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## **Ioannes III Batatzes's Italian Venture: Byzantine Imperial Revival in Mediterranean Diplomacy**

**Abstract:** Three Greek letters by the Holy Roman emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen to the Eastern Roman emperor Ioannes III Batatzes, dating from the year 1250, cast light on the Laskarid involvement in Italian politics outside of the Balkan Peninsula, the traditional sphere of Byzantine influence. In two of the letters, the Holy Roman Emperor informs his son-in-law and ally Ioannes III about the war he is waging against the papal forces in Italy; in the third, Frederick II openly appeals to his Byzantine counterpart not to engage in unionist negotiations with the Holy See. Examining the content of these three letters, I suggest, helps us to redefine the role that the Laskarid polity played in the wider Mediterranean world of the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. In this paper, I focus on the Italian case in order to illustrate that the Laskarid Roman Empire was an active political agent that sought to influence the politics of polities well outside its assumed political sphere of interest. The Italian example allows us to understand that the Byzantine Empire of Ioannes III Batatzes and his successors had enough vigor and resilience from the 1240s to the 1280s to project an image of itself as a dominant power invested in determining international affairs throughout Christendom.

**Key words:** imperial agency, diplomacy, Regno, Byzantium in Exile, chancery

In July 1216, Hugues I, the king of Lusignan Cyprus, sent an official letter to the sultan Izzeddin Kaykaus of Ikonion. In this letter, Hugues I confirmed oaths granting freedom of movement to Izeddin's subjects and their goods upon their arrival in the lands and waters of his island. In turn, a few months later, the sultan himself reciprocated, ensuring security and freedom of movement for the subjects and goods of the Lusignan kingdom throughout the Sultanate of Rum (*Griechische Briefe*, 170–173). Granting trading rights to merchants from a *de jure* Muslim polity was not in the spirit of the official crusading policies; however, the trend of doing business with the Islamic world was far from unprecedented, as by the 1210s there had been an over century-long presence

of crusaders in the Levant. What might strike us as surprising, though, is the fact that both the king of Cyprus and the sultan of Rum opted to dispatch their official oaths composed in Greek and not in Latin or Persian, respectively, nor even French, Arabic, Turkish, or Italian. So why were the official oaths between two non-Byzantine monarchs exchanged in Greek then?

Before answering this question, I suggest that we take a leap in time to the year 1250, when another exchange of letters occurred in Greek. This time, the two correspondents were Frederick II Hohenstaufen—both the king of Sicily and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire—and Ioannes III Batatzes—the emperor of the exiled Byzantine state centred in Asia Minor that was formed by the empire's elites in the aftermath of the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the crusaders. The two monarchs formed an alliance between their states in the 1240s and were exchanging letters since then, making it one of the longer lasting alliances in mid-thirteenth-century Mediterranean. This alliance, however, never received much scholarly attention—other than occasional sentence or two—either among Western Medievalists nor Byzantinists, nor, more recently, scholars focusing on the Mediterranean. This is true of today as much as it was of the official work of historiography of the empire in exile composed by Georgios Akropolites, a high official in the Laskarid administration and a close confidant of the imperial household.

In *The History*, Akropolites remains virtually mute about the alliance between two emperors: Ioannes III Batatzes and Frederick II Hohenstaufen, which culminated in the latter's marriage with the former's daughter Constanza. The only, rather obscure, reference of the two emperors' relations that Akropolites made served as a means to criticize Ioannes III for his illicit affairs by writing:

ἐρώτων δὲ θηλέων ἤττητο, ἐξ οὗτου ἡ σύζυγος αὐτοῦ καὶ βασιλις Εἰρήνη ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἐγένετο· καὶ πολλαῖς μὲν καὶ ἄλλαις εἰς φανεράν ἐχρήσατο μῖξιν, μάλιστα δὲ τῆς ἐξ Ἰταλίας ἐλθούσης ὡς θεραπαινίδος μὲν τῆς ἐξ Ἀλαμανῶν συζύγου βασιλίδος Ἄννης, ἀντιζήλου δὲ αὐτῆς γεγενημένης Μαρκεσίνης τε ὀνομαζομένης τοῦ ἔρωτος ἤττητο. (*Acropolitae Opera*, 52.54–60.)

he [Ioannes III] succumbed to the passion for women, from the time when his spouse and empress Eirene died; he engaged with many and various women in open affairs, but he was mostly affected by the passion for a woman coming from Italy as a lady-in-waiting of his German spouse, empress Anna [i.e. Constanza's new Roman name], who became her rival, by the name of Marchesina.

Somewhat surprisingly, in contemporary scholarship, the situation stays not much changed from the times when Akropolites wrote his account, even though we have quite a few other sources that belong to genres of rhetoric, epistolography, and court poetry that testify to the importance the alliance played at the courts of the two emperors. Thus, for instance, in his otherwise vivid and meticulous biography of Frederick II, David Abulafia dedicates one paltry sen-

tence to the relationship of the two emperors and, in order to dismiss any type of engagement with the Byzantine world, argues that: "Frederick kept on good terms with the Lascarid emperor of Nicaea, ruler of a rump state that resisted Frankish conquest, but this was just one element in a Mediterranean policy whose emphasis lay elsewhere" (Abulafia 1998, 253). Emperor Ioannes III, the son-in-law and ally of Frederick II, in the former's biography did not even merit a proper name and let alone any recognition of the existing and longstanding alliance. Rather, he was a random "ruler of a rump state." While ignoring the very existence of the alliance between the two monarchs has become a staple in scholarship, attempts have been made by Western Medievalists to recognize the existence of the alliance (Borsari 1951; Merendino 1975; Martin 2002). Most recently, Nikolaos Chrissis (2012, 87–102, 146–159) has pointed out the significance of this alliance for papal politics in Italy and the Balkans. On the other end, unlike the Western Medievalists' vivid interpretation of their sources, "Byzantine literature," as Margaret Mullett (1990, 258) puts it, "has never had a good press, least of all from its own students." And so, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, we read that "[t]he main advantage that Ioannes Vatzes derived from this alliance was prestige" (Angold 1999, 555). From conclusions such as this, we inevitably end up with an impression that the post-Komnenian Byzantine Empire instantly becomes an *imperial object* in the hands of other major political subjects in the Mediterranean. Thanks to this trend of bad press that Byzantium has received in the past decades, the role of the Lascarid state outside Asia Minor and the Balkans has rarely been explored at greater length, despite the existing written material; an exception to this rule would be the work of Luca Pieralli (2006). Simply put, if we a priori label the Lascarid state as a *ramp*, there is no reason for anybody to even entertain the idea of the empire's wider role in the Mediterranean. Rather, the focus remains on the empire in exile's attempts to survive the almost sixty-year period of displacement, even though, since the 1230s the Empire of Nicaea was on the offensive. The exploration of the alliance between Frederick II and Ioannes III, I believe, serves as a good starting point in debunking the image of the thirteenth-century Byzantine empire as a mere *imperial object* struggling to survive within its own borders.

Leaving such unflattering notions of "a rump state" behind us, in this paper, I suggest that we look at the Roman Empire of Ioannes III Batatzes as an *active imperial agent* in wider Mediterranean politics. We do this by focusing on exploring the content, style, and tone in which the letters from Frederick II's chancery were composed, in order to cast light on the image Ioannes III Batatzes forged for the Roman Empire domestically and internationally. The focus of this paper, then, rests on the soft power techniques employed by both the Byzantine and the Holy Roman emperors in crafting an image of reputable Roman state centred in Asia Minor. Examining the soft power of the Byzantine

state allows us to recast the ways in which we think about the Byzantine state in exile's image at other royal courts around the Mediterranean. Ioannes III's relations with Frederick II prove to be fruitful ground for commencing a conversation about the extent of Laskarid active political agency outside the Balkans and Asia Minor, that is, the immediate interest sphere of the Roman Empire. By granting the independent active agency to the Byzantine state, not only do we have an opportunity to see the empire in a more radiant light, but we also might alter the ways in which we perceive the unfolding of the politics in the Mediterranean. Frederick II has received much attention back in his own times as much as in modern scholarship for his grand political projects that spanned from Germany and Italy all the way to Jerusalem and Cyprus (Abulafia 1988). By taking a closer look at the ties between this celebrity monarch and Ioannes III Batatzes, I suggest that we can appreciate better the image of a great power that the Byzantine Roman Empire managed to secure for itself in international relations even after the death of Manouel I Komnenos in 1180. By understanding how Frederick II and his court conceptualized the Byzantine polity centered in Asia Minor, we can discern that the post-1204 Roman Empire maintained its position of an active imperial agent in relation to such superpowers as was the Italian *Regno*. On the other hand, taking Ioannes III's political activities outside his traditional sphere of influence seriously, allows us to make more sense of the epistolary production glorifying the emperor in the Southern Italian *Regno* as much as in the papal controlled Rome—the arch-nemesis of Frederick II—that kept trying to win Ioannes III over for its cause. This argument becomes relevant for the fragmented Byzantine world as we see that by the time when Frederick II and Ioannes III were corresponding, the state centred in Western Asia Minor was recognized by foreign powers as the *empire* vis-à-vis its competitors, which were trying to represent themselves as the true Empire of the Romans (Oikonomides 1979). Thus, by adding the exilic empire rooted in Western Asia Minor into the equation of regional powers, we end up looking at a much more politically vibrant and polycentric Mediterranean world.

As neither Akropolites nor any other historian dwell much on the alliance between the two emperors, I shift our focus to the epistolary output of the Italian *Regno*, making it the focal point of our exploration of this alliance to which we can add other source references down the road. The three Greek-language surviving letters from Frederick II's chancery headed by Ioannes of Otranto—a Greek speaking Calabrian—composed in 1250 serve us as an excellent example of Batatzes' soft power propaganda at work. The three Greek letters are a somewhat lucky losers that have come down to us together with another three letters, this time in Latin language, written between 1238 and 1248 addressed to Ioannes III Batatzes by the *Regno*'s chancery (Martin 2002, 476). While we have a total of six diplomatic letters surviving from the Italian side, none of

the letters composed on the Byzantine side have come down to us. Thus, even though we cannot conclude what type of image the emperor of the Romans in Asia Minor and his administration wished to project of their empire, thanks to the three letters from 1250 we can explore the result of the Byzantine polity in exile's branding efforts in the Mediterranean arena, albeit via proxy. That is, we do not know what exact image Ioannes III wished to project of himself and the polity he ruled over, but we can see the fruits of his efforts in the diplomatic discourse produced by a foreign, albeit allied, power. On the other hand, we do know, thanks to the surviving letters, what image Ioannes III's was able to forge and curate in foreign courts as was the one in Palermo of Frederick II.

The feature, which immediately catches our eye, is that the three letters from 1250 are composed in Greek. If we take into consideration that the letters were composed forty-six years after the fall of Constantinople, the fact that they were written in Greek and not in anticipated Latin or even vernacular Sicilian Italian used by Frederick II's administration in the three letters dating back to 1247/1248 to Ioannes III, surely suggests that Ioannes III's polity was kept in high regard with Frederick II's courtiers and administrators. While, unfortunately, there are no extant letters written by Ioannes III addressed to Frederick II, we do not know whether the emperor (that is, his scriptorium) responded in Greek or Latin. From Frederick's letters, however, we do know that Ioannes III sent prompt responses, since Frederick clearly stated that “συγχαίρειν γὰρ ἴσμεν τὴν βασιλείαν σου ἐν πάσαις ταῖς εὐτυχίαις ἡμῶν καὶ τοῖς προτερήμασιν ἡμῶν συνεοφραίνεσθαι” (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 75.) “I know that your imperial highness congratulated me on my successes and that you are rejoicing with me for my gained advantage.” On another occasion, Frederick II congratulates Ioannes III for “ὅσα περὶ τῆς νήσου Ῥόδου μετ' εὐτυχείας πρὸς τὸ παρὸν ἐτελέσθησαν” (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 72.) “successfully bringing to conclusion what was happening in the island of Rhodes.” The former excerpt suggests that Ioannes III informed the ruler of the *Regno* about his own affairs for which he was subsequently congratulated. Moreover, based on the general epistolary output of the Laskarid state (to the Pope, Lusignan kings of Cyprus, Seljuk sultans), I suggest that these responses were composed in Greek. The exclusively Hellenophone correspondence between the two emperors suggests that the Roman Empire, as well as its Greek language, managed to maintain its prestigious position in the post-1204 Mediterranean albeit in a reduced territorial state.

Judging by the tone of the letters addressing the Byzantine emperor, we further discern that Frederick II considered Ioannes III his equal (and not a vassal or a junior ruler). In all three letters he is always addressed as *your imperial highness* (ἡ βασιλεία σου) and emperor of the *Graikoi* (βασιλεὺς τῶν Γραικῶν). By looking at the mere nomenclature the scribes of the *Regno* used to address Ioannes III, we clearly see that the Byzantine emperor was never called a sub-

ordinate of Frederick II's. Not once did Frederick attempt to downgrade Ioannes III's position, while he did not shy from calling Italian lords and city-states (even those rebelling against him) his vassals (πιστοὶ ἡμῶν). Quite the contrary, in a letter sent to Ioannes to dissuade the emperor from engaging in conversation with pope Gregory IX, with whom Frederick was in an open conflict (he was even excommunicated at the Council of Lyon in 1249), the ruler of the Italian *Regno* writes to his counterpart:

Πῶς οὗτος ὁ λεγόμενος μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς [ἀρχ]ιερέων, πάντων ἐνώπιον καθ' ἑκάστην τὴν βασιλείαν σου ὀνομαστί καὶ πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ σέ Ῥωμαίους ἀφορισμῶι καθυποβάλλων, αἰρετικούς τοὺς ὀρθοδοξοτάτους Ῥωμαίους, ἐξ ὧν ἡ πίστις τῶν χριστιανῶν εἰς τὰ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐξήλθε πέρατα, ἀναισχύντως καλῶν, τοιούτους ἄνδρας πνευματικούς κατ' αὐτὸν πρὸς τὴν βασιλείαν σου ἀποστέλλει. οὐκ ἐρυθρίασε; (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 72)

How is it that this so-called priest of priests, who comes ahead of everybody in every day affairs and subjects your imperial highness in name and all those Romans under you to excommunication, shamelessly calling heretics the utmost orthodox Romans, from whom the faith of the Christians spread out to the end of the *oikoumene*, did not blush with shame to send to your imperial highness such spiritual men?

Not only is Ioannes III addressed exclusively as *his imperial highness*, but his subjects are named Romans (and not *Graikoi* as was the common practice to avoid confusion with the pope in Rome). Furthermore, Frederick II emphasized in the letter that it is from the Romans (i.e. the Byzantine Romans) that Christianity as a religion originates in its purest form. In doing so, the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire and the Italian *Regno*, ceded two of his own imperial prerogatives to Ioannes III (that of alleged *Romanness* and the function of the protector of the Church). In the same vein, Frederick II claims that the pope claimed primacy, which otherwise, in accordance with Roman tradition, lies with the emperor, who is identified with Ioannes III. But why did Frederick go this far in his benevolence towards Ioannes III and his subjects? I suggest that he did so because Frederick II wished to keep Ioannes III as an ally as the latter kept the papacy and its allies occupied in the Balkans. The Laskarid polity was a crucial strategic ally of the Italian *Regno*, which genuinely evoked respect from its contemporaries as is seen by Frederick II's willingness to share (or even let go of) his own imperial prerogatives in return for Ioannes III's support. The Laskarid polity's close ties with the *Regno* certainly aided both belligerents in keeping the pope's crusaders busy in two fronts.

Putting aside the letter sent by Frederick II in distress, we look at the remaining two letters from 1250, in which the *Regno*'s ruler provides Ioannes III with extensive information about his campaigns in Northern Italy, or as Frederick II calls it “Ἡ ἄνω Ἰταλία” (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 76) “Upper Italy.” In the letters

Frederick II dwells on details about sieges and military campaigns to the extent that he specifically names his own vassals and opponents. For instance, the ruler of *Regno* emphasizes the role of “Οἱ τῆς Μάρκας καὶ Ῥωμανιόλας πιστοὶ ἡμῶν” (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 75) “my vassals of Marca and Romagna” in regulating his affairs in Northern Italy. By informing Ioannes III about his military maneuvers in Upper Italy, Frederick II demonstrates that he perceived Ioannes III as his equal and close ally who was kept updated about the affairs of the *Regno*. Another reason why Frederick II sent detailed letters about his campaigns in Upper Italy to his ally Ioannes III lies in the latter's own involvement in North Italian affairs.

In February of 1250, Frederick II sent a letter to Michael Angelos of Epeiros in which he asked the *despotes* to grant the right of passage to “ὁ περιπόθητος γαμβρὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰωάννης, εὐδιάθετον ἀγάπην, ἣν πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, ἀδιασπᾶστος ἀνδεῖξαι βουλόμενος, χεῖρα τινὰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοξοτῶν καὶ ὀπλιτῶν πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀποστέλλει.” (*Acta et diplomata* IV, 69.) “our beloved son-in-law, emperor Ioannes, who upholds well-disposed affections towards me and wishes to demonstrate it with unbroken will by dispatching a hand of his archers and hoplites.” Thus, the relations between the two monarchs were more than simply cordial, they were rooted in direct help to one another. In a letter composed in Latin sometime between 1238 and 1241, Frederick asks Ioannes III not to be overly harsh to a man sent from the *Regno* with military troops to assist the emperor in Asia Minor. Taking such examples into consideration, we can speculate that Ioannes III had no reason not to dispatch the promised troops to Italy. Furthermore, while we find no extant proof of Ioannes III's involvement in Frederick II's campaign of 1250, in an Italian chronicle documenting earlier events we encounter a description of Frederick II's North Italian campaign of 1238. In this chronicle the allies who sent their troops to Frederick II are enumerated: “erat enim cum eo patriarcha Aquilegiensis, archiepiscopus Colonie et Magancie, milites Anglie, Francie et Yspanie, comes Provincie cum centum militibus; milites quoque soldam et Vatacii Grecorum imperiatoris” (*Annales Gibelini Placentini*: 479) “with him [Frederick II] was the patriarch of Aquilegia, archbishop of Cologne and Magancia, soldiers of the king of England, France, and Spain, the counts of Provence with a hundred soldiers, as well as mercenaries and soldiers of Batatzes, the emperor of the *Greci*.” This little excerpt stands as a testament of the physical presence of Roman troops sent by Ioannes III to Italy to support his ally as early as 1238. Quite romantically then, we can imagine Roman banners appearing on North Italian soil after centuries of absence.

Why did Ioannes send his own troops in 1238 and quite possibly in 1250 all the way to Northern Italy? Was he not too entangled in the Balkans fighting his own wars and reconquering Roman lands? While this is certainly true, I suggest

that Italy never ceased to a part of the Byzantines' sphere of interest. Ever since the loss of Bari in 1071 (a quite cataclysmic year for the empire), scholarly attention has shifted almost exclusively towards the Balkans and Asia Minor. But the Komnenian regime was very much so invested in Italian affairs as is demonstrated by Manouel I's campaigns in Southern Italy as well as financial endorsements of conflicting factions in Northern Italy (Magalino 1993). In this respect, I suggest that Ioannes III was following in the steps of his pre-1204 predecessors to demonstrate his own influence in Italian affairs as a means to maintain an image of a strong and relevant emperor both internationally and domestically.

The place of Italy in projecting imperial power domestically is maybe best seen on the example of Ioannes III's younger contemporary and eventual emperor of the Romans, Michael VIII Palaiologos. Thus, according to Cecily Hillsdale (2014, 34–87)'s persuasive analysis, the *peplos* sent to the Genoese to ratify an alliance in 1259, Michael VIII is depicted in imperial guise entering the cathedral of Genoa. What is more, a court rhetorician Manouel Holobolos, describes the very *peplos* in his speech delivered before the emperor in order to extol the imperial successes internationally to the domestic audiences. In domestic affairs Italy remained an area worth exploiting for public encomiasts who sought to praise imperial munificence. What is more, in his autobiographical narrative, Michael VIII specifically emphasizes his, otherwise scholarly contested, role in the Sicilian Vespers by saying: “ὅστ’ εἰ λέγοιμι καὶ τὴν νῦν ἐκείνων ἐλευθερίαν θεὸν μὲν παρασκευάσαι, δι’ ἡμῶν δὲ παρασκευάσαι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ συμβαίνοντα λέγοιμι.” (*De vita sua*, 9.42–44) “if I were to claim that I was God's instrument in bringing freedom to them [the Sicilians], then I should only be telling the truth.” By claiming so, in the fashion of his own eulogist Holobolos, Michael managed to turn his domestic audiences' attention to his role in the Italian affairs.

In the fashion of Manouel I Komnenos and Michael VIII Palaiologos, I suggest that Ioannes III Batatzes deployed his alliance with Frederick in domestic purposes. In this undertaking of image-crafting, the troops sent to aid Frederick boosted the image of imperial greatness domestically and internationally. First, the very act of dispatching Roman soldiers to Italy sent a clear message of the regime's strength to the polity's elites. Second, these men's subsequent return to the empire with stories of Italy to relate, left the Roman populace at large conscious of Ioannes III's influence in distant lands. Such an endeavour would have filled the medieval Romans with pride for their *Romanness*, providing the emperor with the always needed public support. On the other hand, foreign chroniclers in the West, such as Placentino Gibellino, were aware of Ioannes of the *Greci*, a ruler who could afford to send troops to his ally in 'Upper Italy' while fighting his own wars against the Latins in the Balkans. Surely, such visible presence in Italy was a fair warning to the noble sons of Europe who were

considering the papal call to go and fight the *Greci* heretics (Chrissis 2012, 87–93, 99–130, 136–175).

By recasting our own views of the Byzantine Empire in exile in the wider Mediterranean politics from that of an *imperial object* in the hands of the great powers to that of an *active imperial agent*, we can go back and answer the initially posed question about the use of Greek language in oaths exchanged by the Lusignan king and the Seljuk Sultan. If we accept that the exilic Roman Empire continued to be a ceremonial role-model of imperial prestige, then the fact that the two non-hellenophone monarchies—albeit with a very much so present Greek speaking populace—opted to use their Greek scriptoria to exchange oaths should not come as much of a surprise. Other than being convenient that both the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and the Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus had Greek scriptoria, thus avoiding potential miscommunication arising from translating between Latin and Farsi, the employment of the Greek language also meant that the two monarchs were followed an established tradition of the Eastern Mediterranean diplomacy: they wrote their letters in Greek. Thus, even after the loss of Constantinople in 1204, the Roman Empire's legacy continued to act as a role model for the newer states that were formed on its soils even if they were not Roman themselves.

With this brief analysis of the Greek letters sent by Frederick II to Ioannes III, I hope to have demonstrated that post-1204 imperial agency was retained through the emperor's active engagement with the rest of the Mediterranean and not just his immediate sphere of influence in the Balkans and Asia Minor. Further research on Laskarid and early Palaiologan interaction with Aragonese polity in Spain and Lusignan Cyprus, as well as on the high status of the Greek language in diplomatic communications, will allow us to become even more aware of the active role the emperors from 1204 until 1282 played in the political life of the Mediterranean. In other words, further contextualization of the empire's foreign policy enables us to understand that the *Byzantine Ideal*, as Christian Raffenspergen (2012, 10–46) has referred to the process of willing adoption of Byzantine practices outside the empire, was alive and well in the Mediterranean even after 1204.

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*Poduhvat Jovana III Vataca u Italiji:  
povratak Vizantije u diplomatiji Mediterana*

Tri pisma na grčkom jeziku koja je sveto-rimski car Frederik II Hoenštaufen poslao istočno-rimskom caru Jovanu III Vatacu svedoče o aktivnosti Laskarida u italijanskoj politici van Balkanskog poluostrva. U dva pisma, sveto-rimski car obaveštava svog zeta i saveznika Jovana III o ratu koji vodi protiv papskih snaga u Italiji; u trećem pismu, Frederik II otvoreno poziva svog vizantijskog kolegu da ne ulazi u unijatske pregovore sa papstvom.

Analiza sadržaja ova tri pisma pomaže nam da redefinišemo ulogu države Laskarisa u široj mediteranskoj politici sredine trinaestog veka. U ovom radu, istažujem primere carskih aktivnosti u Italiji kako bih prikazao da je Rimsko carstvo Laskarisa zapravo aktivni politički agent koji je želeo da utiče na politiku država van njegove navodne sfere uticaja. Smatrajući vizantijsku državu u Maloj Aziji nakon 1204. živopisnim imperijalnim subjektom, a ne imperijalnim objektom lišenim svake političke aktivnosti, dozvoljava nam da preispitamo tradicionalnu sliku carstva u egzilu koja prikazuje državu Laskarisa kao kakvu slabašnu zaostavštinu slavnog carstva Komnina.

Nedavno su istraživači poput Žan-Mari Martina i Nikolasa Hrisisa analizirali papšku politiku i diplomatske aktivnosti Frederika II prema Vizantiji polovinom i u drugoj polovini trinaestog veka kako bi istražili sukob između papstva i Svetog rimskog cara. Inspirisan radovima poput ovih u sopstvenoj analizi tri carska pisma, nudim interpretaciju koja konceptualizuje diplomatske odnose između papstva, Frederika II i Jovana III kao vizantijski pokušaj da utiče na italijansku politiku. Na primeru Italije istažujem kako je Vizantija Jovana III Vataca imala dovoljno snage i izdržljivosti sredinom trinaestog veka da šalje sliku sebe kao dominante sile koja utiče na širu politiku hršćanskog Mediterana. Fokusirajući se konkretno na poduhvat Jovana III Vataca u Italiji nam dozvoljava da sagledamo kontinuitet u vizantijskim imperijalnim nastojanjima da oblikuje apeninsku politiku od italijanske kampanje Manojla I Komnina 1155–1156. sve do podrške Mihajla VIII Paleologa u Sicilijanskim večernjima 1282.

*Cljučne reči:* carska agentnost, diplomatija, Kraljevina Sicilija, Vizantija u egzilu, kancelarija

*L'entreprise de Jean III Vatatzès en Italie:  
le retour de la Byzance dans la diplomatie de la Méditerranée*

Les trois lettres écrites en grec que l'empereur saint-romain Frédéric II Hoenstaufen a envoyées à l'empereur romain d'Orient, Jean III Vatatzès, témoignent de l'activité des Laskarides dans la politique italienne en dehors de la péninsule des Balkans. Dans deux de ces lettres, l'empereur saint-romain informe son gendre et allié Jean III de la guerre qu'il mène contre les forces papales en Italie; dans la troisième, Frédéric II invite ouvertement son collègue byzantin à ne pas entrer dans les négociations œcuméniques avec la papauté.

L'analyse du contenu de ces trois lettres nous aide à redéfinir le rôle de l'état des Lascaris dans la politique méditerranéenne générale du milieu du treizième siècle. Dans ce travail, j'examine les exemples des activités impériales en Italie pour montrer que l'Empire romain des Lascaris est en réalité un agent politique actif qui désirait influencer sur la politique des états en dehors de sa prétendue sphère d'influence. Comme nous considérons l'état byzantin dans l'Asie

Mineure après 1204 comme un sujet impérial pittoresque, et non comme un objet impérial dépourvu de toute activité politique, cela nous permet de réexaminer l'image traditionnelle de l'empire en exil représentant l'état des Laskaris comme un chétif héritage du célèbre empire des Comnènes.

Récemment, des chercheurs comme Jean-Marie Martin et Nicholas Chrisis, ont analysé la politique papale et les activités diplomatiques de Frédéric II envers la Byzance, au milieu et dans la seconde moitié du treizième siècle, pour explorer le conflit entre la papauté et l'empereur du Saint Empire romain. Inspiré par des travaux comme ceux-là dans ma propre analyse des trois lettres impériales, j'offre une interprétation qui conceptualise les rapports diplomatiques entre la papauté, Frédéric II et Jean III comme une tentative byzantine d'influer sur la politique italienne. Sur l'exemple de l'Italie j'explore comment la Byzance de Jean III Vatatzès a eu suffisamment de force et d'endurance au milieu du treizième siècle pour envoyer l'image de soi comme d'une puissance dominante influençant la politique générale de la Méditerranée chrétienne. Le fait de nous concentrer concrètement sur l'entreprise de Jean III Vatatzès en Italie nous permet de conclure à une continuité dans les efforts impériaux byzantins de façonner une politique apennine, depuis la campagne italienne de Manuel I Comnène 1155–1156 jusqu'au soutien de Michel VIII Paléologue dans les Vêpres siciliennes en 1282.

*Mots clés:* agentivité impériale, diplomatie, Le Royaume de Sicile, Byzance en exil, chancellerie

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