.*, 3.16.

⁵⁵⁵ Mango 1992, 475. This was a recension to his earlier argument that that the image depicted Michael VIII and the empress Theodora: Mango 1986, 239 n. 164.

⁵⁵⁶ Magdalino 1996, 72 n. 86.

⁵⁵⁷ Kalopissi-Verti 2003, 79 n. 1.

suggested, the mosaic could well have depicted Romanos and Zoe, although she does not rule out a later date.⁵⁵⁸

I argue that Clavijo's account of how he was told that the depiction of cities and castles at the bottom of the image were symbols of Romanos' endowment is the strongest evidence that the mosaic depicted Romanos III, alongside Zoe. This raises the possibility that Romanos collaborated with Zoe during the foundation of an extensive monastic site. Their actions matched with the pattern which developed in the tenth century, whereby imperial involvement with the 'great imperial abbeys' of Constantinople opened space for imperial women to act. Zoe was also the founder or refounder of the Church of Christ Antiphonetes, and Romanos III may have also been presented as a joint founder of the site.⁵⁵⁹ Zoe and Michael IV also likely restored a church dedicated to the Virgin Gorgoepikoos.⁵⁶⁰ Later in the 1040s, Constantine IX, Zoe and Theodora also appear to have co-operated to develop the monastery of Nea Moni on Chios.⁵⁶¹

Zoe and Theodora are also more widely visible alongside emperors in imperial culture in the period 1028-1055. Images, encomiastic texts and narrative histories connected to the period 1028-1050 attest to the prominence of a public image of imperial partnership between emperors and empresses.⁵⁶² Angelova argued that in the early Byzantine period statements communicated through different media, including images, urban development and texts, contributed to broader discourses

⁵⁵⁸ Angar 2019, 116-136.

⁵⁵⁹ According to the thirteenth-century *Synopsis Chronicle* of Theodore Skoutariotes, Zoe also founded the Church of Christ Antiphonetes, where she was also buried. Skoutariotes, *Synopsis Chronike*, 7.163; Komnene, *Alexiad*, 6.3, also writes that Zoe was buried there. However, both Zilian and Papamastorakis have argued that she was likely a refounder of the church: Zilian 2007, 37 n. 28; Papamastorakis 2003, 497-511. The *Anonymous Sola* collection of poems in the eleventh-century Vat. gr. 753 manuscript includes a dedicatory epigram celebrating the addition of a pavement to Christ Antiphonetes, inlaid with porphyry and silver, attributed to both Zoe and Romanos. It is published in Sola 1916, 24.

⁵⁶⁰ Sola 1916, 150. Magdalino 2003 200 n. 5, identified the emperor in the poem as Michael.

⁵⁶¹ A chrysobull issued by Monomachos to Nea Moni in 1048 references the contributions of Zoe and Theodora to the monastery. They are also described as having issued chrysobulls to Nea Moni in a chrysobull of Nikephoros III Botaneiates from 1079: Miklosich & Müller 2012 (1897), 9 (no. 6).

⁵⁶² For example: Zoe and Theodora are depicted flanking Constantine IX in the so-called 'Monomachos crown' (Oikonomides 1994, 241-262; Kiss 2000, 60-83; Dawson 2009, 183-193) and a miniature illustrating codex Sinai gr.364, which contains homilies of St John Chrysostom (Spatharakis 1976, 99-102). Encomiastic texts produced during Constantine IX's reign consistently describe Zoe as the moon and Theodora as the star to Constantine's sun: Psellos, *Poemata*, 250, ll. 367-369, 252, l.446. Ed Westerink; Mauropous, 'No. 54', ll. 120-130; 'No. 55', ll. 1-47. See further: Bernard and Livanos 2018, 581. Zoe is also depicted as the first person to crown Michael V in *Synop.*, Th 375. Furthermore, the *Chronographia* describes how Zoe's name was placed before that of Michael V in public proclamations. Subsequently in the text, Zoe and Theodora are also depicted flanking Constantine IX during the triumph to celebrate the defeat of the rebel George Maniakes: Psellos, *Chronographia*, 5.1; 6.88. Zoe and Theodora do not appear alongside emperors in numismatic iconography. They only appear on coins alongside one another or alone. More research is needed to explain this. For an overview of coins between 1028 and 1056: Grierson 1973, 711-753.

on imperial power.⁵⁶³ Zoe and Theodora's visibility in the eleventh century matches with this pattern. Statements about their partnership with male emperors communicated through the built environment were integrated with other mediums of communication, resulting in a broad image of imperial power as pluralistic.

Zoe had legitimised the position of four emperors, three through marriage (Romanos III, Michael IV and Constantine IX) and one through adoption (Michael V), between 1028 and her death in 1050. Moreover, she reigned alongside her sister Theodora between April and June 1042. In addition, Zoe and Theodora were co-empresses during the reign of Constantine IX. After Constantine's death, Theodora ruled alone between 1055 and 1056. Zoe's importance as a dynastic heir, channel of power and a legitimiser has been demonstrated by Hill, James and Smythe.⁵⁶⁴ Her significance is exemplified by Psellos' description of her as 'the foundation' (τὴν βάσιν, Ζωήν) in his poetic epitaph for the *Sebaste* Maria Skleraina, the lover of Constantine IX.⁵⁶⁵ Tougher highlighted how it is noteworthy that Theodora continued to act as co-empress alongside Zoe during Constantine IX's reign. He suggested this can be explained by popular devotion to the Macedonian dynasty, meaning that Theodora's visible connections with Constantine IX enhanced the public image of the emperor's power, as well as the need to prevent Theodora from becoming a figurehead for opposition Constantine IX and Zoe.⁵⁶⁶ Other than Michael VI, who is discussed further below, the four male emperors who had reigned before Isaac had all done so alongside the empress Zoe, as well as Theodora after 1042. These empresses were highly visible in the built environment. Zoe and Theodora's importance as dynastic heirs and legitimisers in the period 1028-1055 explains their visibility alongside emperors in the Constantinopolitan built environment. This was therefore further cemented as an imperial norm, following the developments in the tenth century.

Patterns observable within imperial culture in the period between 1028 and 1055 further explain Isaac and Aikaterine's choice of St John Prodromos as a site of patronage. On top of the expectations identified by Ahrweiler that imperial power should be presented as rooted in established precedents, the political context of Isaac's reign meant that it was beneficial for his power to be presented as comparable to that of previous rulers. This is because as mentioned above, Isaac was the first emperor in some two centuries without links to the Macedonian line. Moreover, the civil war through which he had become emperor had brought about substantial disruption and loss of life, suggesting Isaac's rule would not uphold *taxis*. In the first place, the actions of Isaac and

⁵⁶³ Angelova 2014, 263-264.

⁵⁶⁴ Hill, James & Smythe 1994, 215-229.

⁵⁶⁵ Psellos, *Poemata*, no. 17, 251-252, ll. 428-448.

⁵⁶⁶ Tougher 2013b, 312-313, 318-319.

Aikaterine as refounders of a monastic church at a major religious centre in Constantinople allowed the imperial couple to quickly be presented as comparable to emperors and empresses who had contributed to major monastic foundations during the tenth and eleventh centuries, especially the previous four reigns involving a male emperor, before Michael VI. Possibly, had the reign lasted longer, Isaac and Aikaterine would have further developed the public image of their reign crafted at St John Prodromos by founding their own monastic complex. Secondly, the proximity between St John Prodromos and St Mary Peribleptos potentially alerted viewers of the two churches that the partnership of Isaac and Aikaterine was specifically comparable to Romanos III and Zoe. I now examine this possibility in more detail.

St Mary Peribleptos was located roughly 800m further north along the Mese from St John Prodromos. It was a comparable site, featuring a church situated within a wider monastic complex. Most of the building of the Peribleptos was destroyed in a fire in 1782 and it is now the site of an Armenian church dedicated to St George and built in 1887. The substructures of the Peribleptos were exposed in 1997 and site plans were subsequently published by Ferudun Özgümüş and Örgü Dalgıç & Mathews.⁵⁶⁷ Although the type of building is disputed, it seems likely to have been based upon a cross-in-square plan, with the main bay of the church surrounded by colonnades, like an ambulatory, and several side chapels.⁵⁶⁸ In the *Chronographia*, the church is described as being of monumental scale. Clavijo moreover describes the attached monastic complex as extensive.⁵⁶⁹

Above it has been argued that it was likely that through a donor mosaic St Mary Peribleptos was presented as a joint foundation of Romanos III and Zoe. The building and the surrounding site likely therefore appeared as an image of their imperial partnership. An association between Romanos III, Zoe and St Mary Peribleptos helps to explain Aikaterine and Isaac's choice to embellish the church of St John Prodromos specifically between 1057-1059. Here it is telling that Clavijo's description of the church mentions slabs of 'jasper' covering the floor and walls.⁵⁷⁰ Dalgıç & Mathews point out that Clavijo uses 'jasper' to describe coloured marble.⁵⁷¹ The addition of the opus sectile pavement and wall tiles in St John Prodromos, which we have connected with Aikaterine and Isaac's restoration, therefore paralleled the marble decorated interior of St Mary Peribleptos. This reinforces the impression that the embellishment of St John Prodromos was conducted in reference to St Mary Peribleptos.

⁵⁶⁷ Özgümüş 2000, 508-520; Dalgıç & Mathews 2010, 424-431. See also: Dark 1999, 656-664.

⁵⁶⁸ Marinis 2014, 201.

⁵⁶⁹ *Chron.*, 3.14-16; Clavijo, *Embassy*, 67-68.

⁵⁷⁰ Clavijo, *Embassy*, 65. Trans. Strange.

⁵⁷¹ Dalgıç & Mathews 2010, 424.

Clavijo describes being taken by his Byzantine guides to the Peribleptos on the same day as visiting St John Prodromos.⁵⁷² Moreover, Stephen of Novgorod, who was in Constantinople in 1348/1349 describes visiting St Mary Peribleptos after the Stoudios monastery and the *Anonymous Russian Chronicle* composed between 1389-1391 describes visiting the Stoudios afterwards.⁵⁷³ It is thus evident that in the late Byzantine period the two churches were frequently visited together in the same day by pilgrims to Constantinople. It is highly likely that the two churches were also often visited together by eleventh-century pilgrims to the city. This means that a significant number of the visitors to St John Prodromos, who saw the decorations of the church linked with Aikaterine and Isaac, would also see the church of St Mary Peribleptos, and the donor mosaic which we have identified as depicting of Zoe and Romanos III, in the same day. The proximity of St John Prodromos to St Mary Peribleptos thus meant that images of the partnership of Aikaterine and Isaac and Zoe and Romanos III were viewed one after the other by many pilgrims. This possibility points to the proximity of St Mary Peribleptos to St John Prodromos as an important factor behind the decision of Isaac and Aikaterine to focus their patronage on St John Prodromos from an early date in the reign.

The *Patria* suggests that in middle Byzantium, the names of restorers to or developers of buildings became linked with the site as whole.⁵⁷⁴ Therefore, it is possible that through their embellishment of the interior of St John Prodromos, Isaac and Aikaterine also became associated with the image of the building in the Constantinopolitan cityscape. St John Prodromos is located on a slope approximately 150 from the Marmara Sea Walls and St Mary Peribleptos is also located on the same slope some 125m above the Sea Walls (fig. 5).⁵⁷⁵ The two churches would have appeared as prominent features of the cityscape, and very close to one another, to viewers of the Psmathia quarter of Constantinople who were aboard ships passing through the Marmara Sea, to or from one of Constantinople's four major harbours.⁵⁷⁶ Notably, the harbours of Theodosius and Julian were also located in the southern part of the city's shoreline. Sea traffic approaching or leaving these two harbours from or towards the south would have passed close to the Psmathia, and viewers looking west towards Constantinople from onboard these boats and ships would have therefore seen St John Prodromos and St Mary Peribleptos standing in close proximity to one another. This view can be reconstructed by standing to the west of the Marmara Sea Walls on the part of the Kennedy

⁵⁷² Clavijo, *Embassy*, 68.

⁵⁷³ Majeska 1984, 39-40, 146. See page 17 for the date of Stephen of Novgorod's visit. For the date of the *Anonymous Russian Chronicle*: Mango 1952, 380-385.

⁵⁷⁴ For example, the description of the empress Eirene the Athenian's restoration of St Euphemia at the Hippodrome: *Patria*, 3.9.

⁵⁷⁵ Dalgiç & Mathews 2010, 424.

⁵⁷⁶ These were the Prosphorion and the Nearion on the Golden Horn and the Harbour of Theodosius I and the Harbour of Sophia on the Marmara: Hennessy 2008, 213; Magdalino 2001, 211-212.

Avenue which runs along the Samatya quarter (the modern-day Turkish translation of Psmathia). The Armenian Church of St George, on the site of the Peribleptos is highly visible. The Stoudios is now obscured by modern buildings but the minaret which was constructed after the site became a mosque can be seen. From the Kennedy Avenue, the minaret and the Armenian Church appear close to one another, and can be viewed in one glance (fig. 15).

There was a high volume of sea-traffic moving to and from Constantinople in the eleventh century. In addition to a sizeable number of boats transporting fuel and provisions to Constantinople, the city's inhabitants possessed several hundred fishing boats.⁵⁷⁷ Moreover, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, there was an increase in domestic and foreign maritime trade.⁵⁷⁸ All of these ships also carried travellers to and from Constantinople.⁵⁷⁹ The appearance of the two churches alongside each other in the cityscape before this sizeable audience may have been a factor influencing Isaac and Aikaterine's choice of St John Prodromos as a site of patronage. Through their patronage, Isaac and Aikaterine's names likely became associated with the image of the building as a whole. In this context, the close proximity of St John Prodromos to St Mary Peribleptos in the Constantinopolitan cityscape would have likely communicated an assertive message that the reign of Isaac and Aikaterine was comparable to that of Romanos III and Zoe, which was still in living memory. This allowed the reign to meet expectations that imperial power should be presented as a continuation of the established order and therefore comparable to that exercised by previous rulers, as outlined by Ahrweiler.⁵⁸⁰

Before concluding this discussion of the appearance of St John Prodromos as an image of Isaac and Aikaterine's imperial partnership, I shall discuss the contrasting image which this building presented of the reign, in comparison to that of Michael VI (1056-57), who Isaac overthrew. No empress is attested to have ruled alongside this emperor. Before Michael, Theodora had also ruled alone between 1055-56. However, Michael's appearance without an empress contrasted with the male emperors who had ruled between 1028 and 1055, who had all been consistently depicted in imperial culture as in partnership with the empresses Zoe and Theodora. By appearing without an empress, the image of Michael's power thus broke with the pattern established between 1028 and 1055, when depictions in imperial culture of emperors and empresses in partnership were the norm. The

⁵⁷⁷ In 1204 Gunther of Paris was told that the local Greeks operated some 1600 fishing boats: Jacoby 2017, 632. Using written sources, Johannes Koder estimated that between 330 and 720 ships per year arrived at Constantinople to provide the city's population with necessary provisions: Koder 2002 124.

⁵⁷⁸ Two important factors were economic growth and the Byzantine conquest of Crete in 961, which led to greater security from piracy in the Aegean sea: Jacoby 2017, 627-648; Ahrweiler 1966, 165.

⁵⁷⁹ Pryor 2008, 486.

⁵⁸⁰ Ahrweiler 1975, 141.

public image of Isaac and Aikaterine's imperial partnership crafted through their embellishment of St John Prodromos therefore presented them as continuators of established patterns of imperial rule, in contrast to Isaac's predecessor Michael VI, whose status as an outlier was thus foregrounded.

In summary, I argue that patterns in imperial culture which developed in the tenth century and gathered apace in the eleventh century during the reigns of Zoe and Theodora explain Isaac and Aikaterine's actions as joint patrons of St John Prodromos. Likely within the first year of the reign, the image of partnership between emperor and empress, crafted through Isaac and Aikaterine's joint embellishment of the church, very quickly presented the emperor and empress before a sizeable audience as comparable to emperors and empresses before them, especially successive rulers in living memory between 1028 and 1055, when Zoe and Theodora were empresses. The image of Aikaterine as a partner to the emperor was therefore a crucial aspect of the presentation of imperial power through the built environment between 1057-1059. This case study has shed light on imperial norms in the mid-eleventh century, which were founded upon the precedent established by previous emperors and empresses in the tenth and eleventh centuries, especially Zoe and Theodora, who were highly visible as partners in imperial rulership with the emperor. Because of these norms, Aikaterine's contribution to the presentation of imperial power was a necessity. Her necessary role was underpinned by the roles performed by the empresses before her. I now examine how Aikaterine's appearance as a partner to Isaac through the medium of urban development were paralleled by statements about her position made through the medium of imperial encomia, and through physical performances.

Depictions of Aikaterine in encomia 1057-1059

I now once more examine depictions of Aikaterine in Psellos' *Letter* Π 1 (text 1). This time, encomiastic praise of her in this text is examined alongside earlier texts featuring encomiastic descriptions of the empresses Zoe and Theodora. Specifically, the focus of this analysis will be upon three passages in Π 1 depicting Aikaterine as a partner to Isaac, which have not yet been studied in modern scholarship. Through an analysis of these passages I aim to show that in other encomiastic performances in the imperial court between 1057-1059, imperial power was regularly presented as being exercised by Isaac and Aikaterine as partners. The passages will moreover be compared with encomiastic texts from the 1040s and 1050s. It will be argued that the intertextual links which are foregrounded show Aikaterine's visibility as a partner to the emperor was underpinned by developments in the two decades before her reign as empress.

In the previous chapter it was argued that aspects of Π 1 were reflective of the oral and written language used more widely in formal contexts at the imperial court. This argument is based in part upon Jeffreys' proposal that one of Psellos' specific aims during Isaac's reign was to become a regular encomiast for the emperor. The term encomium will now be defined more precisely, alongside an overview of developments in imperial encomia during the 1040s and 1050s. The term encomium appears in Byzantine texts and refers to aspects of a text which praise a person. Encomia can be delivered through the medium of poetry or prose. Many of the texts featuring encomiastic aspects appear to have been delivered as oral performances. Praise of a person can be the central focus of a text or performance or appear alongside other literary objectives.⁵⁸¹

In Byzantium, the small group who pursued an ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, or 'general education' practised the delivery of encomia, which was one of the *progymnasmata*, a series of exercises completed by students as part of their rhetorical training.⁵⁸² Throughout Byzantine history, individuals used their training to praise the emperor and other imperial persons, through the medium of different literary genres.⁵⁸³ Scholars have identified a change in imperial culture in the 1030s through to the 1050s. Bernard highlighted how in this period poems dedicated to the imperial family begin to appear more frequently, following a period of abeyance during the reign of Basil II. The poets include Christopher Mitylenaios, John Mauropous and Psellos.⁵⁸⁴ Lauritzen moreover argued that many of the poems of Psellos produced in this period are occasional and were performed within the imperial court.⁵⁸⁵

Furthermore, Kaldellis has drawn attention to the sudden increase in the number of prose speeches of praise which survive to us from the reign of Constantine IX (1042-1055), in comparison to the period between the seventh and early eleventh century, when the evidence for the performance of

⁵⁸¹ Lauxtermann 2019, 19. An example of an encomium delivered alongside other literary objectives is Psellos' praise of Constantine Leichoudes in *Chron.*, 7.66.

⁵⁸² Encomium was the eighth of fourteen *progymnasmata* outlined in Aphthonios' fifth-century textbook, itself following the prescriptions of Hermogenes: Beaton 1996, 24-25; *ODB* 2005, 'Progymnasmata'. Training in rhetorical theory and performance was a significant aspect of secondary education, pursued by a small number of individuals, throughout the Byzantine period, during which time it underwent relatively few changes: Dennis 1997, 132. Lemerle 1986, 291-298, estimated that in tenth-century Constantinople around 300 men per year completed their secondary education. It was possible for imperial women to attain a high level of education. Anna Komnene's composition of the *Alexiad* in 1148 demonstrates this, and Psellos also describes how Eudokia, Zoe and Theodora, received an imperial (βασιλικῆς) education and instruction (ἀνατροφῆς καὶ παιδεύσεως) in the Great Palace: *Chron.*, 2.4.

⁵⁸³ Guidance for the writing of encomia was given by Aphthonios and Hermogenes. A section of a treatise composed at the turn of the fourth century, attributed to Menander, sets out precepts for a formal speech, described by Menander as an 'epideictic' speech to an emperor (βασιλικὸς λόγος). The influence of Menander has however perhaps been overestimated in modern scholarship because he does not appear to have been widely read in Byzantium. For these points: Lauxtermann 2019, 19-21.

⁵⁸⁴ Bernard 2019, 219.

⁵⁸⁵ Lauritzen 2017, 151-158.

such speeches at the imperial court is much more limited.⁵⁸⁶ The speeches themselves include seven attributed to Psellos and three attributed to Mauropous. There is some evidence for the occasions when they were delivered. An encomiastic oration of Psellos, titled 'To the Emperor himself' (Εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν βασιλέα) was addressed to Constantine IX on Epiphany (6 January).⁵⁸⁷ Mauropous' speeches were all written to be delivered at the church of St George Mangana, and one of the speeches was possibly incorporated into the inauguration ceremony for the church in April 1047.⁵⁸⁸ Kaldellis pointed out that narrative histories also refer to a change in imperial culture in this period.

Attaleiates describes how Constantine IX encouraged young men to train as public speakers and personally listened to their performances, rewarding them with imperial titles.⁵⁸⁹ A passage in Psellos' *Chronographia* also refers to how Monomachos encouraged public speakers to perform at his court.⁵⁹⁰ It seems therefore that encomiastic performances were delivered with greater frequency and regularity within the rhythm of the imperial court in the mid-eleventh century.

The reason for the shift in imperial culture is not clear. Kaldellis suggested Psellos and Mauropous themselves brought the changes about but Lemerle has also pointed out that Monomachos was eager to craft a public image of himself as a promoter of learning and the arts, and so this may also have been an important factor.⁵⁹¹ Equally, it is possible that the empresses Zoe and Theodora were important actors in encouraging more encomia at the imperial court, because as we will see, the texts which survive to us from Constantine IX's reign almost always assert the importance of the empresses, especially Zoe, as a legitimiser of the emperor's rule. After the reign of Constantine IX, as Kaldellis noted, prose speeches of praise became a regular feature of imperial court culture. Later speeches include those addressed to empresses, such as Eudokia Makrembolitissa, Maria 'of Alania' and Eirene Doukaina.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁶ Kaldellis 2019, 693-713. We have only two speeches Arethas addressed to the emperor Leo VI during a feast, and a speech praising Basil II composed by Leo the Deacon. Kaldellis' argument contrasts to those made by previous scholars, who have considered the performance of such speeches at the imperial court a continuous phenomenon in Byzantium. See for example: Dennis 1997, 133-135.

⁵⁸⁷ Psellos, *Oratorio Panegyricae*, no. 6, 88-101.

⁵⁸⁸ Lefort 1976, 271-284, suggested that church was inaugurated on 21 April 1047, based upon his reading of John Mauropous' speeches 'no. 181' and 'no. 182'. In 181, Mauropous describes how he is celebrating the feast of St George, two days after Easter (19 April 1047): Mauropous 'no. 181', 139 (page number from Bollig and Largarde's edition). St George's feast day is in fact 23rd April and 182 seems to have been the original draft for a ceremony on that occasion, which was then abandoned for the earlier date: Lefort 1976, 271-284. However, although the content of Mauropous' speeches suggest that the church of St George had recently been constructed, it is not certain they mark the day that church was inaugurated.

⁵⁸⁹ Attaleiates, *History*, B 21.

⁵⁹⁰ *Chron.*, 6.35.

⁵⁹¹ Lemerle 1977, 193-248.

⁵⁹² Kaldellis 2019, 694.

Zoe and Theodora are praised alongside Constantine IX in several poems from the reign. Examples include two of John Mauropous' longest poems; 54 and 55 and Psellos' epitaph for Skleraina. The empresses also feature in dedicatory epigrams composed by Mauropous, including 71 (Zoe and Theodora) and 73 and 74 (Theodora alone). Turning to prose speeches, Zoe is referred to in all but one of the seven speeches addressed by Psellos to Constantine IX. Theodora is also referred to in the speeches numbered 1, 4 and 6 by Dennis. Moreover, Psellos also composed an encomiastic speech addressed to Theodora during her sole reign (*Oratio Panegyricae* no. 11) and wrote a speech to be performed by Theodora (numbered by Littlewood *Oratoria Minora* no. 1).⁵⁹³ The references to Zoe and Theodora in Psellos' speeches composed during Constantine IX's reign are significant aspect of these texts, which remains understudied by modern scholars. In *Orationes* 2 and 5, composed before Zoe's death in 1050, she is presented as the legitimiser of Constantine's rule. In *Oratio* 6, Constantine IX's deference to Zoe and Theodora is celebrated.⁵⁹⁴ In *Orationes* 1, 4 and 7, composed after 1050 passages are devoted to describing Zoe posthumously.⁵⁹⁵ The attention on Zoe, even after her death, demonstrates her importance for the image of imperial power during Constantine IX's reign.⁵⁹⁶ Zoe and Theodora also both feature in all three of the speeches attributed to John Mauropous. In 186, Zoe and Theodora are depicted leading efforts by the population of Constantinople to appease God during the rebellion of Leo Tornikios in 1047. The final parts of speeches 181 and 182 assert that the emperor shares his imperial status with the empresses.⁵⁹⁷

I argue that references to Zoe and Theodora in earlier encomiastic texts shed significant light on the structure of Π 1, and in particular three key passages in the text, which I now examine in further detail. Each of these passages, as mentioned above, are hitherto unexamined in modern scholarship, and feature direct depictions of Isaac and Aikaterine as political partners, who exercise collective power in collaboration with one other.

In the L manuscript, the first lines of *Letter* Π 1 (1-3) read:

My holy *Despoina* and most divine empress, I am longing
for your majesties and I wish to see you together at home in the
city. Yes, to revel in your glory!

⁵⁹³ Psellos, *Orationes Panegyricae*, no. 11, 117-123; Psellos, *Oratoria Minora*, no.1, 1-4.

⁵⁹⁴ Psellos, *Orationes Panegyricae*, no. 2, 43, ll. 652-661, no. 5, 86, ll. 137-145, no. 6, 96-97, ll. 224-235.

⁵⁹⁵ Psellos, *Orationes Panegyricae*, no. 1, 9-10, ll. 175-206, no. 4, 75-76, ll. 464-491, no. 7, 105, ll. 91-92.

⁵⁹⁶ The parallels between the parts of *Orationes* 1 and 4 devoted to the remembrance of Zoe are highlighted by Papadopoulos 2020, 297-230.

⁵⁹⁷ Mauropous, 'no. 181', 141-142; 'no. 182', 147.

Δέσποινά μου ἁγία καὶ θεόστεπτε βασιλὶς, ποθῶ μὲν τὴν
βασιλείαν ὑμῶν καὶ συνεχῶς ὄρῳ βούλομαι, ἐπιδημοῦσαν τῇ
πόλει· ναί, μὰ τὴν ἐν θεῷ σου καύχησιν!

By contrast, the P manuscript reads τὸν βασιλέα ἡμῶν ... ἐπιδημοῦντα. ('Our majesty... at home') in place of βασιλείαν ὑμῶν ... ἐπιδημοῦσαν in L. The latter therefore depicts Isaac and Aikaterine exercising joint power, whereas P presents Aikaterine as sharing with Psellos a status as a subordinate to Isaac, through the phrase 'our majesty'. Papaioannou preferred the text in L as the best reading of the first line. I agree with his choice. Firstly, L is the earliest version of the text available to us. Secondly, as Papaioannou asserted, L generally provides better readings of Psellian letters than P.⁵⁹⁸ Moreover, the reading in L matches with lines 10 – 12 in both L and P. These read:

Since there is no longer any other way to be acquainted with your [plural] might,
I am consoling myself by writing to you and am thus
resolved to consort with you through letters.
Μηκέτι οὖν δυνάμενος ἄλλως πως συνεῖναι τῷ κράτει ὑμῶν,
ἐμαυτὸν παραμυθοῦμαι τοῖς πρὸς ὑμᾶς γράμμασι· δοκῶ γὰρ
ὁμιλεῖν διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν.

The reading of the opening lines in L also matches with the last lines (38-40) of the letter in both L and P:

May your [plural] sovereignty be very long,
whilst improving the affairs of the Romans,
the sovereignty governing and guiding your power beautifully.
Εἴη δὲ εἰς μακροὺς χρόνους ἡ
βασιλεία ὑμῶν τὰ Ῥωμαίων αὐξάνουσα πράγματα, καὶ τὸ κράτος
καλῶς διοικοῦσα καὶ κατευθύνουσα.

The parallels between the first lines of Π 1 in L and the two other passages in the text which occur in both P and L point to the best reading of the beginning of the letter as that provided in L. The

⁵⁹⁸ Papaioannou 2019, LXVII.

parallels between the first lines and the last lines also draw attention to Isaac and Aikaterine's imperial partnership as a major theme of the text. Before drawing comparisons between these passages and earlier encomiastic texts I will discuss the likelihood of connections between Π 1 and other encomia delivered in the imperial court. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that no examples of long prose speeches in praise of imperial persons from 1057-1059 survive to us. We do however have two poems composed by Psellos (*Poemata* nos. 18 and 19 in Westerink's edition) from this period which combine didactic with encomiastic content, and which are addressed to Isaac. *Poem* no. 18 is of particular value for the present investigation.⁵⁹⁹ It explains the significance of the Kalandai (καλάνδαι), an annual feast. The Kalandai took place in January and the feast should therefore be dated to this month in either 1058 or 1059. Bernard pointed out that the speech has features of a *kletikos logos* (a speech inviting a distinguished person to a festival), appearing to follow the prescription of Menander Rhetor.⁶⁰⁰ We do not know the exact relationship between the text itself and the occasion, whether it was performed at the feast itself, or composed later to recall the event.

In lines 40-43 of the poem Psellos refers to the Constantinopolitan population gathered 'at the doors' to acclaim the emperor.⁶⁰¹ This suggests the scene described in the poem is a gathering of the imperial court within the walls of the Great Palace, held in tandem with acclamations for the emperor performed outside of the palace walls. This also reminds us that such occasions were often connected with events which took place in the city outside of the palace walls. In lines 44-58, Psellos introduces a group of learned men who will sing the emperor's praises in verse. In lines 56-57 of the poem, it is stated that the verse performances praising the emperor will be combined with prose. This poem appears therefore to describe the performance of verse and prose alongside one another.

Lines 10 and 11 of Π 1 reinforce the evidence provided by *Poem* 18. These lines frame the letter as a replacement for occasions when Psellos addressed Isaac and Aikaterine. The letter itself is replete with encomiastic material, most notably in the series of questions Psellos directs to Aikaterine, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Lines 10 and 11 therefore suggests that Psellos praised the emperor and empress during oral performances at the imperial court. Lines 1-3 which also describe an act of speaking, whilst looking at the empress together with the emperor, reinforce

⁵⁹⁹ Psellos, *Poemata*, *Poem* 19, 255-57, ll. 1-108. Ed Westerink, is a celebration of the first year of Isaac's reign, decrying a false prophesy that had predicted he would die.

⁶⁰⁰ Psellos, *Poemata*, *Poem* 18, 252-54, ll. 1-58. Ed Westerink. For analysis of this poem, the features which bear similarities to the *kletikos logos* described by Menander and the significance of Psellos' focus upon the potential of verse compositions: Bernard 2014, 302-05. For Menander's description of a *kletikos logos*: Menander Rhetor, *Peri epideiktikon*, 182-193. Ed. and trans. Russell and Wilson. For the καλάνδαι: Graf 2015, 219-25.

⁶⁰¹ πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν.

the impression that there were occasions when the imperial couple appeared together, and were praised by encomiasts.

The above-mentioned lines suggest Psellos' praise of Aikaterine is not in this instance tailored specifically for the letter, but rather that the language utilised in the letter (and the speech delivered by Psellos' accompanying letter bearer) is reflective of the language Psellos used when addressing Aikaterine in the imperial court. It thus appears that a snapshot of Psellos' routine interactions with Aikaterine has been preserved to us. The reference in *Poem* 18 to multiple encomiasts at the imperial court suggests that Psellos was not the only person to address Isaac and Aikaterine with encomiastic language and that further speeches and verse compositions were performed by courtiers other than Psellos, which have now been lost to us. The presence of multiple encomiasts active at the imperial court is reinforced by a reference in line 96 in the Psellian *Letter* Π 139, further discussed below, to 'fellow-slaves' (οἱ σύνδουλοι) who also deliver encomia.

It is also important to consider that, as discussed above, Psellos was not part of the inner circle of imperial rule when he composed this letter between October and November 1059. One of Psellos' objectives in the letter is to gain more consistent access to Aikaterine and Isaac. In other letters, Psellos uses in-jokes and inverts the expectations of his recipient, as a way of acknowledging and developing the intimacy of their relationship.⁶⁰² However, in this case he addresses Aikaterine from a position of distance and formality. This feature of Π 1 can be attributed to Psellos' position as an outsider during Isaac and Aikaterine's reign. Therefore, it is unlikely that in Π 1 Psellos deviates markedly from language conventional to the culture of the imperial court. In summary, for above reasons given above, Π 1 points to the way Aikaterine was depicted in other encomiastic prose and verse performances at the imperial court.

In this context, the parallels between the opening and closing lines of Π 1 are striking. Both lines 1-2 and 38-39 depict Isaac and Aikaterine as political partners, exercising shared power over the Romans (τὴν βασιλείαν ὑμῶν / ἡ βασιλεία ὑμῶν τὰ Ῥωμαίων). The positioning of these depictions of Isaac and Aikaterine at the beginning and end of the text foregrounds the depiction of the pair as political partners as a key theme of the letter. The depiction of their partnership is reinforced by line 10 in the letter. Here, when referring to occasions when he addressed Isaac and Aikaterine in person Psellos uses the phrase τῷ κράτει ὑμῶν (your [plural] might). *Kratos* means power, and moreover communicates a sense of active power. The translations of this word offered by Liddell and Scott include power, strength, sway and sovereignty.⁶⁰³ Kaldellis defined *kratos* in Byzantine texts as a

⁶⁰² See for example: Π 136, ll. 1-14; Π 215, ll. 12-28; Π 355a, ll. 1-24.

⁶⁰³ LSJ, s.v. "κράτος".

term referring to the emperor's power, as opposed to *basileia* which he proposed refers to the authority, functions and extensions of the imperial office.⁶⁰⁴ The impression of *kratos* as communicating active power is confirmed by narrative histories from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁶⁰⁵

The appearance of the term *kratos* to depict Isaac and Aikaterine's shared power therefore emphasises that the empress is not a passive partner to the emperor, but an active participant in imperial rulership. The impression that *kratos* is intended to depict her partnership in this way is supplemented by lines 21-24:

Do not be amazed if I make requests from you often and
repeatedly. For the countless good favours emanating from your mightiness
(your gentle gaze, your goodwill, your lordly disposition)
I offer a little in return, these inquiries and my obeisance.
Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης, εἰ πολλάκις
ἐπανερωτῶ· μυρίων γὰρ ἀγαθῶν παρὰ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους τυχών
(προσηνοῦς θέας, εὐμενείας, δεσποτικῆς διαθέσεως), μικρὰν
εἰσάγω ἀντίδοσιν, τὴν ἐρώτησιν ταύτην καὶ τὴν προσκύνησιν.

Here the term *kratos* is used to emphasise that Aikaterine has the power to act to help Psellos, who can offer her praise in return. The ways by which Aikaterine could exercise power by responding to Π 1 were discussed in the previous chapter. What I would like to draw attention to here is that the appearance in line 22 of the word *kratos* to describe Aikaterine position reinforces the impression that the choice of the same term to describe her partnership with Isaac is deliberate and designed to depict her as an active colleague in the exercising of imperial rulership.

It must be acknowledged that in the text the questions concerning Isaac's activities as emperor are more extensive and detailed than those addressed to Aikaterine. Encomiastic questions concerning Isaac appear in lines 11-16 and 35-38. In lines 35-38, Psellos asks about whether Isaac is combining hunting with administrative business. By contrast, the questions addressed to Aikaterine are clustered between lines 16-21. This aspect of the text suggests that Isaac's position as emperor is

⁶⁰⁴ Kaldellis 2010, 38.

⁶⁰⁵ Skylitzes uses the term in several passages describing the actions of individuals in war: *Contin*, Ts. 176, l. 4, l. 26, 183, l. 11, l. 15. In *Chron.*, 2.4, Basil II is depicted exercising *kratos* on the borders of the Byzantine Empire, in contrast to Constantine VIII in Constantinople.

prioritised as a higher status position, above that of Aikaterine as empress. However, beyond this, Aikaterine's position as a significant and active imperial colleague to the emperor is repeatedly foregrounded. Here the difference between the opening lines of the letter in manuscripts L and P is telling. P is considered by Papaioannou and Kolovou to have been produced at the end of the twelfth century.⁶⁰⁶ It is not possible to identify with precision the reason for the divergence between P and L, the latter of which I have argued offers the better reading of the text. However, one possibility is that at some point, a scribe working on P, or an earlier manuscript used by P, might have considered that the presentation of Isaac and Aikaterine's collective power in the phrase 'I am longing for your majesties' (ποθῶ μὲν τὴν βασιλείαν ὑμῶν) was unusual enough that it was potentially an error, resulting in the changing of the phrase to 'I am longing for our emperor' (ποθῶ μὲν τὸν βασιλέα ἡμῶν). Thus, the discrepancy between L and P hints that the emphatic presentation of Isaac and Aikaterine as partners in the exercise of imperial power was unusual to later Byzantine readers of the text. This suggests that the sustained depiction of the emperor and empress as partners in Π 1 was a distinct feature of mid-eleventh century imperial court culture, which was not paralleled in later periods in Byzantine history.

What were the factors behind the existence of this aspect of mid-eleventh century imperial court culture? Parallels between Π 1 and earlier encomiastic texts produced during the reign of Constantine IX alongside Zoe and Theodora demonstrate the likelihood that precedents established in this period influenced the way that imperial power was presented during the reigns of Isaac and Aikaterine. There are several examples of the depiction of imperial power as shared between Constantine IX, Zoe and Theodora in encomiastic prose and verse compositions from the reign. The closing lines of Mauropous' *Poem* 54 (ll. 121-137) depict Constantine IX as the sun, Zoe as the moon and Theodora as a star, with Christ as a fourth person in their midst. Comparisons between the emperor and the sun are a recurring aspect of Byzantine imperial imagery and is also present in the depiction of Isaac in Π 1.⁶⁰⁷ The use of moon and star imagery to depict Zoe and Theodora and present imperial power as collective is a common aspect of Byzantine encomia during Constantine IX's reign. It is also echoed in the description of Aikaterine as the living light in Π 1 and line 5 in Π 142, where her presence in Constantinople is compared to moonlight.⁶⁰⁸ Other comparative examples from texts produced during the 1040s and 1050s include lines 141-145 of Psellos' *Oration* 5 which celebrates how imperial power (το κράτος) is underpinned by the harmonious union of

⁶⁰⁶ Papaioannou 2019, lxxvii ; Kolovou 2006, 76-77. By contrast Gautier 1986, 46-47, sets the date in the second half of the thirteenth century.

⁶⁰⁷ Angelov 2007, 80.

⁶⁰⁸ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς σελήνης αὐγῶν.

Constantine IX, Zoe and Theodora.⁶⁰⁹ Likewise the closing passages of Mauropous' speeches 181 and 182 emphasise the shared piety of Constantine IX, Zoe and Theodora.

There are thus intertextual parallels between the consistent and emphatic depiction in the Isaac and Aikaterine as political partners in Π 1 and prose and verse encomia produced during Constantine IX's reign with Zoe and Theodora. It is evident that the appearance of Isaac and Aikaterine as imperial colleagues in 1057-1059 is underpinned by the changes in imperial culture which took place in the 1040s and 1050s. In this period, prose and verse encomiastic performances became more consistently performed in the imperial court. The importance of Zoe, and Theodora as symbols of political legitimacy, meant that in these encomia, imperial power was frequently depicted as a partnership between emperor and empresses. The depiction of Isaac and Aikaterine on similar terms therefore presented their reign as comparable to the last time an emperor and empress had reigned alongside one another. This implied that the reign of 1057-1059 existed within a continuum, connecting it to the 'Macedonian' dynasty.

In her study of the early Byzantine period, Angelova argued that statements on imperial power emanating from different sources should be considered as together producing meaning within broader discourses.⁶¹⁰ Her proposal is illuminating for our understanding of Isaac and Aikaterine's power. Considering the evidence from encomia alongside that from the built environment it appears that the message in encomia in this period that imperial power was exercised as a partnership between emperor and empress, presented to an audience of imperial courtiers, functioned in tandem with the image of imperial power presented through St John Prodhromos before a wide audience in Constantinople. A cohesive statement was made that the power exercised by Isaac alongside Aikaterine was presented as comparable to, and continuous from, the partnerships between emperors and empresses that had characterised the last reigns of the Macedonian period.

Aikaterine's visibility as an imperial partner alongside Isaac was therefore necessary for the crafting of a public image emphasising the legitimacy of imperial power. Three decades ago, Hill, James and Smythe highlighted Zoe's importance as a dynastic heir. However, the legacy of Zoe, and her sister Theodora, has remained understudied, and Hill subsequently labelled Zoe and Theodora as special cases. This case study demonstrates that the visibility of the sisters caused their successor Aikaterine

⁶⁰⁹ The text reads: ἡ γάρ τῶν βασιλευόντων συζυγία μοναρχία γεγονυῖα διὰ τὴν σύμπνοιαν λαμπρότερον τὸ κράτος ἐντεῦθεν προδείκνυσιν, οὐ διαιρούμενον ἐν διαιρουμένοις σώμασι, συνενούμενον δὲ μάλλον τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ταύτῃ: *OM* 5, 86, ll. 141-145.

⁶¹⁰ Angelova 2014, 263-264.

to be more visible. The visibility of the empresses who came after Aikaterine will be further discussed below.

Aikaterine's visibility in Constantinople during wartime, summer - autumn 1059

In the last part of this chapter, evidence is examined for Aikaterine's visibility through physical performances in Constantinople when Isaac was absent from the city during the campaign conducted around Sredets between late summer and September 1059 against an alliance of Hungarians and Pechenegs.⁶¹¹ The investigation is focused upon passages in letters Π 138, 140 and 139 (addressed to Isaac), and Π 40 (addressed to Isaac's nephew Theodoros Dokeianos) These texts all feature references to Aikaterine and were all composed during the 1059 campaign. Summaries of the letters as a whole have been published by Jeffreys, and it must be acknowledged that the passages referring to Aikaterine are small sections of the texts.⁶¹² However, it will be shown below that they are all important for the objectives of the letters. Apart from Π 140, which is only attested in manuscript P, these letters all appear within the cluster of letters in L identified by Papaioannou. The references provide snapshots of an empress in action in mid-eleventh century Byzantium. This is the first time the passages depicting Aikaterine have been analysed in detail in modern scholarship.

Below it will be argued that Aikaterine performed a role of leadership in Constantinople whilst Isaac was absent at the head of the Byzantine army. It will be argued that her physical performances in this period, and depictions of these performances in encomia showed her to have a leading role in the conducting of the military campaign and moreover complemented other depictions of imperial partnership with the emperor in the built environment and encomiastic texts. Additionally, there will be a discussion of comparable performances delivered by Aikaterine's successor, Eudokia Makrembolitissa. Continuities between Aikaterine's role and those of her predecessors, Zoe and Theodora will also be highlighted.

A recurring theme in letters Π 40, 138 and 140 is Psellos' *parrhesia* with Aikaterine. As already discussed in this chapter, Psellos' depiction of his relationship is unlikely to be accurate. To reiterate, the main reason to doubt Psellos' portrayal is that in Π 1, he characterises any reply from Aikaterine as a favour. Moreover, a recurring objective evident in Π 1 and the other letters Psellos wrote during Isaac's reign is to gain access to the inner circle of imperial power, implying that he was an outsider when he composed the texts. It seems therefore that in these letters Psellos is very likely presenting

⁶¹¹ For an overview of these events see above, 48.

⁶¹² Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 234 (Π 138); 343-344 (Π 140); 369-370 (Π 40); 389-390 (Π 139).

as personal and informal occasions when he had in fact interacted with Aikaterine when she was performing a public role. This is now further investigated.

Letter Π 138 was written at an earlier stage in the 1059 campaign, before Isaac's engagement with the Pecheneg leader Selte. It is a long letter, and the main purpose appears to be to establish greater *parrhesia* with the emperor. This is demonstrated by the opening lines where in a modesty *topos* Psellos, who states that he has been invited to write to the emperor, asserts that he has long yearned to write to him, but was held back by fear and reverence (ll. 1-20).⁶¹³ The text includes a general statement about Psellos' relationship with Aikaterine. Using encomiastic language Psellos writes that the people in Constantinople long to see Isaac again in the capital (ll. 113-117) and then describes his own need to see Isaac (ll. 118-119). The letter then includes a description of Aikaterine (ll. 120-124):

And if my lady and empress did not comfort and
revive me, looking benevolently, and conversing gently, and not
at all deeming me unworthy, but welcoming me with sympathy, and deeming me worthy of
every grace, I would no longer be amongst the living, deprived of such
a lord and emperor.

Καὶ εἰ μὴ με ἡ ἐμὴ δεσπότης καὶ βασιλὶς παρεμυθεῖτο καὶ
ἀνεκτᾶτο, ὁρῶσά τε εὐμενῶς, καὶ ὁμιλοῦσα προσηνῶς, καὶ μὴ
ἀπαξιοῦσα ἐν μηδενί, ἀλλὰ συμπαθῶς προσιεμένη, καὶ πάσης
ἀξιοῦσα χάριτος, οὐκ ἂν ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν ἦν, τοιοῦτου δεσπότης καὶ
βασιλέως ἐστερημένος.

In Π 138, no further detail is provided on the nature of Psellos' interactions with Aikaterine. However, it is noteworthy that lines leading into the passage describe how people in Constantinople are missing Isaac and that Psellos includes himself amongst these people. Psellos' depicts Aikaterine as a substitute for Isaac, who enables him to endure the emperor's absence. There is a possibility that Psellos is here presenting as personal what were in fact formal encounters with Aikaterine when she was acting as a visible leader and face of imperial power at the court in Constantinople in Isaac's

⁶¹³ For the identification of a modesty *topos*: Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 243.

absence. However, because the details in Π 138 it is impossible to draw further conclusions from this letter alone.

Letter Π 40 provides more concrete evidence that Psellos did indeed meet with Aikaterine during the campaign, and that moreover in his letters he employed a strategy of depicting these interactions with Aikaterine as highly personal. In line 38 of this letter Psellos writes that the letter recipient Theodoros Dokeianos (who was on the campaign) had directed him to inform Dokeianos' female relatives of his father's death in the field. Psellos may have received this instruction in a letter Dokeianos sent to him, which is mentioned in lines 51-52 of Π 40. Subsequently in lines 38-45 Psellos writes that he has followed Dokeianos' instruction, beginning by informing Aikaterine:

And so having gone, as you instructed, to the holy *Despoina*, I called upon the icons of women. And she was not lacking an exhortation from me. For she was filled with *pathos*, and beginning at the same time as me, she sent forth many tears from her eyes, and neither she alone, but also the all-brilliant *Sebaste*.

Κάγὼ μὲν οὖν ὡς ἐκέλευσας πρὸς τὴν ἁγίαν ἀπεληλυθὼς δέσποιναν, τὰ εἰκότα περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐφθεγξάμην. Ἡ δὲ οὐδὲ παρακλήσεως ἐδεῖτο τῆς ἐμῆς· ὅλη γὰρ ἦν τοῦ πάθους, καὶ ἅμα τῷ ἐμὲ προκατάρξασθαι, δάκρυα τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀφῆκε πολλά, οὐχ αὐτὴ μόνη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πανυπέρολαμπρος σεβαστή·

In Π 40, Psellos depicts himself as a messenger and go-between for Dokeianos and Aikaterine and other female members of the imperial family, who he calls 'the icons of women' (τὰ εἰκότα περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν). Psellos' statement that he acted following the instruction of Dokeianos is likely accurate. This is because Dokeianos is the recipient of the letter and it is improbable that Psellos provided falsified information about an instruction which the recipient himself had given. It is therefore highly likely that Psellos did meet Aikaterine to communicate the news of the death of Dokeianos' father. Psellos frames his role as a messenger as being founded upon intimacy with Aikaterine and other members of the imperial family. Attention is drawn to the close relationship between Psellos and Aikaterine through the specific depiction of the tears which they shed together for Dokeianos' father, along with an unnamed *Sebaste*. This person could well be Aikaterine's daughter, Maria, although Maria is nowhere else attested with this title.

However, Psellos' depiction of the intimacy which he shares with Aikaterine, and perhaps also Maria, contrasts with other statements in the letter concerning Psellos' relationship with Isaac. In lines 49-57, Psellos expresses his pleasure to have read in a previous letter written by Dokeianos that Isaac has a high opinion of him. However he then adds that he has repeatedly sent his man to Isaac with

gifts from Constantinople but feels uncertain about whether they are being well-received by the emperor.⁶¹⁴ On the one hand the evidence that Psellos corresponded regularly with Dokeianos suggests that he had a good relationship with the imperial family. However on the other hand his uncertainty about his relationship with Isaac suggests he is nonetheless outside of the inner circle of imperial power. We must also keep in mind the broader prosopographical evidence for Psellos' position as an outsider to the inner circle of imperial power in this period, and the evidence for Psellos' distance from Aikaterine in Π 1. Given this context, it can reasonably be suggested that the imperial family did not rely upon Psellos as a messenger to communicate information between themselves.

What is more likely is that Psellos was requested by Dokeianos to address Aikaterine in a public context, either in verse or prose, to lament the death of Dokeianos' father, and that he did not privately communicate new information to Aikaterine on behalf of another member of the imperial family. Above, we have seen that Psellos' *Poems* 18 and 19 appear to have been composed for public performance during Isaac's reign. Moreover, he had also been commissioned by Constantine IX to compose a long poem lamenting the death of the *Sebaste* Maria Skleraina (died before May 1046), which was likely performed in the church of St George Mangana in 1047.⁶¹⁵ Although outside of the inner circle of the imperial family and their servants during Isaac's reign, Psellos' *Proedros* title nonetheless meant that he was a high ranking member of the imperial court. *Proedros* is listed seventh in the hierarchy of titles in the late tenth-century *Escorial Taktikon*.⁶¹⁶ Psellos' experience and his high rank would have made him an appropriate person to deliver a public performance on an occasion arranged to lament Dokeianos' father. Once more then, the possibility is raised that Psellos is exaggerating the extent of the *parrhesia* which he shared with Aikaterine during a meeting with her, when she was in fact performing a public role during an occasion lamenting the death of a member of the imperial family.

Π 140 is a long letter praising a victory which Isaac had achieved during the 1059 campaign. This may be the military victory over Selte, but in this text, Psellos provides no specific details on the victory, nor explains how he came to learn of it. This is in keeping with other passages in this letter, where, as we have discussed, Psellos complains that he is poorly informed about the campaign and cannot therefore offer appropriate praise. Lines 105-107 describe how upon learning about a Byzantine victory, Psellos hurried to inform Aikaterine:

⁶¹⁴ Π 40 ll. 49-57.

⁶¹⁵ Short 2021, 15-16, 34 n. 93; Agapitos 2008, 563-568.

⁶¹⁶ *Escorial Taktikon*, 263, l. 10. Ed Oikonomides.

[...] and so, being without preparation,

I rode towards the empress,

and shared my joy with her.

[...] καὶ ὥς εἶχον ἀπαρασκεύως

ἐφιπασάμενος πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα τε γίνομαι, καὶ τῆς χαρμονῆς

αὐτῇ ἐκοινωνῆσα.⁶¹⁷

In Π 140 Psellos describes making an impromptu visit to the empress. He presents himself as travelling swiftly from his household to bring her news of Isaac's victory, at short notice 'being without preparation' (εἶχον ἀπαρασκεύως). This implies that Aikaterine and Psellos share a close relationship, which enables Psellos to overstep the boundaries of formality when visiting her. It is tempting here to view Psellos' story as a work of fiction because elsewhere in the letter he admits that he has very limited information on the campaign. However, the more concrete evidence for a meeting between Aikaterine and Psellos in Π 40 makes it credible that Psellos is once more referring to a meeting that took place, but is exaggerating the extent of his *parrhesia* with the empress.

Psellos' Letter Π 38 sheds further light on this point. This is a later letter addressed to the emperor Romanos IV to celebrate a victory when he was on military campaign in 1069. Jeffreys argued that the letter was composed by Psellos after he had returned from Romanos' campaign.⁶¹⁸ It is also written to establish *parrhesia* with the emperor. In lines 17-21 Psellos describes the excitement in Constantinople as news of Romanos' victory spread and claims to have acclaimed Romanos' success. In lines 21-26 the letter then immediately describes how Psellos gave an account to the empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa about Romanos and his virtues, provoking her to weep with joy. In lines 26-31 Psellos describes spreading the news around the capital to the patriarch, the senate and the wider populace. In lines 66-69 Psellos thanks Romanos for communicating to Eudokia about a favour for Psellos. Psellos therefore implicitly acknowledges that he is not the only line of communication between emperor and empress.

Although several details in Π 38 are opaque, it is nonetheless possible to detect the pattern which also appears in Psellos' earlier letters referring to Aikaterine. It is evident in this text that Psellos is presenting as personal, what was in all probability a public encounter. This is suggested by Psellos'

⁶¹⁷ Π 140 ll. 105-107.

⁶¹⁸ Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 313. For the history of Romanos IV's campaigns against the Seljuk Turks, culminating in the defeat at Manzikert in 1071: Kaldellis 2017, 241-248.

acknowledgment that Eudokia had an alternative line of correspondence with the emperor, indicating she was not dependent upon Psellos for information about the campaign led by Romanos. This raises the possibility that the primary purpose of the occasion when Psellos addressed Eudokia was to celebrate Byzantine victory, rather than brief Eudokia with new information on the progress of the campaign. Secondly, this impression is reinforced by Psellos' description of the encomiastic language he used to describe Romanos' virtues. Thirdly, it is developed by the location of the passage depicting Psellos' interaction with Eudokia in the text. The passage is embedded within an account of how the emperor's victory was acclaimed more widely in the city amongst different groups within the population. It seems Psellos is presenting an account of a presentation of the 1069 campaign to the public in Constantinople, of which the occasion when Psellos addressed Eudokia was a part.

The parallels between Π 38 and the earlier letters to Aikaterine suggest that Psellos utilised the same strategy when depicting his relationship with the empress Eudokia as when depicting Aikaterine in letters composed during the 1059 campaign. This lends further weight to the supposition that Aikaterine also engaged with Psellos in a public context, and that he presented this as personal in his letters. Moreover the parallels between the letters also suggest that there were similarities between the roles performed by both Aikaterine and Eudokia during military campaigns. This is further discussed below. Firstly, to explain why Psellos foregrounds his relationship with Aikaterine in Π 40, Π 138 and Π 140 I will analyse how the references to Aikaterine contribute to Psellos' strategy to alter or sustain his relationship with the recipients.⁶¹⁹ This approach is influenced by Mullett's proposal that the relationship between writer and recipient must be treated as central to the composition and reception of Byzantine letters.⁶²⁰

It has already been demonstrated that in all of Psellos' letters written to Isaac and his family, a consistent objective can be identified: to establish regular correspondence with the emperor. Moreover, in Π 138 and 140, Psellos also appears to have aimed to become a regular encomiast for Isaac. Although Π 40 is not addressed to Isaac, this text also seems to have been written with the objective of establishing regular correspondence with the emperor in mind, because Psellos asks Dokeianos for feedback on how his gifts were received by Isaac. On the other hand, when composing this letter, Psellos also appears to have aimed to sustain a pattern of correspondence between himself and Theodoros Dokeianos which had already been established, evidenced by the directive which Dokeianos issued to Psellos. Psellos' references to Aikaterine in the third person in his letters

⁶¹⁹ Mullett 1997, 18.

⁶²⁰ See above, 86 n. 382.

can be connected to the objectives listed above. Psellos' depiction of the *parrhesia* shared between himself and Aikaterine appear to be designed to persuade his addressees, Isaac and Dokeianos, that he is someone with whom they should hold regular correspondence. This is because Psellos' depiction of his intimacy with Aikaterine develops an image that he is a natural correspondent with imperial persons.

In summary, it appears that the interactions with Aikaterine which Psellos refers to in Π 40, Π 138, Π 140 did take place. However, the texts most likely exaggerate Psellos' role during occasions which were headed by Aikaterine, when she was addressed by courtiers, including Psellos himself. These performances developed public images of the campaign, for example by celebrating its achievements and mourning the loss of notable participants, such as Dokeianos' father. The depiction of the presence of an unnamed *Sebaste* in Π 40 moreover suggests that Aikaterine's daughter Maria took part in these occasions.

A passage in Psellos' *Letter* Π 139 offers another snapshot of Aikaterine's public role alongside Maria during the 1059 campaign. This letter is written in praise of the leadership of the 1059 campaign. In lines 32-33 and in 94-95, this text is explicitly presented as an encomium, and in 94-95 Psellos also acknowledges that his work parallels that of other encomiasts at the imperial court.⁶²¹ Aspects of this text are similar to Π 140, showing Psellos as an outsider writing to establish greater *parrhesia* with the emperor. Jeffreys argued that an objective of this letter is to persuade Isaac to make Psellos a regular encomiast.⁶²² In this letter Psellos writes that he has not heard if Isaac has yet attained victory but anticipates that this is the case and goes on to praise his leadership of the army. Towards the end of the letter, between lines 86-93, vigils conducted by Aikaterine and her daughter Maria are described:

Not alone divine emperor, not alone bring you the
war to successful issue. For the empress, the great glory
and ornament of the *genos* of women, has been through this with you. I am not speaking
flattery as God is my witness but neither am I strong enough
to bring forward the whole truth. At your side, she approached the *Theometer* (Mother of
God), as chief representative, as suppliant, shedding how many tears?

⁶²¹ The text reads: Καὶ περὶ μὲν ὑμῶν λόγος πολὺς, κἀγὼ τὸ μέγα ὑμῖν ἀναγράψω ἐγκώμιον.

⁶²² Jeffreys 2010, 81, observed that in this text Psellos is poorly informed about the campaign and explicitly complains that he cannot write good encomia if he does not know what the emperor is doing: Π 140, ll. 2-4.

For how much of the night was she sleepless, together with the daughter?

So to you both the shared battle, to you both the shared trophy.

Πλὴν μὴ οἴου, θειότατε βασιλεῦ, μόνος κατορθωκέναι τὸν

πόλεμον· συνδιηγωνίσατο γάρ σοι τοῦτον καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς, τὸ μέγα

τοῦ γυναικείου γένους ἄγαλμα καὶ καλλώπισμα. Καὶ οὐ θωπεύων

λέγω ἐπὶ θεῷ μάρτυρι, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ αὐτὴν καθαρὰν τὴν ἀλήθειαν

παραδεικνῦναι δυνάμενος· αὕτη γάρ σοι τὴν θεομήτορα συνεξέ-

πεμψε, πρεσβεύουσα, ἱκετεύουσα, ποῖα οὐκ ἀφιεῖσα δάκρυα, ἥ

πόσον μέρος ἀποκαθεύδουσα τῆς νυκτός, μετὰ γε τῆς θυγατρός;

Κοινὸς οὖν ἀμφοῖν ὁ ἀγὼν, κοινὸν καὶ τὸ τρόπαιον.

Π 139 establishes an explicit link between Aikaterine and Maria's vigil and the military victory achieved by the Byzantine army led by Isaac. The text describes how Aikaterine and her daughter Maria held long vigils to intercede with the Virgin Mary, who is named the Mother of God (τὴν θεομήτορα). The phrase 'approaching the Mother of God' implies that their vigils were conducted before an icon of Mary. The vigils were conducted to bring victory to the emperor. Psellos stresses that they were a contributing factor to Isaac's victory and presents them as complementing the military leadership enacted by Isaac in the field. The empress and her daughter are thus presented as participants in a collegiate imperial effort to achieve military victory. The successes of the campaign were therefore presented as having been achieved by the emperor Isaac, the empress Aikaterine, and their daughter Maria in partnership. It is notable that the depiction of Maria's participation in the campaign parallels the evidence for her visibility alongside Aikaterine as a recipient of addresses presenting a public image of the campaign.

In the previous chapter, the visibility of letter receptions, demonstrated by Mullett, was discussed. In this context, it is very likely that as well as Isaac other participants in the 1059 campaign received the letter and heard a version of its contents. Jeffreys' proposal that the purpose of Π 139 is to persuade Isaac to give Psellos more opportunities to compose encomia is here also relevant. If this is the case, it follows that Psellos expected that Isaac and other military leaders in the campaign would approve of the contents of the letter, and that Psellos took few risks in crafting an encomium to celebrate the Byzantine military victory. This increases the likelihood that Psellos does not here falsify his account of Aikaterine and Maria's actions. Moreover, the possibility is raised that when depicting Aikaterine

and Maria's vigils as an important factor contributing to Byzantine military victory, Psellos crafted an image reflective of the contents of encomia produced by other imperial courtiers during the campaign.

Further evidence for this point is provided in ll. 94-95 (noted above). These lines are located immediately after the account of Aikaterine and Maria's vigils. Psellos acknowledges the work of other encomiasts, and adds that he will speak on similar terms to them. Shortly afterwards, in ll. 100-101, which close the letter, Psellos praises the 'fortune' (τὴν εὐτυχίαν) and 'glory' (τὴν εὐδοξίαν) of Aikaterine and Maria, alongside Isaac's nephews.⁶²³ As shown in Π 40, one of Isaac's nephews, Theodoros Dokeianos, was a leader in the 1059 campaign. According to Bryennios, another of Isaac's nephews, Manuel Komnenos, had gained military experience before his father John Komnenos' death in 1067. In the following chapter it will be shown that the Komnenos family were not in favour during Constantine X's reign (1059-1067). In this context it is most likely the military experience which Manuel gained came through his presence on the 1059 campaign led by Isaac.⁶²⁴ Thus, the most likely reason that Psellos names Aikaterine and Maria alongside Isaac's nephews at the end of *Letter* Π 139 is because each had contributed to the campaign, through prayer and headship of the army respectively. This is a fitting way to end a letter written in praise of the campaign as a whole.

Psellos' naming of Aikaterine and Maria in this section of the letter, which is acknowledged to parallel other encomia, suggests that the image of the empress and her daughter as participants in the 1059 campaign was an important aspect of the wider presentation of imperial power in other encomia in this period. Although Psellos' statement that he is paralleling other encomia is located just after the lines depicting Aikaterine and Maria's vigils, it nonetheless raises the possibility that depictions of them as colleagues in the leadership of the campaign through prayerful vigils were also publicised in other encomia. If these vigils, were not themselves highly visible, subsequent descriptions in encomia may have been the main way that they reached a wider audience. Here it is worth noting that Dennis suggested that versions of encomia delivered in the imperial court in the middle Byzantine period were disseminated in other cities in the empire, including Thessalonike.⁶²⁵ In the light of Dennis' suggestion, it is possible that encomia communicating the message that

⁶²³ The text reads: Εὖ οὖν ἴσθι, φιλανθρωπότατε βασιλεῦ, ὅτι τὴν εὐτυχίαν καὶ τὴν εὐδοξίαν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς σοῖς ἀπεκλήρωσεν ὁ θεός, ἐν πατράσιν, ἐν γυναικί, ἐν θυγατρὶ, ἐν ἀνεψιοῖς, ἐν φίλοις, ἐν ὑποχειρίοις αὐτοῖς.

⁶²⁴ Bryennios, *History*, 1.6. In 1070, Romanos IV decided to appoint Manuel General of the Eastern Armies to lead a campaign against the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor, also suggesting that Manuel had some previous experience of military campaigns: Bryennios, *History*, 1.7; Attaleiates, *History*, B 139. Manuel died in 1071 on a second campaign. See further: Varzos 1984, 61-64, who date's Manuel's birth to c1045.

⁶²⁵ Dennis 1997, 140.

Aikaterine and Maria were praying for imperial victory was communicated outside of Constantinople, and thus to a wider audience than the emperor and the imperial court.

In summary, the letters analysed above shed light on a multifaceted public role performed by Aikaterine and her daughter Maria during the 1059 military campaign against the Hungarians and Pechenegs. Π 139 shows that not only does the empress, alongside her daughter Maria appear to have performed a leadership role by heading formal occasions when a public image of the campaign was crafted, but they appear to have also made contributions to the campaign through vigils before an icon of Mary, which were publicised in court encomia.⁶²⁶ Aikaterine's performances during all these occasions, alongside Maria, meant that imperial power was presented as collective even when the emperor was absent, contributing to the multifaceted image of imperial collegiality presented through the built environment and encomia addressed to the emperor and empress.

Evidence for a regularised role performed by eleventh-century empresses during campaigns

Above it has been shown that passages in Π 38 point to continuities between the roles performed by Aikaterine and Eudokia Makrembolitissa. This will now be further discussed. There are significant differences between Aikaterine's and Eudokia's reigns. Between 1067-1071 Eudokia was an empress-regent, and her sons Michael, Constantine and Andronikos were associated with her in rule. She married Romanos IV in 1068, thereby legitimising his position as emperor. Coins and seals which depicted Eudokia alongside Romanos and her sons visualised her importance as a regent and a legitimiser of Romanos' rule.⁶²⁷ Modern studies of Eudokia's reign have tended to focus upon the years 1067-1071, and the distinct factors structuring her position as empress-regent in this period.⁶²⁸

Another of Psellos' letters, Π 37, which is written to Romanos IV, depicts Eudokia conducting vigils in Constantinople during a military campaign. The contents of this letter therefore parallel Π 139, depicting Aikaterine. Papaioannou and Michael Jeffreys agree that Π 37 was addressed to the emperor in early 1069, shortly after he had returned from the 1068 military campaign in Anatolia.⁶²⁹ It is thus earlier than Π 38. Lines 42-44 of this letter refer to Eudokia's performance of vigils to

⁶²⁶ The appearance of Aikaterine's name alongside Isaac on the city walls of Chersonesos also sheds light on a military aspect to her role, because it suggests that the inhabitants of the city considered both emperor and empress as protectors from potential attackers (fig. 2). Angelova has highlighted a similar pattern in sixth-century Byzantine fortifications and argued that this is evidence of the inclusion of sixth-century empresses in the concept of military victory: Angelova 2014, 201.

⁶²⁷ For coins struck during Romanos' reign alongside Eudokia: Grierson 1973, 785-797. For seals: Zacos & Vegler 1972, 81-84, nos. 91, 92, 93.

⁶²⁸ Vratimos 2013, 277-284; Garland 1999, 168-179; Hill 1999, 62-66; Oikonomides 1963, 101-128.

⁶²⁹ Papaioannou 2019, 83; Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 171.

support Romanos. It is unlikely that Psellos is fabricating this account because Romanos was in Constantinople with the empress when he received the letter, and so he could easily verify the accuracy of its contents. The parallels between *Letters* Π 37, Π 38 and Psellos' letters depicting Aikaterine point to a continuity between the positions of the two empresses. They raise the possibility that both Aikaterine and Eudokia performed a regularised role during Byzantine military campaigns. This role seems to have involved appearances at the head of formal occasions relating to the campaign and the conducting of publicly-known vigils for the success of the army. This possibility has not so far received attention in modern scholarship.

Significantly, there is evidence that Zoe and Theodora also performed a similar role to both Aikaterine and Eudokia, during their reign alongside Constantine IX. The clearest evidence is provided by John Mauropous' speech 186. Both Lagarde, who was the original editor of the text, and Lefort agree that this speech was delivered on 29 December 1047. Lefort moreover proposed that the text was delivered at St George Mangana as part of the triumph to celebrate the defeat of the rebel Leo Tornikios in September 1047, which is described briefly in the *Chronographia* and alluded to in the *Synopsis*.⁶³⁰ This speech presents Zoe and Theodora as having made significant contributions to the imperial victory which has been achieved. In sections 31 and 32 of Lagarde's edition of the speech there is an account of how Zoe and Theodora helped to transform Constantinople into a place of prayer by encouraging people to pray at the holy places in the city. Mauropous presents the empresses acting in tandem with the patriarch Michael Keroularios, who led a procession to pray for the deliverance of Constantinople. In section 50, in a scene which is remarkably similar to that depicting Aikaterine in Π 139, the empresses are depicted praying for the defeat of Tornikios before icons.

The *Chronographia* also twice depicts Zoe and Theodora physically appearing in spaces alongside the emperor Constantine IX on occasions designed to present an image of imperial military might, one celebrating victory, and the other during the course of a conflict. The text gives an account of Zoe and Theodora sitting either side of Constantine in the courtyard of St Saviour of Chalke as he watched a triumph celebrating the defeat of the rebel George Maniakes (1043).⁶³¹ The text also contains an account of how in 1047, when the rebel Leo Tornikios besieged the city, Constantine appeared alongside Zoe and Theodora on a balcony of the Blachernae Palace near the city walls.

⁶³⁰ Lagarde 1882, 178; Lefort 1976, 271-272, 282. *Chron.*, 6.123; *Synop.*, Th 442, alludes to prisoners from the rebellion paraded in the forum.

⁶³¹ *Chron.*, 6.87-88. The triumph is also attested in *Synop.*, Th 428 and Gregory Abû'l Faraj (Bar Hebraeus), *Chronography*, I, 200-201. Tr. Budge. The depiction of this triumph is analysed by McCormick 1997, 180-184, who dates it to March – July 1043.

Psellos adds that he himself was present on this occasion.⁶³² Psellos moreover describes the triumph in 1047 following the defeat of Tornikios as greater than those which had come before. This suggests that Zoe and Theodora were also present on this occasion, like in 1043.⁶³³

By contrast, in the middle Byzantine period before 1042 evidence for the association of empresses with imperial victory through physical performances is scarce.⁶³⁴ Michael McCormick counted thirty-two victory celebrations which took place in Constantinople between 718 and the death of Constantine IX in 1055. He pointed out that in this period there is no evidence that women participated in triumphal ceremonies, other than Zoe and Theodora.⁶³⁵ Michael IV is attested in narrative histories to have celebrated a triumph following his defeat of Peter Delyan in 1040.⁶³⁶ However Zoe is not mentioned (Theodora was at this time a nun at the Petrion monastery). Similarly, Psellos does not mention Zoe when describing Romanos III's preparations for a triumph which he would have celebrated upon return from his 1030 campaign against Aleppo, had it not gone so badly.⁶³⁷

Taken together, this evidence indicates that the appearance of Zoe and Theodora in military triumphs, and on related occasions connected to ongoing military campaigns, was a new development after 1042. The reasons for this change are not clear, and as McCormick has pointed out, an analysis is hampered by a lack of specific evidence for who had chief responsibility for the organisation of triumphs in this period.⁶³⁸ Political events during Constantine IX's reign provide a plausible explanation. Maniakes and Tornikios were both acclaimed emperor when leading rebellions against Constantine IX.⁶³⁹ By contrast, although Michael V was overthrown by a popular uprising, and there were conspiracies against Michael IV and Romanos III, none of these emperors

⁶³² *Chron.*, 6.109.

⁶³³ *Chron.*, 6.123.

⁶³⁴ In her study of the period 324-600, Angelova has drawn attention to the appearance of several empresses as partners in imperial victory in coins and inscriptions: Angelova 2014, 198-202. In this period, physical performances delivered by the empress Pulcheria, which may have associated her with the 421/22 campaign against the Sassanian Empire have also received attention: Holum 1989, 103-111. It has been shown that memories of earlier Byzantine imperial figures were preserved in the built environment and texts including the *Patria*, but a study of the connections between developments in the early period and the eleventh century is outside of the scope of this thesis.

⁶³⁵ McCormick 1986, 186, 203-204. It should be noted that the empress Eirene who ruled alone between 797-802, partook in a process on Easter 799 where she was borne on a chariot, and preceded by two generals: James 2001, 55-56.

⁶³⁶ See above, 72-73 ns. 340 & 341.

⁶³⁷ *Chron.*, 3.8.

⁶³⁸ McCormick pointed out that officials including the *Praipositos* and the *Paradunasteon* are mentioned in the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies*, but their exact roles are unclear. He argued Psellos' reference to Constantine's aptitude for staging victory celebrations indicates that he was personally involved in the organisation of these occasions. McCormick 1986, 226; Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R522 – 525.

⁶³⁹ Maniakes: *Synop.*, Th 428, Lupus Protospatharius Barenis, *Chronicon*, 6. Tr. Loud. Tornikios: *Chron.*, 6.104; Attaleiates, *History*, B 23; *Synop.*, Th 439. See also: Cheynet, 49, 51, nos. 61, 65.

faced a rebel acclaimed as emperor.⁶⁴⁰ The appearance of Zoe and Theodora on occasions connected to the imperial campaigns against the rebellions drew attention to Constantine's possession of a legitimising tie to the Macedonian dynasty, which the contenders for his throne lacked. Their appearance in the 1043 triumph, and likely also in the 1047 triumph, must have also communicated the message that God had brought about victory for the legitimate emperor over enemies who had claimed to be emperors illegitimately.

It is also possible that Zoe and Theodora's positions had become linked with images of military triumph during their joint reign between April and June 1042 and it was therefore expected that they would appear in settings relating to military campaigns during Constantine's reign. Kotsis argued that *nomismata* and *histamena* produced during the joint reign of Zoe and Theodora in 1042 and the sole reign of Theodora in 1056 presented links between the position of empress, the Virgin Mary and military triumph which were unprecedented in Byzantine iconography. The reverse of the coins shows Zoe and Theodora holding the labarum together, with the Orans Virgin depicted on the obverse. The reverses of *nomismata* and *histamena* from Theodora's sole reign depict her holding the labarum with the Virgin, with Christ depicted on the obverse. Kotsis pointed out that these coins for the first time show an empress holding the labarum, which she argued signifies military might.⁶⁴¹

The empresses' appearance in the triumph of 1043 may have set a precedent which meant that they appeared on occasions linked to other military campaigns, which as mentioned above, are not depicted in narrative histories. In the account in the *Chronographia* of the 1043 triumph Psellos also writes that Constantine was skilled in the staging of occasions designed to celebrate military victory.⁶⁴² This implies that other similar occasions in addition to the 1043 and 1047 triumphs were staged which are not mentioned in the text. There were in fact several military conflicts during Constantine IX's reign which could have been linked with a triumphal celebration. These included conflicts with the Kievan Rus, the Seljuk Turks and the emir of Dvin. Ani was also annexed through a combination of military and diplomatic efforts in 1045. It is here important to note McCormick's point that in Byzantium victory celebrations could be staged for political reasons, even if a military success was very minor.⁶⁴³ It is possible therefore that Zoe and Theodora also appeared as participants in imperial victory on other occasions not directly attested in the *Chronographia*.

It must be acknowledged that the occasions when Zoe and Theodora appeared alongside Constantine IX are not exactly the same as those involving Aikaterine and Eudokia which have been

⁶⁴⁰ Cheynet 1996, 38-49, nos. 31-60.

⁶⁴¹ Kotsis 2012, 28. For an overview of the coins: Grierson 1973, 731-732, 748-753, plates LVIII, LXII.

⁶⁴² καὶ οἷος ἐκεῖνος σκηνὰς πλάττειν εἰδώς: *Chron.*, 6.87, 402, ll. 25-26.

⁶⁴³ McCormick 1986, 188.

identified in Psellos' letters. Firstly, in the examples discussed above, Aikaterine and Eudokia performed roles without the emperor, who was away from Constantinople on campaign, whilst Zoe and Theodora appeared alongside Constantine IX. Secondly, there is no direct evidence that either Aikaterine or Eudokia were visible in a military triumph. In relation to the first point it is important to note that Constantine IX never left Constantinople to lead a military campaign, choosing instead to delegate command of the Byzantine armies. By contrast, Isaac, Constantine X and Romanos IV were all at some point absent from Constantinople at the head of a military campaign.⁶⁴⁴ Secondly, according to the *Chronographia*, Isaac was involved in a triumph after the autumn 1059 campaign but Psellos gives so few details that it is not possible reach a conclusion as to whether Aikaterine was involved or not.⁶⁴⁵ There is no clear evidence that Romanos IV, or Constantine IX, held a triumph during their reigns.⁶⁴⁶

Nonetheless, I argue that Zoe and Theodora's reign alongside Constantine IX set a precedent for empresses to be linked alongside emperors with military campaigns through physical appearances, and the celebration of their contributions to imperial victory in encomia, such as that produced by Mauropous. Within the specific circumstances of the reigns between 1057-1071, these performances developed in new ways, for example, involving the appearances of empresses in Constantinople, whilst the emperor was away from the city with the army. Nonetheless, in 1057-1059, the reign of Constantine IX alongside Zoe and Theodora was the last time that a male emperor had ruled alongside an empress. I argue that the visibility of Aikaterine in Constantinople during the 1059 campaign against the Hungarian and Pechenegs would have presented the imperial power she shared with her husband as comparable to that which was exercised by the last rulers of the Macedonian period. Therefore, Aikaterine's role in Constantinople during the campaign potentially contributed to the broader presentation of imperial power in 1057-1059 as continuous from that exercised during the Macedonian period.

Later, when performing a visible and active role in Constantinople during the campaigns of Romanos IV, Eudokia was also performing a role expected of empresses, which had developed during Zoe and Theodora's reigns. Eudokia was moreover presenting her power as comparable to and continuous from previous regimes. Psellos' letters thus point to the existence of regularised and expected roles performed by mid-eleventh century empresses during military campaigns. The similarities identified between the roles of Aikaterine and Eudokia are moreover significant because aspects of Eudokia's

⁶⁴⁴ Kaldellis 2017, 208-209.

⁶⁴⁵ *Chron.*, 7.70.

⁶⁴⁶ There is in the *Continuation* a hint that Constantine X may have celebrated a triumph after the dispersal of a Pecheneg army in 1065: *Contin.*, Ts 116.

role as empress alongside Romanos IV have been approached by Hill and Garland as distinct from the positions of the empresses who immediately preceded her. The evidence from Aikaterine's reign, between the reigns of Zoe and Theodora and that of Eudokia, suggests there were more continuities in the position of empress in the eleventh century than has been previously acknowledged.⁶⁴⁷

Shaping the role: A comparative example from Eudokia's reign

To end this chapter, I return to the point made by Verbanaz, who argued that eleventh-century Salian queens in Germany and the Holy Roman Empire were able to shape and expand the necessary roles they performed. Could mid-eleventh century empresses, including Aikaterine, similarly shape and expand the expectations surrounding their roles as empress? Despite the relative abundance of source material for Aikaterine's position as empress, direct evidence for her capacity to enact agency and her actions between August 1057 and November 1059 is limited. Evidence for her agency and enactment of competitive power at the time of Isaac's abdication, and subsequently as a former empress, is more abundant but is complicated to approach and requires a separate discussion, which is conducted in the next chapter. In this chapter I analyse Eudokia Makrembolitissa's actions to shed light on how empresses were empowered by the developments to the position of empress of which Aikaterine was a part.

Attaleiates' history includes an account of Eudokia Makrembolitissa and Romanos IV's crossing the Bosphorus in 1071 at the beginning of the campaign against the Seljuk Turks which resulted in the defeat at Manzikert. The account is also followed by Skylitzes in the *Continuation* with some slight variations.⁶⁴⁸ According to Attaleiates, Romanos began the campaign in the usual way by calling up the soldiers and then crossing the Bosphorus through the Chalcedon straits. Then he stayed at the palace of the Hieria (named Heria by Attaleiates) on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus. Attaleiates adds that Eudokia and Romanos had a disagreement shortly before the campaign and so Eudokia decided not to accompany Romanos when he departed across the Bosphorus to Chalcedon with the army, instead remaining in the Great Palace. Romanos however sent a dove to Eudokia, which had happened to land on his ship whilst he was crossing the Bosphorus. Attaleiates describes the dove as coloured more black than white and Skylitzes adds that the empress and emperor therefore

⁶⁴⁷ A fruitful further line of investigation could be the reasons for depictions of Eudokia in partnership with Constantine X on silver and copper coins for the first time since Martina in 629 (Grierson 1973, 765, 771-778) and in other visual sources including folio 6 of Codex Paris. gr. 922 (Spatharakis 1973, 102-106) and an octagonal container now held in Moscow (Grabar 1950, 18-28).

⁶⁴⁸ Attaleiates, *History*, B 142-143; *Contin.*, Ts 142, ll. 14-15.

perceived it as a bad omen. Thereafter, according to Attaleiates, Eudokia was moved by love for Romanos to travelling the next day to Chalcedon. Skylitzes on the other hand uses the Greek phrase ἄλλ' ἐκείνη περιπετῶς σχοῦσα τῆς θρύψεως to describe Eudokia's actions, which McGeer translates as 'But when the empress had had her fill of pleasure'.⁶⁴⁹ Attaleiates writes that Eudokia remained in Hieria for several days, when she gave a farewell speech to the emperor.

Attaleiates uses the noun εἰωθὸς to describe Romanos and Eudokia's actions. The word translates in English as custom or tradition. He writes that Romanos followed εἰωθὸς by beginning the campaign at Hieria. However, he adds that Eudokia broke with εἰωθὸς when she did not initially accompany Romanos across the Bosphorus to Hieria. On the other hand, when Eudokia did join Romanos a day later, thereafter staying with him and giving a farewell speech, this did follow εἰωθὸς.⁶⁵⁰

In the narrative structure of the text, Attaleiates' depiction of these events functions as a prologue to the main account of the 1071 campaign. Eudokia's initial decision to remain in the Great Palace is presented as a series of omens which were a presage that the campaign would end in defeat.⁶⁵¹

Krallis argued that this passage is designed to promote Attaleiates' own aptitude in the reading of omens and that Attaleiates moreover uses wordplay by using the name Heria rather than Hieria to criticise the Romans for abandoning ancestral virtues.⁶⁵² Therefore the account must be approached cautiously. However, in an unpublished article, the late Ruth Macrides argued that Attaleiates gives an account of a historical event which did take place.⁶⁵³ Macrides argued that Attaleiates' use of εἰωθὸς to describe Eudokia's actions is evidence of an established practice amongst empresses. She pointed out that narrative historians often pick up on deviations from a routine event and deem them worthy of mention. She went on to argue that Eudokia's absence from Hieria was such a deviation, and this is why Attaleiates included it in his history.

It is unclear who exactly was present at Hieria other than the emperor and empress but Attaleiates' account implies that other participants in the campaign were there, including in all probability the historian himself. Krallis argued that Attaleiates was present at Hieria at the start of Romanos IV's

⁶⁴⁹ Skylitzes, *Contin.*, Th 143 ll. 14-15. McGeer reads the variant περιπτῶς instead of περιπετῶς: McGeer 2019, 111 n. 136.

⁶⁵⁰ Attaleiates, *History*, B 122, 143. Skylitzes uses εἰωθὸς only once. He describes how Eudokia broke with εἰωθὸς by not initially crossing the Bosphorus.

⁶⁵¹ It is worth noting that earlier in the text, Hieria is also the setting where Romanos learns about the revolt of Robert Crispin, the story of which works as a prologue to the account of the 1069 campaign: Attaleiates, *History*, B 122.

⁶⁵² Krallis 2012, 209-211, arguing the name Heria evokes the goddess Hera and that Attaleiates' depiction of the subsequent movement of the army from Hieria to Elenopolis named after St Helen (called Eleenopolis, or 'Patheticville' by Attaleiates) draws attention to the negative impact of the Romans' change from paganism to Christianity.

⁶⁵³ Macrides shared a draft version of this article with me privately.

1069 campaign, and this further increases the probability that he depicts an event which he witnessed when at Hieria in 1071.⁶⁵⁴ Macrides' proposal is therefore plausible and I follow it in this thesis whilst maintaining caution that it is possible that specific details such as description of the black and white dove sent by Romanos to Eudokia may have been included within the narrative of the text to develop this passage as a prologue to the account of the defeat at Manzikert.⁶⁵⁵

Macrides did not however make a clear argument for where the established practice depicted by Attaleiates came from. In the context of the development of a multifaceted image of imperial partnership between emperor and empress in the eleventh century, outlined in this chapter, I suggest that the practice may have had its roots in Zoe and Theodora's reigns. It is possible that because of their importance as legitimisers of rule, Zoe and Theodora had delivered speeches to soldiers at the beginning of campaigns. For the reasons argued above, it is most likely that this practice would have developed in Constantine IX's reign, when the empresses became more closely linked with military campaigns through physical performances. On the other hand, Romanos III conducted campaigns in Asia Minor in 1030 and 1032 and so it is possible that Zoe crossed the Bosphorus and gave a speech before soldiers in this period, giving rise to the custom later followed by Eudokia Makrembolitissa. It is also possible that Aikaterine did this in 1059, and that Eudokia had previously done so during the reign of Constantine X.⁶⁵⁶ Attaleiates tells us that Romanos also went to Hieria at the start of the 1069 campaign, when Eudokia was likely also present, and when she may have also given a speech.

Eudokia's appearance alongside Romanos during the crossing of the Bosphorus and the stay at Hieria at the start of military campaigns would have presented public image of a partnership in imperial power between emperor and empress. On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that Eudokia's position in 1068-1071 was different to that of Aikaterine because she was a regent for her son Michael VII. Moreover, Romanos had become emperor through marriage to her. A public image of Eudokia's partnership with the emperor must have in part communicated that Romanos was a legitimate ruler, through his marriage to her. However, on the other hand, I argue, that images of imperial partnership between Eudokia and Romanos would have also presented power in this period as comparable to previous rulers, including Aikaterine and Isaac, and before that, Zoe, Theodora and

⁶⁵⁴ Krallis 2019, 169-170.

⁶⁵⁵ Kyle Sinclair also proposed that this passage was a depiction of a historical event, and is evidence that empresses routinely accompanied emperors at the start of campaigns: Sinclair 2014, 171 n. 107.

⁶⁵⁶ It should be noted that if Aikaterine and Eudokia gave speeches before soldiers in this period they must have done so in Europe, because Isaac and Constantine X (who left Constantinople with a small army in 1064) did not cross the Bosphorus during military campaigns. Romanos III was the last emperor before Romanos IV to do this. For Romanos III's and Constantine X's campaigns: Kaldellis 2017, 160-161, 163, 236.

the emperors who ruled alongside them. Because of the importance of the link between continuity and legitimacy in Byzantine political ideology, this facet of Eudokia's and Romanos' appearance as imperial partners would have also been important for the presentation of imperial power as legitimate.

In this context, what were the implications of Eudokia's decision not to travel with the emperor, as described by Attaleiates? Attaleiates presents Eudokia's decision to join Romanos as an emotional one. However, it is also possible that her decision to join the emperor late was a deliberate one, as implied by Skylitzes. If Eudokia and Romanos did indeed have a dispute before his 1071 campaign, and Eudokia then decided to travel separately across the Bosphorus but nonetheless give a public farewell speech to Romanos IV, this may have served as a warning to the emperor. Her actions may have served to remind him how the public image of their rule as a partnership was necessary for the presentation of the reign as legitimate. Attaleiates' association of this incident with a series of unusual events which are depicted as bad omens presaging defeat suggests that Eudokia's actions were noted by participants in the 1071 campaign, and caused a degree of unease.

The importance of public images of imperial partnership within the framework of mid-eleventh century imperial culture meant that it was necessary for both Aikaterine and Eudokia to be highly visible when presenting imperial power. The example from Attaleiates' *History* suggests that the necessity of the empress' role within this framework gave them leverage to enact power by reshaping the way they appeared in public, even in opposition to the emperor. As a necessary component of the public image of imperial power between 1057-1059, Aikaterine had access to the same resources as Eudokia. Therefore, I argue, like Eudokia, Aikaterine was also during her reign empowered by the framework of imperial culture. The necessity of Aikaterine's appearance as a partner to the emperor must have opened a range of choices to her to enact agency and power to pursue specific objectives, potentially even in opposition to Isaac.

Conclusion

This chapter utilised a methodology proposed by Tanner et. al., which recognises a dynamic connection between culture and power, and encouraged the questioning of when it was necessary for women to perform a role within monarchy. This approach has shed light on three areas of imperial culture where the emperor Isaac and the empress Aikaterine were presented as partners in the exercising of imperial power. These are the built environment in Constantinople, encomia delivered at the imperial court, and Aikaterine's multifaceted physical appearances in

Constantinople during a military campaign, which were also depicted in *encomia*. It has been shown that the presentation of imperial power as shared by emperor and empress was not a new phenomenon in mid-eleventh century Byzantium. However, the consistency with which this message was communicated through different mediums in this period is notable. It has been argued that the pervasiveness of the image of imperial partnership in imperial culture produced between 1057-1059 can be explained by pressure to present the reign as continuous from the period when Zoe and Theodora were empresses. Thus, a different explanation to that of Neville has been offered for changes in the visibility of imperial women in the mid-eleventh century. Rather than attributing Aikaterine's visibility mainly to shifts in literary culture, I argue that her visibility as a partner to Isaac was rooted in cultural and political developments which took place after 1028, some aspects of which, most notably changes in the built environment, were also connected to earlier developments in the tenth century.

To conclude, Aikaterine's contribution was necessary for the exercise of imperial rule between 1057-1059. Although direct evidence for Aikaterine's agency within the framework identified is lacking, I have drawn attention to the spaces open to her through a comparative example of how her successor Eudokia used her public image as a partner to the emperor as a resource to assert herself in a dispute with Romanos IV. The parallels between Aikaterine and Eudokia are also significant because they shed light on the existence of substantial continuities between Aikaterine's reign and those of her predecessors Zoe and Theodora and her successor Eudokia. Hitherto modern scholars have tended to analyse the reigns of eleventh-century empresses in isolation. The continuities highlighted in this chapter must be recognised if we are to move forwards in our understandings of the positions of empresses in eleventh-century Byzantium.

Chapter Five

Aikaterine's Agency and Power as a Former Empress and Nun

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse Aikaterine's visibility in several written sources connected to the period between 1059 and her death in the mid-1060s. It is in this period that Aikaterine becomes most visible in narrative histories, and also when the first-person inscription in *MGS 02* bearing her name appears. Soon after Isaac's abdication in November 1059 Aikaterine was tonsured and became a nun, taking the name Xene. Her actions followed Isaac's abdication and taking of the monastic habit. Along with her daughter Maria, Aikaterine lived in the Myrelaion women's monastery.⁶⁵⁷

This chapter is composed of three interlinked sections. In the first section it will be argued that part of the reason for Aikaterine's visibility is that her identity was reshaped and appropriated to legitimise Constantine X Doukas' power. I will argue that Constantine X and his associates, including Psellos, attempted to reconfigure Aikaterine's identity to present her as a Doukas kinswoman. This section includes a challenge to an argument made by Leonora Neville, through a new reading of the depiction of Aikaterine as a speaker in *Chronographia* 7.79-83. In this section, a speech composed by Psellos for Constantine X to deliver (*OM* 5) and Bryennios' *History* are also analysed. I also build upon a suggestion of Cheynet that Aikaterine's appearance in *OM* 5 was linked with a conspiracy enacted against Constantine X.⁶⁵⁸

Aikaterine's role as a legitimiser of Constantine X's power has never before been studied in detail in modern scholarship. However, this argument is important for our understanding of the political history of this period, because, as Kaldellis has noted, much of Constantine X's reign is frustratingly opaque. Here specifically, Aikaterine's importance will be shown to have not only derived from her significance as a link between Constantine X and the old ruling class, but also the prestige which she carried in Byzantine society as a descendant of the Bulgarian imperial family.⁶⁵⁹

The second section examines how Aikaterine enacted power when she was a nun based in the Myrelaion convent in Constantinople. In his study of *MGS 02*, Diehl concluded that Aikaterine was

⁶⁵⁷ *Contin.*, Th. 109, ll. 16-18.

⁶⁵⁸ Cheynet 1996, 315 n. 43.

⁶⁵⁹ Kaldellis 2017, 238.

someone who ‘qui finit obscurément au cloître sa vie étrange et agitée’.⁶⁶⁰ By contrast, in this thesis it will be argued that when she was a nun, Aikaterine exercised competitive power to resist the new emperor’s attempt to reconfigure her identity. Here I follow the definition of competitive power offered by Stafford as the capacity to take action even ‘where our desires come up against those of others’.⁶⁶¹ The argument of this section turns upon the *Continuation* and the inscriptions in the evangeliary MGS 02, and on seal BZS.1955.1.5083. In both inscriptions Aikaterine is identified in the first person. Crucially, these sources brings us close to Aikaterine’s own voice, facilitating a sustained examination of her position directly, rather than through the mediation of male authors.

The last part of this chapter examines the factors empowering Aikaterine. This section makes use of comparative material connected to other middle Byzantine female religious communities, and also to other eleventh- and twelfth-century women who became nuns in the last period of their life, including the non-imperial elite woman Kale Pakouriane and the empresses Eudokia Makrembolitissa, Maria ‘of Alania’ and Eirene Doukaina. Evidence from these individuals’ lives is used for contextualisation, to fill in the gaps in the evidence for Aikaterine’s position by examining the likelihood that she could act, and thus to build a comprehensive picture of her power, and vice versa. The position of widows in Byzantine society has received scholarly attention.⁶⁶² However, the specific histories of the three above-mentioned former empresses as widows and nuns remains understudied.⁶⁶³ It is evident that all three exercised power after their tonsure, but, I argue, there needs to be further discussion of the factors empowering these individuals at this stage in their lives. The evidence for the actions of Aikaterine, who was tonsured in c1059 and widowed in 1061, is a good springboard to develop this discussion, because of the relatively good evidence for her actions in this period, including the direct evidence for her enactment of competitive power provided by the MGS 02.

Representations of Aikaterine by the Doukas regime

The starting point for the investigation how Aikaterine legitimised the imperial power of Constantine X is the depiction of her role in Isaac’s abdication in the first part of Psellos’ *Chronographia*. This part of the text was finished between 1059 and 1063, during Aikaterine’s lifetime. As discussed above, Treadgold proposed that Constantine X was the commissioner of this part of the *Chronographia*, but

⁶⁶⁰ Diehl 1922, 248.

⁶⁶¹ Stafford 1997, 161.

⁶⁶² See for example: Gerstel & Kalopissi-Verti 2014, 195-211; Macrides 1992, 89-98; Laiou 1981, 236-243.

⁶⁶³ More work has been done on the history of Maria of ‘Alania’ than Eirene Doukaina or Eudokia Makrembolitissa: Garland 2006, 112-115.

this is not certain.⁶⁶⁴ However, even if Constantine X was not the commissioner of the text, it seems likely that this text is reflective of the way the Doukas family wished Isaac's abdication and Constantine's succession to be portrayed. This is because, as discussed above, Psellos had a close relationship with several Doukas family members in the first years of Constantine's reign, especially Constantine's brother John Doukas. This is evident in *Letter* Π 43, which is written by Psellos to reassure John that he need not worry that Constantine's affection for him had cooled.⁶⁶⁵ Thus, in all probability Psellos anticipated that members of the Doukas family would be amongst the audience for the *Chronographia*, or at least be aware of its contents.

The possibility should also be considered that excerpts of the text were delivered orally in front of a gathered audience of imperial courtiers. The Doukas family may have considered it important to present an image legitimising and justifying their imperial power to these people, some of whom may have been appointed by Isaac or other previous emperors. It is reasonable to suppose that there were loyalists to the old regime who were unwilling to accept the new Doukas hegemony. Bearing this audience in mind, Psellos may have considered it appropriate to craft a message in his *Chronographia* justifying the imperial status of the new emperor.

There is a further reason to support this suggestion. Narrative histories depict widespread opposition to Constantine X in the first years of his reign (according to Attaleiates when Constantine's power was still growing) resulting in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow him on the feast day of St George (23rd April). Cheynet suggested that the conspirators aimed to restore Isaac Komnenos as emperor, and he therefore dated the conspiracy to 23rd April 1060, when Isaac was still alive. Polemis on the other hand dated this event to 23rd April 1061, noting that Attaleiates implies that it took place very soon after the first Sunday after Easter, which was on the eve of St George's day in 1061, but three weeks earlier in 1060. Based upon Polemis' reading of Attaleiates' *History*, I think the date of 1061 is most likely. Attaleiates, Skylitzes and Zonaras mention the involvement of the Eparch of Constantinople. Cheynet identified this person as Nikolaos Cheilas. The texts also show that the conspirators included elements of the army and the imperial fleet, several notables within the capital, and a part of the population of Constantinople.⁶⁶⁶ The accounts of this conspiracy gives concrete evidence for widespread resistance to Constantine X in the first years of his reign, which provides an explanatory context for why Psellos, as a supporter of the Doukas regime, would want to stress the legitimacy of Constantine X's power in the *Chronographia*.

⁶⁶⁴ Treadgold 2013, 290-91.

⁶⁶⁵ Jeffreys, M. 2016a, 424; Jeffreys, M. 2016b, 157-158; Π 43, ll. 68-74.

⁶⁶⁶ Attaleiates, *History*, B 71-74; *Chron.*, 7a.22; *Contin.*, Ts. 111.18-27; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.8, ll. 3-11; Cheynet 1996, 58 no. 83; Polemis 1965, 61-62.

Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine is notable because in the text she delivers an extended speech during a dramatic scene when she pleads with Isaac not to give up power. This is the longest depiction of Aikaterine speaking in any text. In her monograph *Heroes and Romans*, Neville has analysed this scene.⁶⁶⁷ The scene is depicted between sections 79 and 83 in book 7 of the *Chronographia*. Psellos begins by describing Aikaterine's illustrious lineage and acknowledging that her daughter Maria was subsequently tonsured. This also draws attention to the fact that Aikaterine too was tonsured after the events which are depicted in this part of the text. Aikaterine is then presented as leading a dirge, in which her daughter Maria takes part, before she speaks directly to the narrator of the scene, Psellos, and also to Isaac. Aikaterine first blames Psellos and an unnamed group who are described with the first-person plural as responsible for persuading Isaac to abdicate. Then she criticises Isaac directly for abandoning his family, all the while emphasising her ongoing loyalty to him. In the midst of Aikaterine's speech, Isaac issues a rebuttal and describes her with the phrase ἀλλ' αὕτη which translates as 'but this one'. As Neville has observed it is considered rude to use this form of pronoun in somebody's presence in modern Greek. It is probable that this was the case in medieval Greek too.⁶⁶⁸ At this point Psellos asserts that Isaac really did say this to Aikaterine (οὕτω γὰρ εἰρήκει) which draws attention to the rudeness of Isaac's remark.⁶⁶⁹ As Neville has further observed, this speech is depicted as disordered and hyperbolic and the association of the speech with a dirge furthermore connects it with an ancient tradition of female mourning that associated grieving women with irrationality.⁶⁷⁰

Silence is presented as ideal female behaviour in eleventh and twelfth-century Byzantine texts.⁶⁷¹ Indeed, it is a recurring topos in Byzantine literature that women should keep silent because their speech was naturally inferior and moreover potentially dangerous because it evoked sense-orientated emotions.⁶⁷² Laiou furthermore argued that this textual evidence sheds light on Byzantine social practice, for example aristocratic women's avoidance of the marketplace, which was associated with vocality.⁶⁷³ Thus, in all probability, Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine's speech would

⁶⁶⁷ Neville 2012 146-150.

⁶⁶⁸ *Chron.*, 7.82, 684, l. 27. It can also be considered impolite to use the feminine third person singular pronoun with inadequate reference in the English language, and one response to a person who does this is to ask them 'who's she – the cat's mother?' See: 'she, pron.1, n., and adj.'. *OED Online*. December 2021. Oxford University Press <<https://www-oed-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/Entry/177685>> (Accessed 20/02/2022).

⁶⁶⁹ *Chron.*, 7.82, 684, l. 27; Neville 2012, 146-7.

⁶⁷⁰ Neville 2012, 146. See further: Alexiou 2002.

⁶⁷¹ This is seen for example in Anna Komnene's depiction of her mother Eirene Doukaina: *Alexiad*, 3.3; Neville 2016, 17.

⁶⁷² Papaioannou 2013, 215-16, who highlighted how in a speech which Psellos prepared for empress Theodora to deliver, it is stressed that as a woman Theodora should normally not speak in public in her own voice, and it is only because of her imperial status and her studied manners, through which she has gained masculine qualities, that she can deliver a speech.

⁶⁷³ Laiou 2001, 263-67.

have been striking to his audience and drawn their attention to these passages as a critical stage in the development of the narrative of the text.

When assessing the significance of this speech, it is important to begin by acknowledging that it is not the only time that a woman speaks in the *Chronographia*. The empress Zoe also speaks during a dirge when she is exiled from Constantinople by Michael IV.⁶⁷⁴ Moreover, in the second part of the *Chronographia* Eudokia Makrembolitissa speaks to Psellos directly at length, to announce her decision to marry Romanos Diogenes.⁶⁷⁵ In her analysis of the depiction of Theodora's speech in Procopius' *Wars*, Leslie Brubaker has argued that the representation of a woman speaking directly in Byzantine texts indicates the gravity of an occasion, when a situation was so bad that the natural order was reversed and women spoke instead of men.⁶⁷⁶ It is likely that one of the literary objectives of Aikaterine's speech is to communicate the gravity of the events surrounding Isaac's abdication to Psellos' audience, and here it works in the same way as the others in the text spoken by women.

Neville has proposed a second literary objective for the speech. Approaching the text from a gendered perspective, she argued that the inclusion of the speech allows Psellos to depict Isaac as a strong man despite voluntarily surrendering imperial power, because he is able to reject the pleas of his wife. This, Neville argued, allows Psellos to present both the old regime and the new Doukas regime, which he both served, in a positive light.⁶⁷⁷ She has recently argued that the speech cannot be used to assess Aikaterine as a historical individual, or to analyse her role as wife of Isaac.⁶⁷⁸

One problem with Neville's argument is that Psellos was excluded from Isaac's inner circle.⁶⁷⁹ On the other hand, during the first years of Constantine X's reign Psellos appears to have had access to the emperor and to have held influence, or in other words *parrhesia* with him.⁶⁸⁰ This suggests he would have been more motivated to depict Constantine positively than Isaac. Now, a different hypothesis to that offered by Neville will be proposed, which offers a new way of looking at the significance of the speech in the text. The foregrounding of Aikaterine as a speaker in the scene of Isaac's abdication and selection of Constantine as his successor seems to draw attention to the dissolution of her marriage tie with Isaac when she was tonsured. I will now argue that the speech furthermore foregrounds Aikaterine's subsequent establishment of a relationship with Constantine Doukas,

⁶⁷⁴ *Chron.*, 5.22.

⁶⁷⁵ *Chron.*, 7b.6-8.

⁶⁷⁶ Brubaker 2004, 430; Procopius, *Wars*, 1.24.

⁶⁷⁷ Neville 2012, 150.

⁶⁷⁸ Neville 2019, 18.

⁶⁷⁹ See above, 87-88.

⁶⁸⁰ For a definition of *parrhesia* see above, 89.

which is moreover described with language that implies a familial tie.⁶⁸¹ It is also notable that this passage in the *Chronographia* assigns Aikaterine an agentic role in the choice of Constantine as Isaac's successor. The implications of this will now be considered in further detail.

In her analysis of the *Chronographia*, Neville does not mention the last part of Aikaterine's speech. This passage reads as follows:

Yet she failed to convince him with these arguments, and when she had given up all hope of winning him over to her own point of view, she went on, "At least, then, nominate as emperor the one who serves you with greatest loyalty and devotion. As long as you live, he will treat you with due honour, and he will be just like a son to me." At these words the emperor gained fresh strength. The Duke Constantine was immediately sent for and joined us.

Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡ βασιλὶς· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔπειθε λέγουσα. ἐπεὶ δὲ ταύτης ἀπεγνώκει τῆς συμβουλῆς, «ἀλλ' ἡμῖν γε» φησὶ «διάδοχον τῆς βασιλείας τὸν εὐνοϊκώτατόν σοι καὶ εὐμενέστατον ποιήσον, ὅπως ἂν καὶ σοὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα συντηρήσειε ζήσαντι· κάμοί γε ὅποσα παῖς χρηματίσειε.» ἀνερρώσθη γοῦν ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ βασιλεὺς· καὶ ὁ Δοῦξ Κωνσταντῖνος, εὐθύς ἐκείνῳ μετὰπεμπτος γίνεται [...].⁶⁸²

It is significant here that Aikaterine's speech is presented at the decisive factor leading to Isaac's decision to appoint Constantine as successor. Moreover, her statement that she will treat Isaac's successor as a son, is also significant. At this point in the text, there is a digression which describes Constantine's lineage and the qualities which made it appropriate for him to be emperor.⁶⁸³ Then, when Psellos returns the audience to the narrative of Isaac's abdication in sections 89-90, a ceremonial occasion is depicted when Isaac relinquishes the throne to Constantine and gives him 'authority' (τὴν ἡγεμονίαν) over Aikaterine and their daughter Maria.⁶⁸⁴ In this passage Isaac speaks, and asserts that his family members encouraged him to abdicate and bequeath imperial power to Constantine Doukas. Thus, the message that it was Isaac's family, led by Aikaterine, who brought about Constantine's succession, is reinforced. This is the first point to be made about Aikaterine's visibility in the *Chronographia*. Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine's speech, in which she enacts agency to influence Isaac's choice of successor, tells a story that Aikaterine realised he was no longer capable of protecting her or their family because of his desire to become a monk. Therefore, she

⁶⁸¹ Talbot 1990, 119.

⁶⁸² *Chron.*, 7.83, 686, ll. 20-26. Trans. Sewter, 326.

⁶⁸³ *Chron.*, 7.84-89.

⁶⁸⁴ *Chron.*, 7.89, 694, l. 25.

requested that Constantine succeed Isaac, because he was the best man for the job. Psellos' decision to depict Aikaterine speaking at length shows the telling of this story was a priority for him when he composed the text.

These passages in the *Chronographia* also work at another level to make a stark comment about Aikaterine's identity after Isaac's abdication in 1059. To explain this point, I return to the beginning of the abdication scene in the text. Here, Psellos introduces Aikaterine by referring to her daughter Maria's tonsure. As we have noted, his audience must have been aware that Aikaterine was also tonsured soon after Isaac's abdication. The reference to Maria's tonsure would therefore have alerted the audience that this part of the text depicts Aikaterine's involvement in events which led to her becoming a nun. This passage is thus framed as a moment of transition for Aikaterine, part of the process leading to her new identity as the nun, Xene. This theme is foregrounded in her speech criticising Isaac, especially where she predicts that she will be 'condemned to a widowhood full of sorrow' (ἐμοὶ δὲ δυσφορωτάτην ἐγκαταλιμπάνεις χηρείαν) and Isaac's rude rebuttal, stressed by Psellos' reminder that Isaac really did address Aikaterine in this way.⁶⁸⁵ The speech and the rebuttal draw the attention of the audience of the *Chronographia* towards the abdication as an event when Aikaterine and Isaac's marriage tie was ruptured, with both individuals subsequently entering different monastic communities.

At the end of her speech Aikaterine shifts her allegiance to Constantine Doukas and uses language normally associated with the family: 'he will be just like a son to me' (κάμοι γέ ὅποσα παῖς χρηματίσειε), to imply that they have a new relationship which will be a maternal one. After the digression in the text concerning Constantine's personal qualities, Psellos makes explicit that Aikaterine's new relationship with Constantine fills the void left by the dissolution of her marriage tie with Isaac. This occurs when Psellos depicts Isaac delivering a speech whereby he gives authority over Aikaterine and her daughter Maria to Constantine. Aikaterine was once the wife of a Komnenos, but this identity has been erased, and instead she is now linked to Constantine Doukas with language implying a family tie. In other words, the text implies that we should no longer think of Aikaterine as the wife of Isaac Komnenos, but rather the kinswoman of Constantine Doukas.

In the *Chronographia* there is thus evidence that Aikaterine and Isaac's entrance into monastic communities opened space for different individuals and groups to claim ties with Aikaterine. Here it is worth noting Macrides' observation that although monastic charters forbade monks from making bonds of kinship with laypeople, they frequently did so.⁶⁸⁶ Therefore, the establishment of new ties

⁶⁸⁵ *Chron.*, 7.82, 686, 10-11. Trans Sewter, 325.

⁶⁸⁶ Macrides 1987, 144.

after tonsure was familiar in Byzantine social practice. An argument which Stafford made in her biographical study of eleventh-century English queens is here relevant: 'A late Saxon king's identity was his own. A late Saxon queen's, even after consecration, remained tied to that of her husband or son'.⁶⁸⁷ This pattern is also evident in Byzantine texts and visual sources, where women are very often introduced, or visualised, in relational terms, through reference to their family tie to a male relative, especially their father before marriage, and their husband and children afterwards. This phenomenon, the binding of women to familial categories in Byzantine texts and images, especially the categories of wife and mother, has been observed by several scholars, including Brubaker and Catia Galatariotou.⁶⁸⁸ In fact, as Patlagean points out, women are almost never identified by their first name in Byzantine texts from the tenth and eleventh centuries, but rather their relational status to men, unless they are related to an emperor.⁶⁸⁹ Recently, Neville has argued that when composing the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene employed sophisticated literary strategies to perform idealised roles as daughter and wife, whilst simultaneously asserting her authority as a historian.⁶⁹⁰ The evidence that Komnene wrote in this way points to social practices in Byzantium: it indicates that people identified and judged women as individuals according to their performance of normative familial roles.

The constitution of women's identities is connected to Byzantine conceptions of the centrality of the reproductive role for females, which was in turn based upon understandings of human biology derived from readings of Hippocrates, Aristotle and especially Galen. The latter explained that nature ordained that half of human embryos should become women for the purpose of procreation.⁶⁹¹ This suggests that a further point made by Stafford concerning the medieval west is also relevant in Byzantium: the identities and related roles available to women were dominated by the stages of life-cycle to a greater extent for than men, for whom there was a wider range of options available at each stage in the life-cycle.⁶⁹² The telescoping of women's identities around the roles of daughter, wife and mother were furthermore connected to the high ideological status given to monogamous marriage by the Church and in Christian writings, and the fact that girls were typically married at a very young age, sometimes even earlier than the legal minimum age of twelve, and therefore spent their whole adult life performing the roles of wife, mother and widow.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁷ Stafford 1997, 92. Another example from scholarship on the medieval west is Skinner 1995, 139-145, who observed how women's identities were frequently linked with men in tenth-century documents from the South Italian duchies of Amalfi, Naples and Gaeta.

⁶⁸⁸ Brubaker 1997, 63; Galatariotou 1984/5, 78-83.

⁶⁸⁹ Patlagean 1987, 592.

⁶⁹⁰ Neville 2016, 43-60, 175-6.

⁶⁹¹ Neville 2019, 24.

⁶⁹² Stafford 2006a, 101-01.

⁶⁹³ James 2008, 645; Kaldellis 2006, 23-24.

A specific example of the identification of women according to their relational ties with men appears in a passage we have already discussed in the Skylitzes' *Synopsis* where Aikaterine is referred to only as the wife of Isaac, with no mention of her name, which was added as an interpolation later, likely by Michael of Diabolis.⁶⁹⁴ This example also illustrates Patlagean's point that women who are not imperial are rarely named in sources for the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁶⁹⁵ Outside of the texts, it is noticeable that in visual sources from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, imperial and non-imperial women are almost always depicted alongside their husbands and their eyes are often depicted gazing towards their spouse, for example in the portrait depiction of Maria and Nikephoros Botaneiates/Michael VII in manuscript *Coislin* 79 (fig. 16).⁶⁹⁶

Because Byzantines, like other medieval peoples, tended to telescope their identification of women through their links to male relatives, it follows that the erasure of these links could create space for a woman's identity to be refashioned and refocused around ties with other individuals. Aikaterine's son Manuel had died by 1059. At least one of her brothers, Aaron, was still alive. However, the establishment in the *Chronographia* of Aikaterine as a character with no husband or son, two of the primary relationships by which Byzantine women were identified, opens a space for her identity in the text to be rebuilt and refocused as primarily based upon on her relationship with Constantine Doukas. Psellos implies that this relationship should be understood by his audience as one akin to that of mother and son.

There are two main reasons why was it beneficial for Psellos to closely link Constantine X Doukas with Aikaterine, and to refashion her identity as one primarily based on a relationship with the emperor. The first is connected to the point made by Ahrweiler about the importance placed upon continuity in Byzantine ideology.⁶⁹⁷ Psellos' representation of Constantine's links with Aikaterine must be considered within the context of expectations that imperial power be presented as sustaining the established order. They framed Constantine's rule as one of continuation from the old ruling class. A passage in Skylitzes' *Continuation* sheds further light on this point. Skylitzes describes Isaac's choice of Constantine as his successor as follows:

⁶⁹⁴ *Synop.*, Th 492. Another example in the *Continuation* is a reference to the first wife (also Aikaterine's niece) of Romanos Diogenes before he became emperor, who is identified only by her relational ties to Diogenes and her brother Samuel Alousianos: *Contin.*, Ts 134.

⁶⁹⁵ Patlagean 1987, 592.

⁶⁹⁶ Two images of twelfth-century non-imperial women appear in Kastoria, Greece. One is a donor portrait in the Church of Sts Anargyroi, Kastoria, depicting Anna Radene alongside her husband Theodore Lemniotes and her Son John, with the Virgin and Child (fig. 17). For the provenance, see above 97 n. 435. The second shows another woman named Anna alongside her husband Nikephoros Kasnitzis in St Nicholas of Kasnitz (fig. 18). For the provenance: Hatzaki 2009, 24-26.

⁶⁹⁷ Ahrweiler 1975, 141.

[...] he appointed as emperor not his own brother John, nor his nephew Theodore Dokeianos, nor some man he could have married to his daughter, nor even some person or other related to him by blood, but the *Proedros* Constantine, whose ancestral family name was Doukas [...]

[...] βασιλέα προχειρίζεται οὐ τὸν ὁμαίμονα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννην, οὐ τὸν ἀδελφιδοῦν ἑαυτοῦ Θεόδωρον τὸν Δοκειανόν, οὐκ ἄνδρα προσζεύξας τῇ θυγατρὶ οὔτ' ἄλλον τινὰ τῶν πρὸς αἷμα ὠκειωμένων αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ τὸν πρόεδρον Κωνσταντῖνον, ὃν Δούκας τὸ πατρωνυμικὸν ἀνέκαθεν ἦν [...] ⁶⁹⁸

It is likely that Skylitzes aimed to present Constantine's succession as a smooth transition because at the time he wrote the monarchy headed by Alexios I was underpinned by marriage ties between members of the Komnenos and Doukas families.⁶⁹⁹ However, Skylitzes seems to have thought that it was necessary to acknowledge that Isaac's family members were passed over, suggesting this was perceived as unusual at the turn of the twelfth century. Leidholm argued this passage almost certainly reflects Byzantine thinking on the appropriate order of succession to an emperor.⁷⁰⁰ This suggests the passage sheds light on longer-term perceptions of the succession, therefore allowing us to link it to patterns of thought in Byzantium in 1059. From this passage, it thus appears that Constantine's succession as emperor in place of Isaac's relatives would have been perceived as unusual by contemporaries. The presentation of Aikaterine's relationship with Constantine with language and imagery that implied kinship would therefore have countered potential perceptions that Constantine's succession ahead of Isaac's relatives was improper.

A second important reason was the prestige of Aikaterine's overlapping identities as an imperial Bulgarian woman and Byzantine empress. We have already established the high regard for Aikaterine's imperial Bulgarian lineage in Byzantium. It was promoted by the Komnenos family in the first half of the eleventh century before becoming a significant aspect of imperial court culture between 1057 and 1059. This further enhanced Aikaterine's reputation as a former empress, and a member through marriage of the Komnenos family who had for two years constituted the Byzantine monarchy. Aikaterine was therefore a potent symbol of legitimacy for new emperor. This was important because it was difficult for Constantine to present his imperial power as legitimate for two reasons. Firstly, like Isaac, Constantine could not claim a direct link with the Macedonian dynasty.⁷⁰¹ Secondly, there had never before been a Doukas emperor, and the most illustrious ancestors that

⁶⁹⁸ *Continuation*, Th 108, ll. 18-21. Trans. McGeer, 49.

⁶⁹⁹ Magdalino 1993, 202-203.

⁷⁰⁰ Leidholm 2019, 147.

⁷⁰¹ See above, 113.

Psellos could associate with the family, when attempting to celebrate Constantine's lineage in the *Chronographia*, were Andronikos and Constantine. Their reputation had been tainted by Andronikos' conflict with Leo VI in 906 – 907 and Constantine's failed attempt to be acclaimed co-emperor alongside Constantine VII in 913.⁷⁰² In this context, a visible connection with Aikaterine provided Constantine X Doukas and his relatives with a valuable link to two imperial families. It therefore naturalised the association of the Doukas family with imperial power.

My reading of the *Chronographia*, raises the possibility that Aikaterine was represented widely with language that implied she was a relative of the Doukai, something not yet studied in modern scholarship. It will now be argued that Psellos' in-text depiction of Aikaterine in the *Chronographia* can be used alongside comparative sources to show how she was represented on a wider scale. A key comparative text is *OM* 5. The parallels between this oration and the *Chronographia* indicate that Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine in the latter text was a response to what he may have perceived was the message of official communications delivered by Constantine X.⁷⁰³

OM 5 is written on behalf of Constantine X and attributed to Psellos. Kaldellis categorises it as an 'emperor's accession speech'.⁷⁰⁴ This text gives another account of Isaac's abdication and Constantine's succession.⁷⁰⁵ Isaac's illness is stressed, as is the consent of his family to his abdication and the bequeathing of power to Constantine. Within the speech, an account is given of how Aikaterine immediately wanted to imitate Isaac when he was tonsured, but Constantine attempted to persuade her not to. When she entered the religious life, against Constantine's wishes, he included her in imperial acclamations in the themes, as a mark of respect. A purported transcription of the acclamation is given in the text:

'Aikaterine, Great *Basilissa* of the Romans and *Autokratorissa*, many years, and Constantine Doukas, Great *Basileus* of the Romans and *Autokrator*, many years'.

«Αἰκατερίνης μεγάλης βασιλίσσης καὶ αὐτοκρατορίσσης Ῥωμαίων πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη καὶ Κωνσταντίνου μεγάλου βασιλέως καὶ αὐτοκράτορος Ῥωμαίων τοῦ Δοῦ πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη».⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰² *Chron.*, 7.83; Polemis 1968, 16-25.

⁷⁰³ It is worth noting here that McGeer 2018, 27, and Lemerle 1977, 300-302, have both suggested that the Doukas rulers were more adept than some written sources would have us believe. Leidholm 2019, 127-28, further observed that the Doukas family must have successfully promoted the reputation of their name, noting that it became synonymous with nobility and illustrious ancestry, noting its appearance in *Digenis Akritis* and the *Timarion*.

⁷⁰⁴ Kaldellis 2015, 56 n.111.

⁷⁰⁵ The oration is published in full at: Psellos, *Oratoria Minora*, no. 2, 16-18.

⁷⁰⁶ *OM* 5, 18, ll. 54-57.

The content of this acclamation is extremely significant. The expression of hope that the emperor and empress will live many years is a conventional acclamation. From the tenth century, similar speeches are attested in the *Book of Ceremonies* and by Liutprand of Cremona.⁷⁰⁷ However, if this passage is an accurate transcription of the acclamations in the themes, then the ordering of precedence goes beyond what would be necessary to demonstrate Aikaterine and her family's consent to Constantine's accession. Tăpkova-Zaimova argued that the acclamation shows Aikaterine and Constantine were co-rulers for a time.⁷⁰⁸ However, the message concerning Aikaterine and Constantine's relationship is in all probability more nuanced, given that, as stated in *OM 5*, Aikaterine was tonsured by the time the oration was composed.

Cheyne was sceptical about the story in *OM 5* that Aikaterine was included in the acclamations as a gesture of respect from Constantine. Rather, he identified the acclamation as a way of stressing the legitimacy of Constantine X's succession from Isaac, and pointed out that it accompanied similar emphases upon the consent of the army and the Senate. However, he did not analyse the content of the acclamation further.⁷⁰⁹ I will now do so. The placement of Aikaterine first, and then Constantine second, both with equivalent imperial titles, seems to communicate several messages. Firstly, she is depicted as a political partner of Constantine, despite her tonsure and retreat to the Myrelaion convent. Secondly, her relationship with Constantine is implied to be maternal. This is demonstrable through a comparison with a passage in book five of the *Chronographia* which describes how the name of empress Zoe was placed before that of her adopted son Michael V, thereby stressing Michael's legitimacy as an emperor through his adoptive maternal relationship to the Macedonian empress.⁷¹⁰ The parallels here suggest that Aikaterine and Constantine's bond was being presented as a mother-son relationship in acclamations in the themes delivered early in Constantine's reign, paralleling Psellos' story in the *Chronographia*.⁷¹¹

Bryennios' *History* provides related evidence for the production of a space where Aikaterine was an embodied symbol of Constantine's legitimacy. In his account of Constantine's reign, Bryennios describes how the emperor made frequent visits to Isaac and his family:

⁷⁰⁷ For example: Constantine VII, *Book of Ceremonies*, R196, R198, R200-201; Liutprand of Cremona, *Embassy*, 244-245 (page numbers from Squatriti's edition).

⁷⁰⁸ Tăpkova-Zaimova 2017, 61.

⁷⁰⁹ Cheynet 2003, 315 n.43.

⁷¹⁰ *Chron.*, 5.1.

⁷¹¹ It is possible that Constantine was concerned to neutralise potential opposition in certain themes, whose populations may have been loyal to Isaac. These potentially included the Armeniakon theme, where Isaac's household at Kastamon was located, and the neighbouring themes of Paphlagonia, Boukellarion, Chaldia and Koloneia.

Doukas honoured him [Isaac] in every way. He called him both lord and emperor and privileged him with the front seat during his frequent visits to him. The emperor visited regularly and consistently. Not only did he honour Isaac, but also all of his relatives: his wife, daughter, brother and others.

[...] διὰ πάσης ἤγεν ὁ Δούκας τοῦτον τιμῆς κύριόν τε καὶ βασιλέα ἀποκαλῶν καὶ προεδρίας ἀξιῶν, ὁπηνίκα φοιτῶν ἦν πρὸς αὐτὸν· ἐφοίτα δὲ συνεχῶς. Οὐκ αὐτὸν δὲ μόνον ἤγε διὰ τιμῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τοῦτου συγγενὲς ἅπαν, γυναῖκα καὶ θυγατέρα καὶ ἀδελφὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους.⁷¹²

Bryennios' *History* was in all probability written later in the 1120s and 30s. In chapter two, it was argued that Aikaterine's lineage is distorted in the text. This passage of the text is also potentially misleading because Bryennios may be writing here to present Constantine X Doukas' reign as a precursor of the Komnenos-Doukas coalition of the twelfth century. Nonetheless, we should pay attention to the presentation in the text of Constantine's appearance in spaces with Isaac, and with his other relatives, as a significant aspect of the reign. This is achieved by the use of the word 'frequent' (φοιτῶν) followed by the phrase 'regularly and consistently' (ἐφοίτα δὲ συνεχῶς). This matches with a pattern observable in the *Chronographia* and *OM* 5: that the emperor's connections with Aikaterine were foregrounded during the first part of his reign. This parallel suggests Bryennios' account may contain a grain of historicity.

Bryennios describes Constantine's visits to Isaac separately from those which he made to Aikaterine and Maria, implying that these were different occasions. If Bryennios' account is reflective of events which did take place in the years immediately after Isaac's deposition, then it is possible that Constantine's physical appearance alongside Aikaterine and Maria, without Isaac, produced a space which foregrounded their relationship with him as the focal point of their identities. The production of this space would have reinforced the message also present in the acclamations in the themes and the literary performance of Psellos' *Chronographia*. We should acknowledge that Aikaterine and Maria's identification in Bryennios' text as Isaac's 'relatives' (συγγενὲς) potentially contradicts this hypothesis. However, in the milieu of Komnenian rule in which Bryennios wrote, the primacy of Aikaterine's ties of kinship with the Komnenos family had been restored. This would explain why Bryennios does not elaborate upon how Constantine's visits to Aikaterine foregrounded the links which this emperor claimed following Isaac's deposition.

⁷¹² Bryennios, *History*, 1.5, 85, ll. 5-9.

Thus, Psellos' representation of Aikaterine was not an isolated phenomenon. When composing the *Chronographia*, Psellos appears to have employed a sophisticated literary style to foreground a story that was already being told through other oral and spatial media, including imperial acclamations in the themes. This story refashioned the relational terms which constituted Aikaterine's identity by presenting her no longer as the wife of Isaac, but rather primarily as the close kinswoman of the new emperor, who was like a son to her. A public image was thus crafted presenting Constantine's reign on similar terms to the reigns of his predecessors, where imperial women had been highly visible. The importance of public images of imperial partnership in mid-eleventh century Byzantium was discussed in the previous chapter and Eudokia Makrembolitissa was also visible as an empress alongside Constantine.⁷¹³ The visibility of Aikaterine's ties with Constantine contributed to this wider image of the reign, but their greatest value must have been that they neutralised criticisms of Constantine's succession, and also served to naturalise the imperial power of the Doukas family by associating them both with the Komnenos family and the family of the Kometoupoloi.

The argument of the second chapter emphasised that gender should be analysed as one of a range of factors shaping individual lives, but the argument made here has underlined that within this framework gender is a crucial analytical category for biographical studies of medieval women. A gendered approach to the sources analysed above has yielded findings which shed light on how women's identities could potentially be reshaped by different parties in Byzantium, within the context of the politics of reputation outlined by Neville and Leidholm.⁷¹⁴ I will now examine how Aikaterine exercised power within this framework, during the period between c1059 and her death.

Competitive power: Aikaterine's voice and her resistance to the Doukas imperial regime

It will now be argued that Aikaterine herself told a different story about her identity by asserting that she was a member of the Komnenos family rather than a relative of Constantine. Firstly it will be argued that she enacted competitive power as defined by Stafford to resist the reshaping of her identity by the imperial regime. Thereafter the factors will be considered which empowered Aikaterine to act in the period after she was tonsured and joined the religious community at the Myrelaion convent. My analysis of Aikaterine's actions and the factors empowering her draws upon comparative source material and builds upon the work of other scholars, especially Talbot, Morris

⁷¹³ See above, 161 n. 647.

⁷¹⁴ See above, 71.

and Neville. It is intended to shed further light on how former empresses and elite women could act when they were nuns and members of coenobitic religious communities.

MGS 02 is an important source for the argument of this section. The following discussion fills a gap in scholarship on this source, because there has been little analysis of Aikaterine's visibility in the text, beyond Diehl's identification of her as the donor of the evangeliary. This text is crucial because it provides evidence for the name Aikaterine herself used. The last folio of *MGS 02* will be examined alongside Seal BZS.1955.1.5083 bearing the inscription 'Theotokos, help Xene Komnene nun' and the depiction of Aikaterine as former empress and nun in Skylitzes' *Continuation*. This text provides information on Aikaterine's residence at the Myrelaion and her burial-place.

The *Continuation* depicts Aikaterine and her daughter Maria living in the 'palace of the Myrelaion' after they had been tonsured.⁷¹⁵ Skylitzes' depiction of Aikaterine's residence in the Myrelaion is corroborated by Glykas' twelfth-century account, which describes Aikaterine's place of residence as 'the monastery' (τῆ μονῆ) of the Myrelaion.⁷¹⁶ Above, Glykas' depiction of her living alongside the community has however been argued to be inaccurate.⁷¹⁷ The Myrelaion was a women's monastery founded by Romanos I Lekapenos (r.920-944), who converted it from a pre-existing palace, which had been built recently, in the tenth century. It was attached to a church which was built by Romanos I before 922.⁷¹⁸ The church still stands today, where it functions as the Bodrum Camii mosque, in the Fatih district of Istanbul, about a kilometre west of the Hagia Sophia. The monastery, which is no longer visible, stood on top of a monumental Late Antique rotunda, which also still stands (fig. 19).

Studies and excavations have demonstrated that the site of the monastery was rectangular building occupying the eastern side of the rotunda, opening onto a substantial terraced courtyard on the western half of the site.⁷¹⁹ Although the mosque and the rotunda are now surrounded by high rise buildings, photographs taken by David Talbot-Rice during the excavations which reported in 1933 show that both the church and the monastery would have been highly visible in the middle Byzantine cityscape (fig. 20). As further discussed below, the Myrelaion was located close to the

⁷¹⁵ Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς Αἰκατερίνα καὶ ἡ ταύτης θυγάτηρ Μαρία τὴν τρίχα κειράμεναι διῆγον ἐν τοῖς παλατίοις τοῦ Μυρελαίου, πᾶσαν ἄσκησιν μοναδικὴν μετερχόμεναι: *Contin.*, Th 109, ll. 16-18.

⁷¹⁶ Glykas, *Annales*, 604, l.2.

⁷¹⁷ See above, 54-55.

⁷¹⁸ Between 922 and 961, the following people were buried at the Myrelaion (in chronological order): the empress Theodora, wife of Romanos I, their sons Christopher and Constantine and Constantine's wife Helena, Romanos I himself and his daughter the empress Helena. The emperor Maurice and two of his sons were also transferred there: Striker 1981, 6, who also points out that the church must have been built before Theodora was buried there in 922. Abrahamse argued that Romanos I made the Myrelaion a convent to coincide with Theodora's burial there: Abrahamse 1985, 39.

⁷¹⁹ Striker 1981, 15; Naumann 1966, 199-216; Rice 1933, 151-174; Wulzinger 1925, 98-108.

south-western branch of the Mese. There is evidence that in 960 Romanos II's sister Agathe, like Aikaterine and Maria, was tonsured and sent to the Myrelaion. For this reason there is consensus amongst modern scholars that site was a women's monastery.⁷²⁰ Skylitzes' use of the word 'palace' (ἐν τοῖς παλατίοις) to describe the Myrelaion appears to be an anachronistic description of the monastery.

It is reasonable to treat with scepticism the story in *OM* 5 that Aikaterine was motivated to become a nun out of a desire to imitate Isaac. Imperial women were very often tonsured and sent to monasteries for political reasons. Narrative histories explicitly present as such the entrance of the future empress Theodora into the Petrion monastery in Constantinople 1029 and the empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa entrance into Piperoudion monastery in 1072.⁷²¹ For this reason it seems likely that Aikaterine's tonsure after Constantine X became emperor was also involuntary. It is likely that main motivation for a new emperor to ensure that a former empress was tonsured is that it reduced the likelihood that she might provide legitimacy to a future claimant to the throne by marrying him.⁷²² It might also be assumed Aikaterine's joining of the Myrelaion was also beneficial to Constantine X because her movement was more restricted when she became a nun, but the findings of this chapter will demonstrate that she continued to maintain a personal network which, I argue, she utilised to enact resistance to the new emperor's rule.

This remainder of this section investigates the power which Aikaterine exercised when she was a member of the coenobitic religious community there. To begin this investigation I turn to the inscription on the last folio of the manuscript of the evangeliary *MGS* 02 and the inscription on *BZS*.1955.1.5083, which I will then compare with evidence for other communities and individuals. The inscription on the last of the 262 folios of *MGS* 02 reads:

In the month of March in the first indiction, the year 6571 [1063], this evangeliary was offered to the monastery of the Holy Trinity on Halki, by Empress Aikaterine Komnene, who took, by putting on the angelic habit, the monastic name Xene. Pray for her to the Lord in the matins and the divine liturgy.

⁷²⁰ See: Savage 2019, 76-78; Marinis 2014, 172-175; Striker 1981, 6-10; Mathews 1976, 209-219; Janin 1969, 351-354. For evidence that the Myrelaion held property before 1073, and received pious donations in 1085 and 1087: Miklosich & Müller 1890, 11, 26, 31.

⁷²¹ For Theodora: *Chron.*, 5.34-35; *Synop.*, Th 377. For Eudokia: Attaleiates, B 169; *Chron.*, 7b.30-31; *Contin.*, Th 152; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.5, l. 3.

⁷²² Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.2, refers to a story that the eunuch Leo Cydoniates checked Eudokia Makrembolitissa's ambition to marry Nikephoros Botaneiates and once more become empress with cogent advice. Komnene however refuses to elaborate on further details of the story. It is possible that according to the story Leo advised Eudokia not to marry Botaneiates because her tonsured status made this inappropriate, thus reflecting Byzantine perceptions of appropriate behavior for tonsured empresses.

Μη(νί) Μαρτ(ίω) ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ἀ ἔτ(ους) σφοά. Προσηνέχθη τὸ τοι(οῦ)τον ἐυαγγέλιον εἰς
τῇν ἁγίας Τρι(άος) μο(νήν) τῆς Χάλκης παρ ' Αἰκατερίνης Βασιλίσης τῆς Κομνηνῆς τῆς ἐν τῷ
ἀγγελικῷ σχήματι Ξένης μοναχῆς· καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπερ αὐτῆς διὰ τ(ὸν) κ(ύριο)ν ἐν τε τῇ
ἐώθινῃ ἀκολουθίᾳ καὶ τῇ θείᾳ λειτουργίᾳ.⁷²³

Diehl dated the script of the inscription to the eleventh century. It identifies Aikaterine as the donor of the evangeliary to the monastery of the Holy Trinity monastery on the Halki island in the Princes Archipelago.⁷²⁴ Although it is not certain that Aikaterine herself produced this inscription, her identification as the donor of the evangeliary means that it is likely that she at least supervised its production, and this inscription therefore brings us closest to her own voice. The evangeliary itself may have been especially produced to be donated to the monastery, but it may have already been in Aikaterine's possession, this is discussed further below.⁷²⁵ Approaching the evangeliary from a codicological perspective, it should be considered that it had a liturgical function and would have therefore been visible to participants in the liturgy at the Holy Trinity, including lay people.⁷²⁶ The text therefore offers a promising opportunity to examine how Aikaterine presented herself in public, rather than how she was presented by others. Opportunities to engage with a woman's voice directly are scarce in the source material from eleventh-century Byzantium and indeed more widely in other medieval societies.⁷²⁷ The inscription thus demands sustained analysis.

I argue that it is highly significant that in the inscription in *MGS* 02, Aikaterine is named as the 'Empress Aikaterine Komnene'. It is especially significant that her second name is given as Komnene. In the first place, this inscription would have been visible when the evangeliary was used during liturgy at the Holy Trinity. Secondly, the implication of the inscription is that her names were recited as Aikaterine Komnene and Xene in the matins and divine liturgy at the Holy Trinity and she was thus publicly linked with her affine relatives in the Komnenos family.

The public portrayal of Aikaterine as a Komnene woman in the inscription differs from depictions elsewhere where her relationship with the Doukas family is foregrounded as one of primary importance for her identity. As far as we can tell, in her own words, Aikaterine asserted that she was a member of the Komnenos family through her marriage to Isaac, and she did not present herself as a relative of Constantine, which is how she was depicted by the Doukai and their associates, such as

⁷²³ Ed. Diehl 1922, 244.

⁷²⁴ Diehl 1922, 247-248.

⁷²⁵ As a comparison, in her will Kale Pakourina (1098) bequeathed several books already in her possession to a monk and to the Vatopedi monastery: *Actes d'Iviron* vol. 2, no. 47, 187, ll. 30-31. This text is further analysed below.

⁷²⁶ See above, 125.

⁷²⁷ Stafford 1997, vii-viii.

Psellos. At this stage, we should consider evidence that it is possible that during Constantine X's reign, between 1059-68, the Komnenos family were prevented from forming marriage alliances other than with the Doukas family. According to Bryennios' history, none of the sons of Isaac's brother John Komnenos and Anna Dalassene married before John's death, which occurred in 1067. Their daughters Maria and Eudokia did marry in this period, although both of their husbands, Michael Taronites and Nikephoros Melissenos, seem to have been close to the Doukas family. In addition, John was tonsured during this period, and possibly Anna Dalassene too.⁷²⁸ This raises the possibility that the Doukas family were hostile to the Komnenoi in this period. Tension is further hinted at by Anna Komnene's and Nikephoros Bryennios' depictions of Anna Dalassene's hostility towards the Doukas family.⁷²⁹

The donation of an evangeliary in Aikaterine's name suggests that in this context she resisted attempts made during her own lifetime by the Doukai and their allies to refashion her identity, by presenting her as a kinswoman of Constantine X Doukas. In the second chapter it was pointed out that the evidence that Aikaterine used the surname of her affine relatives in personal inscriptions stands out. Elite women in the eleventh century appear to have very rarely done this, even if, as argued above, their membership of an affine family was important for the shaping of their identities.⁷³⁰ The atypicality of Aikaterine's use of the surname Komnenos further suggests that she was deliberately attempting to resist the way she was being portrayed by the Doukai. The source which brings us closest to Aikaterine's voice therefore opens a window upon her capacity to act to realise her own will in opposition to others. Here we see Aikaterine enacting what Stafford has defined as competitive power, which involves the capacity to take action even 'where our desires come up against those of others'.⁷³¹

The inscription 'Theotokos, help Xene Komnene, nun' on the reverse of seal BZS.1955.1.5083 and provides further evidence in support of this point (fig. 7). Aikaterine is the best candidate to have possessed the seal, although it must be acknowledged that it cannot be linked to her with absolute

⁷²⁸ Bryennios, *History*, 1.6. The late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *typikon* for the liturgy at the monastery of Christ Philanthropos (founded by the empress Eirene Doukaina), lists commemorations for John and Anna Dalassene. The couple are both given the epithet *monachos/e*. The commemoration also shows that John died on July 12, 1067: Kouroupou & Vannier 2005, 41-69. As Garland notes, Anna Dalassene was certainly a nun before 1081, because some of her seals prior to this date describe her as *μοναχῆ*, and so she may have been tonsured at the same time as John: Garland 1999, 187. A seal shows that Taronites was a Kouropalates, usually the highest title awarded to non-imperial family members, during Michael VII's reign: *PBW* (2016), Michael 136 <https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/107859/> (Accessed 20/02/2022). Bryennios describes how Melissenos was one of few men to remain loyal to Constantine X's son Michael VII when Nikephoros Botaneiates rebelled in 1078: Bryennios, *History*, 3.15.

⁷²⁹ Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.2; Bryennios, *History*, 3.6.

⁷³⁰ See above, 64.

⁷³¹ Stafford 1997, 161.

certainty. In the third chapter, it was discussed how seals were used to assure the integrity of folded letters, and bundles of documents and gifts, and were therefore visible during the multi-stage processes which often accompanied the reception of letters in Byzantium. The existence of seal BZS.1955.1.5083 raises the possibility that Aikaterine sent letters and bundles of texts and gifts when she was a nun.⁷³² The content of the inscription on BZS.1955.1.5083 further suggests that the appearance of Aikaterine's seal during letter receptions communicated the same message as the inscription in *MGS* 02. It seems therefore, that Aikaterine used multiple media to craft a public image stressing her membership of the Komnenos family, and therefore to exercise competitive power. This possibility is further examined below.

Secondly, as discussed in the second chapter, the juxtaposition of Xene and Komnene in the inscription on BZS.1955.1.5083 draws attention to a further aspect of the message about imperial power which Aikaterine communicated. The appearance of the name Xene, which can be translated into English as 'foreign woman', may have reminded viewers of the seal that Aikaterine was born into the Bulgarian family of the Kometopouloi, who were perceived in eleventh-century Byzantium to hold imperial status. The appearance of the name Komnenos immediately after Xene may also have foregrounded to viewers the ties between the Kometopouloi and the Komnenos family, which Aikaterine had brought about. As well as stressing Aikaterine's connections to the Komnenos family, the appearance of the name Xene Komnenos would have also drawn viewers' attention to the imperial ties which Aikaterine had brought to the Komnenoi. I suggest therefore that Aikaterine used this and other comparable seals both to assert her identity as a Komnene woman, which called into question the way the Doukai were presenting her, and to simultaneously emphasise the ties of kinship with a line of imperial rulers which she had brought to the Komnenos family, which had naturalised their own imperial power, and which the Doukas family lacked.

Skylitzes' *Continuation* sheds light on a further example of Aikaterine's enactment of competitive power. I argue that it sheds light on memories of her actions and power at the turn of the twelfth century, when the text was composed:

The passage in the *Continuation* reads as a whole:

The empress Aikaterine, who had changed her name to Xene upon becoming a nun, arranged the commemorations of the emperor and invited a few other monks and all those practising the monastic life in the Stoudios monastery. Seeing that she had not long to live, she held the annual commemorations as usual and in the customary way, but she gave

⁷³² It is worth noting that there are many examples of eleventh-century seals possessed by nuns: Laurent 1965, 290-303, nos. 1459-1477.

instructions that the gifts stipulated on these occasions be doubled. The *hegoumenos* was at a loss to understand this, and when he quietly approached her and asked the reason for the twofold increase, she said, “It is because, most honoured father, I do not know if I will be with you next year, and perhaps God has arranged my affairs differently in accordance with His will.” And so it came to pass. She died, having requested in the meantime that she be buried among the monks in the cemetery of the Stoudios monastery.

Τῆς δὲ βασιλίσσης Αἰκατερίνης, ἐν τῷ μοναχικῷ Ξένης μετονομασθείσης, ἐπετείως τελοῦσης τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως μνημόσυνα συγκαλούσης τε ἄλλους τέ τινας μοναχοὺς καὶ δὴ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τῇ τοῦ Στουδίου μονῇ ἀσκουμένους σύμπαντας, ἐπειδὴ ἔμελλε τελευτᾶν ἐτέλει μὲν συνήθως καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐτήσια, διπλᾶ δὲ πάντα τούτοις τὰ ἐκ τύπου διδόμενα παραθέσθαι προσέταξε. Τοῦ δὲ καθηγουμένου διαπορήσαντος καὶ τὸν λόγον τοῦ διπλασιασμοῦ ἡσυχῇ προσελθόντος καὶ ἀπαιτήσαντος, «ὅτι τοι» ἔφη «ὦ τιμιώτατε, οὐκ οἶδα εἰ καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἐπιὸν ἔτος ὑμῖν συνέσομαι, τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἴσως ἄλλως καὶ ὡς αὐτῷ βουλευτὸν οἰκονομήσαντος». Ὁ δὲ καὶ γέγονε· τετελευτήκει γὰρ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἀξιώσασα ταφῆναι σὺν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν τῷ κοιμητηρίῳ τῆς τοῦ Στουδίου μονῆς.⁷³³

Skylitzes’ depiction of Aikaterine focuses on how she embraced the monastic life, her organisation of annual commemorations for Isaac’s death, and her decision to double the gifts for these commemorations when she thought death was near. Skylitzes locates the commemorations at the Stoudios monastery. He then provides a description of Aikaterine’s death and burial at the Stoudios. The attestation of Aikaterine’s death in the *Continuation* is unusual for a former empress. For example, the deaths of Aikaterine’s successors Eudokia and Maria ‘of Alania’ are unattested. Both Tougher and Stafford have highlighted how biographers of medieval women must learn to turn the scarcity and brevity of sources to their advantage and Stafford has suggested that the very fact of the presence of evidence should be read as significant in itself.⁷³⁴ From this angle, Skylitzes’ depiction of Aikaterine’s death can point to her visibility as a former empress.⁷³⁵

The depiction of Aikaterine’s burial at the Stoudios is the part of Skylitzes’ account most likely to be accurate. In the previous chapter it was established that it is unlikely Skylitzes fabricated this information and his depiction of Aikaterine’s burial therefore provides a concrete link to the Stoudios. It is thus possible that the closely connected depiction of Aikaterine doubling the gifts for

⁷³³ *Contin.*, Ts 110, ll. 6-17. Trans. McGeer, 51-53.

⁷³⁴ Tougher 2020, 214; Stafford 2006a, 102.

⁷³⁵ *Contin.*, Ts 110.

Isaac's commemorations and to arrange her burial at the site could also be accurate. Glykas' statement that Isaac was buried at the Stoudios helps to explain Aikaterine's motivations to be buried at the site.⁷³⁶ If one accepts Glykas' statement, it means Aikaterine shared a burial site with her husband (although it is unclear if she was buried next to Isaac). Stafford has emphasised that in tenth-century England, naming and burial practice communicated clear messages on women and men's identities and dynastic status.⁷³⁷ Morris also argued that in middle Byzantium a burial within the site of a monastery was 'the culmination of a process of identification of an individual or his or her family with the establishment concerned'.⁷³⁸ Elsewhere, I have highlighted how Constantine IX's burial next to his lover Maria Skleraina at the Mangana seems to have sent out a message underlining that this site was a legitimising symbol for their relationship, because of their previous patronage there.⁷³⁹

Building upon her established links with the Stoudios, established through her major renovation of St John Prodromos, it is very likely that Aikaterine's burial at the Stoudios, at the same site as Isaac, not alongside the members of the Lekapenos family at the Myrelaion monastery, communicated to a wide audience the same message as the name which she used: that she was a member of the Komnenos family. This explains why she would have sought to arrange her burial there, by doubling the gifts for Isaac's commemorations. Skylitzes' account thus emerges as a credible story especially given the evidence already discussed that Aikaterine exercised competitive power to assert her membership of the Komnenoi.

The *Continuation* thus gives a credible account of Aikaterine enacting agency and achieving a specific objective, matching with other evidence for her actions in this period. In the previous chapter the possibility was discussed that Skylitzes' depiction of Aikaterine should mainly be read as a response to late eleventh-century politics but I argue for an alternative explanation for her visibility in this passage. The fact that Aikaterine is most visible in the *Continuation* in the period after Isaac's death suggests that memories of her actions focused on this period and her involvement with the commemoration ceremonies.⁷⁴⁰ The existence of these memories in turn points to the visibility and widespread knowledge of Aikaterine's involvement with commemoration ceremonies at the Stoudios in the 1060s, including her actions in connection to these occasions. The *Continuation* thus

⁷³⁶ Glykas, *Annales*, 604, ll. 3-8.

⁷³⁷ Stafford 1997, 91.

⁷³⁸ Morris 1995, 136.

⁷³⁹ Short 2021, 38-39.

⁷⁴⁰ It is worth noting that *The Patria* shows that in middle Byzantine Constantinople memories of specific individuals were often linked with specific sites in the city, through stories passed down in oral tradition, see above, 129 n. 545.

provides another snapshot of Aikaterine exercising competitive power, by crafting a public image of her identity as a member of the Komnenos family and therefore resisting the reshaping of her identity to naturalise the imperial power of Constantine X Doukas.

Here it is worth noting Talbot's short biographical study of the empress Theodora Palaiologina (b.c. 1240 – d. 4 March 1303), who also became a nun before her death, and was probably a member of the coenobitic community at Lips, which she had restored. Talbot has pointed out that Palaiologina distanced herself from her deceased husband Michael VIII through the acts of piety and charity which she carried out as a widow. She did this because she did not want to any longer be associated with Michael VIII's union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches through the Council of Lyon in 1274, which had been repudiated by his son Andronikos.⁷⁴¹ Although Palaiologina acted in the opposite way from Aikaterine, who acted to visualise the ongoing ties between herself and her husband, Talbot's case study nonetheless shows that Aikaterine was not the only former empress whose actions after her reign appear to have been in part motivated by political objectives.

There is an important recension to the points made above. Morris described the importance of 'spiritual patronage' in middle Byzantine society, emphasising that the prospect of impending death was a catalyst for Byzantines to enact endowments and donations. This is because these two actions were considered an important part of preparation for death. Morris argued that they were considered important to ensure the maximum amount of intercession (from the living and the dead) for a soul after death.⁷⁴²

Skylitzes attributes Aikaterine's decision to double the gifts made to the Stoudios during Isaac's commemoration to her awareness of her impending death. In her inscription in *MGS* 02, Aikaterine also requests intercessions from participants in liturgy at the Holy Trinity. It is important to know that according to Skylitzes, and in Aikaterine's own words, she had clear spiritual motives for her donations to the two monastic communities. However, what is also clear is that Aikaterine's actions enabled her to craft a public image of herself. We can still see this image today, in the information on her burial place provided by Skylitzes, and in the still-visible inscription *MGS* 02. In particular, it is highly likely that her place of burial was widely known in Constantinople. Aikaterine was surely aware that her actions projected her to wide audiences as a member of the Komnenos family, and made different statements about her identity to those produced by the Doukas family and their supporters. Aikaterine thus likely acted both on the one hand to prepare for her death,

⁷⁴¹ Talbot 1992, 295-303.

⁷⁴² Morris 1995, 123-128.

which she perceived was nearing, but also simultaneously to make public statements about her identity.

What were the results of Aikaterine's exercising competitive power? The narrative accounts of the unsuccessful conspiracy on St George's Day (23rd April) enacted against Constantine X can help answer this question. Cheynet proposed that conspirators were motivated to act in order to reject Constantine's presentation of himself as ruling with the consent of the army, the Senate, and Isaac's family.⁷⁴³ As discussed above, Cheynet argued for a 1060 date for the conspiracy, when Isaac was probably alive. Isaac may have still been alive in the spring of 1061, the more likely date of the conspiracy.⁷⁴⁴ However, even if he was dead, the conspirators may have aimed to make one of his relatives emperor, such as Theodoros Dokeianos or his brother John Komnenos. In this context, Cheynet's point about the rejection of the Doukas narrative of Constantine's power still stands. Aikaterine may have intended for her continued projection of her identity as a Komnenos family member, contradicting the way she was presented by the imperial regime, to encourage Byzantines to continue to question the narrative of Constantine's succession produced by the Doukai and their associates, and therefore encourage them to resist his power, even after the failed conspiracy of 1060/61. As Cheynet showed in his list of conspiracies and rebellions during Constantine's reign, this emperor did not for a second time face a major threat to his position through a conspiracy, suggesting Aikaterine did not achieve her objective.⁷⁴⁵ However, the possibility that Aikaterine attempted to encourage ongoing resistance to Constantine's rule is still important and sheds light on her power and what she did with it. Stafford has stressed that the failure to achieve an objective does not equate to powerlessness, but rather the encountering of a stronger power.⁷⁴⁶

In summary, a close reading of the inscription in MGS 02 and Skylitzes' *Continuation*, as well as seal BZS.1955.1.5083 together sheds light on statements which Aikaterine herself made about her identity to a wide audience in Constantinople in the last years of her life and in death. Aikaterine appears to have taken actions to resist the Doukai and their associates, such as Psellos, who during her own lifetime attempted to refashion her identity by presenting her as a kinswoman of Constantine X Doukas. As far as we can tell, in her own words, Aikaterine asserted that she was a member of the Komnenos family through her marriage to Isaac Komnenos, and she did not present herself as a relative of Constantine, as she is presented in the *Chronographia*.

⁷⁴³ See above, 168.

⁷⁴⁴ For the date of Isaac's death at some point between 1060 and early 1062 see above, 57 n. 280.

⁷⁴⁵ Cheynet 1996, 58-60.

⁷⁴⁶ Stafford 1997, 161.

It thus appears that Aikaterine could exercise competitive power and she was not hindered in this regard by the fact she was no longer a reigning empress, having become a nun in 1059, when her husband was also tonsured and her marriage was dissolved. One of Aikaterine's objectives may have been to encourage continuing resistance to Constantine X, and she may not have achieved this. However, the inclusion of an account of Aikaterine's actions in Skylitzes' *Continuation* suggest that they were well remembered at the turn of the twelfth century. This in turn indicates that Aikaterine's involvement with commemorations at the Stoudios were well-known amongst Byzantines in the early 1060s. This suggests that Aikaterine's enactment of competitive power was in part successful. It appears she was able to craft a visible and memorable public image of herself which asserted her membership of the Komnenos family.

Factors empowering Aikaterine after 1059

In the final part of this chapter I examine the expectations and assumptions, in other words the structural framework, which enabled Aikaterine to act, and the resources which she used to enact competitive power. This is an important discussion because, as Hill has pointed out, the precise resources of imperial women's wealth are obscure.⁷⁴⁷ This discussion builds upon comparative evidence, including that for the power of the elite woman Kale, who became a nun, and for the power of other tonsured former empresses including Maria 'of Alania' (former empress in Byzantium between 1081 and c1103). I also examine evidence from the *typika* for the religious communities at Kecharitomene (twelfth century) and Lips (late thirteenth century), and the work of previous scholars, especially Talbot, Morris and Neville. Despite the work conducted by these scholars, the positions of many imperial women within middle Byzantine monasteries remains understudied. The present examination of the roots of Aikaterine's power as a nun is designed to offer some specific points for consideration in this area. This discussion is divided into two sub-sections. The first examines the resources to which Aikaterine had access, where I build upon the work of several scholars, especially Talbot, but apply evidence from their findings to Aikaterine's history, which has not yet been done. The second sub-section discusses Aikaterine's access to space as a nun in the Myrelaion, and challenges the findings of several scholars, including Talbot and Neville.

⁷⁴⁷ Hill 1999, 177.

Aikaterine's resources

The existence of the evangeliary *MGS 02* and the account of Aikaterine's actions in the *Continuation* raise several questions which have thus not been fully answered. Firstly, was Aikaterine's decision to arrange the initial commemorations for Isaac at the Stoudios, or was it prescribed in the emperor's will? Above, it was suggested that Aikaterine enacted agency to double the gifts for the annual commemoration of Isaac's death at the Stoudios, but how certain is this and can we tell what kind of gifts were donated? Further, was the evangeliary donated to the monastery of Holy Trinity one of Aikaterine's possessions, or did she pay for it to be produced? Answers to these questions can build a more comprehensive picture of Aikaterine's agency and the factors empowering her.

To answer these questions I begin with comparative texts which shed light on the power of the elite woman Kale, who at the end of her life was in a comparable situation to Aikaterine. Kale was tonsured and took the monastic name Maria sometime between her husband's death in 1093, and the composition of her own will in 1098. The texts are firstly the will of Symbatios Pakourianos (1090), Kale's husband and secondly the will of Kale herself, both preserved in the archives of the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos.⁷⁴⁸ The third document is the *Synodikon of Iviron*. This is a list of benefactors to be commemorated at the Iviron. It includes details of their gifts and services to the monastery. It was drawn up in 1074 and revised regularly until 1180. It stipulates that annual joint prayers are to be held for Kale and Symbatios on 30th April and 1st November, and for Kale alone on 31st August.⁷⁴⁹ The following analysis builds upon the investigation of all three documents by Talbot, who studied Kale's life and how it sheds light on Byzantine women's legal rights and the position of nuns in Byzantine society. She describes Kale's will as 'one of the most precious documents for women's studies preserved on Athos'.⁷⁵⁰

Kale was an elite member of Byzantine society. According to the will of Kale's husband Symbatios Pakourianos, a Georgian-born Byzantine courtier and general, he possessed the title *Kouropalates* and therefore Kale must have been a *Kouropalatissa*.⁷⁵¹ In his will, Pakourianos donated three estates to Kale. The text shows she also gained possession of her dowry, which was worth fifty

⁷⁴⁸ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 150-156, n. 44 (Symbatios Pakourianos), 170-183, n. 47 (Kale). The Iviron monastery was founded in the late tenth century by John Tornikios and the Georgians Georgios and Euthymios. It is third in the hierarchy of monasteries on Mount Athos. In the eleventh century it covered an area of around 9,023m²: Talbot 2019, 31 n. 64; Otsuki 2001, 89 n. 1.

⁷⁴⁹ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 6, no. 60 (30th April), 7, no. 103 (31st August), 8 nos. 120 (1st November) & 121 (30th April).

⁷⁵⁰ Talbot 2014, 201-215; Talbot 2012, 1011-1014, quote at 1011; Talbot 2010, 835-836. See also: Otsuki 2001, 89-99; Morris 1995, 120-142.

⁷⁵¹ *PBW* (2016), Symbatios 101 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/108328/>> (Accessed 20/02/2022); *PBW* (2016), Kale 102 <<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/107466/>> (Accessed 20/02/2022).

pounds of gold.⁷⁵² In the opening lines of Kale's will, drawn up five years after Pakourianos' death, the author states that she has become a nun. Talbot argued that Kale was living as a nun in her residence in Constantinople, alongside several of her relatives who are also named as nuns in her will.⁷⁵³

Kale's will outlines how she carried out her husband's instructions for arranging his burial, customary commemorations on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after his death and annual commemorations thereafter at the Georgian monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos. According to the text, when following her husband's instructions, Kale donated to the community at Iviron seven pounds of gold plus additional expenses for further prayers for Pakourianos' soul and for his annual commemoration. Furthermore, she followed her husband's instructions by distributing six pounds of gold to the poor in Constantinople, and a substantial amount of grain. Later, she made additional arrangements to ensure that her husband was commemorated in perpetuity at the Iviron monastery. This involved the donation of the village of Radolibos in Macedonia, which was a substantial settlement of 122 households, and which she had inherited from Pakourianos. The monks were instructed to use some of the food from this settlement to arrange a commemorative meal for Pakourianos, called a spiritual symposium.⁷⁵⁴ Notably, Kale also arranged for similar amounts of food to be distributed for the commemoration of her own death.⁷⁵⁵ In her will Kale made further arrangements to bequeath items to her relatives and associates. The items bequeathed included books in her possession.⁷⁵⁶

Several aspects of the wills of Pakourianos and Kale help to explain aspects of Aikaterine's power after Isaac's death and before her own death and burial at the Stoudios. Firstly, in the light of the evidence from Kale's will, and given that Isaac resided as a monk in the Stoudios monastery after his death, it seems likely that, like Kale, Aikaterine arranged annual commemorations for Isaac at the Stoudios in correspondence with her husband's own wishes, rather than acting on her own initiative. Secondly, the will helps to fill the gaps in Skylitzes' account concerning the nature of the gifts which Aikaterine donated to Stoudios and sheds light on the provenance of *MGS* 02. Kale describes her donations to the Iviron in detail in her will. Her initial donations, following Pakourianos' will, were monetary. However, the later donations and bequeathments which she made involved the donation

⁷⁵² *Actes d'Iviron* II, 154, no. 44, ll. 1-16.

⁷⁵³ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 178, no. 47, ll. 1-3. Talbot 2014, 175, argued that because there is no mention of a convent in Kale's will, and because the text shows her house had a chapel and liturgical items it seems most likely she remained in her own residence as a nun.

⁷⁵⁴ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 178-179, no. 47, ll. 3-21. Talbot 2010, 1011-1013.

⁷⁵⁵ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 181, no. 47, ll. 50-52.

⁷⁵⁶ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 179-181, no. 47, ll. 21-47.

of property (*Radobilos*) and moveable goods. This suggests the gifts donated to the Stoudios by Aikaterine could have also been either monetary, moveable goods or property.

There is a further important point to be made here. Both Laiou and Talbot have demonstrated that the dowry was an important resource for Byzantine widows. Talbot highlighted several examples when widows' dowry rights were protected in law courts.⁷⁵⁷ It is evident that women could also acquire money, property or moveable goods through several other means, including inheritance from their parents, legacies from their husband, through purchase, or foreclosure.⁷⁵⁸ Talbot has also shown that on occasions when a husband and wife separated and both entered monasteries, it was possible for women to access their dowry immediately.⁷⁵⁹ Although Aikaterine had arrived as a prisoner in Constantinople, her mother Maria had held the court title *Zoste Patrikia* before she became a nun in 1029. It can be assumed that Maria therefore received *roga*, an annual payment of gold, like other holders of court titles.⁷⁶⁰ This means that Maria could have provided a dowry when Aikaterine married Isaac in c1028/1029.

The date of Maria's death is unattested, but Aikaterine may have also received an inheritance from her. She could have used her inheritance to enact purchases of moveable goods and property which may have subsequently made up a part of her resources after she became a nun in c1059. Given Talbot's findings it is possible that Aikaterine gained control of her dowry from Isaac at the time she became a nun and that it was thereafter a substantial aspect of the resources which she utilised to enact power in this period. She may have also gained access to a legacy from Isaac at this time. An alternative possibility is that Aikaterine acquired her dowry and a legacy when Isaac died between 1060 and early 1062.

⁷⁵⁷ Talbot 2012, 1002-1004.

⁷⁵⁸ Talbot 2012, 1004. See for example: Romaïos, *Peira*, vol. 4, 54, ll.18-24. Ed Zepos. This shows that at some point before 1043 the future *Sebaste* Maria Skleraina enacted a forceable takeover of the *charistikion* of the monastery of St Mamas (near Constantinople), in lieu of an outstanding debt. See further: Short 2021, 12 n. 15. For a later example: *PLP*, no. 10860 (Kanabina Martha) & Talbot 2010, 837, showing the nun Martha Kanabina purchasing in the year 1400 a garden alongside her husband.

⁷⁵⁹ Talbot highlighted the example of the tonsure of Ignatios Theologites and his wife Makrina, described in a patriarchal act of c1400. The act shows that Ignatios confirmed Makrina in her dowry when they were both tonsured in separate monastic cells: Talbot 1985, 105-106.

⁷⁶⁰ See: *Kletrologion of Philotheos*, 95, l.20 – 96, l. 6. Ed Oikonomides. This text attests that the *Zoste Patrikia*, like other holders of court titles, paid a customary gift (totaling 48 *nomismata* and 8 lbs of gold) when attending an imperial banquet. The expectation that the title holder should give a customary gift implies that she received an annual *roga*: There is no firm evidence for the exact amount of *roga* Maria would have received as *Zoste Patrikia*. However, Liutprand, *Antapodosis*, 6.10, (composed 958-962) describes *magistroi* receiving an annual sum of 24 gold *nomismata* during a distribution of *rogai*. The title *Zoste Patrikia* is ranked one place above *magistroi* in the *Kletrologion of Philotheos*, 95 ll. 14-21, and two places higher in the late tenth-century *Escorial Taktikon*, 263, ll. 6-12. Thus, holders would have likely received a greater amount than the sum named by Liutprand. See also: *ODB* 2005, 'Roga'; Hendy 1985, 187-195; Lemerle 1967, 77-100.

Judging from the will of Kale, a conceivable interpretation of Skylitzes' account is that the arrangements and resources for the initial commemorations for Isaac at the Stoudios were set out in Isaac's will, and Aikaterine on this occasion acted as an executor, but that she later enacted agency by using her own resources to double the gifts given to the Stoudios for the commemorations. The evidence from Kale's will also raises the possibility that *MGS 02* was an item which Aikaterine acquired, perhaps through purchase or inheritance before she donated it to the Holy Trinity.

Thirdly, aspects of Kale's will and the *Synodikon of Iviron* also shed light on Aikaterine's burial at the Stoudios in another way. The *Synodikon* attests that Pakourianos prepared a sumptuous tomb for both himself and Kale.⁷⁶¹ Talbot describes this arrangement as highly unusual because it would breach the rule of *abaton*, meaning 'untrodden' or 'inaccessible', that no woman should be present on Mount Athos. *Novel* 133 of Justinian, which codified this principle, stated that no member of the opposite sex should enter a men's or women's monastery, even a corpse for burial. The only exception were gravediggers in a woman's monastery. Talbot further stated that she can find no other example of a woman being buried in a monastery on Mount Athos. Indeed, as Talbot pointed out, Kale seems to have opposed the idea, because she stipulates in her will that she wants to be buried in the place where she dies.⁷⁶² Based upon the parallels between Kale's will and Skylitzes' account of Aikaterine's burial, two suggestions can be made. Firstly, Kale's will provides another example of a woman making her own decision about her burial place, potentially in opposition to the arrangements made by her husband. The parallels with Skylitzes' depiction of Aikaterine making her own request to be buried in the Stoudios, suggests that Aikaterine's agency was in this respect not unusual.

Further, Aikaterine's burial in the Stoudios, which Skylitzes adds was, 'amongst the monks there' suggests that Pakourianos' request that Kale be buried in the Iviron monastery might not have been as unusual as Talbot claims. Kale was a major patron of the Iviron monastery and is recognised alongside her husband as such in the *Synodikon of Iviron*.⁷⁶³ If, as Skylitzes implies, we understand that Aikaterine intended her doubling of the commemoration gifts for the Stoudios to secure her burial at the site, alongside Isaac, then we can assume that Aikaterine's donations to the community at Stoudios, like Kale's to Iviron, were substantial. Both Aikaterine and Kale therefore emerge as major patrons of the Stoudios and Iviron respectively. It may have therefore been a more regular

⁷⁶¹ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 8, no. 121.

⁷⁶² *Nov.* 133.3 (539); *Actes d'Iviron* II, 181, no. 47, ll. 52-53; Talbot 2014, 201-215; Talbot 2012, 1013.

⁷⁶³ *Actes d'Iviron* II, 8, no. 60. Both Kale and Symbatios are described as founders, exemplifying the flexibility of this term, see above, 129.

occurrence than Talbot thinks for women to be buried in male monasteries when they had made major contributions to the community.

The fact that Aikaterine and Kale both retained and used substantial possessions after their monastic vows is significant in itself. Morris and Talbot have both studied the ideals and reality of personal poverty amongst religious in Byzantium and argued that practice regarding possession of personal property by nuns and monks varied. I am in agreement with their arguments. There existed norms and ideals concerning the renunciation of personal property by nuns and monks, evident in *typika* for monastic foundations and depictions of spiritual instructions.⁷⁶⁴ Morris pointed out that although canon law prescribed that religious should not retain personal property after their tonsure, legalisation issued by emperors in the ninth century acknowledged the possibility that nuns and monks could retain their possessions, even in coenobitic communities.⁷⁶⁵ Talbot pointed out that this ambiguity opened space for variation in practice in the middle Byzantine period, demonstrated by the *typika*. The requirement for nuns and monks to give up their possession depended on whether an individual was affiliated to a community (Talbot argued Kale was not), the rule of the community itself and the societal status of individuals, with elite members of society often afforded substantial privileges.⁷⁶⁶

What can be added to Morris' and Talbot's points is that the specific evidence for the actions of several empresses who were tonsured in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries clearly indicates that it was routine for them to possess substantial possessions, and put them to use. There is evidence that Eudokia Makrembolitissa (1072), Maria 'of Alania' (tonsured c1090) and Eirene Doukaina (tonsured 1118) retained landed possessions and acted as patrons on a large scale in the period when they were nuns.⁷⁶⁷ It appears therefore that Aikaterine's usage of her own possessions to enact pious donations, after becoming a nun in the Myrelaion community, was unexceptional behaviour either for a former empress, or an elite non-imperial woman such as Kale, who had taken religious vows.

In summary, although Skylitzes' depiction of Aikaterine's actions is terse, comparative evidence, especially for Kale's actions after her husband's death, sheds light on gaps in Skylitzes' account. The contextualisation provided by a comparative approach aids more concrete understandings of the factors empowering Aikaterine in the period between Isaac's death between 1060 and early 1062

⁷⁶⁴ Morris 2010, 177.

⁷⁶⁵ Morris 2010, 177-178.

⁷⁶⁶ Talbot 2019, 175, 178.

⁷⁶⁷ Scholars have assumed that Eirene Doukaina lived as a nun at the Kecharitomene, which she had founded: Papaioannou 2019, 156; Jordan 2000, 649; Polemis 1968, 71. However there is no conclusive evidence for this, and it is also possible that she lived unaffiliated to a community.

and her own death in the mid-1060s. In particular, it is possible to make suggestions on the nature of Aikaterine's resources in this period and the social framework which rendered her usage of the resources acceptable. On the one hand, Aikaterine appears to have had access to substantial wealth, possibly acquired through a combination of dowry, inheritance and purchase, which should be linked to her membership of the Kometopouloi and Komnenos families. On the other hand, norms in middle Byzantine monastic culture enabled her to use these resources after she became a nun. Overall, it appears that Aikaterine's enactment of competitive power through her actions to secure her burial in the Stoudios and donate the evangeliary *MGS 02* to the Holy Trinity monastery, matched with expectations and norms for both imperial and non-imperial elite women who had been tonsured in middle Byzantine society.

The spatial dimensions of Aikaterine's power

The existence of *MGS 02* and the account in Skylitzes' *Continuation* raises two further questions, how did Aikaterine interact with the monks in Holy Trinity and the Stoudios and was she actually present at the commemorations at the Stoudios? In this section a range of comparative material is used to answer these questions and to assess the spaces to which Aikaterine had access to exercise competitive power when she was a nun at the Myrelaion. This section also contributes to ongoing discussions about the extent to which middle Byzantine nuns were cloistered. A key concept here is the principle of *abaton*, the principle that members of the opposite sex should not enter a monastery. As mentioned above, it was founded upon legislation, *Novel* 133 of Justinian, issued in the year 539. This was reiterated in canon 47 of the Council of Trullo (691/92) and canon 18 of Nicaea II in 787.⁷⁶⁸

Concerning the matter of visitors from the opposite sex to male and female monasteries, there is scholarly agreement that the connection between legal precedent and monastic practice and spatial organisation was in the middle Byzantine period complex and often ambiguous. Talbot and Nathalie Delierneux have both argued that in women's monasteries, *abaton* was not followed strictly, because there were frequent visitors whose presence was necessary for the operation of the site, including men.⁷⁶⁹ Turning to men's monasteries, as already noted in this study it was possible for that women to enter male monastic communities.⁷⁷⁰ Talbot has also encouraged approaching

⁷⁶⁸ Talbot 1998, 114 n. 6.

⁷⁶⁹ Delierneux makes use of two hagiographic texts focusing on two cloistered nuns, the tenth-century *Life* of Irene of Chrysobalanton and the fourteenth-century *Life* of Euphrosyne the Younger: Delierneux 2016, 101-117; Talbot 1998, 119-127.

⁷⁷⁰ See the evidence from the *Life of Lazaros*, above, 125 n. 525.

Byzantine monasteries as sites divided into areas with varying degrees of privacy, meaning some spaces could be open to visiting members of the opposite sex. In relation to this point she has pointed out that the major church at several monastic sites appear to have been built on the edge of sites, with a public entrance, to facilitate the visitation of female pilgrims.⁷⁷¹

A second facet of this debate concerns the extent to which middle Byzantine nuns travelled outside of their monasteries. Here there is disagreement between different scholars. Using hagiographic texts Delierneux argued that some nuns left cloistered communities more frequently than would appear from legislation.⁷⁷² However Talbot argued that even high-status middle Byzantine nuns such as abbesses still typically led very cloistered lives, and the circumstances whereby even privileged nuns could leave convents were restricted.⁷⁷³ Below I will highlight hitherto underdiscussed evidence that Aikaterine, and other middle Byzantine nuns, could access various spaces outside their monasteries more freely than Talbot acknowledges. I will however use a broader range of evidence than that used by Delierneux, including *typika*, narrative histories, letters, and physical evidence.

Skylitzes' *Continuation* depicts Aikaterine conversing with the *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios to arrange the annual commemorations for Isaac there. This person was likely named either Michael Mementoulos or Kosmas.⁷⁷⁴ The existence of MGS 02 also implies that Aikaterine had correspondence with members of the monastic community of Holy Trinity on the Halki island. Together, these two texts shed light on how Aikaterine maintained a network of personal relationships after she became a nun. It appears that her relationships with members of at least two male monastic communities contributed to her ability to exercise competitive power, as outlined above. How was Aikaterine able to maintain this network? As discussed above, the existence of seal BZS.1955.1.5083 shows that as a nun Aikaterine corresponded with individuals and groups through letters and therefore may have corresponded with the monks of the Stoudios and Holy Trinity without ever meeting them.⁷⁷⁵

On the other hand, in the *Continuation*, Skylitzes uses the participle προσελθόντος ('approaching') to depict the interactions between Aikaterine and the *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios. This participle implies a face to face meeting and suggests that Skylitzes understood these interactions to have

⁷⁷¹ Talbot 1998, 117, 124.

⁷⁷² Delierneux 2016, 101-117; notes that the two hagiographic texts mentioned above emphasise that both women did not leave their monasteries and present this as an aspect of their sanctity, which conversely hints that some nuns left cloistered communities frequently.

⁷⁷³ Talbot 2019, 66-68 (lifestyles), 80-81 (travel).

⁷⁷⁴ See above, 57 n. 281.

⁷⁷⁵ This is also a possibility for with Kale, for example. It is very unlikely she travelled to the Iviron monastery, because in the case of Mount Athos, the rule of *abaton* was applied rigorously for the whole area: Talbot 1998, 117 n. 26.

been conducted in person. Could Skylitzes' understanding be accurate? Comparative evidence from *typika* of the Kecharitomene and Lips monasteries also suggests that it was possible for Aikaterine to move outside of the Myrelaion, and sheds light on the spaces to which she potentially had access when maintaining a personal network. The Kecharitomene was founded around 1110 by Eirene Doukaina (r.1081-1118) who also produced the *typika*.⁷⁷⁶ Part four of the text in Gautier's edition (ll. 299-358) outlines a series of privileges which are to be open to any daughter of Anna Komnene or Maria Komnene (themselves Eirene Doukaina's daughters) who joined the community.⁷⁷⁷ In their analyses of the *typikon* Jordan and Catia Galatariotou argued that these women were to be privileged because they were relatives of the founder, Eirene Doukaina.⁷⁷⁸ However, in the *typika*, Anna and Maria Komnene's status as *Porphyrogennete* (born-in-purple) is stressed. I suggest this indicates that their daughters were to receive privileges not only because they were relatives of the founder Eirene Doukaina, but also because of their imperial status.

Significantly, one of the privileges to be granted to the daughters of Anna and Maria Komnene is a freedom of movement not available to other members of the community, even those with high status.⁷⁷⁹ Ll. 324-339 of the *typikon* states that the Komnene women should be allowed more freedoms to meet with family members outside of the convent, these lines contrast to ll. 729-754, which outline the much more limited circumstances whereby ordinary nuns may meet family members. I will now analyse ll.324-339 further.

In the first place, ll. 324-329 outline that a Komnene women may meet female relatives within the convent, and male relatives near the gate of the convent without restricting the frequency or reasons for these visits. This contrasts to ordinary nuns, who are limited to two visits from family members a year, unless the nun is ill (ll. 729-754). Moreover, the Komnene women will also be allowed to leave the convent in certain circumstances. These circumstances are outlined in lines 329-334:

But if one of these women is not able to abide by the regulation laid down for the rest of the nuns in this our rule concerning going out of the convent, she will be permitted by the

⁷⁷⁶ The site was adjacent to a men's monastery named Christ Philanthropos, founded by Alexios. It was located towards the north-east of Constantinople, between the Pantokrator and the Petra: Neville 2019, 89-90; Janin 1969, 188-191.

⁷⁷⁷ All subsequent line references to this text refer to Gautier's edition published at, Gautier 1985, 19-155.

⁷⁷⁸ Jordan 2000, 650; Galatariotou 1988, 279-281.

⁷⁷⁹ Further privileges listed between ll. 299-358 include stipulations that Anna Komnene and Maria Komnene's daughters are to be allowed a private cell and two servants or slaves, as well as more food than the other nuns. Other women of high status may also be allowed private accommodation and also one servant.

superior, if some unfortunate circumstance has happened to her, to leave the convent with one of the very old and devout sisters, whichever one the superior wishes.⁷⁸⁰

Εἰ δέ τις των τοιούτων οὐ δύναται τῷ περὶ τῆς ἐξελεύσεως τῆς μονῆς ορισθέντι ἐπὶ ταῖς λοιπαῖς μοναζούσαις ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἡμῶν τυπικῷ ἐμμένειν τύπῳ, παραχωρηθήσεται παρὰ τῆς καθηγουμένης, περιστατικοῦ τίνος αὕτη συμβάντος, ἐξέρχεσθαι τῆς μονῆς μετὰ μιας των γηραιότερων καὶ σεμνότερων ἀδελφῶν, ἣν ἂν ἡ καθηγουμένη βούλοιτο.

The text goes on to describe what a Komnene woman should do if she leaves the convent to visit a sick relative (ll. 334-339). Galatariotou drew attention to the ease with which a Komnene woman could leave Kecharitomene to visit relatives, within the framework set out in ll. 323-339.⁷⁸¹ However, it has not yet been pointed out in modern scholarship that the language used in ll. 329-334 appears to be deliberately vague. In the first place, it is implied that the Komnene women may forego customary restrictions on movement if they feel they cannot abide by them. In the second place περιστατικοῦ τίνος αὕτη συμβάντος is a vague phrase. This is demonstrated by differences in its translation into modern languages. It is translated by Jordan as ‘if some unfortunate circumstance has happened to her’ but is translated by Gautier simply as ‘en cas d’événement particulier’. This indicates that the circumstances whereby a Komnene woman could request permission from the superior of the community to make a journey were not strictly defined, and that this was a deliberate choice made by Doukaina when composing the *typikon*. This is in contrast to the prescriptions for ordinary nuns, who are only permitted to briefly leave to visit a parent who is on their deathbed (ll. 759-767).

The late thirteen-century *typikon* of the empress Theodora Palaiologina for the women’s monastery of Lips in Constantinople sheds further light on the points raised above. This *typikon* outlines how the foundation was intended to house fifty nuns, following Theodora’s restoration of the site in the late thirteenth century.⁷⁸² Talbot highlighted how the *typikon* provides for an extraordinarily privileged residence (exceeding the provisions for Kecharitomene) for Theodora’s descendants. One line in the *typikon* which appears in a discussion concerning whether Theodora’s descendants should eat at the common table, in fact implies that Theodora’s descendants may follow the rule of the

⁷⁸⁰ Trans. Jordan, 670.

⁷⁸¹ Galatariotou 1988, 280.

⁷⁸² Lips was originally founded as a monastery in the early tenth century. It is now the Fenari Isa Camii mosque in Istanbul: Talbot 2000, 1254-1255; Talbot 1992, 298-302.

typikon at their own discretion. In part forty of the text Theodora asserts that her prerogative to order the rule of the convent how she sees fit stems in part from her position as a *Despoina*. This line points to her imperial status. I suggest that it shows that Theodora and her descendants connections to the imperial family were an important factor justifying their privileged position within the community at Lips. The vagueness of the abovementioned phrase also parallels that in the Kecharitomene *typikon*. I suggest that the phrases in both *typika* are deliberately ambiguous, to avoid closely prescribing the circumstances whereby imperial women could act in a way outside of the normal rule.

Kecharitomene and Lips are similar to one another because they both had links to the imperial family. Both monasteries had imperial founders and it is evident from their *typika* that one of the principle aims of both foundations was to provide a potential place of residence for members of the imperial family.⁷⁸³ There are further close parallels therefore between the history of the Myrelaion and the histories of Kecharitomene and Lips. As mentioned above, the Myrelaion was founded by an emperor (Romanos I), and at least one imperial woman, Agathe, lived as a nun there. Moreover, Anna Dalassene was in possession of a *sekretion* of the Myrelaion (a unit administering lands held by the monastery) by 1087, when her son Alexios I was emperor, indicating a close connection to the imperial family.⁷⁸⁴ For this reason, although the *typikon* of the Myrelaion has been lost, it seems likely that a culture developed at this monastery which permitted imperial women more freedoms than other nuns, like in Kecharitomene and Lips. I suggest therefore that Aikaterine likely had access to similar privileges to the imperial women at Kecharitomene, regarding face to face access to contacts outside of the community. This would have enabled her to more easily maintain a network of personal relations, and engage regularly with members of other monastic communities, as she is depicted doing in the *Continuation*, and as the donation of MGS 02 implies that she did.

The evidence that imperial women were routinely privileged in monastic culture, especially in monasteries linked with the imperial family, and that these privileges allowed them greater freedom of movement than other nuns, contextualises the account of Skylitzes, suggesting that Aikaterine could plausibly have conducted a conversation with the *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios. One possibility is that Aikaterine met the *hegoumenos* in the vicinity of the Myrelaion, perhaps at the gate. Alternatively, the substantial terraced courtyard at the Myrelaion, which was a visible and open

⁷⁸³ For an examination of the motivations of founders of monasteries, with a focus upon Doukaina and Palaiologina: Galatariotou 1988, 277-284.

⁷⁸⁴ Oikonomides 1980/81, 245 n.58; Janin 1969, 352. In 1087 Dalassene issued and sealed a *pittakion* consenting to a *chrysobull* of Alexios I donating estates on the island of Leros formerly belonging to the Myrelaion to the monastery of Patmos and requesting that the donation be registered in the *sekretion* of the Myrelaion: Miklosich & Müller 1890, 32-33.

space, could have functioned as a meeting place between outsiders and members of the community.⁷⁸⁵ However, the evidence from the *typika* analysed above also indicates that Aikaterine could have regularly made journeys outside of the Myrelaion. This further raises the possibility that she travelled to the Stoudios to arrange the commemorations, where she spoke with the *hegoumenos* in the church of St John Prodromos, as well as to participate in ceremonies.

Attaleiates provides an account of Eudokia Makrembolitissa's actions as a nun which further demonstrates that Aikaterine could have plausibly visited the male monastic community of the Stoudios. Eudokia was tonsured in October 1071, after her son Michael VII became sole ruler, following the defeat of Eudokia's second husband the emperor Romanos IV at Manzikert in August of the same year. As mentioned above, according to Attaleiates, who is followed by Skylitzes and Zonaras, Eudokia entered the Piperoudion monastery on the east shore of the Bosphorus, which she had founded. Attaleiates and Skylitzes also depict her travelling to Prote island (modern-day Kinaliada) in the Princes Archipelago. The texts add that she did so to arrange and commemorate the funeral of Romanos IV, who was buried in a monastery on the island in August 1072.

As has already been discussed, Attaleiates was a participant in the military campaign led by Romanos in 1071, which resulted in the emperor's defeat. Moreover, it is likely that the location of this emperor's grave was widely known at the time that Attaleiates composed his history in c1079/80. Given these two factors, it is likely that the story about Eudokia Makrembolitissa's presence on Prote island is accurate. It is noteworthy that Attaleiates adds that Eudokia had to ask for permission from Michael VII to travel there. However, this comparative example nonetheless demonstrates that Aikaterine could also have travelled to the Stoudios to both arrange and take part in commemorations for Isaac.

At the Stoudios, Aikaterine could have met the *hegoumenos* in person in the church of St John Prodromos. In the previous chapter it was argued that the Stoudios monastery was in the tenth century a major pilgrimage destination. Evidence was highlighted from a letter of Niketas Stethatos which shows that the laity had access to the church of St John Prodromos at the site, and it was suggested that this included female pilgrims.⁷⁸⁶ A comprehensive plan of the Stoudios monastery has not been completed in modern scholarship, because only the church still stands at the site, and it is closely surrounded by residential buildings. However, the textual evidence discussed in the previous chapter suggests that the church had a public entrance, and that the building therefore functioned

⁷⁸⁵ For male staff in female monasteries: Talbot 2019, 81-83.

⁷⁸⁶ See above, 125.

as a space within the site which the monks routinely shared with outsiders to the community, potentially including women.

There is a further important point to consider here. As mentioned above, the Myrelaion was located close to the south-western branch of the Mese, which was the main thoroughfare in Constantinople. The monastery was located just west of the point where the road bifurcated into south-western and north-western branches. Striker points out that the Myrelaion would have been accessible to the Mese by side streets.⁷⁸⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, the Stoudios was also located on the south-western branch of the Mese (fig. 5). This raises the possibility that Aikaterine used the Mese to travel between the Myrelaion and the Stoudios, both to discuss the arrangement of commemorations there, and for the ceremonies themselves. A journey along the Mese between these two sites would have been highly visible and therefore contributed to the crafting of a public image which linked Aikaterine to the Stoudios monastery, and affirmed her ties with Isaac and the Komnenos family. Above it was suggested that Skylitzes' account is based on memories of Aikaterine's visibility in the city during this period. It is possible that Aikaterine's regular movement between the Myrelaion and the Stoudios, most likely along the Mese, was one factor enabling her to continue to craft a public image of herself in the period when she was a nun.

A question which has remained unanswered in this chapter is whether Aikaterine herself chose to enter the Myrelaion, or whether her location there was involuntary. As discussed above, Aikaterine became a nun in the immediate aftermath of Isaac's abdication at a time when Constantine X was still establishing his power. In this context it is possible that she was able to choose which religious community she would enter. Aikaterine may have chosen the Myrelaion because of its longstanding links with the imperial family, described above. However, the fact that the Myrelaion is close to the Mese and well connected to the Stoudios suggests that she may have deliberately chosen to enter this community because of its physical location within Constantinople, which promised to facilitate her staging of visible events within the city.⁷⁸⁸

Could Aikaterine have also travelled to the monastery of Holy Trinity on the Halki island (which incidentally is visible from the Stoudios monastery, fig. 21) to arrange and celebrate the donation of the evangeliary? Above, it has been argued that Aikaterine probably died in the mid-1060s, before the end of Constantine X's reign on 23 May 1067. Skylitzes also writes that Aikaterine acted to prepare for death, which suggests that she may have been in poor health in 1063, when the

⁷⁸⁷ Striker 1981, 7.

⁷⁸⁸ As a point of comparison: Eudokia Makrembolitissa's entrance into the Piperoudion monastery in 1072, which she had founded, also suggests she exercised choice over which monastery she entered after she was tonsured and banished from the imperial court, see above, 181 n. 721.

evangelary was donated to Holy Trinity. However, the possibility that Aikaterine travelled to the Halki island should not be ruled out. As a point of comparison, *Letter G4* composed by Theophylact of Ohrid was addressed to the former empress Maria 'of Alania' on the Prinikipo island (modern-day Büyükkada), also in the Princes Archipelago, around 1095, when she could well have been a nun.⁷⁸⁹ Archaeological excavations conducted in the 1990s demonstrate that Maria's likely founded a monastery in Mount Papikon in Greece, and was buried there. This raises the possibility that she was also a resident in this monastery when she was a nun.⁷⁹⁰ Garland therefore suggested that Maria travelled to Prinikipo from Mount Papikon, rather than being a resident there.⁷⁹¹ The evidence from *Letter G4* therefore raises the possibility that tonsured imperial women could make long journeys outside of coenobitic communities. The possibility that they could do this can be explained cultural norms which allowed tonsured imperial women great flexibility when following their monastery's rule, especially in imperial foundations. It is also noteworthy that Theophylact does not mention the reason for Maria's presence on Prinikipo. This suggests that her presence there was routine rather than being linked to an exceptional event, by contrast to Eudokia's journey to the archipelago for Romanos IV's funeral.

I suggest Aikaterine's donation of the evangelary *MGS 02* to the Holy Trinity monastery was a less pressing reason for her to travel, in comparison with her organisation of commemoration services for Isaac at the Stoudios. However, the evidence from *Letter G4*, and that of the *typika* analysed above, nonetheless indicates that it was possible for Aikaterine to make a longer journey outside of the Myrelaion to witness the donation of her evangelary to Holy Trinity. As noted above, Talbot argued that women's monasteries generally observed stricter regulations on enclosure than male monasteries. She noted however that in some specific circumstances nuns could leave convents for brief periods of time, but argued that they rarely embarked on long pilgrimages. Talbot also noted that the *typika* show that there were significant differences in lifestyle between privileged and ordinary nuns, although maintaining, as we have noted, that the movements of all nuns were

⁷⁸⁹ Theophylact, *Lettres*, 138-139, no. 4, ll. 19-23. According to Zonaras, Maria became a nun before the death of Michael VII, whom she visited on his deathbed: Zonaras, *Epitome*, 18.19. However, Michael's date of death is not clear. According to the *Alexiad*, Maria and her son Constantine (who died on 12 August 1094) were linked with the unsuccessful conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes against Alexios I in 1094: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 9.8; Kouropou & Vannier 2005, 67. Mullett and Garland argued that it is most likely that Maria became a nun at this time: Mullett 1984, 209; Garland 2006, 111.

⁷⁹⁰ The excavations uncovered a mid-eleventh century monastic complex with a donor portrait of a mother and son and a grave with the inscription MARIA BOTONIATENA. Zekos therefore suggested that Maria founded this complex with her son Constantine and that this was her burial place: Zekos 1998, 199-212. Makris 2019, 55-75 has however questioned the link between Maria and Mount Papikon and argued that the portrait portrays a lay woman. He does not however present any evidence which rules out Zekos' suggestion.

⁷⁹¹ Garland 2006, 111.

generally highly restricted.⁷⁹² The evidence for the position of imperial women, including Aikaterine, Eudokia and Maria provides an important recension to Talbot's point. It appears that after they had taken religious vows, imperial women retained a freedom of movement which was greater than Talbot acknowledged. In Aikaterine's case, her ability to move between the Myrelaion and the Stoudios, and perhaps also Holy Trinity on Halki appears to have enabled her to maintain a network of personal relationships and project a public image of herself.

To close this section I shall discuss the possibility that Aikaterine's status as a nun in fact gave her access to spaces closed to her as a laywoman. Here I respond to Neville's argument that Anna Komnene's proximity to the Kecharitomene convent in the mid-twelfth century allowed her to transgress normative gender boundaries. I also build upon a suggestion of Talbot, who in her argument that nuns were on the whole more secluded than monks proposed that this is connected to social norms of relative seclusion for upper-class laywomen.⁷⁹³ In chapter three it was demonstrated that elite Byzantine women exercised power by performing socially sanctioned and regularised roles within a system of petition and response. The examples discussed were connected to Byzantine letter culture. Women could have potentially exercised power within this framework through formal letter receptions and the direction of responses, which did not require them to regularly travel outside of their residences. Talbot argued that the greater extent to which she perceived nuns were cloistered in comparison to male monks reflects social norms within elite society.⁷⁹⁴ As Laiou also argued, it appears that gender ideals in Byzantium encouraged women to limit activities involving movement outside of the home, and that restricted visibility outside of the home was also perceived as a marker of women's elite status.⁷⁹⁵ However, it is in fact possible that as a nun, Aikaterine could exercise power in a different way to when she was a laywoman or empress, because she could more easily access male monastic communities and therefore enter spaces previously inaccessible to her.

In her study of Anna Komnene's residence in the palatial buildings attached to the Kecharitomene community in the mid-twelfth century, Neville proposed that 'dwelling in figurative or physical monasteries seems to have made Byzantine women appear humble and modest, and hence given them greater license for behaviours that fit gender ideals less easily'.⁷⁹⁶ Neville's argument has two strands. On the one hand, she argued Komnene's links with the Kecharitomene community helped her to project an image of humility and modesty, which rendered her transgressive act of writing

⁷⁹² See above, 196 n. 773.

⁷⁹³ Talbot 2019, 80.

⁷⁹⁴ Talbot 2019, 80.

⁷⁹⁵ Laiou 2001, 263-267.

⁷⁹⁶ Neville 2016, 138.

history (the *Alexiad*) more culturally acceptable. On the other hand, Neville argued that Komnene's residence in the palatial buildings attached to the Kecharitomene enabled her to meet more easily with men to whom she was not related, with whom she conducted historical research and discussed philosophy.

Like Talbot, Neville also argued that elite middle Byzantine lay women did not frequently intermingle with men to whom they were not related. She refers to the advice of Kekaumenos, who warned against a man allowing male guests into the home, because this could result in the guest meeting and seducing his wife. Neville argued that Komnene's status as an associate of a monastic community enabled her to 'desexualise herself' and cultivate a reputation for piety which was beyond suspicion. This would have shielded both herself and the men who met her from accusations of inappropriate behaviour. Komnene was widowed from 1137, and Neville pointed out that Komnene's association with the Kecharitomene helped to clarify that she was not interested in remarrying and that she was beyond interest in sexual relationships.⁷⁹⁷

Neville's argument lends further weight to the possibility that Aikaterine did interact with the *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios personally, as Skylitzes suggests, and that this occurred in the Stoudios. It is possible that Aikaterine's status as a nun allowed her to access male monasteries more easily than if she was a married or widowed lay woman. When Aikaterine took religious vows, new opportunities may have opened to her to travel to male monasteries, including the Stoudios and possibly Holy Trinity. This is because Aikaterine's status as a nun and her membership of the Myrelaion community would have helped her to desexualise herself and to project an image of piety. These factors in all probability would have rendered her presence in a male monastery and her interaction with the monks there, which transgressed the ideal of *abaton*, more acceptable. The two instances which we have identified when Aikaterine enacted competitive power to project a public image of herself as a Komnene woman and therefore resist Doukas attempts to reshape her identity both involved male monasteries. Because Aikaterine's status as a nun in all probability allowed her more straightforward access to these places than if she was a laywoman, her religious vows can be identified as a factor empowering her between c1059 and 1063.

Finally, Neville argued that Komnene did not become a nun until her deathbed. She asserted that Komnene did this because if she had become a nun, her ability to leave the Kecharitomene convent would have been curtailed, as well as her freedom to talk with men who were not her relatives. For this reason, she argued that 'it seems we should omit a monastic retirement from Anna's

⁷⁹⁷ Neville 2019, 89-105 ; Neville 2016, 133-139; Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 42, I. 26 – 43, I.5.

biography'.⁷⁹⁸ However, Neville did not take into account the possibility that imperial women could leave convents regularly, which I have argued for above. Neville's argument is based on a verse in Tornikes' funeral speech for Komnene describes her taking 'the dress of perfection' meaning a monastic habit, close to her death.⁷⁹⁹ However, Tornikes does not give a precise date for when Komnene put on the habit. It is possible that he is referring to an event which took place in the years leading up to Komnene's death, rather than something which occurred on Komnene's death bed. If Komnene had been a nun for a few years before her death, this would match with established patterns of behaviour demonstrated by other elite Byzantine women who were also tonsured towards the end of their life but not on their deathbed, such as those discussed in this chapter. This case study of Aikaterine's actions as a nun shows that Komnene would not necessarily have been as restricted in her actions as Neville argued, had she become a nun at a date further removed from her death. Given the privileges enabling imperial women to move quite freely, demonstrated above, it is possible that Komnene could have conducted research and written the *Alexiad*, after taking religious vows.

Conclusion

Throughout her life, the range of choices open to Aikaterine were structured by a dominant set of interconnected ideas which formed the basis of how the positions of women in society were identified and explained. The choices open to her were structured by the telescoping of the identities of Byzantine women upon their roles as daughter, wife and mother. After 1059, as a situated actor, Aikaterine exercised agency and competitive power by asserting the ongoing importance of her identity as Isaac's wife, thereby resisting attempts led by Constantine X to present her as a kinswoman of the Doukas family, to justify his imperial power. Her actions may have been intended to encourage other Byzantines to also question and resist the narrative of Constantine's succession told by the imperial regime. Above, in the second chapter, it was argued that the evidence for Aikaterine's own statements about her identity in inscriptions do not match with Leidholm's argument that the identity of elite Byzantine women was founded primarily upon their links with their natal kin, at the expense of those with their affine relatives, or his broader argument that ideas about the extended family excluded affine relationships established by marriage.⁸⁰⁰ The findings of this section have reinforced the argument of the second chapter by demonstrating that

⁷⁹⁸ Neville 2019, 102.

⁷⁹⁹ Tornikes, *Lettres et Discours*, no. 14, 313, ll. 15-16. Ed Darrouzès. Trans. Neville 2016, 133 n. 4.

⁸⁰⁰ Leidholm 2019, 19, 120-122.

the inscriptions in MGS 02 and seal BZS.1955.1.5083 were part of a series of sustained choices and actions taken by Aikaterine whereby she sought to identify herself with her affine relatives. Her actions included her decision to double the gifts to the Stoudios monastery for Isaac's annual commemoration, and her choice to be buried there.

Furthermore, the findings of this chapter have demonstrated that Aikaterine had access to substantial resources which enabled her to exercise competitive power. Her resources in all probability stemmed from her membership of the family of the Kometopouloi and her marriage to Isaac Komnenos. Norms in middle Byzantine monastic culture also empowered Aikaterine to act in this period. It was acceptable for elite and imperial women to retain substantial possessions after they became nuns, and to continue to make use of them. Moreover, it appears that imperial women had access to freedom of movement than other nuns, in coenobitic communities linked with the imperial family. These privileges enabled Aikaterine to maintain a network of personal relationships, and to project a public image of herself which challenged the attempts of the Doukas family to reshape her identity. Indeed, Aikaterine's status as a nun appears to have given her access to spaces which were not open to her as a laywoman. She seems to have been more easily able to enter male monasteries, and she used these sites to stage events which visualised her ties with the Komnenos family, remembered at the end of the eleventh century in Constantinople, when Skylitzes wrote the *Continuation*. To conclude, in the light of the evidence from Aikaterine's life, more research is required on the power wielded by tonsured imperial and elite women in Byzantine society.

Conclusions

This thesis has sought to subject the source material for Aikaterine's life to sustained biographical study. This is an important study because, by the standards of Byzantine empresses and imperial women, the source material for Aikaterine is relatively rich, but has until now received insufficient attention. Most notably, Aikaterine appears as a speaker in two narrative histories, was the recipient of one lengthy letter from Psellos and is mentioned as a third person in several other Psellian letters. Moreover, this study is important because, as has been demonstrated, Aikaterine is a historically significant figure. The thesis has in the first place yielded new findings on Aikaterine's history. To briefly summarise, the political importance of the link she established between the Komnenos family and the Kometopouloi has been demonstrated. Furthermore, it has been shown in this thesis that as the first empress to rule after the reigns of Zoe and Theodora and the end of the Macedonian dynasty, Aikaterine's reign was a historically significant bridging period. In addition, it has been shown that Aikaterine was a politically important and visible actor during the first years of Constantine X's reign. In the second place, this thesis has aimed to explore Aikaterine's life as a paradigm for the life of other women and men in middle Byzantine society and in other comparable medieval societies. Firstly, this approach answered a call by Tougher to use material relating to the imperial family to shed light on the lives of other people in Byzantine society.⁸⁰¹ Secondly, this approach responded to the opportunity opened by the material pointing to Aikaterine's history before she became empress, connected to her status as an imperial Bulgarian woman. This aim has been achieved through series of case studies orientated around Aikaterine's life course and targeted towards different subjects in Byzantine and medieval studies.

Throughout each case study there have been two uniting themes. These are identity and power. Each chapter has demonstrated how projections and images of who Aikaterine was were shaped and reshaped by different individuals and groups in eleventh-century Byzantine society. Furthermore, each chapter also shed light on Aikaterine's power as an actor situated within wider societal structures. Every chapter has provided concrete explanations for how findings on Aikaterine's identity and power shed light on the lives of other women and men in middle Byzantine society. The findings have also been shown to be relevant to studies of the medieval west, because they have built upon advances made by scholars of this field, especially the 'beyond exceptionalism' project. Broadly, this thesis has aimed to contribute to discussions relating to the themes of identity and

⁸⁰¹ Tougher 2013a, 398-399.

power in several areas within Byzantine and medieval studies, by yielding findings which draw upon all available evidence, and therefore challenge assumptions made in previous scholarly arguments.

The first chapter has filled a gap in prosopographical studies of eleventh-century Byzantium. Using all available source material, it has offered a first prosopographical survey of Aikaterine's life since Diehl's 1922 article on *MGS* 02, which was in need of updating. Using all available source material, a basic chronology of her life has been reconstructed. New light has been shed on Aikaterine's personal network, her links with significant political developments in the eleventh century, including the rebellion of 1057 which led to Isaac becoming emperor, and her physical movements during her reign as empress. This chapter moreover established parameters for further discussion of facets of Aikaterine's identity conducted in the thematic chapters. These include her name, ethnicity, and social status. I have argued that Aikaterine was perceived in Byzantine society as a Bulgarian imperial woman because she was the daughter of a Kometopouloi ruler. I have therefore challenged the arguments of Panov, who has argued against associating the Kometopouloi with the First Bulgarian Empire.

The second chapter examined Aikaterine's overlapping identities as a Bulgarian imperial wife and wife of Isaac and member of the elite Komnenos family. This examination was conducted chiefly through analysis of Nikephoros Bryennios' *History* and the interpolations to Skylitzes' *Synopsis* composed by Michael of Diabolis. There is a scholarly consensus that Michael of Diabolis' identification of Aikaterine as the daughter of John Vladislav is correct, rather than Bryennios' identification of Samuel as her father. However, until now scholars of Balkan and Byzantine history, including Panov and Neville, have attributed the difference in the texts to fabrication on the part of Bryennios. This chapter proposed a new argument, that Aikaterine's links with Samuel, whose memory was more prestigious than that of John Vladislav, were deliberately foregrounded by the Komnenos family during the eleventh century. The result, I have argued, was that precise memories of Aikaterine's patriline were blurred by the time that Bryennios wrote in the 1120s and 30s, resulting in his identification of Aikaterine as Samuel's daughter.

My explanation for the differences between Bryennios' history and the interpolations to the *Synopsis* of Michael of Diabolis challenges previous scholarly arguments in two areas. Firstly, the findings of the chapter offer a counter example to the recent argument made by Leidholm, that ideas about extended family excluded affine relationships established by marriage and that in eleventh-century Byzantium elite women were identified much more strongly with their natal *genos* than their affine relatives. Aikaterine continued to be identified with her natal kin after marriage, but this identity was remoulded to serve the needs of her husband's family, to the extent that in

Constantinople, accurate memories of her patriline had been lost by the twelfth century. It must however be admitted that Leidholm's argument focuses on the way that women themselves perceived and presented their identities. By contrast, the argument of this chapter focuses more upon the way Aikaterine's identity was presented and perceived by others. However, I drew attention to evidence from the inscriptions written in Aikaterine's name in *MGS* 02 and on seal BZS.1955.1.5083, showing that Aikaterine presented herself as member of the Komnenos family, but also suggesting she participated in the foregrounding of the links between the Kometoupoloi and the Komnenos family. Further considerations of how Aikaterine saw herself, how she presented her links with her natal and affine relatives, and how she was empowered by her identification with the Kometopouloi and the Komnenoi, are offered by the findings of the third and fifth chapters. Returning to the second chapter, a question for further research raised by the findings is whether elite women who entered Byzantium as foreigners, such as Aikaterine, were identified in different ways with their natal and affine kin than elite women who were born into the majority Byzantine ethnic group.

In the second chapter it was also shown that the process whereby Aikaterine's identity was reshaped after she entered Byzantine society was paralleled by some of her male relatives. This case study therefore provides evidence from a Byzantine context to support observations made by the scholars involved in the 'beyond exceptionalism' project, which focuses upon the medieval west. Specifically, the findings of the chapter reinforced the argument made by Jordan in her study of women, power and political culture in twelfth-century Antioch (where the ruling elite had strong political and cultural connections to western Europe). Jordan argued that complex webs of factors rendered women and men powerful or powerless in medieval societies, and therefore scholars should be cautious of prioritising one analytical category, such as gender, above others. The evidence that there was a process whereby both Aikaterine and her other female and male relatives' imperial Bulgarian identities were reshaped to enhance the reputation of elite Byzantine families provides evidence which reinforce Jordan's arguments, but within a Byzantine historical context, which is an area that was not covered by the recent volume produced by the 'beyond exceptionalism' project.

The third chapter has demonstrated the duality of Aikaterine's power when she was empress in 1057-1059. Duality is a concept developed by scholars of queenship in the medieval west, to describe queens whose power derived both from their participation in monarchy and their lordship in their own right. This chapter has therefore provided further evidence of the fruitfulness of the application of theories developed by scholars studying medieval western women to women's studies in Byzantium. Through a comparison between two letters written by Psellos to Aikaterine and

Nikolaos Skleros, the second concerning the elite Byzantine woman Anna Radene, this chapter has shed light on evidence that both before and after she became empress, Aikaterine was integrated into Byzantine politics, and was powerful. Her power was connected to her performance of socially sanctioned and regularised roles within a system of petition and redress.

It was shown that within this system, Aikaterine's capacity to exercise power (following Stafford, both relational and competitive) was underpinned by her overlapping identities as a descendant of the family of the Kometopouloi and a member of the Komnenos family. The prestige which a link with these families conferred was a valuable commodity which Aikaterine could use to act directly, or influence others to act on her behalf. The investigation of this chapter built upon the suggestion made in chapter two that Aikaterine ultimately benefited from enhancement to the reputation of both the Kometopouloi and Komnenos family, which I argue resulted from the foregrounding of her genealogical connections with Samuel, a process which began when she was betrothed to Isaac following her arrival in Constantinople as a captive. Here, the biographical approach of the thesis has thus shed light on processes of marginalisation and empowerment in an individual life which altered through time and in different physical spaces.

The third chapter also builds upon the arguments of several scholars in Byzantine studies. Building upon Mullett's study of Byzantine letter culture, I have demonstrated how the display of identities and relational ties during formal letter receptions empowered both women and men. In the last two decades, Holmes, Neville and Jonas Nilsson have all characterised petition as an integral part of the tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine political system. The biographical approach of this thesis has developed on their arguments by providing a specific case study of the factors which empowered individuals within this system. This chapter has also highlighted two further methodological points for consideration. Anna Radene is not visible outside of the letter composed by Psellos to Nikolaos Skleros. Aikaterine, on the other hand, is visible in a range of source material, matching the observations on the disparity between source material for imperial and non-imperial women highlighted by Patlagean. However, in this chapter it has been possible to shed light on Radene's power, through a comparison with Aikaterine. This chapter therefore provides further confirmation of Tougher's proposal, that it is possible to utilise a biographical study of an imperial woman as a paradigm to develop understandings of the positions of other elite Byzantine women, who are less visible in the source material.

Importantly, the findings of the third chapter also demonstrate that in middle Byzantium, women and men were potentially empowered by the same factors. Admittedly, in source material for eleventh-century Byzantium, politically active men are attested much more frequently than women.

However the findings of this chapter demonstrate that women were not debarred from the taking action within the Byzantine political system because of their gender. Therefore, for a second time in this thesis, the arguments made by several scholars focusing on the medieval west, including Cartwright, Earenfight and Jordan were shown to work in a Byzantine context. I suggest that studies of Byzantine women's history should not automatically give the analytical category of gender priority over other factors shaping the lives of individual medieval women, including class and status. The histories of middle Byzantine women can be effectively approached as resulting from a web of overlapping factors.

Chapter four focused upon how as empress Aikaterine was integrated into the system of imperial rulership between 1057-1059. Like the previous chapters in this thesis, the approach of this chapter is influenced by, and responds to, the 'beyond exceptionalism' model advocated by Tanner et. al. Above all, this chapter demonstrated that the projection of Aikaterine's identity as a co-ruler with Isaac was a necessary component of the presentation of imperial power between 1057-1059. Aikaterine's reign was demonstrated to be historically significant because it was a bridge between the reigns of Zoe and Theodora in the first half of the eleventh century and the reign of Eudokia Makrembolitissa, who came after her. This chapter has shed light on how the aftermath of Zoe and Theodora's tenures impacted the trajectory of Aikaterine's reign, which in turn established precedents for Eudokia's position. Specifically, it appears that Zoe and Theodora's visibility as legitimisers of imperial power and partners in imperial rulership, which in turn built upon earlier tenth-century developments, rendered it necessary for Isaac and Aikaterine to be identified in imperial culture as joint rulers. By doing so, Isaac and Aikaterine met expectations in Byzantium, outlined by Ahrweiler, that imperial power should appear to be maintaining the established order, or *taxis*.

The findings of the fourth chapter also responded to the argument of Verbanaz, working within the 'beyond exceptionalism' project, who proposed that Salian queens were able to expand and shape the necessary roles they performed. Using a case study of Eudokia Makrembolitissa's actions at the beginning of Romanos IV's 1071 military campaign, it was demonstrated that the necessity for eleventh-century empresses to be highly visible when presenting imperial power gave them leverage to enact their own power by reshaping the way they appeared in public, even in opposition to the emperor. The relevance of Eudokia's history for an understanding of Aikaterine's position once more demonstrated the political and cultural continuities which linked eleventh-century Byzantine empresses.

My argument that Zoe and Theodora's reigns shaped the trajectories of Aikaterine and thereafter Eudokia's reigns is important because thus far the links between Zoe and Theodora and the empresses who came after them has been understudied. Admittedly, Smythe published a short article on the framework for empresses' power in middle Byzantium, but this chapter has highlighted continuities shaping the reigns of successive eleventh-century empresses which his study did not cover. In her 1999 monograph Hill also made an argument for a crisis of male authority which pervaded eleventh-century Byzantium and thus enabled empresses to act in different ways. However, in the same monograph, Hill presented Zoe and Theodora as 'special cases'. The tendency to study eleventh-century empresses in isolation is also typified by the study of Hill, James and Smythe, which focused in upon Zoe's role as a legitimiser of imperial power, with little discussion of what came afterwards. A lack of recognition of the continuities linking Zoe and Theodora's reigns with their successors has also led Neville to argue that the greater visibility of imperial women in texts from the mid-eleventh century onwards can be attributed mainly to changes in literary culture. The interdisciplinary approach of this chapter, influenced by Angelova's proposal that varied source material should be approached democratically, has sought to provide evidence that counters Neville's point. I have aimed to highlight how imperial women are also more visible in other sources from this period, outside of the texts. Judging from the findings of this chapter I suggest that overall, to achieve a rich understanding of the factors empowering empresses in the middle Byzantine period, there must be further study of the continuities linking different empresses. I suggest coordinated biographical studies are one way to achieve this, and will return to this point at the end of these concluding remarks.

The fifth chapter aimed to explain Aikaterine's visibility in several written sources in the period between Isaac's abdication in 1059 and her death, in c1065, when she was a nun at the Myrelaion. This is an important investigation because depictions of Aikaterine in two narrative histories, the *Chronographia* and the *Continuation*, focus in upon her actions in this period. The themes in this chapter parallel those of chapter two. Once more, Aikaterine's ties with her affine relatives are considered, and another process is identified whereby her identity was reshaped for political purposes. This time, it is asked how the Doukas family claimed links with Aikaterine to justify their new imperial status. Moreover, responding to Neville, who argued against using the *Chronographia* as a source for Aikaterine as a historical figure, I have argued that through a careful reading of the texts it is possible to shed light on Aikaterine's agency and power in this period.

The first part of this chapter offered a completely new reading of Psellos' depiction of Aikaterine's speech in the *Chronographia*. It has been argued that in this text Psellos employed a sophisticated literary style to present Aikaterine as a close kinswoman of the emperor Constantine X Doukas.

Through a comparison with other sources, including Psellos' *OM* 5, it has furthermore been argued that the depiction of Aikaterine's identity in the *Chronographia* was projected more widely by the Doukas regime and their allies. I have argued that the Doukas family did this to present Constantine X's reign as continuous from that of Isaac's and to counter accusations that his succession ahead of Isaac's relatives was improper. This is important because until now Aikaterine's importance for these events has been subject only to a very brief analysis by Cheynet. Moreover, I have argued that this representation of Aikaterine should be situated within a societal context whereby Byzantine women were identified according to their relational ties with men. The argument of chapter two emphasised the importance of examining gender alongside other factors when studying medieval women, but this chapter has underlined the significance of gender as an analytical category within this framework. A gendered approach yielded findings shedding light on how women's identities could potentially be reshaped by different parties in Byzantium, within the context of the 'politics of reputation' which has been outlined by Neville and Leidholm. I have also highlighted parallels between eleventh-century Byzantium and the contemporary medieval west, by drawing attention to Stafford's argument that late Saxon queens identities were also tied to their husbands and sons.

In the second part of chapter five evidence was examined that Aikaterine exercised agency by projecting her own messages about who she was. It has been argued that Aikaterine's inscription in *MGS* 02 and Skylitzes' account of her involvement with commemorations for Isaac at the Stoudios monastery foreground her ability to enact competitive power in the period after Isaac's death (between 1060 and early 1062). Supporting evidence comes from seal BZS.1955.1.5083, which was probably used by Aikaterine, although this is not certain. Since Diehl's identification of Aikaterine's name in the inscription in *MGS* 02 in 1922, this text has until now received little further attention. I have argued that both the inscription in *MGS* 02 and the account of Aikaterine's actions in Skylitzes' *Continuation* provide evidence that Aikaterine resisted the attempts to reshape her identity as one linked with the Doukas family, and that she crafted a public image of herself as a Komnenos woman. Aikaterine therefore enacted agency and power, within a range of choices open to her in the structural context whereby Byzantine women's identities were telescoped around their relationships with male relatives, and whereby reputation was closely linked with social status and power.

The third part of chapter five has also raised further methodological points. The evidence that through a sustained series of choices and actions Aikaterine identified herself with her affine relatives provides a counterpoint to Leidholm's argument that elite women in the period overwhelmingly identified with their natal relatives. In this respect, this chapter builds upon the argument of the second chapter, by shedding further light on Aikaterine's own perspective on her identity. In the last part of this chapter, I attempted to identify the factors empowering Aikaterine

after 1059 when she was a nun at the Myrelaion. On the one hand, I demonstrated the likelihood that she had access to substantial resources, which increased after Isaac's death, between 1060 and early 1062. In this respect, the findings of the chapter reaffirm the arguments of Morris and Talbot that middle Byzantine nuns and monks often retained substantial personal possessions after their tonsure. I have however challenged the arguments of Talbot in my analysis of Aikaterine's access to space in this period. Talbot argued that even privileged nuns were strictly enclosed in convents in the middle Byzantine period. The findings of the chapter demonstrate that in this period, tonsured imperial women, including Aikaterine, in all probability had more routine access to freedoms of movement than Talbot has acknowledged.

My analysis of the space to which Aikaterine had access also develops another argument of Neville. She identified middle Byzantine convents as sites of power for women, because links with these places helped them to develop cast-iron reputations for piety and humility, which rendered it more acceptable for them to transgress gender boundaries. I am in agreement with this aspect of Neville's argument. Neville however maintains that imperial women (her argument specifically focuses on Anna Komnene in the twelfth century) could maximise the potential of a convent as a resource for power by living alongside the community without getting tonsured, because then they could maintain a greater freedom of movement. My findings indicate that Neville has overstated the drawbacks of entering a religious community for imperial women who became nuns. The investigation of this chapter demonstrates that Aikaterine continued to be able to maintain a network of personal relations and to move outside of the convent, and so her full entrance into a religious community did not necessarily involve a loss of power, as Neville would claim. Moreover, it appears that Aikaterine gained less restricted access to male monasteries after she became a nun, which opened a new space for her to exercise competitive power, previously unavailable to her as a laywoman, by engaging in ceremony at the Stoudios that was widely known about in Constantinople, and possibly also in Holy Trinity on Halki island.

To conclude, taken together, the results of this thesis have firstly demonstrated that Aikaterine was a figure of historical significance. Before she became empress the links she established between the imperial family of the Komnenoi and the Komnenos family contributed greatly to the reputation and power of the latter. In the period when Aikaterine was empress, projections of her as a co-ruler with Isaac were a vital aspect of the legitimisation of imperial power. Crucially, Aikaterine was the first empress to rule after Zoe and Theodora. The trajectory of Aikaterine's reign, which also set the tone for that of her successor Eudokia, demonstrates that the reigns of the two 'Macedonian' empresses before her had a lasting impact on Byzantine imperial women. By carefully analysing the source material for Aikaterine from a biographical perspective, it has therefore been possible to

shed light on previously unidentified longer-term continuities in Byzantine women's history. This thesis has also demonstrated Aikaterine's hitherto overlooked significance as an important and visible political actor after she became a nun in 1059.

Secondly, the results of this thesis have offered points for discussion in several areas of Byzantine studies. The biographical approach of this thesis has provided a series of case studies focused upon different stages in Aikaterine's life which demonstrate how broader arguments made by several modern scholars do or do not work for the history of an individual life in eleventh-century Byzantium. In relation to this, a specific result of this thesis has been to demonstrate the effectiveness of the application of recent theories from studies of western medieval women to Byzantine women's history. The uniting themes of this thesis are identity and power. The uniting question related to these themes has been, how did structuring processes shape Aikaterine's identity and power as an individual? The findings of this thesis, which answer this question, provide material for further investigation of structuring processes shaping the positions of different groups of women and men in eleventh-century Byzantium. In this respect, this study is intended as an exemplar for the potential for biography to bring about advancements in other academic fields, as proposed by Tougher.

In relation to this point, the findings of this thesis suggest that biographical studies of medieval individuals can make important contributions to wider collaborative projects. The thesis shows how, firstly, a biographical study can find place within a wider thematic project by providing findings which make use of all available source material to test broader arguments made by scholars using wider source material. Secondly, the thesis points to what could be achieved through a series of biographical studies of individuals conducted alongside one another. A collaborative project involving multiple biographies of middle Byzantine empresses would surely shed further light on the patterns structuring the lives of Byzantine women, building upon the advancements achieved in this thesis through the study of Aikaterine's life alone.

The final word must go to the inscription which brings us closest to Aikaterine's own voice. On the evangeliary which she donated to the Holy Trinity monastery she is named as 'the Empress Aikaterine Komnene, who took, by putting on the angelic habit, the monastic name Xene'. The way that Aikaterine named herself on this inscription evokes her identities as a Byzantine empress co-regnant, a foreigner and descendant of the imperial family of the Kometopouloi, a member of the Komnenos family, and a nun. Aikaterine's choice to foreground these identities together on the inscription on her evangeliary points to her own self-perception of herself as a carrier of overlapping identities, and her awareness of how they empowered her.

Appendix One: Texts

Text 1

Letter Π 1. Τῇ δεσποίνῃ Αἰκατερίνῃ. Ed. Παραϊοαννου.

Δέσποινά μου ἁγία καὶ θεόστεπτε βασιλὶς, ποθῶ μὲν τὴν
βασιλείαν ὑμῶν καὶ συνεχῶς ὀρᾶν βούλομαι, ἐπιδημοῦσαν τῇ
πόλει· ναί, μὰ τὴν ἐν θεῷ σου καύχησιν! Καὶ μὴ ἀπίσται μοι
γράφοντι, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ ἠπίστησας πώποτε, κἂν ὁ Χαρωνίτης οὐ
(5) βούληται.

Ποθῶ μὲν οὖν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρόντας. Ἀποδημησάντων δὲ τῆς
Πόλεως καὶ ἐξεληλυθότων βραχύ, φέρειν οὐ δύναμαι· ἀλλ' ὥσπερ
πῦρ ἐμφωλεῦον μου τῇ ψυχῇ κατακαίει καὶ δαπανᾷ· καὶ οὐκ ἔχω
ἐνεγκεῖν τὴν διάστασιν.

(10) Μηκέτι οὖν δυνάμενος ἄλλως πως συνεῖναι τῷ κράτει ὑμῶν,
ἐμαυτὸν παραμυθοῦμαι τοῖς πρὸς ὑμᾶς γράμμασι· δοκῶ γὰρ
ὁμιλεῖν διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν. Ἐπὶ τούτῳ οὖν καὶ τὸν συνήθη πρὸς
τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν ἐξαπέστειλα μοναχόν. Καὶ τολμῶν ἐρωτῶ:

Πῶς ἔχει ὁ μέγας φωστήρ, ὁ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλεύς, καὶ μᾶλλον

(15) ἐμός; Πῶς ἔχει τὸ τῆς καρδίας μου φῶς, ἡ τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς ἀγαλ-
-λίασις, τὸ ἀκήρατον ἄνθος τῆς ἡδονῆς, ὁ νοητὸς ἥλιος;

Ἐπειτα δὴ καὶ περὶ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους πυνθάνομαι: Πῶς ἔχει ἡ
τε ὡς ἀληθῶς βασιλὶς, ἡ χρυσοῖς κροσσωτοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν περιβε-
-βλημένη, πεποικιλμένη, ἡ καὶ ἐκ γένους βασιλείον αἷμα λαχοῦσα,
(20) καὶ κρείττονι αὐθις βασιλείᾳ τὴν προλαβοῦσαν νικήσασα εὐκλειαν;
Πῶς ἔχεις ἡ φωσφόρος ζωή; Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης, εἰ πολλάκις

ἐπανερωτῶ· μυρίων γὰρ ἀγαθῶν παρὰ τοῦ σοῦ κράτους τυχών
(προσηγοῦς θέας, εὐμενείας, δεσποτικῆς διαθέσεως), μικρὰν
εἰσάγω ἀντίδοσιν, τὴν ἐρώτησιν ταύτην καὶ τὴν προσκύνησιν.

(25) Γένοιτο οὖν μοι αἱ ἀποκρίσεις σου δεξιαί: ὅτι χαίρεις, ὅτι
εὐθυμεῖς, ὅτι ἐπαγάλλῃ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι ὑγιαίνοντι. Ναί, Χριστέ
μου καὶ βασιλεῦ, οὕτως ἔχοι τὰ καθ' ὑμᾶς· ὡς ἐγώ τε βούλομαι
(καὶ οἶδε μόνος ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας τὰ κρύφια), καὶ ὑμεῖς βούλεσθε
τε καὶ εὐχεσθε. Καὶ ὅτι μὲν πολλῶν καὶ παρὰ τοῦ φιλανθρωποτά-

(30) -του βασιλέως χαρίτων ἀπήλαυσα, οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἀρνηθεῖην, ἀλλὰ
μεγάλῃ βοῇ καὶ λαμπρᾷ τῇ φωνῇ: τιμῆς, προεδρίας, δεξιώσεως,
ὁμιλίας, ἐτέρων πλειόνων. Ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ ταῦτα τοσοῦτον ἐκεῖνον
ποθῶ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς ἐμφύτους αὐτοῦ ἀρετὰς καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰ
πράγματα ἐπιμέλειαν.

(35) Ἀλλὰ πείσαι ποτε τοῦτον κἂν νῦν, καθαρᾶς τυχεῖν ἀπολαύ-
-σεως· ὡς γὰρ ἀκούομεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐξῆλθε τῆς Πόλεως θηρεῦσαι,
ἀλλὰ φροντίσαι, οὐδὲ θῆρας ἐλεῖν, ἀλλὰ σεκρετικὰ διαλύσαι
ζητήματα. Ὅμως ἐχέσθω τοῦ ἥθους. Εἴη δὲ εἰς μακροὺς χρόνους ἡ
βασιλεία ὑμῶν τὰ Ῥωμαίων αὐξάνουσα πράγματα, καὶ τὸ κράτος

(40) καλῶς διοικοῦσα καὶ κατευθύνουσα.

Letter Π 1. To the Despoina Aikaterine.

My holy *Despoina* and most divine empress, I am longing for your majesties and I wish to see you together at home in the city. Yes, to revel in your glory! Do not disbelieve me who is writing, just as you have never disbelieved me, and as the one from Charon does not wish.

Thus I long for both of you to be present. Your being away from the city and your brief departure, I am not capable of bearing it, but instead it burns and consumes me, just as a hidden fire in my soul, and I cannot bear the separation.

Since there is no longer any other way to be acquainted with your [plural] might, I am consoling myself by writing to you and am thus resolved to consort with you through letters. To this end I have dispatched the usual monk to your majesty. And with daring I ask: How goes it with the great light, emperor of the universe, and more so of me? How goes it with the light of my heart, the joy of my soul, the pure flower of delight, the perceptible sun?

Herewith I enquire of your mightiness: How goes it with the truthful empress, who has been decked out in many colours by the golden tassels of nobility, she who possessed the blood of *basileia* through her family and then having won a glorious victory took hold of a greater *basileia*? How goes it with the living light? Do not be amazed if I make requests from you often and repeatedly. For the countless good favours emanating from your mightiness (your gentle gaze, your goodwill, your lordly disposition) I offer a little in return, these inquiries and my obeisance.

May answers come to me by your hand: That you are glad, that you are in good cheer, that you exult in the good health of the emperor. Yes, by my Christ and my ruler, may he take charge of our affairs! Just as I want it (and the one God knows the secrets of the heart), and you both wish for it and pray for it. The fact I have enjoyed many graces from the most charitable emperor, I shall not deny, but rather proclaim with a loud and clear voice: honour, a privileged position, welcome, intimacy, and much more. But it is not because of these things that I long for him, but rather because of his natural goodness and concern for public affairs.

But persuade him, now as ever, to meet with some honest enjoyment. For I hear that he did not leave the City to hunt but to reflect, not to catch wild beasts, but to settle administrative business. He should stay consistent to his disposition. May your [plural] sovereignty be very long, whilst improving the affairs of the Romans, the sovereignty governing and guiding your power beautifully.

Text 2

Letter Π 255. Τῷ κριτῇ τοῦ Αἰγαίου (Νικολάῳ τῷ Σκληρῷ (?)) Ed. Papaioannou.

Πρώτῳ σοι αὕτῃ (ῆ) προσλαλιά: οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς Πόλεως πρὸς τὸ
Αἰγαῖον, ἀλλ' ἢ ἐν τῇ Πόλει, ἢ ἐν τῷ Αἰγαίῳ· ἢ γὰρ ἐγὼ αὐτόθι
διὰ σέ, ἢ σὺ ἐνταῦθα δι' ἐμέ, καὶ ἐσμέν ξενοπροσώπως ἀμφότεροι,
καὶ ἡπειρῶται, καὶ ἐπιθαλάττιοι. Ὡς οὖν αὐτόθεν ὁμιλῶν σοι καὶ
(5) οὐκ ἐκ διαστήματος, ἐρωτῶ τὰ συνήθη: πῶς σοι τὰ τῆς ὁδοῦ; πῶς
σοι τὰ τῆς ζωῆς, τὰ τῶν πραγμάτων, τὰ τῶν δικῶν, τὰ τῶν
εἰσπράξεων (εἰ μὴ πέφρικας); Ἀλλὰ τί ποτε ἐρωτῶ, συνών σοι καὶ
εἰδὼς ἅπαντα; καὶ γὰρ καὶ εὐθυπόρησας, καὶ ὑγιαίνεις, καὶ κρίνεις
ἐννόμως καὶ ἀδεκάστως, καὶ τὰς εἰσπράξεις ὥσπερ εἴωθας
(10) πέφευγας. Ὅρῃς οἶον τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης πτερόν, ὁπόση ἢ δύναμις; ἢ
γὰρ αὐτόθι σοι συμπερίειμι, ἢ κἀνταῦθα μάντις εἰμί σοι καὶ τῆς
ζωῆς καὶ τῶν πράξεων.

Ὡσπερ οὖν ἀδιαστάτως ὁμιλῶ, οὕτως δὴ καὶ ἀξιῶ ἐμφανῇ
ποιῆσαι προστασίας ῥοπήν, τοῖς προῖσταμένοις προαστείων, τοῦ
(15) τε Πετρωνᾶ, καὶ τοῖς Πυργηνοῖς. Ταῦτα μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ τὴν μονὴν
τῆς Ὀμονοίας τελοῦσιν, ἢ δὲ μονὴ δεσπότην ἔλαχε τὴν ζωστήν τὴν
κυρὰν Ἄνναν, τὴν ἀδελφὴν τοῦ Ῥαδηνοῦ· αὕτῃ δὲ ὠκείωταί μοι ἐξ
ἀρχαίας πρὸς τὸ τοῦ Μονομάχου γένος συνηθείας καὶ ὁμιλίας.

Ποίησον οὖν με πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα σεμνότερον, ἐλαφρᾶς
(20) ἀξιώσεως, μεγάλην τιμὴν ἀντικαταλλαπτόμενος. Καὶ ὁ τὸ κτῆμα
δὲ ἀπαιτῶν ἀπῆλθῃ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τοῖς δηλωθεῖσιν προσχήμασιν
διανομῶν, μηδὲν περὶ τούτου προστεταγμένος. Ἀπαιτήσας οὖν
καὶ ταῦτα, ἀπότισον τοῖς ἀφαιρεθεῖσι· καὶ πολλαχῶς με πρὸς τὴν

ἀξιώσασαν κατακόσμησον, οὐχ ἵνα ἐρωτικὸς ταύτη ὀφθείην, ἀλλὰ

(25) φιλότιμος ἄνευ ἔρωτος.

Letter Π 255. To the judge of the Aegean <Nikolaos Skleros?>

First this word came to you: not out of the City towards the Aegean, but either in the City or in the Aegean. For either I am there through you or you are here through me, and we are together with each other, and dwellers of the land and dwellers of the coast. And so consorting with you from the same place and not from a distance, I ask the customary things: How are the things of the road for you? How is life? How are the public affairs? How are the legal trials and the collection of taxes (if that was not uncouth)? But why ever do I ask this, being linked to you and knowing everything? You, having not strayed, are healthy, you judge justly and fairly, and you have avoided the collection of taxes as is your habit. What kind of wings of affection do you see? How much power? For either I go round with you there, or here I am a diviner of life and business to you.

And just as I continuously consort with you, so I deem it worthy to enact the visible influence of patronage, for the managers of the estates, Petronas and the Pyrgenoi. For they are appointed to the Homonias monastery. The monastery is possessed by the mistress, the *Zoste* and Lady Anna, the sister of Radenos. She is long acquainted to me through her association and intimacy with the Monomachos *genos*.

Make me more esteemed by the woman, a light request, bringing great honour in exchange. He is demanding to have the property returned from regulations in plain pretence, not acknowledging prescriptions concerning these things. And so having demanded the return and such things, repay him with deprivation. And set me up to be deemed worthy in many senses, not so that I am seen by her in an erotic way, but with honour and not with erotic passion.

Appendix Two: Figures

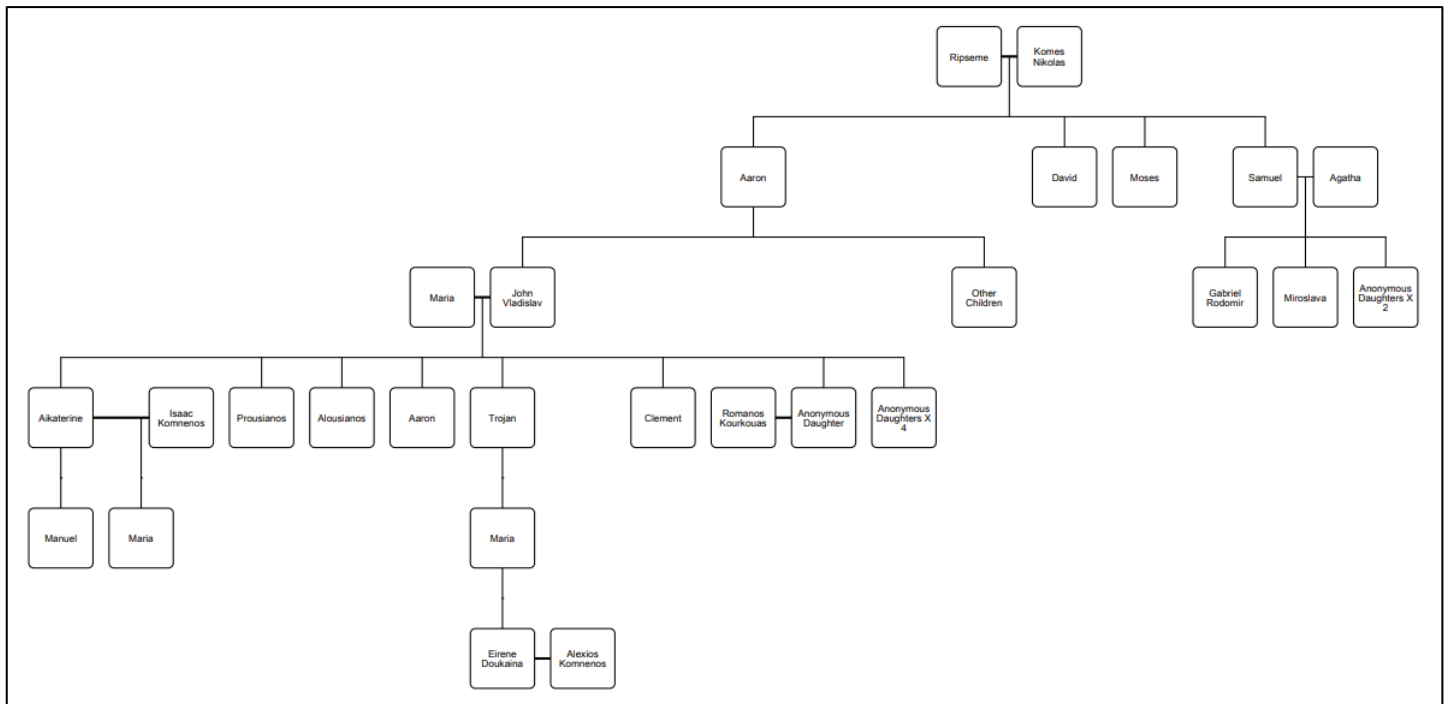


Figure 1: Aikaterine's natal family. The descendants of Ripseme and *Komes Nikolas*.

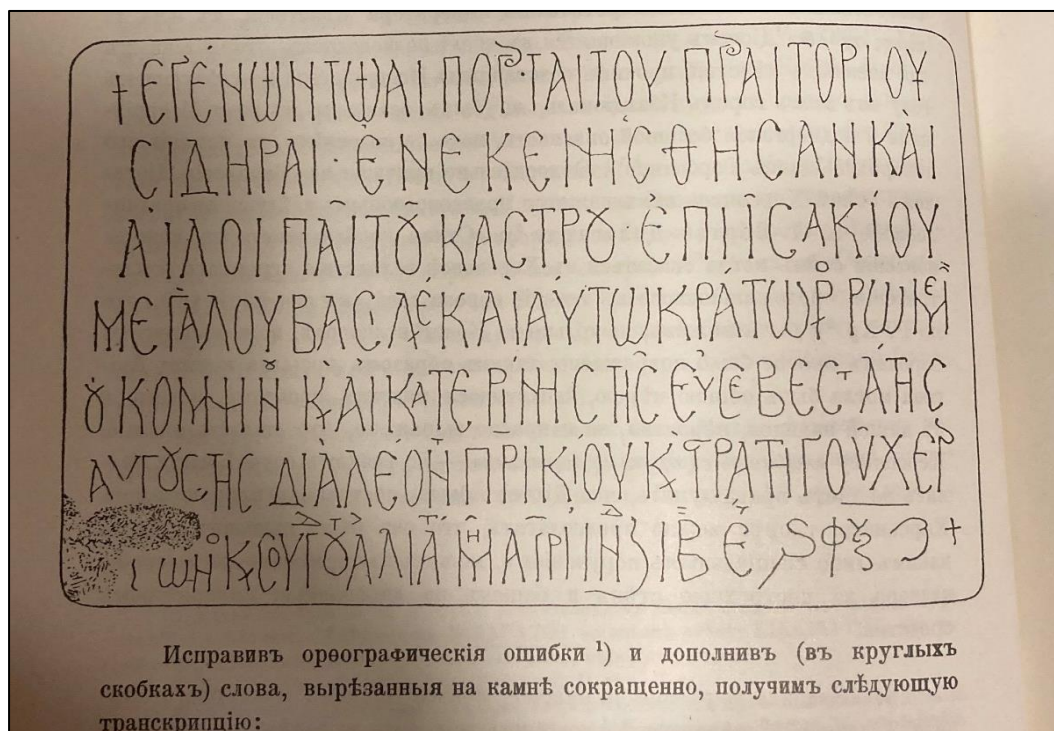


Figure 2: Sketch of dating inscription on the city walls of Chersonesos, 1059. After V.V. Latyshev, 1896. *Sbornik Grečeskikh nadpisei khristiansikh vremen iz iuzhnoi Rossii*, 16. Saint Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Imeparatorskogo Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva (IIAO).

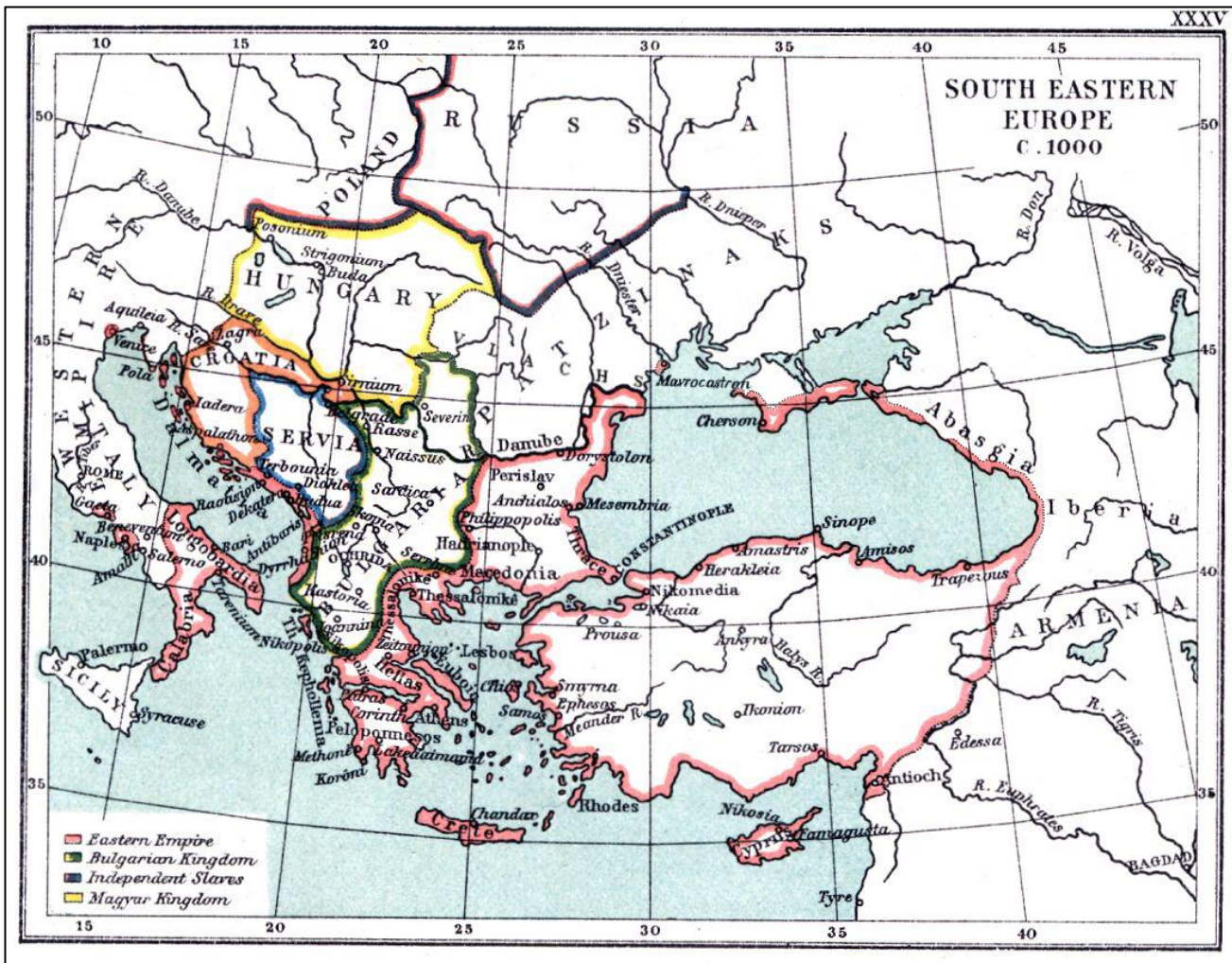


Figure 3: South-eastern Europe c1000. After, E. Freeman (J.B. Bury ed.), 1903, *Atlas to the Historical Geography of Europe*, Third edition, Map XXXV. London, New York & Bombay: Longmans Green & Co.

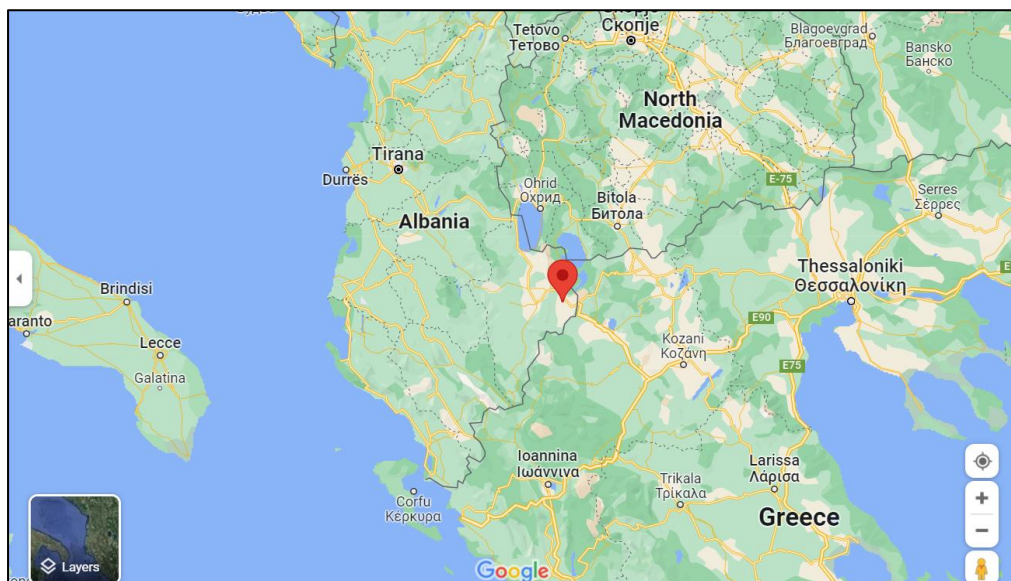


Figure 4: Map showing location of Devoll District. *Google Maps*, n.d. URL: <https://www.google.com/maps/> (Accessed 28/02/2022).



Figure 5: Constantinople in the Byzantine period. Map by Wikicommons user Cplakidas. Licensed according to the licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Universal Public Domain Dedication.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Byzantine_Constantinople-en.png (Accessed 28/02/2022).



Figure 6: Dumbarton Oaks. 'Evangelist Mark,' Object BZ.1979.31.1. *Online Museum Collections*. URL: <<http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27050>> (Accessed 03/04/2022)

Xene Komnene, nun (ca. 1060)

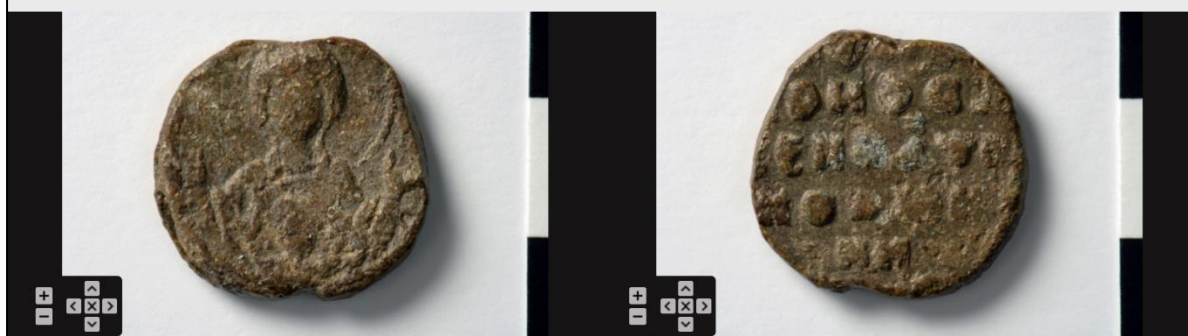


Figure 7: Dumbarton Oaks. Seal BZS.1955.1.5083. *Online Byzantine Seals Collection*. URL: <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.5083>> (Accessed 28/02/2022).

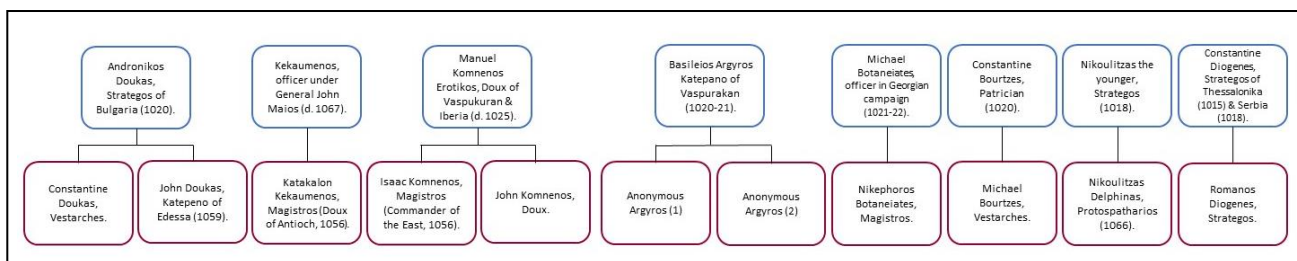


Figure 8: The fathers of the circle around Isaac Komnenos. Many of the fathers of the military officers involved in Isaac Komnenos' rebellion (1057) held rank during Basil II's reign (top row). The offices of the 1057 rebels date to that year unless otherwise stated (second row). It is unclear if Constantine Bourtzes was Michael's father or uncle: *Synop*, Th 377. Sources: Attaleiates, 29.3-8; *Chron.*, 7.23; *Synop.*, Th 355, 358, 365-366, 371, 377, 483; Kaldellis, 2017, 216-217; *PBW* (2016); Roueché, 2013; Cheynet, 1996, no. 80, 56-57; Polemis, 1965; 28.



Figure 9: Samuel's fortress over the old town in Ohrid. Photograph by Wikicommons user Wlado bg. Released by the copyright holder into the public domain. URL: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ohrid_samuilova_krepost.jpg> (Accessed 28/02/2022).



Figure 10: George Maniakes sends the letter of Christ to Romanos III. Source: History of John Skylitzes (Skylitzes Matritensis (Biblioteca Nacional de España). Author: Unknown, 13th-century author. Uploaded to Wikicommons by user Cplakidas. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or fewer. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgios_Maniakes_sends_the_letter_of_Christ_to_Romanos_III.jpg (Accessed 01/03/2022).



Figure 11: Depiction of St. Theodore the Studite and Stoudios Monastery, from the tenth-century *Menologion* of Basil II. Uploaded by Wikicommons user Ghirlandajo. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or fewer. URL: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodore_Studite_\(Menologion_of_Basil_II\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodore_Studite_(Menologion_of_Basil_II).jpg) (Accessed 01/03/2022).



Figure 12: General view of the Opus Sectile floor at St John Prodromos. Photograph by Ahmet Mutlu, 2013. After E. Kudde & Z. Ahunbay, 2016, 'İstanbul İmrahor İlyas Bey Camii-Studios Bazilikası Orta Bizans Dönemi Opus Sectile Döşemesinin Belgelenmesi ve Korunması İçin Öneriler'. *Restorasyon Konservasyon Çalışmaları Dergisi* 17, 46.



Figure 13: Fragments of wall tiles from St John Prodromos. Photograph by David Hendrix. URL: <<https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/stoudios>> (Accessed 01/03/2022)



Figure 14: Constantine IX Monomachos and Zoe donor mosaic, St Sophia, Istanbul. Photograph taken by Emma Huig, 2020.



Figure 15: View of the minaret of Imrahor Mosque (St John Prodromos) (narrow structure far left) and the tower of the Armenian church of S George (Peribleptos) (far right), from the Marmara Sea Walls in the Samatya quarter of Istanbul, near the Yenikapi harbour. Own photograph, 2021.



Figure 16: Maria “of Alania” and the Nikephoros III Botaneiates/Michael VII. In the *Homilies of John Chrysostom*. Bibliothèque nationale de France Manuscript *Coislin 79* folio 2 bis verso. Uploaded by Wikicommons user Eugenea. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 70 years or fewer. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicephorus_III_and_Maria_of_Alania_BnF_Coislin79_fol2bis.jpg. (Accessed 01/03/2022).



Figure 17: Theodore Lemniotes, Anna Radene and their son John with the Virgin and Child, twelfth century. Church of Sts. Anargyroi, Kastoria. After M. Hatzaki, 2009, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text*, figure 10. London: Palgrave Macmillan.



Figure 18: Nikephoros Kasnitzis and his wife Anna, twelfth century. St. Nicholas of Kasniti, Kastoria. After M. Hatzaki, 2009, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text*, figure 11. London: Palgrave Macmillan.



Figure 19: View of Bodrum Camii (Myrelaion Church) across the adjacent rotunda. Own photograph, 2021.



Figure 20: Bodrum Camii (Myrelaion Church) in c1930. Photographs by D.Talbot-Rice. Uploaded by David Hendrix. URL: <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/myrelaion> (Accessed 01/03/2022).



Figure 21: View of the Princes Archipelego (with Halki/ Heybeliada island in the background, taken from Kennedy Avenue, below Imrahor Camii (St John Prodromos). Own photograph, 2021.

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