

The making of an ethnic group: the *Romaioi* in the 12th-13th centuries

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In matters regarding ethnic or national identity, Byzantium until recently was seen from two opposing perspectives. That the Byzantines considered themselves Greeks but hid it behind the label of the Roman citizen, “Romaioi”, due to the pejorative notion of paganism that the word “Hellen” had received in the Late Antiquity.¹ Or, according to the second view, that the multi-ethnic character of the Byzantine empire and Christianity entails a denial by modern historians of any national or ethnic identity for the Byzantines.² Only recently attempts like Magdalino’s, Beaton’s or Kaldellis’ have tried to challenge these prevailing views.³

¹ Charanis P., “The formation of the Greek people”, στο Vryonis S. (ed.), *The "Past" in medieval and modern Greek culture*, Malibu 1978, 88 και 91; Vakalopoulos A., “Byzantium and Hellenism. Remarks on the racial origin and the intellectual continuity of the Greek Nation”, *Balkan Studies* 9 [1968], 101-126; Vryonis S., “Recent scholarship on continuity and discontinuity of culture: Classical Greeks, Byzantines, Modern Greeks”, στο Vryonis S. (ed.), *The "Past" in medieval and modern Greek culture*, Malibu 1978, 237-256.

² Jenkins, *Byzantium and Byzantinism*, 142-145; Mango C., “Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism”, inaugural lecture in the Koraes’ Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, at University of London King's College, October 27th 1964, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 [1965], 29-43; Nicol D.M., *Byzantium and Greece*, inaugural lecture in the Koraes’ Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, at University of London King's College, October 26th 1971, London 1971, 1-20.

³ Beaton R., “Antique nation? ‘Hellenes’ on the eve of Greek independence and in twelfth – century Byzantium”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 31 [2007], 76-95; Kaldellis A., *Hellenism in Byzantium: The transformations of Greek identity and the reception of the classical tradition*, Cambridge 2007; Magdalino P., “Hellenism and Nationalism in Byzantium”, in Magdalino P., *Tradition and transformation in medieval Byzantium*, Aldershot 1991, no. XIV. 1-29. Magdalino is the first that tried to explain and set into context the Hellenism of the 12th-century authors. He connected them with the confrontation of the Byzantines with the West and he adopted a more realistic view. While he did not deny that certain Byzantine authors did thought themselves as Greeks, he downplayed the references and he did not generalise. Kaldellis however for the first time examines extensively every single piece of evidence of Hellenism in the 12th and early 13th centuries. His main arguments is that the *Romaioi* formed a nation, they never thought themselves as Greeks before 1204, that the Hellenism was only a construction of the literati, but during the time of the Nicaean empire it became the main component of a nationalistic ideology. However, he fails to understand the weight of the term “nation” and he has certain mistakes in his effort to put everything under his general picture.

However it is essential to study the terminology of our sources. The modern sociological theory defines the ethnic group as a social group based on the observance of common cultural traits between the members of the same group. Ethnic groups are built on the basis of observable cultural differences (such as clothes, language, religion, way of life etc.) and the cohesion of the group is based on the maintenance of safe boundaries. Usually the ethnic groups claim common descent between the members of the same group and have one collective name.⁴ Three terms are used in the sources of 12th-13th centuries to denote what we would call ethnic group: *genos*, *ethnos* and *phylon*. There is no essential difference between these terms and they are used interchangeably for the Franks, the Italians, the Venetians, the Turks etc.. Most importantly all three terms are used for the *Romaioi* as well.⁵ Consequently, the Byzantines are *omophyloi*, *omoethneis*, and *omogeneis* between them, whereas all the others are *allophyloi*, *alloethneis*, *allogeneis*. It is also clear that these terms do not apply to religious communities. For the later we come across the terms *omopistoi*, *omophronoi* or *omodoxoi*.⁶

Then there is the question: who is a *Romaios*? At first sight the term seems to have a twofold meaning. In the first place we have the political label of *Romaios*: it is used to denote the whole Byzantine empire or all the Byzantines or the Byzantine army as a force.⁷ But the non native regiments of the Byzantine army were Romans only as far as they fought for the Romans. There are cases where *Romaios* is used for a specific section of the army. So, John Kinnamos says for the army that Manuel I sent to Italy that it consisted of Alans, of Germans and of *Romaioi*.⁸

In addition certain people are called *Romaioi*. This is true for the populace of Greek-speaking places like Constantinople, Thessalonike, the Aegean islands. But is used also for the Christian inhabitants of Turkish occupied places like Ikonion. It is used for certain people in the literary works. Some cases are very remarkable like that of a certain Gabras, follower of

⁴ Barth F., *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*, Boston 1969, 9-38; Smith A., *The ethnic origins of nations*, Oxford 1986, 22-31.

⁵ E.g. Eustathios of Thessalonike, *De capta Thessalonici*, 138; Niketas Choniates, 69.8; Michael Italikos, 106.22.

⁶ E.g. Niketas Choniates, 523; Theorianos, 248.

⁷ E.g. Kinnamos, 48.1-2: *ὡς δὲ οὐδεὶς οὐδαμῶθεν αὐτῷ κατεφαίνετο, τῶν τινα Ῥωμαίων μεταπεμψάμενος στρατιωτῶν, Πέρσην μὲν τὸ γένος Πουπάκην ὄνομα.*

⁸ Kinnamos, 271.

the Turkish Sultan, for whom Kinnamos says that he was a *Romaïos* by race but was raised among the Turks. The interesting thing is that many subjects of the emperor are not called *Romaïoi*, but they are *allogeneis* or even sometimes *barbarians*. So John Italos, the famous philosopher and student of Psellos who was accused of heresy, is called *barbarian* as well;⁹ and a certain Isach, a baptized Christian and trusted follower of Manuel Komnenos;¹⁰ Among other *allogeneis* figure John Axouch, member of the Byzantine elite at the time of John II Komnenos, who was a Persian by race;¹¹ the military commander Prosouch who was Persian by race but was raised and educated in Roman ways.¹² The Vlach Ivanko, commander of Philipopolis, while preparing his revolt, is said to have started increasing the size of his army with more of his *omophyloi*, while decreasing the number of the *Romaïoi*.¹³ Thus we see that this was not only a construction of the literati but a reality recognised by the people.

The *Romaïoi* had their land, it seems not to have been coterminous with the whole Byzantine empire. So provinces like Serbia, Bulgaria, Cilicia are treated differently than the *lands of the Romaïoi*.¹⁴ Moreover certain *allogeneis* populations inhabited the lands of *Romaïoi*. Latins, Armenians, Vlachs, Albanians, Bulgarians etc..¹⁵

Disloyalty to the emperor is not sufficient for someone to be considered as non-Roman. The aforementioned Ivanko is a Vlach, but other apostates are *Romaïoi*, like Leo Sgouros in Argos¹⁶ or Theodoros Magkaphas in Philadelpheia.¹⁷ Orthodoxy is also not enough for someone to be called *Romaïos*. The most obvious cases are those of the Bulgarians and Serbians, but this is true also for the Egyptian Orthodox, who are separated from the *Romaïoi* Orthodox of Egypt (i.e. the Greek-speaking populace of Egypt)¹⁸ and also for a whole clan of

⁹ Anna Komnene, V.8-9.

¹⁰ Kinnamos, 298.

¹¹ Kinnamos, 5; Niketas Choniates, 9.

¹² Kinnamos, 33-35 and 373.

¹³ Niketas Choniates, 473 and 510; *Orationes et Epistulae*, Z.57 and 62.

¹⁴ Serbia: e.g. Nikephoros Bryennios, III.1.; Kilikia: e.g. Kinnamos, 38-39; Bulgaria: e.g. Niketas Choniates, 372.

¹⁵ Anna Komnene, XIII.5.1-2 (*Arvanitai*) , III.8.4 (Bulgarians, Vlachs), IV.4.3 (Turks in Ochrid); Niketas Choniates, 403 (Armenians), 487 (Vlachs).

¹⁶ Michael Choniates, II, letter 100 ; Niketas Choniates, 606.

¹⁷ Niketas Choniates, 400 and 603; Niketas Choniates, *Orationes et Epistulae*, Θ.93.

¹⁸ Theodoros Balsamon, 178 (question 11).

heretics like the Bogomils.¹⁹ But even the Greek language is not a safe criterion for someone to be seen as a *Romaïos*. In addition to the Bogomils, in the *Alexiad* we have the case of some Greek-speaking semi-barbarians (*μιξοβάρβαροι ἑλληνίζοντες*). They helped the Turks in their attacks against the emperor Alexios I Komnenos.²⁰ Presumably they were Muslims, the offspring of mixed marriages and this condition, along with their support of the Turks, made them non-Romans. These two characteristics, the main boundaries of the ethnic group, to be Orthodox and Greek-speaking, had to be acquired by a person from his birth. So John Italos, albeit a subject of the emperor and (at least born) Orthodox, was a native Italian speaker and *so* a barbarian. Undoubtedly though, to speak the Greek language was a much stronger criterion. So, it comes about that the term *allogenes* is commonly a synonym with *allophonos/alloglotos* (of another language).²¹

Did the Byzantines call themselves Greeks? There is a handful of references in the 12th century in which it seems that the word denotes the Byzantines. Most of them, though, seem like a word-play and stem from a purely rhetorical context. For example Niketas Choniates wonders about the leader of the Normans who had sacked Thessalonike in 1184: “How much evil did this Roman-hater (*μισορρώματος*) allow and how much disdain he held for every *Hellen*”.²²

It has been claimed by some modern researchers that the scholars of the 12th century deployed all this rhetoric of Hellenism in order to differentiate themselves, the educated Hellenes, the true descendants of the ancient Hellenes philosophers and writers, from the

¹⁹ Anna Komnene, IV.6.2 and XV.8.2.

²⁰ Anna Komnene, XV.5.2.

²¹ E.g. Niketas Choniates, 263.

²² Niketas Choniates, 301. Other references: Anna Komnene, X.8.6, XI.12.3, XV.7.9; Nikephoros Basilakes, I.166-167; Michael Choniates, I, 57.94 and I, 11.83; Eustathios of Thessalonike, N.235. There are only two references which the term *Hellen* seem not to be of non rhetorical nature. The first comes from the pen of Ioannes Tzetzes, who claims twice in his works (*Epistles*, 6; *Chiliades*, V.ιζ') that he is “a noble Iberian from his mother-side and a pure Greek from his father side”. However, Tzetzes was indeed what some Byzantine authors called “mixobarbaros” and here he might tried to defend himself of these accusations deploying his illustrious Georgian ancestry along with his pure Greek father-side ancestry. The second reference is in the satiric dialogue *Timarion* (115-117 and 150) where “Greeks” among other people appear to participate in the panegyris of St Demetrios in Thessalonike. However the vocabulary of the dialogue is generally peculiar; the Christians are called *Galilaitoi*, Constantinople is *Byzantion* and the Franks are the *Lusitans*, like the vocabulary of the dialogue’s prototypes in the first and second centuries AD.

barbarians that were living not only outside the empire but even in it, the uneducated Greek or semi-Greek populace.²³ We have to underline that apart from one reference by George Tornikes, in which he expresses his regret that uneducated barbarians are preferred to fill up posts, instead of Greeks,²⁴ there is no evidence to support the view that these “rhetorical Greeks” are the scholars. Certainly, all this rhetoric play with Hellenism was theirs and they must have included themselves in this, but it was not Greek education that made them a “kind” of Greeks.

And suddenly a cataclysmic event: the fall of Constantinople in April 1204 to the Crusaders. For the Byzantines it was a shock. This brought forth an unprecedented patriotism, an ethnicism on part of the *Romaioi*. All the ethnic differences are now stressed provoking hostilities and sometimes shaping loyalties. So Akropolites thinks it is natural that the Bulgarian population of northern Macedonia shifted its loyalty quickly and delivered its cities to the Bulgarian ruler, or that the Byzantine population of Melnik (presumably Greek speaking, distinguishing the Bulgarians) delivered the city to John III Batatzes on grounds that they were *homogeneis*.²⁵ The authors after the fall of Constantinople feel contempt for the fates of the *Romaioi*. The king of Bulgaria Kalojan massacred the population of the cities of Thrace and took the epithet of Roman-slayer, *Romaioktonos*.²⁶ Akropolites believes that the Latin and Bulgarian races have a natural hatred for the Romans. Many Byzantine authors urge for the restoration of the Roman realm.²⁷

It is exactly at this time that we can date the first certain references to Greeks. The term *Graikos* appears in the *History* of Niketas Choniates in pieces that he wrote after the fall of Constantinople. All references to *Graikos* denote the Byzantines but are used in a Latin

²³ Beaton R., “Antique nation? ‘Hellenes’ on the eve of Greek independence and in twelfth – century Byzantium”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 31 [2007], 88-90; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 290-291.

²⁴ Georgios Tornikes, 10.129.

²⁵ Akropolites, section 48.

²⁶ Akropolites, section 13.

²⁷ See Angelov D. “Byzantine ideological reactions to the Latin conquest of Constantinople”, in Laiou A. (ed.), *Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and its consequences (La IV^e Croisade et ses conséquences)*, Paris 2005, 293-310; Angold M., “Byzantine ‘Nationalism’ and the Nicaean Empire”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1 [1975], 49-70; Gounaridis P., “ ‘Grecs’, ‘Hellènes’ et ‘Romains’ dans l’ état de Nicée”, in *Αφιέρωμα στον Νίκο Σβορώνο* (eds. Κρεμμυδάς Β., Παναγιωτάκης Ν., Μιλτιάδου Χ.), Volume 1, Πέθυμο 1986, 248-257; Irmscher J., “Nikäa als ‘Mittelpunkt des griechischen Patriotismus’ ”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 4 [1972], 114-137.

context, to show what the Latins call the Byzantines.²⁸ But even though the *Graikos* seems to mean in this context the Orthodox Christian, the evidence we have suggests that this is not the case. For example in the correspondence of the Constantinopolitan priests with the Latins, the latter figure not only as *allodoxoi* but also as *allogeneis*.²⁹

The term *Hellen* used in the 12th century in a rather rhetorical context, now in some cases straightforwardly denotes the Byzantines. This is most common in the letters of the emperor Theodore II Laskaris, and also in the history of Niketas Choniates after the fall of Constantinople.³⁰ Certainly this change reveals a growing attachment of the scholars to the Hellenic part of their identity but we cannot conclude to a Greek ethnic identity, since this is not a uniform phenomenon and is even doubtful among scholars. However, it is clear that the essence of being a *Romaïos* do not change when it shifts to *Graikos* or *Hellen*. It is the same ethnic group.

Ethnic identity is not only a matter of a name, or how you build your identity opposed to the Other, but it is also a matter of how you construct your past and where you trace the common descent that the members of an ethnic group claim. It is sufficient to remember of the various adventures that the Greek national identity had during the last two centuries, with occasionally the rejection of the Byzantine past or its increased importance or even the hilarious attempt to identify the Albanians with the ancient Pelasgians in an effort to unite the two people in the period just before the emergence of Albanian nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century.³¹

The components of the Byzantine construction of their past are three: the ancient Greek heritage, the Christian heritage and the ancient Roman heritage. The Byzantine literary works

²⁸ For example Niketas Choniates says (477): *οἱ δ' Ἀλαμανοὶ τοσοῦτον ἀπεῖχον ἕκθαμβοι τοῖς ὀρωμένοις τούτοις φανῆναι, ὥστε καὶ ἀνέθαλπον μᾶλλον τὸν ἔρωταν, ὃν ὑπέτυφον ταῖς λαμπρειμονίαις τῶν Ρωμαίων ἐναυόμενον, καὶ ἠῤῥχοντο τάχιον κρατῆσαι Γραικῶν ὡς ἀγεννῶν τὰ ἐς πόλεμον καὶ περισπουδαζόντων τὰς ἀνδραποδώδεις χλιδάς.*

²⁹ Nikolaos Mesarites, *Epitaphios an Ioannes Mesarites*.

³⁰ E.g. Niketas Choniates, 580 and 610.

³¹ See volume by Ricks D. – Magdalino P., *Byzantium and the modern Greek identity*, Aldershot: Ashgate 1998; For the Greeks and Albanians see for example Λαμπρυνίδης Μ., *Οἱ Ἀλβανοὶ κατὰ τὴν κυρίως Ελλάδα καὶ τὴν Πελοπόννησο*, Αθήνα 1907.

are full of quotations from ancient Greek authors or the Holy Bible and full of *exemplae* of biblical, ancient Greek or Roman personages. All three elements are exhibited to different degrees, in the writings of all Byzantine authors, and the importance of each one depends on the preferences of the specific author and of the occasion and purpose of each work. Thus for example it is natural that speeches that praise a churchman or that are delivered on a religious feast are full of biblical quotations and *exemplae*.

On account of the rhetorical motive presenting the Byzantines as God's Chosen People (*to ethnos to agion*) and also of the content and the structure of the byzantine chronicles, some modern scholars were ready to accept that a Byzantine's past was nothing more than the history of the Chosen People of God.³² The Byzantine chronicles usually begin with the Creation of the World by God and finish at the lifetime of the author. They tend to be brief in the start, more extensive after Constantine I and this increase continues as the author comes closer to his time. Jewish biblical history is usually succeeded by the history of the Roman emperors after Augustus and Greek history is only dealt with in connection with these two basic parameters. The main theme of world history is the Succession of Kingdoms, the last of which is the empire of the Romans.³³ We should note hereby that the literary genre of the chronicle had this structure since its foundation and the Byzantine authors did not and could not change it, even though in a certain degree they could successfully include their program and preferences, like for example Zonaras, who included an extensive part of the history of republican Rome in his chronicle. Moreover, the motive of the "holy nation" is very rare in our texts, and it is of course always a rhetorical expression.³⁴ Even the Latins during the 12th century are sometimes called "the holy nation".³⁵ The Byzantines belonged to this holy nation only if they are Christians in the context of the text.

On the other hand, the ancient Greek past even during the 12th century does not seem to have a special place. When we meet the ancient Greeks, they are always *those* Greeks. They do not

³² Mango C., "Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism", inaugural lecture in the Korae's Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, at University of London King's College, October 27th 1964, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 [1965], 29-43.

³³ Jeffreys E.M., "The attitudes of Byzantine chroniclers towards ancient history", *Byzantion* 49 [1979], 199-238; Macrides R. – Magdalino P., "The Fourth Kingdom and the rhetoric of Hellenism", στο Magdalino P. (ed.), *The Perception of the past in twelfth-century Europe*, London 1992, 117-156.

³⁴ For example see Nikephoros Basilakes, 53 (again in a rhetorical expression).

³⁵ Theophylaktos, *Vita Clementis Ochridensis* (for the Bulgarians); Niketas Choniates, 69-70.

seem to be part of *us* (the Byzantines).³⁶ What is important however and happens exactly during this time is the increase of the Greek element in literature and its different treatment. The ancient Greeks earlier despised for their paganism, now become models to be imitated. Scholars come to feel nostalgic for the time of the Ancient Greeks, they re-create past worlds in their works, they cite Greek authors side by side with Christian Fathers and they admire the ancient monuments.³⁷ Still they never called themselves *Hellenes* and they never seem to share this past.

This development goes alongside with another one: the diminution of the Latin Roman past. Not only *exemplae* of Latin personages are almost lacking from literature, but also the Romans of antiquity are viewed as Others; still not *us*. They are *those* Italians Romans, the descendants of Aineias (*Aineiades Romaioi*), they are even sometimes called barbarians.³⁸ The empire of *these* Romans seem to have ended in 476, when Romulus Augustulus was deposed and their descendants are now the Latins, not the Byzantines.³⁹ What is becoming

³⁶ See for example Nikephoros Basilakes, 95: *Εἰδέναι μέντοι περὶ τούτων καὶ λέγειν ὅσα εἰς ἐμὴν ἐλήλυθε γινώσιν οὐκ ἂν ἀρνηθεῖην, ὥσπερ καὶ περὶ τινος ἄλλου τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσι μὲν τιμωμένων, παρ' ἡμῖν δὲ ἀτιμαζομένων, οὐ πολυμάθειαν ἐνδεικνυμένος, ἀλλὰ φιλομαθοῦς ψυχῆς ἀποπληρῶν ὄρεζιν.*

³⁷ Michael Choniates, II, 8.13: *Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὁ μάταιος ὄμηρ, ὡς εἰ μὴ καὶ Δημοσθένους ζήλωτὰς τοὺς ἐκείνου πολίτας εὐροίμι, ἀλλὰ γε τοῦ κριθίνου Δημοσθένους πάντως, οἶδας δήπου τὸν Δείναρχον. Οἱ δὲ οὐ μόνον λιμὸν τοῦ ἀκοῦσαι λόγον, ἀλλὰ καὶ λιμὸν ἄρτου κριθίνου δυστυχοῦσιν οἱ τλήμονες. Ἦν δὲ ἄρα κάκεῖνο τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστοῦ σοφὸν πορεύεται καὶ γενεὰ ἔρχεται, ἡ δὲ γῆ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἔστηκεν. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ χάρις τῆς γῆς ἡ αὐτή, τὸ εὐκραές, τὸ ὀπωροφόρον, τὸ παμφόρον, ὁ μελιχρὸς Ὑμηττός, ὁ εὐγάληνος Πειραιεύς, ἡ μυστηριώδης Ἐλευσίς ἦν ὅτε, ἡ τῶν Μαραθωνομάχων ἱππήλατος πεδιάς ἡ τε Ἀκρόπολις αὕτη, ἐφ' ἧς ἐγὼ νῦν καθήμενος αὐτὴν δοκῶ πατεῖν τὴν ἄκραν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ· ἡ δὲ φιλόλογος ἐκείνη γενεὰ καὶ περιττὴ τὴν σοφίαν οἶχεται, ἐπεισῆλθε δὲ ἡ ἄμουσος, πτωχὴ τὸν νοῦν, πτωχὴ τὸ σῶμα, κούφη μεταναστεῦσαι καὶ ἄλλοτε ἄλλης ἐπιβῆναι τροφὴν μαστεύουσα, κάκεῖθεν αὐθις ἀναπτῆναι κατὰ τοὺς ἀβέβαιους καὶ πλάνητας ὄρνιθας. Κάντεῦθεν ἡ μεγάλη πόλις ἐρείπιον μέγα καὶ ἄλλως θρυλλούμενον.*

³⁸ Tzetzes, Chil. III.o; Tzetzes, *Epistles*, 6.

³⁹ Both Manasses (2483-2508) and Michael Glykas (490) say this (*τότε δὴ τότε καὶ ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων παύεται βασιλεία. Σημείωσαι δὲ ὅτι ἀπὸ Ῥωμόλου ἤρξατο αὕτη, καὶ μετὰ αὐτὴ καὶ γ' ἔτη ἐν Ῥωμόλῳ πάλιν πεπαύεται, κρατούντων ἐκείσε μετὰ ταῦτα ῥηγῶν μεγιστάνων καὶ ὅσοι τοιοῦτοι χωράρχαι βάρβαροι*), but this line of thought can be also traced to Anna Komnene (while criticizing the Pope: *Καὶ ταῦτα ἀρχιερέως ὦ δίκη, καὶ ταῦτα πρώτου ἀρχιερέως καὶ ταῦτα προκαθήμενου τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀπάσης γενομένου, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ οἱ Λατῖνοι λέγουσί τε καὶ οἶονται· ἔστι γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο τα ἀλαζονείας αὐτῶν. Μεταπεπτοκότων γὰρ τῶν σκήπτρων ἐκεῖθεν ἐνθάδε εἰς τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν τε καὶ ἡμετέραν βασιλίδα πόλιν καὶ δὴ τῆς συγκλήτου καὶ ἅμα πάσης τῆς τάξεως μεταπέπτωκε καὶ ἡ τῶν θρόνων ἀρχιερατικὴ τάξις*), to Kinnamos (218-220) and to Niketas of Side (*De controversiis ecclesiae Graecae et Latinae (recensio A)*, 1.1.2).

clear is that the Byzantines' past does not go earlier than the foundation of Constantinople, the transfer of kingship (*basileia*) there (as part also of the idea of the Succession of Kingdoms), to the capital of the eastern Romans (*Romaioi tes eoas*). Constantine was so great not only because he happened to be the first Christian emperor, but also because he transferred the kingship to Constantinople, the *New Rome* and this fact permitted to the Byzantines to be called *Romaioi*. This capital transfer is their *myth of descent*, which myth, however, does not include the *old Rome* anymore. The Byzantines considered themselves first of all descendants of Constantine, and not of Augustus, David, or Alexander the Great.

After the shock of 1204 the ethnicity on part of the Byzantines takes a new shape. They feel that they not only lost their New Jerusalem, their New Rome but that this was also their punishment for the capture of Troy and the massacre of the Trojans, the supposed ancestors of the Romans and the Latins.⁴⁰ Many Byzantines do not hesitate any more to call themselves Greeks and this for the first time finds its way to the official ideology.⁴¹ The main objective though of this ethnicity was not to create a new basis but to build upon the already established official imperial ideology. So, when its main aim was fulfilled, the recapture of Constantinople, these voices were receded to the pre-1204 situation and until the time of Plethon in the 15th century.

These two centuries were vital for the future of Greek identity. First of all, it is exactly at this time that the ethnic group of the *Romaioi* came into being and set up its boundaries effectively separating itself from the Others. Secondly, exactly at this time it rehabilitated its ancient Greek past, rejected its pre-Constantinian Latin past and acknowledged that the Christian religion is not sufficient to shape the identity of its group. Only with both these developments could this ethnic group survive in the next centuries and then in the 19th century build a new nation-state and a national ideology and change officially its ethnic name from *Romaioi* to *Hellenas*.

⁴⁰ This comparison of the fall of Constantinople with Troia comes from the pen of Niketas Choniates (652).

⁴¹ For example see the famous letter of Ioannes III Batatzes to the Pope, where emphatically the emperor boasts his Hellenic descent: Grumel V., "L'authenticite de la lettre de Jean Vatatzès, empereur de Nicée, au pape Grégoire IX", *Echos d'Orient* 29 (1930), 452-458.

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