

Ought one to marry? Manuel II Palaiologos' point of view*

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Manuel II Palaiologos wrote his text on marriage and its ethical aspects between 1394 and 1397. At that time he was newly married and his wife had already given birth to their firstborn, John VIII. The text is presented in the form of a dialogue between the emperor Manuel and his mother, the dowager empress Helena Kantakouzene, wife of John V Palaiologos. An unusual case in dynastic policy, Manuel II was a bachelor until his forties. Fortunate circumstances caused him to inherit the throne after the death of his elder brother, Andronikos IV, in 1385, but he himself was not yet married and thus had no legitimate successor. His nephew, John VII, was his long-standing rival. The intention of the author of the dialogue was, without doubt, to show how important inheritance was for the imperial family. The text of the dialogue was subsequently corrected by the emperor himself; the revised version is dated to between 1417 and 1425. This article argues that the text was revised in order to encourage Manuel's own son, John, to marry and have successors.

If one wants to learn something about Byzantine marriage, Manuel's dialogue on the subject is a very discouraging source. The text concerns marriage, but Manuel's wife does not appear in it at all.¹ The editor established the date of composition between 1394 and 1397. Manuel was already married and had fathered a successor (1392). It was a time of serious troubles for Byzantium. The blockade of Constantinople by Bayezid I had started in 1394, and the battle of Nikopolis (1396) proved disastrous for the Christians. Manuel

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1 The crucial book on Manuel's reign is by J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, NJ 1968).

wrote his text after these events, and dedicated the dialogue to Demetrios, Kydones, a friend of the imperial family, who died in 1397. The dedication gives us a precise *terminus ante quem*.² The historical circumstances explain Manuel's mood and his scepticism concerning the prospects of saving the empire without considerable assistance from the Latins, greater than that offered at Nikopolis. He must have been aware that his successor might soon have no empire to rule. The fate of Byzantium, however, is not discussed in Manuel's text. Its subject is marriage and its ethical aspects. It is presented in the form of a dialogue between the emperor Manuel and his mother, the dowager empress Helena Kantakouzene, wife of John V Palaiologos.

The witty introduction does not reveal any serious problem. It gives the reader the impression of a friendly discussion between the emperor, in his forties, and his mother. Let me quote a sample: 'You seem to be joking,' Helena says. 'Oh, no Mother, I am not joking,' replies the emperor. To this his mother responds: 'I am sure you are, you cannot be serious!'³ The dialogue sounds informal. Many examples from the text create the impression that the conversation is a private one or a rhetorical exercise, which it is almost impossible to summarize. Yet we should not be misled by the conventional form. We are dealing with a text written by a very sophisticated emperor. Barker calls him 'a philosopher King', who was 'unique among his fellow Basileis'.⁴ From the very first line, we can see that the emperor had talked to his mother about marriage before, and he was afraid that she had formed a mistaken opinion about his views. The text sounds like a recollection of a conversation which must have taken place before Manuel's wedding, that is, before 1392.⁵ In this context the whole dialogue becomes comprehensible. The mother's aim is to persuade Manuel to get married. She speaks of the succession and his duty to the state, stressing the rivalry between his and his brother's line.

2 A. Angelou, *Manuel Palaiologos, Dialogue with the Empress-mother on Marriage* (Vienna 1991) 20 (Introduction).

3 Angelou, *Dialogue*, 60, 61. The edition has a facing-page English translation. I cite Angelou's translation in my text.

4 Barker, *Manuel II*, 84 and 421, respectively.

5 The Russian archimandrite Ignatios of Smolensk witnessed Manuel's coronation and that of his Serbian wife, Helena Dragaš. See *Le Pèlerinage d'Ignace de Smolensk, 1389-1405*, ed. B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en Orient* (St Petersburg 1889) 143-7; cf. G. P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, DC 1984) 108-10. Only one Greek source (Vat. gr. 162) states that Helena was 'one-eyed but prudent by nature'. See R.-J. Loenertz (ed.), 'Chronicon breve de Graecorum imperatoribus, ab anno 1341 ad annum 1453 e codice Vaticano graeco 162', *EEBS* 28 (1958) 209.65-6; Barker, *Manuel II*, 99 n. 24. Barker compares this description with the famous portrait of Helena with Manuel and their three sons in the manuscript of Dionysius Aeropagite, stating that there are no traces of deformity in Helena's face. I was privileged to see this miniature at the Louvre in 1996, courtesy of J. Durand. It is so conventionally painted that one cannot rule out Helena's defect, although no other chronicler mentions it. On the other hand, Manuel's blue eyes are only too distinct. The political context of Manuel's wedding has most recently been discussed by S. W. Reinert, 'Political dimensions of Manuel II Palaiologos' 1392 marriage and coronation: some new evidence', in C. Sode and S. Takács (eds), *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot 2001) 291-303.

Manuel Palaiologos was born in 1350. His parents, John V Palaiologos and Helena Kantakouzene, were ill-matched. Their wedding was supposed to put an end to the civil war between the regency government of the dowager empress, Anne of Savoy, ruling on behalf of her minor son John V, and John Kantakouzenos, the best friend and first minister of her deceased husband, who also claimed to be a regent.⁶ The war lasted from 1341 until 1347, and ended with the victory of John Kantakouzenos, who became the co-emperor. The victory was strengthened by the marriage of Kantakouzenos' daughter with John V. Unfortunately, it did not make peace between the two ambitious families, and John VI Kantakouzenos was forced by his son-in-law to abdicate in 1354. Then John V started his reign independently, and the fifty years of his rule turned out to be a disaster, although he did his best to show that the salvation of the empire, threatened by the Turks, was his main goal. According to Doukas, he devoted even more time to women.⁷ His wife, Helena Kantakouzene, was a notable exception.

Manuel was the second son of this couple. He did not have hopes of succeeding to the throne as his elder brother, Andronikos IV, was made co-emperor. It seems that the parents divided their love and care for the children between them. Andronikos was favoured by his father, while Manuel enjoyed the love of his mother.⁸ John V treated Manuel as a pawn in international politics. At the very beginning of John's reign, in 1355, when the emperor was looking for assistance in the West, he asked the pope for help and offered to send the five-year-old Manuel to the papal court to receive a Latin education. The pope declined the offer, thus depriving the young Manuel of a chance to learn Latin in Latin lands.⁹ Then, in 1370–1, during John's stay in Venice, when it turned out that the emperor had no means to pay for his bed and breakfast, he left the twenty-one-year-old

6 The conflict is described by John Kantakouzenos himself and by a high official at the court, Nikephoros Gregoras. See Ioannes Cantacuzenus, *Historiae*, ed. L. Schopen, II (Bonn 1828), *passim*, and Nicephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, II (Bonn 1830), *passim*. The latest book on this subject is D. M. Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor: A Biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and Monk, c. 1295–1383* (Cambridge 1996).

7 As stated explicitly by Ducas, *Historia Byzantina*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1834) 44. The chronicler adds his negative opinion about the quality of John's mind.

8 This was far from the idealized pattern of family relations created in the treatise by Andronikos II's son. See M. Dąbrowska, 'Family ethos at the imperial court of the Palaiologos in the light of the testimony by Theodore of Montferrat', *Byzantina et Slavica Cracoviensia* 2 (1994) 73–81.

9 O. Halecki, *Un empereur de Byzance à Rome. Vingt ans de travail pour l'union des Eglises et pour la défense de l'empire d'Orient 1355–1375* (Warsaw 1930) 33. Halecki uses the expression 'le père adoptif' for the pope, which is repeated by Nicol and gives a very peculiar image of John V's political intuition and his paternal feelings. Innocent VI did not need a surrogate family, and his expectations were strictly political. See D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261–1453*, 2nd edn (Cambridge 1993) 258. Halecki, *Un empereur*, 32, was convinced that John deserved more sympathy. On John V, see now J. Radić, *Vreme Jovana V Paleologa (1332–1391)* (Belgrade 1993). This huge study does not really change general opinion on John's policy. The author's devotion to details and to the Balkan context should be stressed.

Manuel as a hostage of the Venetian government, while he tried to change his situation as a humiliated debtor.¹⁰

For Manuel this rather long stay was sweetened by an encounter with a mysterious woman whose name is unknown to historians.¹¹ He fell in love with a Venetian woman, and fathered an illegitimate daughter, Zampia, taking care of her as long as he lived.¹² The story of the Venetian woman is extremely obscure. The actual duration of the relationship is difficult to establish. She was probably dead by the time of Manuel's marriage. Since Manuel was excluded from the dynastic policy of the court, he was in charge of his family life, and thus remained a bachelor until his forties, which was rare in Byzantium. His brother Andronikos was betrothed at a young age to a Bulgarian princess — in 1355, the year when Manuel was supposed to start his education at the papal court. By the year of Manuel's stay in Venice, 1371, Andronikos had already had a son, the future John VII. In these circumstances, with a clear prospect of succession through Andronikos IV to his son, John VII, the grandson of the old emperor John V, the latter seemed unperturbed by Manuel's unmarried state.

An interesting passage in Chalkokondyles' chronicle, accepted by only a few historians, suggests that his father made an attempt to arrange a marriage for Manuel. According to the chronicler, John V decided to marry the thirteen-year-old Manuel to the daughter of the Trapezuntine emperor. When she arrived in Constantinople, the whole court — and most of all, her prospective father-in-law — was dazzled by her beauty. With such a rival, Manuel had no chance. Whatever the case, the woman was no longer considered his

10 The stay in Venice concerned Byzantine financial obligations for the Serenissima. See D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge 1988) 304–7. It was the first visit of a Byzantine emperor to Venice. In the fourteenth century relations between the two powers were drastically changed. Byzantium became a permanent debtor of the republic. In this unfortunate situation for the emperor, it was not Andronikos IV but Manuel who appeared in Venice to help his father in the negotiations. Then he was left in Venice for some months in 1371; he received pocket money, 300 ducats, from the Venetian senate. As a hostage, Manuel was a pawn in Venetian hands. See R.-J. Loenertz, 'Jean V Paléologue à Venise (1370–1371)', *REB* 16 (1958) 217–32; J. Chrysostomides, 'John V Palaiologos in Venice (1370–1371) and the chronicle of Caroldo: a reinterpretation', *OCP* 31 (1965) 76–84. This article presents a view different from Halecki, *Un empereur*, 228–31.

11 Cf. M. Dabrowska, *Lacimiczki nad Bosforem. Malzenstwa bizantynsko-lacińskie w cesarskiej rodzinie Paleologow (XIII–XV w.)* (The Latin Ladies on the Bosphoros. Byzantine-Latin marriages in the imperial family of the Palaiologoi [13th–15th Centuries]) (Lodz 1996) 98, 114. I follow Barker, *Manuel II*, 474, who wrote in an e-mail of 5 October 2006: 'Zampia was born in the 1370s, which might rule out her resulting from a liaison in Venice, though not for sure.' As we cannot rule out the possibility, I would like to suggest it.

12 I deal with Zampia in a project begun at All Souls in 2001: 'The double life of the emperor: the illegitimate children of the Palaiologoi and their careers.' Zampia, a daughter of Manuel II Palaiologos, was married to a Genoese, Hilario Doria, who acted as Manuel II's envoy in diplomatic missions. See Barker, *Manuel II*, 158. Andronikos IV could have been sure of his position, as he married Maria-Kyratza from Bulgaria, who bore him the future John VII. See S. Mešanović, *Jovan VII Paleolog* (Belgrade 1996). 'The double life of the emperor' will be part of a book or an article. I suspended work on it due to my stay at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

bride-to-be.¹³ As his mother's beloved son, who bore a resemblance to his grandfather, John Kantakouzenos, Manuel was a rival, rather than a political partner, for his father. Life taught John V a bitter lesson when his son Andronikos IV rebelled against him, using a disagreement in the Osmanli family. The sultan, to whom John V had been a vassal since 1372–3, asked the emperor to punish his son. Andronikos was disinherited. It was Manuel who remained loyal and was awarded the imperial title in 1373. He was more loyal to his father than his father deserved. This situation did not last long, since Andronikos usurped power in 1376 and put his father and brothers, Manuel and Theodore, into prison. John V regained his position in 1379.¹⁴

Leaving aside this *coup d'état*, it should be said that there was no matrimonial policy of the court in the case of Manuel. In fact, he was not considered a successor. Therefore, Manuel was free to find the woman of his choice or, perhaps, she found him. Whatever the case, the woman became the mother of Zampia and probably of his other children, who died early, and to whom Manuel and his mother allude in the dialogue.¹⁵

I would conjecture that Manuel, unlike his profoundly Palaiologos brother, was too much of a Kantakouzenos for his father to consider him his successor. This distrust testifies to a prolonged rivalry between the two families even after the abdication of John VI Kantakouzenos and his son Matthew. Helena Kantakouzene, the wife of John V Palaiologos, conducted her own policy by promoting the Kantakouzenoi through her children, although they had already become Palaiologoi. The eldest son, Andronikos, was under his father's tutelage, but the younger sons, Manuel and Theodore, were neglected by him. As a result, they remained under the influence of the mother. Manuel and

13 Chalkokondyles, *Historiarum libri decem*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1843) 81. See R.-J. Loenertz, 'Une erreur singulière de Laonic Chalcocondyle: le prétendu second mariage de Jean V Paléologue,' *REB* 15 (1957) 176–81. A. Bryer supports this view: 'Greeks and Turkmen: the Pontic exception', *DOP* 29 (1975) 140. Eudokia was a daughter of Alexios III of Trebizond and of an unknown mother, a widow of Emir Tacedin. M. Carroll does not exclude John's interest in the woman in analysing the text of Sphrantzes that alludes to this liaison. See M. Carroll, 'A minor matter of imperial importance in the Sphrantzes' "Chronicle"', *B* 49 (1979) 88–93. I find her arguments plausible. John V's wife lived until 1396, but this is not a counter-argument. He did not divorce her and marry off John to the Trapezuntine lady. The history of the Byzantine court knows such triangular situations, e.g. the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, his wife Zoe, and his mistress Maria Skleraina. See M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History* (London 1984) 46. This 'trio' is described by Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. E. Renauld, II (Paris 1928) 50–60.

14 Manuel was crowned in Thessalonica at the age of twenty-three and this ceremony could have been seen as a good omen. He was quickly disappointed by Andronikos' rebellion and then by his father's behaviour after regaining the throne. Embittered, Manuel withdrew to Thessalonica. He lived away from the Constantinopolitan court. See Nicol, *The Last Centuries*, 277–83; G. T. Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica 1382–1387* (Rome 1960).

15 Angelou, *Dialogue*, 96–7: '...why should we add further to the welter of our anxieties and divide the mind into two, into things mutually opposing: on the one side, arms and wars and, to be brief, their usual outcome; and on the other side, the education and upbringing of children, and all the other cares and arrangements to be made for them and for the house; let alone illnesses and deaths of children, mourning for them and following them to their graves'. See Barker, *Manuel II*, 474.

Theodore, the future despot at Mistra, became best friends.¹⁶ After Theodore's untimely death, Manuel mourned him deeply, expressing his grief in his funeral oration.¹⁷

The whole milieu, consisting of the empress mother, Manuel and Theodore, was greatly influenced by Demetrios Kydones, an intellectual and mentor of Helena and Manuel. Demetrios was in close contact with Manuel, and they exchanged many letters. Being pro-Latin, Demetrios preferred to stay in Venice from 1371 rather than return to Constantinople.¹⁸ The emperor Manuel's letters to Kydones and other friends show him to be a melancholy man, without any prospects for his own future or that of the empire. In a letter to Manuel Chrysoloras written during the emperor's stay in the West, Manuel says that he does not see any point in writing, and his mood is clearly shown by the remark that sad birds do not sing.¹⁹

The historical scene having been set, we can return to the dialogue on marriage. The structure of a dialogue involves the continual exchange of opinions. The old empress Helena Kantakouzene argues for marriage, while her son, Manuel, argues against it. Only fortunate circumstances allowed him to inherit the throne after the death of Andronikos in 1385, but he himself had no legitimate successor. On the other hand, there was Andronikos' son, John VII, already betrothed, if not married, in 1390.²⁰ Manuel was convinced that his line of succession was threatened with extinction. This anxiety about succession can be found in the pages of the dialogue. He admits that 'the *kairos* was not for marriage':²¹

I did get married and quickly looked upon children. But, I was not able to eliminate with the blessings of marriage all the everyday cares of married life. These cares come one after the other, and there is never an end in sight. On the other hand, to tell the

¹⁶ On Theodore's reign in Mistra in 1383–1407 see D. A. Zakythinis, *Le Despotat grec de Morée 1262–1460, I: Histoire politique* (Paris 1932) 125–65. After 1379, when John V regained illusory power, his sons had also shared his illusion: Andronikos IV and his son reigned on the north coast of the Sea of Marmara, while Manuel was in Thessalonica and Theodore in Mistra. Nicol, *The Last Centuries*, 283, calls them puppets in Turkish or Italian hands.

¹⁷ Manuel II Palaeologus, *Funeral Oration on his Brother Theodore*, ed. and tr. J. Chrysostomides (Thessalonike 1985).

¹⁸ Démétrius Cydonès, *Correspondance*, ed. R.-J. Loenertz, 2 vols. (Vatican 1956–60); Demetrios Kydones, *Briefe*, ed. F. Tinnfeld, I.1, 2 (Stuttgart 1981–2). G. T. Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus* (Washington, DC 1977). The comments of the editors are very useful for analysing the political context of Manuel's and Kydones' statements. On Kydones' devotion to Helena Kantakouzene, see F. Kianka, 'The letters of Demetrios Kydones to empress Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina', *DOP* 46 (1992) 155–64. Kydones accompanied John V to Rome in 1369 and was in Venice in 1370–1. He returned to the republic in 1390, where he was granted Venetian citizenship in January 1391. He regretted his decision to return to Constantinople because of the political situation. He finally left Constantinople after the disaster at Nikopolis in 1396 and went to Venice, and then to Crete, where he died in 1397–8. See F. Kianka, 'Demetrios Kydones and Italy', *DOP* 59 (1995) 107–10.

¹⁹ Dennis, *Letters of Manuel Palaeologus*, no. 39, 105.14–15. 'Sad birds' is an allusion to Plato.

²⁰ For John VII's marriage see Barker, *Manuel II*, 463–4. For his child: G. T. Dennis, 'An unknown Byzantine emperor, Andronikos V Palaeologus (1400–1407?)', *JÖB* 16 (1967) 175–87.

²¹ Angelou, *Dialogue*, 55 (Introduction).

truth, being a bachelor was a bit of a storm; only being married has not been a calm either.²²

The ruler should, however, give a good example. 'You see,' the empress says, 'you cannot be in a position to regulate well the lives of your subjects, unless you show yourself as though having been all shaped up before.'²³ She justifies her attitude thus: 'I was not at all to blame for urging you to marry.' She continues, 'But you, my dear, as it happens, are a statesman; and not just that — you are a ruler, too, and you ought to be the model and standard for those who live as citizens under you.'²⁴ Helena does not stop warning her son against the danger of his unmarried state, which puts him in a difficult position in his confrontation with John VII, his strong nephew. 'You will have a successor, you will eliminate John VII.' 'If you had children,' she says, 'you would have fewer plots than if you had not.'²⁵ He agrees that the civil war is gangrenous. 'A disaster,' she answers.²⁶ Apparently she did not love her grandson, who was so much a Palaiologos and so little a Kantakouzenos. Manuel on the whole accepted her point of view; his opposition to her argument was typically philosophical: why should I marry when the state is in such dire straits? Why should I have children and see their misery, illnesses and looming death?²⁷ This particular excerpt of the dialogue merits special attention. Manuel must have suffered because of the loss of his children. Helena tries to make Manuel think about the good aspect of marriage and a happy future for the children.²⁸ At the end of this verbal duel Manuel admits that he has been defeated. 'Come on, then,' he says to his mother, 'the winning argument is on your side.'²⁹

Manuel's pessimistic attitude towards marriage is not evident only in this work. It can also be found in the treatise on Islam, written in the winter of 1391 or 1392, when he was a vassal of the Turkish sultan and stayed in his camp near Ankara.³⁰ This conversation with a Muslim was written for Theodore, his brother. Let us concentrate on the passage where Manuel and his interlocutor talk about marriage. From the Muslim

22 *Ibid.*, 71.

23 *Ibid.*, 69.

24 *Ibid.*, 87.

25 *Ibid.*, 117.

26 *Ibid.*, 111.

27 *Ibid.*, 96–7. The text is quoted above in n. 15.

28 *Ibid.*, 51–5 (Introduction). Uncertain about the future of his successors, Manuel is recollecting the loss of the children he had with the Venetian woman.

29 *Ibid.*, 117.

30 Manuel II Palaiologue, *Entretiens avec un musulman: 7e controverse*, introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par T. Khoury (Paris 1966). The whole treatise discusses various aspects of Islamic religion, and only the seventh dialogue, which is devoted to Islamic law, touches upon the problem of marriage, stating only that it is a necessity for a man. See the new edition: *Kaiser Manuel II. Palaiologos, Dialog über den Islam und Erziehungsratschläge*, ed. W. Baum, tr. R. Senoner (Vienna 2003).

point of view, a man cannot be alone. Celibacy is unthinkable.³¹ 'What is a man without a woman?', the Muslim asks. This question is put indirectly, as the conversation concerns general differences in the religions.

Why did Manuel write a dialogue on marriage after the battle of Nikopolis or even earlier? He was already married, and his first son, the future John VIII, had been born at the end of 1392. Taking this fact into consideration, the whole dialogue seems out of place; and yet it makes sense. Even with a wife and a child, Manuel still doubts whether he did well to marry and have children. His mother's recurrent warning is the danger of losing the throne to his nephew, John VII. She encourages her son to think in a responsible way about the family.

Helena died in 1396. Kydones, to whom the treatise was dedicated, passed away one year later, and Theodore, the beloved brother, died in 1407. Manuel became even lonelier. Manuel's funeral oration for Theodore is so full of sorrow and grief that it is difficult to read. He says that he is weeping rather than writing. Miserable as he was, he managed to write more than a hundred pages (in the modern edition). It is not a small oration, but a very personal and moving reaction to a family disaster. Manuel had lost his last friend. 'We were created for ourselves,' he writes, 'one for another.'³² Their fraternal bonds were very strong. Manuel remained a bachelor much longer than his brother, who married the beautiful Bartolomea Acciaiuoli, daughter of the Florentine Duke of Athens, in 1384.³³ It did not weaken their relations as best brothers. 'We were one in success and misfortune, in comfort and in sorrow.'³⁴

To sum up, it is clear that the first version of the dialogue was composed not to discuss marriage per se but to justify marrying for dynastic reasons, the need to have male heirs in order to compete with the nephew John VII. Still, a most interesting question remains unanswered. Why did Manuel revise his dialogue and delete some passages? The exact date of this revision is unknown. Angelou considers the whole period from 1417 to 1425, but he is inclined to date the revised version to 1417, basing his arguments on philological considerations. It would hardly have been possible for Manuel to write it in his last years when he was really old, given that he became paralysed three years before his death.³⁵ I would like to argue that the revised version was meant for his son John VIII.

31 *Ibid.*, 86. Manuel cites the opinion of Tabarsi a Shi'a, a writer, who says: 'De votre monde j'ai aimé les femmes et les parfums', and stresses that 'mon délice est dans la prière'. This opinion seems to have been shared by Manuel, yet marriage was not necessary for him to enjoy those 'délices'.

32 Chrysostomides, *Funeral Oration*, 162.

33 The Duchy of Athens, a product of the Fourth Crusade, was ruled by the Burgundian family, de la Roche, then by the Catalans, who were introduced to the political scene in Constantinople by Roger de Flor, a notorious adventurer. See K. M. Setton, *Catalan Domination in Athens (1311-1388)* (Cambridge, MA 1948). Finally, the Duchy was taken over by the family of Florentine bankers, the Acciaiuoli, who had begun their career in Naples. Bartolomea was a good asset of this rule. Theodore hoped that his father-in-law would offer him rights to Athens, but the Duchy remained in Latin hands until the Ottoman conquest.

34 Chrysostomides, *Funeral Oration*, 218.

35 In 1422 Manuel had his first stroke, which eliminated him from active political life. John VIII became the actual ruler. See Barker, *Manuel II*, 381.

John was born in 1392.³⁶ His childhood was spent in precarious circumstances. The blockade of Constantinople by the Turks started in 1394. The battle of Nikopolis in 1396 was inconclusive. Manuel decided to look for help in the West. He left Byzantium at the end of 1399. Afterwards, he regretted that he had done so, leaving his infant son behind in the Peloponnese.³⁷ Tamerlane's victory at Ankara in 1402 changed the situation. The Turks were completely defeated. The spirit of Manuel soared. In 1414 he started to think about strengthening the Peloponnese by building the Hexamilion, a great wall on the Isthmus of Corinth, which was to protect the peninsula against Turkish invasion.³⁸ Manuel profited from Ottoman dynastic conflicts at that time; he had high hopes for the future. John was to be his successor; unfortunately, however, John was not interested in marriage. He passed his time in the Peloponnese in 1413–16 without any interest in his young bride who had come from Moscow in 1414 and eventually died in Constantinople in 1417.³⁹ Their union was probably not consummated. There was still no successor, and John was already twenty-five years old. It cannot be ruled out that Manuel was revising his text as early as 1414–15, because John was in no hurry to start a family life.

Circumstances suggest that the dialogue was revised to encourage John to marry, and the authority of his grandmother was to guide him. Marriage was necessary. The rival, John VII, died in 1408, and his son Andronikos V had died even earlier, but the succession was not secure. Manuel politely eliminated all the passages concerning John VII and the family quarrel.⁴⁰ The text was meant to offer advice. We do not know whether John VIII

36 On John VIII, see I. Djurić, *Sumrak Vizantije: Vreme Jovana VIII Paleologa 1392–1448* (Belgrade 1984). Presenting a panorama of the last years of the empire, this book can be compared with the work on John V by Radia from the Belgrade school of Byzantinists.

37 J. Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and other Essays* (Oxford 1964) 105. The author confuses Cleopa Malatesta, Theodore II Palaiologos' wife, with Sofia of Montferrat, calling the latter Sophia Malatesta, which was not the case: Gill, *Personalities*, 108.

38 D. M. Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor: the Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, Last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge 1992) 24. For the role of the Hexamilion during John's rule see M. Dąbrowska, 'Hexamilion i Varna, (Hexamilion and Varna)', *Balcanica Posnaniensia* 8(1997) 61–70.

39 Anna was a daughter of the Great Duke Basil I of Moscow. After Manuel's coronation in 1393, Basil dared to say that the Orthodox, and not 'the emperor', 'had Church', and Manuel's name was not commemorated in the Muscovite churches. Patriarch Antonios IV calmed the situation. Anna's appearance in Constantinople is a proof of the great political ambitions of Basil, who was still dependent on the Mongols. See Nicol, *The Last Centuries*, 299.

40 As an example, I quote a bitter passage from the end of the treatise. The emperor addresses his mother: 'Perhaps you remember the time when he [John VII] used to say he regretted what he had done — it was a sham — and when he used to commend peace warmly in his words and promise that in future he would be as a loving son. And he did all these things as though in secret, while he slyly confided to our worst and impious enemies then at peace with us and under a treaty. His plan was to make them angry at us and cause the present war [the siege of Constantinople, which began in 1394]. He would thus vent his hostility, which he had been fostering for a long time against us. You know, Mother, how I believed him then' (Angelou, *Dialogue*, 111). It is evident that the emperor wanted to eliminate the traces of family dispute from the text. John VII was no longer alive, and relations with the Turks were good. Thus the emperor was concerned about the future of the dynasty.

took the advice to heart. He married for the second time in 1421. According to Doukas, his wife, Sophia of Montferrat, turned out to be so ugly that the marriage was probably not consummated because of his revulsion.⁴¹ At the time of John's second marriage, Manuel had little to say, as he had become old and very ill. It seems to me that the revised version of the dialogue might have been composed in 1414 or later, in order to persuade John to think about the future of the dynasty, in which he did not seem interested. Angelou points out that Manuel's dialogue is extraordinary in the sense that it is not about marriage but about a concrete family situation. He is right, but he concentrates on the first version. The message of the second version remains the same, but the addressee is evident: John VIII, who had five brothers with ambitions similar to his own.

It is interesting to compare Manuel's work with a text on a similar subject by Philippe de Mezières, a writer connected with the Cypriot court of the Lusignans. He wrote his *Livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage* between 1385 and 1395, almost at the same time as Manuel wrote his dialogue.⁴² This is a religious treatise, and love is seen in the context of Christ's passion. Paradoxically, Manuel's dialogue has no religious message, which is surprising both for Byzantine literature, so much concerned with religion, and for Manuel himself, who had theological interests. The difference in tone between the two texts may be explained by the difference of their implied readers. Philippe's treatise is written as a 'réconfort des Dames mariées', who were unhappy in their marriages.⁴³ The example of Christ is shown to them all the time, and the important virtues such as patience, understanding and submission to the husband are promoted.⁴⁴ The treatise was written with Isabelle de Bavière, the wife of king of France, Charles VI the Fool, in mind. Her marriage to the insane Charles was unhappy. There were rumours that she was comforted by the king's brother, Louis of Orleans.⁴⁵

41 Sophia's disfigured face was described by Doukas, 100–1. See M. Dąbrowska, 'Sophia of Montferrat or the history of one face', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis, Folia Historica* 56 (1996) 177–94. John VIII divorced Sophia in 1426, and in 1427 he married the beautiful Maria of Trebizond, who became the lady of his heart. A rumour spread in Constantinople that she had more than family connections with her brother Alexander. John's third marriage was childless, and he did not leave any illegitimate children. His infertility was his tragedy, as was that of his brother Constantine XI, who succeeded him and died on the walls of Constantinople on the last day of the siege, on 29 May 1453. See Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor*, *passim*.

42 Philippe de Mezières, *Livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage*, ed. J. Williamson (Washington, DC 1993).

43 De Mezières, *Livre*, 43.

44 Before De Mezières, Boccaccio, in his story of Griselda in the *Decameron*, promoted such a paragon of a faithful wife, ready to sacrifice herself for the family. Petrarch made a Latin translation of Boccaccio's story, and Chaucer based the Clerk's Tale in *The Canterbury Tales* on Petrarch's version.

45 There is no direct evidence for Isabelle's liaison with Louis of Orleans. It is known that he paid her many visits and that he was murdered near the queen's apartments in Paris. See *Chronique du religieux de Saint Denis contenant le règne de Charles VI de 1380 à 1422*, ed. M. L. Bellaguet, III (Paris 1842) 730. The supposed or true love affair was treated as an excuse for Jean the Fearless to kill Louis, his political rival: R. C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392–1420* (New York 1986) 4.

Manuel's text differs greatly from Philippe's. It is more interesting, more original, more unusual. In no way does it compare with the treatise by an earlier emperor, Theodore II Laskaris, which is a show of rhetorical skill on the uselessness of remarriage.⁴⁶ Manuel's dialogue makes one think about a certain Polish gentlewoman who was getting married during the First World War and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. She felt so uncertain about her own and her family's future that she ordered her clothes and linen to be embroidered, and her china to be marked with the philosophical question: 'Διὰ τί', 'What for?'⁴⁷ This perennial question seems to have been shared by Manuel, too. For both of them the *kairos* was not for marriage.

46 Theodoros II Ducas Laskaris, 'Ad amicos qui ipsum hortabantur ut uxorem duceret', in *Opuscula rhetorica*, ed. A. Tartaglia (Munich 2000) 109–18. John III Vatatzes' second wife's lady-in-waiting was dearer to him than the political profits from this marriage. On Vatatzes' marriage to Constance (Anna) of Hohenstaufen see A. Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea: The Story of an Empire in Exile* (London 1912) 308.