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Byzantine Culture in Late Mediaeval Greek States*

On April 13, 1204 Constantinople, the richest and most populous city of the world, the “pride of the Universe”, the Queen of Cities, was conquered and plundered by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade. The diversion of the Crusade and the sack of Constantinople were due not only to the interests of the West but to the disintegration of the Byzantine Empire, the separatist movements and dynastic conflicts. The Byzantine Empire was dismembered and split into Latin and Greek States. Byzantine territories were allotted by the Treaty of Partitio Romanae to the leaders of the Crusade and the Venetians. Baldwin of Flanders was elected Emperor of Romania and was crowned in the church of St. Sophia on 16 May. A Venetian Patriarch was also appointed. Thus the Latin Empire of Constantinople was established. Boniface of Montferrat demanded the second city of the Empire, Thessalonike, with the title of King.¹

Many refugees especially from the upper classes, the elite, fled from the City before or after the tragic events, and found refuge in Asia Minor or in continental Greece. Three Greek independent states were founded by relatives of the imperial families of Komneni and Angeli: The Empire of Trebizond on the Black Sea, the Empire of Nicaea in Bithynia and the State of Epiros.² With military campaigns and diplomatic


moves, their rulers achieved to consolidate their power, extend their territories and claim the imperial power. Their main goal being the recapture of Constantinople and the ascension to the genuine throne of the Queen of Cities, turned them into rivals. Their relations underwent many phases and in the course of time they were led to hostility and open conflict. The outline of events may be followed in the extant narrations of Nicetas Choniates, an eyewitness of the sack of Constantinople, and George Akropolites. We depend on their historical narrations, but also on all kinds of sources, histories, rhetoric, epistolography, imperial charters and documents, coins and seals, hagiographical sources and monuments, which help us reconstruct the period.

The Emperor Alexius III Angelos had fled from Constantinople in Thrace in July 1203 together with the treasury. His son-in-law Theodore Laskaris, who had been honoured with the title of despot, fled from the conquered City to Bithynia, where his family found refuge in Nicaea, even though he was initially rejected. The withdrawal of the Latin forces from Asia Minor and their defeat at the battle of Adrianople by the Bulgarian tsar Kalojan on April 14, 1205, gave the opportunity to Theodore Laskaris to suppress his Greek rivals in Asia Minor and come to terms with the Sultanate of Iconium. In 1206 he was proclaimed and in 1208 he was crowned emperor, most probably in the church of St. Sophia in Nicaea by the new Patriarch Michael IV Autoreianos. Thus, Nicaea, a city only 60 miles away from Constantinople, became the seat of the Byzantine political and ecclesiastical authorities, of the Emperor and the Patriarch. Theodore signed as Emperor of the Romans, he minted his own coinage, and he was hailed by the Greek rhetoric as the saviour and deliverer of the Romans. Although Alexius III was still the legitimate emperor, Theodore by his investment of the imperial title claimed to be the sole heir of Byzantine emperors and the continuator of the Byzantine imperial idea. He surpassed all his Greek rivals in Asia Minor, and he became a symbol of unity, the person who could bring “one fold under one shepherd”. “God gave us the Empire as the monarchical institution, in the likeness of his own government, thus setting aside for all time the

disorder that results from polyarchy”, the Patriarch wrote to him in 12085.

Just before the fall of Constantinople David and Alexios Komnenos, grandsons of the Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos, fled from Constantinople and with the military assistance of their aunt, the Georgian Queen Thamar, established themselves at Trebizond on the southern coast of the Black Sea. Being the only male descendants of the Komneni family they claimed to be the true heirs of the imperial title. David, a competent general, soon became master of the cities across the Pontic shore, but he was defeated by Theodore Laskaris on his way to Nikomedieia. After his death in 1212 his brother Alexios ruled as sole emperor at Trebizond. The empire of the Grand Komneni lasted until 1461, when they succumbed to the Ottoman Turks6.

In continental Greece resistance against the Franks was carried out by the ruler of Nauplion Leo Sgouros, who marched to Thessaly and by his marriage to the third daughter of Alexios III, the emperor bestowed over him the title of despot, showing his resentment to Theodore


Lascaris for trying to persuade the cities of Asia Minor to accept him as *basileus* instead of his father-in-law (ϝώς βασιλεῖς ἀντὶ τοῦ πενθεροῦ αὐτοῦ) and for his proclamation⁷. A cousin of Alexios III, Michael Comnenos Doukas, also participated in the resistance against the Franks in the Peloponnese after he had left the service of Boniface of Montferrat, and set himself as an autonomous ruler at Arta. By diplomatic negotiations and treaties with the Latin Emperor and the Venetians he strengthened his position and he gained *de jure* the recognition of his realm. Very soon he broke the agreements and he drove away the Venetians from Dyrachion and Corfu, while he captured Larissa in Thessaly and other strongholds. After his assassination in 1214/5 his half-brother Theodore Doukas, a most ambitious and competent ruler, captured cities from the Bulgarians and the Franks, and after a long siege he obtained Thessalonike late in 1224, putting an end to the Lombard Kingdom⁸. In late 1225/6 he was proclaimed and in 1227, probably at the Day of Pentecost, he was crowned Emperor of the Romans in Thessalonike, most probably in the cathedral of St. Sophia, by the archbishop of Achrida Demetrios Chomatenos⁹.

Much has been written by eminent scholars about the history, the political ideology, the administration and economic organization, the ecclesiastical policy, the social structure, of these states. This paper focuses on Byzantine culture and learning in the States of Epiros, Nicaea and Trebizond, and the last small Byzantine state in Peloponnese, Mystras.


The State of Epiros reached its peak by the conquests of its rulers Michael and Theodore Doukas at the expense of Franks, Venetians and Bulgarians and extended from Naupaktos in the South to Dyrrhachion in the North and from the Ionian and the Adriatic Seas to the Evros River. The disastrous defeat of Theodore Doukas by the tsar Ivan Asen II and his imprisonment in 1230 diminished the aspirations of Theodore to the imperial throne of Constantinople. In 1246 Thessalonike became part of the Nicaean Empire, while Theodore’s nephew Michael II Doukas from Arta continued the wars against the emperors of Nicaea and the Palaiologi even after 1261, when Constantinople was recovered.10

Epiros in the west of the Balkan Peninsula was exposed to the hostility and the cultural impact of the West and was isolated from the other Greek provinces by the Pindos range. After the sack of Constantinople many officials who served in the administration probably remained there, while it is recorded that many others, members of the senate, high-ranking officials and intellectuals fled to Epiros and ran the administration and military affairs under the command of its rulers. Refugees were also permitted by Michael I to settle in the castle of Ioannina. The administrative center was Arta at the bank of the Arachthos River until 1224, when Thessalonike was recaptured and Theodore Doukas and the senate moved there. Three eminent personalities played a most significant role in the ecclesiastical and political affairs: John Apokaukos, metropolitan of Naupaktos, Demetrios Chomatenos, archbishop of Achrida, and George Bardanes, metropolitan of Corfou. They became the champions of Theodore’s political and ecclesiastical policy, defending his right to the anointment and coronation and to the election of new prelates in vacant sees without the consent of the Patriarch. The same ecclesiastical policy was followed by Trebizond as well. The independent ecclesiastical policy of the rulers of Epiros and Trebizond challenged the Patriarch’s jurisdiction to their lands. Although the Empire of Nicaea was restricted in the Eastern territories, the jurisdiction of the Patriarch extended to all


the territories of the old empire, and there was a tendency to expand the boundaries of the State of Nicaea to coincide with those of the Patriarch's authority. The metropolitan of Naupaktos, John Apokaukos (1199/1200-1232), was the senior in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Epiros, a prolific writer and a distinguished scholar and theologian. He was a nephew of the historian Constantine Manasses, who had been metropolitan of Naupaktos from about 1175 to 1187. He had studied in Constantinople together with the later Patriarch Manuel Sarantenos and other eminent prelates and scholars. It was the last quarter of the twelfth century, when studies of ancient Greek writers flourished and scholars “atticized”, e.g. Eustathios of Thessalonike, Michael Choniates, Euthymios Tornikes, Basilios Pediadites and others. Apokaukos had served as a patriarchal scribe (υπογραφεύς), a post that he left when he was elected to the see of Naupaktos. His correspondence with the metropolitan of Athens Michael Choniates, Demetrios Chomatenos, George Bardanes, Theodore Doukas and his wife, with officials of administration and clergy and the decisions of the ecclesiastical court of his metropolis provide plenty of information about the political, ecclesiastical, military and social affairs in Epiros.

Demetrios Chomatenos had studied also in Constantinople. It is obvious that he had brought with him his library, especially law books, to Achrida, where he served as a chartophylax until 1217, when he was elected archbishop of Achrida by the ecclesiastical synod of Epiros. His 152 documents, letters, synodal acts and judicial decisions prove that he was a competent canonist and they are a good source for the history, the provincial life, the customs and morals in a vast area.

George Bardanes was born in Athens. He was a student of the learned metropolitan of Athens Michael Choniates, with whom he corresponded even when the latter left Athens and lived in self-exile on the territory of Epiros.

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island of Keos. He was called “Atticos”, because of his origin and his elaborate style of writing. He was ordained bishop of Corfu in 1219 after the wish of Theodore Doukas, because of his knowledge and ability to defend the policy of the state and to follow a strict Orthodox policy towards the West.

We are not well informed about education in Epiros, except of some casual references by Apokaukos, e.g. for a school of sacred scriptures in Vonitsa, where Demetrios Eugeniotes, brother of the local bishop Niko- laos, taught. Apokaukos complained about illiterate prelates and clergy. He himself as well as Michael Choniates and other prelates complained that they lived among barbarians, among people who did not understand their elaborate atticized homilies. A number of epigrams and inscriptions painted or carved in various churches and other monuments, even on seals, imply the existence of a circle of intellectuals in Epiros. Some in verses, as the inscription on a tower of Dyrrachion, were perhaps written by John Apokaukos. The three above-mentioned scholars did not have learned successors. Even the Life of the saintly empress Theodora, the consort of Michael II, was written by a monk, Iob Melias, who came in exile to Arta from Constantinople in about 1275, because of his anti-unionist feelings. Researchers have widely investigated the existence of manuscripts commissioned or copied in Epiros in the thirteenth century.


and fourteenth centuries in various libraries; they were mostly of religious or liturgical content\textsuperscript{18}.

Many archaeologists have studied the monuments of the so-called Despotate of Epiros. Few monuments date to the first third of the thirteenth century. It was during the reign of Michael II (1230-1268) and Nicephoros I (1267/8-1296) that although the state diminished in size, it flourished in art. According to Professor P. Vocotopoulos “In the sphere of architecture a local school developed in Epiros in the thirteenth century, the roots of which lay in the Helladic school and in the local tradition, and which received influences from Macedonia and Constantinople and from the West. Its principal monuments survive at Arta and in the wider area ... Church building in the Despotate is characterized by a diversity of types and by the innovative solutions that were implemented in some of the monuments”\textsuperscript{19}. The most imposing building is the Panagia Paregoritissa at Arta with marvelous mosaics; it was built by Nicephoros I after 1290. Much of its sculptural decoration reflects Italian art\textsuperscript{20}.

Many thirteenth-century wall-paintings survive in Epiros, e.g. in Kato Panagia and St. Theodora at Arta, in St. Demetrios of Katsouris. The late thirteenth-century wall paintings that were discovered in 1975 in the narthex of the katholikon of the Blacherna Monastery are of particular iconographical interest. The Litany of the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, which was performed in Constantinople every Tuesday, is depicted on the southwest arcade. It is a unicum in byzantine art. According to Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou who has been studying the monument for many years, the three ladies on the left may be identified with the basilissa Anna Palaiologina, the wife of Nicephoros I, her mother Eirene-Eulogia, sister of Michael VIII Palaiologos, and her other daughter, Theodora Raoulaina. They met each other in Constantinople.


after the death of Michael Palaiologos in 1282 and the renounce of the Synod of Lyon. Two fine pieces of gold embroidery have been ascribed to Epirot embroidery workshops. A silk *endyte* of St. Marc’s in Venice with a representation of the archangels Michael and Gabriel, and a purple silk shroud (ποδέα) of the National History Museum in Sofia which comes from Achrida. The shroud is embroidered with gold and some silver wires and light blue silk threads. It depicts the Virgin Blachernitissa with a medallion of Christ Emmanuel on her chest. It is surrounded by a yellow silk stripe with a gold embroidered inscription, probably written by John Apokaukos, in which the royal couple, Theodore and Maria Doukas, is mentioned expressing their devotion to the Holy Virgin.

Compared to the scarce source material available to us from Epiros, the Empire of Nicaea provides us with a fuller and continuous account of the period: Historiography, autobiographies, the cartulary of Lembiotissa Monastery, rhetoric, epistolography, inscriptions, coins and seals etc.

One of the main tasks of Theodore I Laskaris in Nicaea was the organization of the state and the re-establishment of the institutions. He relied on high officials and intellectuals, lay and ecclesiastical, who found refuge in Nicaea. One of them was Nicetas Choniates, a former grand logothete, who came to Nicaea in 1206 and soon became the official orator of the court. His History is the chief source for the events during the reign of the last Comneni and Angeli and the spoliation of Constantinople. Nikolaos Mesarites, a deacon of Hagia Sophia, who remained in Constantinople and together with his brother participated in the negotiations with the Latin authorities, in order to defend the religious rights of the Orthodox people and clergy of Constantinople, was the go-between for the Greek people of Constantinople and Theodore Laskaris, asking for the latter’s coronation. Later he became metropolitan of Ephesos and exarch of all Asia. His writings reveal the political and ecclesiastical situation in Constantinople during the Latin

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occupation and the State of Nicaea. Theodore Eirenikos, a former epi
tou kanikleiou (in 1198) and hypatos ton philosophon, was elected Patri-
arch in 1214.

Undoubtedly, the greatest scholar of his time was Nicephoros
Blemmydes. He was born in Constantinople in 1197, and fled with his
parents to Prusa in 1204. In 1208 he moved to Nicaea, where he was
taught Homer and other Greek poets, the Rhetoric of Hermogenes and
Logic. According to his Autobiography, he spent some time in the im-
perial court, where he took a kind of education together with other boys of
the elite. He was not satisfied, so he crossed many times the border to
meet a certain scholar Prodromos, a hermit in the area of the
Skamandros River, in Troad, which was under the Latin rule. There he
was taught arithmetic, geometry, physics, syllogistic and astronomy. He
was 26 years old, when he returned to Nicaea in 1223. The new Emperor
John Batatzes (1222-1254) showed a special interest in higher education.
He was present in Blemmydes’ oral examination by the hypatos ton
philosophon Demetrios Karykes and he was impressed of his knowledge.
Although Blemmydes was offered a service in the court, he preferred to
join the Church. He was ordained a priest in the cathedral of St. John at
Ephesos and then he became a monk. He participated successfully in the
negotiations with the representatives of the Pope at Nicaea and Nym-
phaion, where was the palace of Batatzes, in 1234. In 1233 on his way to
Jerusalem, which had been liberated by Friedrich II Hohenstaufen in
1227/8, together with other scholars he stopped at Rhodes, where he was
hosted by the local independent governor Leo Gabalas. They visited a
monastery famous for its rich library. Later on Blemmydes was asked by
the emperor to visit and select books from provinces of the old empire.
He spent a year (1238/9) on Mount Athos, in Macedonia, Thessaly and
Epiros and selected many books. In one of his letters to the Despot of

24. A. Heisenberg (ed.), Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Kaisertums
und der Kirchenunion I, II, III, in Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wis-
senschaften, philosophisch-philo logische und historische Klasse 1922-1923 (= idem,
Quellen und Studien zur spätbizantinischen Geschichte [Variorum Reprints], London
1973, II.I, II.II, II.III).
25. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Θεόδωρος Εἰρηνικός, πατριάρχης οἰκουμενικός ἐν Νικαίᾳ,
Byzantinische Zeitschrift 10 (1901) 182-192. - C. N. Constantinides, Higher Ed-
cuation in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (1204 - ca. 1310),
26. Nicephori Blemmydae autobiographia sive curriculum vitae necnon epistula uni
C. N. Constantinides, Higher Education 7-9, 12, 15. - M. Angold, Church and Society in
Epiros Michael II and his consort he expressed his thanks\textsuperscript{27}. The same time the Patriarch Germanos II visited Epiros.

John Batatzes entrusted the education of his son and heir Theodore to the best scholars of the day: Nicephoros Blemmydes and George Akropolites.

In 1233 at the age of 16 George Akropolites came to Nicaea. He was born in Constantinople in 1217, and he was sent to Nicaea for higher education. His teachers were Theodore Hexapterygos and Nicephoros Blemmydes, chosen and payed by the emperor. In 1236 together with four other students he went to Ephesos, where Blemmydes taught in his monastery of St. Gregory the Wonderworker. Later on he undertook the teaching of Prince Theodore, which was interrupted in 1246, when Akropolites accompanied the Emperor John Batatzes on his three-month campaign in Thrace and Macedonia. The course of Theodore’s study though was kept alive by correspondence with Akropolites, as it was before with Blemmydes, and by the good library available in the palace. He was taught Logic and Philosophy, as is documented by Theodore’s 39 letters to Akropolites, which the latter collected and with a verse preface presented them to Theodore; also by the encomium to Acropolites which Theodore wrote in response\textsuperscript{28}.

The flourishing of letters in Nicaea was attributed by Theodore Skoutariotes to the Emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1259). He rebuilt the church of St. Tryphon in Nicaea and established state schools. His classical education and his admiration for the ancient Greek world is revealed in his encomium to Nicaea. He regarded himself and his people as descendants of the ancient Hellenes. He referred to Asia Minor and his state as Hellenikon and Hellas. He compared Nicaea with the golden age of Athens because of philosophy and secular learning, finding her though superior because of the Christian Faith\textsuperscript{29}.

Many monasteries flourished in the State of Nicaea and many manuscripts, most of religious content, have survived. Mounts Galesion and Latros were the major monastic centers of Asia Minor. The Monastery of Theotokos on the Lembos island near Smyrna was rebuilt in 1228. Its cartulary with documents dated from 1192 to 1294 is of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} J. B. Bury, Inedita Nicephori Blemmydae, \textit{Byzantinische Zeitschrift} 6.3 (1897) 526-537.
\item \textsuperscript{29} \textit{Theodorus II Ducas Lascaris} 67-84. Cf. C. N. Constantinides, \textit{Higher Education} 19-20.
\end{itemize}
great importance for the study of administration, economic organization and social structure of the state. Also the monasteries of Theotokos on the mountain Galesion (Alman dag) near Ephesos and those of Kelibara and Stylos on Latros were very important\textsuperscript{30}.

The State of Trebizond consisted territorially of a long strip of coast on the Black Sea, protected in the South by the barrier of the Pontic Mountain. After the sack of Sinope by the Seljuk Sultan of Iconium in 1214 a Turkish wedge separated the State of Trebizond from the Byzantines of Nicaea\textsuperscript{31}.

The city of Trebizond consisted of three connected but distinct enclosures, the Lower City, the Middle and the Citadel, where the ruins of the Emperor’s palace can still be seen on the hill. The walls run down to the sea shore on either side. In the center of the Middle City stands the church of Theotokos Chrysokephalos, a triple-aisled basilica which has undergone many structural alterations. It was the metropolis, where the Great Komneni were crowned and buried. The church of the patron’s saint Saint Eugenios, a martyr of the late third century, still stands. The best preserved church is the monastery church of St. Sophia, two miles to the west of the city walls; it dates from the thirteenth century\textsuperscript{32}.

A chronicle written by Michael Panaretos in the fifteenth century covers in simple style the major political and ecclesiastical events of the Empire between the years 1204 and 1426\textsuperscript{33}.

The emperors of Trebizond, who styled themselves as Grand Komneni, were patrons of letters and art. One of the most famous scholars was Gregory Chioniades (1240/50-1320), who was born in Constantinople, where he studied medicine. He was ordained priest by 1295 and lived for a short time in Tabriz of Persia (1295/6), where he learned the Persian language and studied astronomy. When he returned to Trebizond, he translated Persian astronomical works into Greek. His pupil George Chrysokokkes (1335/50-1365), of Constantinopolitan origin, wrote treatises on astronomy, medicine and geography. He had also

\textsuperscript{30} Sophia Kotzambasi, Βυζαντινά Χειρόγραφα από τα Μοναστήρια της Μικράς Ασίας, Athens 2004.


\textsuperscript{33} Μητριάδη Παναγιώτου Πεδη των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών, ed. O. Lampsides, Athens 1958. See also A. Savvides, Οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί 161-164 (with literature).
studied mathematics and astronomy under the scholar Manuel of Trebizond. A renowned scholar and a high-ranking official was Constantine Loukites (second half of the 13th century – 1340), who taught mathematics and astronomy at the schools of St. Eugenios and St. Sophia. Two encomia of the city of Trebizond were composed. One by John Eugenikos in 1450 (Τῇ Τραπεζουντίων πόλει ἐγκωμιαστικὴ ἔκφρασις), by which he praises the city for the many churches and monasteries, the beauty of its forests, its inhabitants and the economical prosperity. The second was composed by the renowned scholar Bessarion, who was born in Trebizond (1399/1400-1472). He praised Trebizond as the commercial center built on crossroads, and the architectural style of the palace. Bessarion was a pupil of the metropolitan of Trebizond Dositheos, whom he followed in Constantinople, where he studied rhetoric under Manuel Chrysokokkes. In 1427 as a deacon he studied philosophy and mathematics under George Gemistos-Plethon, at Mystras. In 1437 he was ordained bishop of Nicaea and participated in the Synod of Ferrara-Florence in 1438/39, where he supported the union of the Churches and the subordination of the Orthodox Church to the Church of Rome. He was ordained cardinal of the Roman Church in 1440. Before his death he offered his library to Venice. Among his books and manuscripts was the Chronicle of Michael Panaretos, which Fallmereyer found by 1820 and gave him the impetus to study the history of Pontos.

A great part of the wealth of the Empire of Trebizond was centered in the monasteries, which controlled the largest estates. The three great monasteries of Soumela, Vazelon and Peristera (Peristereota) were endowed by the emperors. Alexius III Komnenos and his wife Theodora were the founders of the Monastery of St. Dionysios on Mount Athos.

A microcosm of Byzantine Constantinople though was Mystras built on Mount Taygetos near Sparta in Moreas (Peloponnese), especially in the early fifteenth century, when Manuel II Palaiologos patronized its development, particularly after his son Theodore II had been enthroned as despot in 1408. The churches of Mystras, St. Demetrius, the

35. D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries* 42. – A. Savvides, Οἱ Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοὶ 155-156.
Brontocheion and Afentiko, Peribleptos and Pantanassa of the fourteenth century are variations of the Byzantine style and techniques; their frescoes are among the most striking examples of the art of the Palaiologan period.

Writers and philosophers congregated at Mystras: Isidore, later bishop of Kiev, Bessarion, later bishop of Nicaea, George Scholarios, who was to become the first Patriarch under the Turkish rule. Councilor of the young despot, the philosopher George Gemistos-Plethon, encouraged Manuel to take a series of measures for the reform of administration and economy, for the defense of Moreas against the Turks. “The realties” though according to D. Nicol, “were very different from the romantic ideas of Plethon”. The Despotate came to its end in May 1460\textsuperscript{38}.

In conclusion, the three Greek states that were established after the Fourth Crusade followed their own devices. They kept alive the Byzantine tradition in learning and art; they transmitted the Byzantine Culture and received the impact of the West as well as from other peoples, whether they were enemies or allies.

Ο Βυζαντινός πολιτισμός στα ύστερα Ελληνικά Μεσαιωνικά Κράτη

Η μελέτη εστιάζει στον πολιτισμό και την παιδεία στα ελληνικά κράτη που δημιουργήθηκαν μετά την άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης από τους Φράγκους της Δ’ Σταυροφορίας το 1204, της Ηπείρου, της Νίκαιας, της Τραπεζούντας και το τελευταίο μικρό κράτιδιο του Μυστρά.
Τα έγγραφα και οι αποφάσεις των εκκλησιαστικών δικαστηρίων των λογίων ιεραρχών Ιωάννη Απόκαυκου και Δημητρίου Χωματηνού παρέχουν πληροφορίες για την πολιτική ιδεολογία, την εκκλησία, τον στρατό και την κοινωνία του κράτους της Ηπείρου, στοιχείων όμως αναφορές για την παιδεία. Επιγραφές, επιγραφές σε ναούς και άλλα μνημεία, έμμεσες επιγραφές σε σφραγίδες μαρτυρούν την παρουσία διανοουμένων στην Ήπειρο. Χειρόγραφα από την Ήπειρο χυρίως λειτουργικού περιεχομένου έχουν βρεθεί σε βιβλιοθήκες του εξωτερικού. «Σχολή» χαρακτηριστικής με επιρροές από την Μακεδονία, την Κωνσταντινούπολη και τη Δύση μαρτυρεί η Παναγία Παρηγορήτισσα της Άρτας. Οι τοιχογραφίες της Κάτω Παναγιάς, της Αγίας Θεοδώρας Άρτης, του Αγίου Δημητρίου του Κατούβη, του νάρθηκα της Μονής της Βλαχέρνας, η χρυσοκέντητη «ενδυτή» του Αγίου Μάρκου Βενετίας και η χρυσοκέντητη ποδέα του Θεόδωρου Δούκα και της συζύγου του από την Αχρίδα (σήμερα στο Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο της Σόφιας), αποτελούν πολύτιμα δείγματα της συνέχειας του βυζαντινού πολιτισμού.
Αντίθετα στη Νίκαια, στην «αυτοκρατορία εν εξορία», η ιστοριογραφία, αυτοβιογραφίες, η ιστορικά χείμενα, επιστολογραφία, επιγραφές, μοναστικά κέντρα, η διάσωση κωδίκων και οργάνωση βιβλιοθηκών, η προσέλκυση λογίων μαρτυρούν την προστασία των πολιτιστικών αγαθών από τον αυτοκράτορα και τη διαφύλαξη της ελληνικής γλώσσας και παιδείας, με εκφράση τη βασιλεία του Θεόδωρου Β’ Λάσκαρη, όταν η Νίκαια αναδείχθηκε όχι μόνον η «κιβωτός» της βασιλείας αλλά και «Νέαι Αθήναι».
Στη μακρινή Τραπεζούντα οι Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί αναδείχθηκαν προστάτες των γραμμάτων και των τεχνών. Σπουδαία θρησκευτικά και πολιτιστικά κέντρα αναδείχθηκαν οι μονές Σουμελά, Βαζελώνος και Περιστερεώτα. Πολυμαθείς λόγοι όπως ο Γρηγόριος Χιονιάδης και ο Γεώργιος Χρυσοκόκκης διέπρεψαν στην ιατρική, τη γεωγραφία, την αστρονομία, επίσης ο Κωνσταντίνος Λουκίτης, ο Βησσαρίων, που έφθασε και στον Μυστρά, στον κύκλο του τελευταίου λογίου του Βυζαντίου, του Γεωργίου Πλήθωνα Γεμιστού.