

Małgorzata Dąbrowska
(Łódź)

FAMILY ETHOS AT THE IMPERIAL COURT
OF THE PALAIOLOGOS IN THE LIGHT
OF THE TESTIMONY BY THEODORE OF MONTFERRAT¹

“Il m'est venu à la main unung petit livre” – this is how Jean de Vignay, a French translator, writes about the treatise by Theodore of Montferrat in the fourteenth century.² Theodore was a son of Byzantine Emperor, Andronikos Palaiologos and of Yolanda, the daughter of William VII, Marquis of Montferrat, the granddaughter of Alfonso X, king of Castile. His work called: “Enseignemens ou ordonences pour un seigneur qui a guerres et grans gouvernemens a faire” was written in major part in 1327, i. e. in the time of most acute conflict between Andronikos II and his grandson, Andronikos III, Theodore's half-nephew.³ The modest and slightly long-winded treatise instructing the readers in how to wage wars, may also serve as a source for the reconstruction of the family ethos at the imperial court in the 14th century.

In fact, Theodore's treatise has a very personal tone; it was written out of concern for the imperial rule and for the welfare of Byzantium. The author displays a strong attachment to his family whose role must have been significant in his life. The text presents a whole catalogue of values that are appreciated by Theodore and held up as models for imitation. They point to the personality traits which were of particular interest to the imperial family. “Je nourri selonc la costume des autres

¹ The paper was presented during the International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Moscow in August 1991.

² *Les Enseignements de Theodore Paleologue*, ed. Ch. Knowles, London 1983, 21. All the quotations are taken from the original text, written in old French.

³ On Emperor Andronikos II and his family see: U. Bosch, *Kaiser Andronikos III. Palaiologos. Versuch einer Darstellung der byzantinischen Geschichte in den Jahren 1321–1341*, Amsterdam 1965; H. Constantinidi-Bibicou, *Yolande de Montferrat, impératrice de Byzance*, “L'Hellénisme Contemporain”, II ser., 4, 6 (1950), 425–442; A. Laiou, *A Byzantine Prince Latinized: Theodore Palaeologus, Marquis of Montferrat*, “Byzantion” 38 (1968), 386–410; Eadem, *Constantinople and the Latins. The foreign Policy of Andronicus II 1282–1328*, Cambridge Mass. 1972.

filz des Griex”,⁴ says Theodore in the introduction to his treatise. Let’s not ask the author how to win a war then. Let’s ask him what kind of ethos or a set of values was handed down to Theodore in his home.

The attitude to God heads the list of recognized values. Theodore is a God-fearing person who demonstrates faith in divine assistance. “Ja soit ce que je suy non digne et non souffisant devant la présence de li”,⁵ confesses the author, but at the same time he believes in God’s forbearance for his littleness. He hopes that God lends him the support he once offered to David fighting Goliath.⁶ Theodore stresses the need to study the Bible, remarking that it was his mother’s frequent occupation.⁷ He advocates the purity of doctrine and warns against heresy. “Gouverneur de gens ne doie pas souffrir que aucun herege en aucun degré de la foy converse en sa compaignie”.⁸ What seems rather striking is the fact that the discord between the Latin and Greek Churches is tactfully bypassed in the text. It is even more striking, because Theodore knew about this discord from both sides. The author often emphasizes the need to attend the service and listen to the sermons which strengthen people and protect them from harmful influence, “car les dyables labourent continuelment a la perdicion de la nature humaine”.⁹

Home fostered Theodore’s attachment to the native country and his appreciation of the glorious past, which is reflected in the treatise.¹⁰ Love for the fatherland was closely connected with love for parents and brothers. Theodore describes himself as “homme amant ses parens et sa generacion et tout le país et la terre de Griex”.¹¹ It was the desire to serve the country and family that impelled the author to create his work.¹² Writing about Greece, Theodore does not lose of his mother’s country where he was to rule later. He takes pride in his noble descent. “Je suis nez de tels nascions (...) lezquelz Diex a honores des ancien temps, et leur a donne et ottroie grace entre les autres du monde”.¹³

⁴ *Les Enseignements...*, 26.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 107.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 34.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 30.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 46.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 47.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 25, 36–37, 109, 111.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 109.

¹² *Ibidem*, 37.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 25.

Sensitive to the Byzantine heritage as he is, Theodore also recognizes his links with Italy and Spain.

Love for parents occupies a prominent place in the treatise. The author creates a pattern of correct relationships between himself and mother, father, brothers and half-brothers. What matters most, is obedience to parents and loyalty to brothers. Theodore states that he went off to Greece "pour la cause de servir a ma nascion si que a mon pouoir je pense accomplir a l'un et a l'autre son devoir selonc le deu naturel, tant du pere comme de la mere".¹⁴ Respect for father and readiness to help him is an overriding value in Theodore's view on the Byzantine feud. However, he criticizes Andronikos for the uncritical acceptance of the influence that Theodore Metochites had on political decisions.¹⁵

Mother is depicted as a paragon of feminine virtues. "Elle fu moult tres debonnaire et moult piteable"¹⁶ says the author. He adds that she was always merciful not only for people but also for animals which were well looked after.¹⁷ One of the passages depicted in the work focuses on the moment when the envoys from Italy arrive at the court to tell Yolanda that her brother, John of Montferrat died without an heir. Theodore is pleased to remark that mother, grieved as she was, soon mastered the situation.¹⁸ The throne of Montferrat was given to Theodore who was then fourteen. The author stresses his eagerness to comply with mother's wishes: "je vueil obeir aus commandemens de ma mere du tout en tout, sanz moy estendre en aucune chose autre qui ne li plaisoit pas".¹⁹ Theodore also displays loyalty and respect for his brothers. The late John Palaiologos is described as better and more worthy of the throne of Montferrat.²⁰ Theodore deplores his untimely death. He speaks tenderly of his youngish brother Demetrios, he is respectful when talking about his half-brother Michael IX Palaiologos. He points out that Michael's reign was free from the unrest that was stirred up later by his son, Andronikos III.²¹ The family pattern is enriched with the portrayal of the relationship between Theodore's

¹⁴ Ibidem, 37.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 109.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 29.

¹⁷ L. cit.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 30.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 33.

²⁰ Ibidem, 31.

²¹ Ibidem, 109.

parents i. e. Andronikos II and Yolanda-Eirene. The author is not so malicious as Gregoras. Unlike the chronicler,²² he never mentions marital arguments. He omits the facts which do not suit the family model created by him. According to the treatise, Yolanda sought her husband's advice when the future of Montferrat was in question. She followed her husband's choice and stayed with him instead of accompanying Theodore to her country.²³ To sum it all up; love for parents and brothers, obedience and loyalty are the prominent features of Theodore's family model.

The treatise also presents a catalogue of characteristics that should mark out a ruler who is, in a sense, father to his subjects. Elements that are worth highlighting may have been a substantial part of the family education. They are the three theological virtues: faith, hope and love. Hope is regarded as the most important. "Premierement esperance, pour ce que desespoir est la pire chose que nous puissions cognoistre".²⁴ Next to it, Theodore mentions mercy and pity; he also speaks about the spiritual strength that is needed to resist the satanic temptation.²⁵ Dwelling on the love of one's neighbour, he gives as an example the love that is shown to a stranger, which makes a good deed even more praiseworthy.²⁶ Theodore raises the subject of chastity, saying that lust blinds people. Men yield to it, and as a result they are easily influenced by the families and friends of their mistresses.²⁷ "Je conseille que les gouverneurs aient bonnes meurs au monde et que il hantent avec les hommes bien enseignés et aornés des bonnes meurs".²⁸

Theodore makes quite a few remarks which can serve as a basis for the partial reconstruction of *savoir-vivre* at the table. Tossed in casually, they testify to a careful home education. Theodore advocates eating and drinking with moderation. He recommends eating three or four meat-courses at the most. They should be served with bread and wine.²⁹ "Ne il n'afiert pas trop parler en mengant", because incessant

²² *Nicephorus Gregoras, Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, vol. I, Bonnae 1829, 233, 14–238, 5.

²³ *Les Enseignements ...*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 59.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 60–61.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 62.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 63.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 64.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 70.

talking bores the listeners and makes the meat dishes cool.³⁰ One should not overeat “car quant les hommes ont l'estomac plein, les fumosités et les vapeurs si occupent le cervel et empeeschent le courage”.³¹ Theodore disapproves of people who shun company, since “boire, mengier et couchier ensamble aprivoisent moult les gens l'un a l'autre”.³² To be precise, he means feasting and camping with brothers in arms. Theodore offers advice on how to entertain guests and make conversation at the table. He remarks that it is rude to doubt the interlocutor's statement.³³

The major part of the treatise is devoted to the conduct at the battlefield. I am not going to focus on a model of ideal leader. Instead, I will dwell on the principles that were passed down in the family. Theodore places a crucial emphasis on honour. It is better to die a dignified death rather than be a coward, “car vault miex seigneur mort a honneur que vif, desherité a honte”.³⁴ If conflicts arise, peaceful solutions should be tried first. If the war cannot be prevented any longer, enemies should be held in respect.³⁵ They should not be denied dignity when they are captives. The dead soldiers of the enemy forces have the right to the proper burial.³⁶

While Theodore was writing his treatise, reality of the Byzantine court diverged rather strongly from the ideal model. Andronikos III stood up against Andronikos II, that is to say, the grandson declared war on the grandfather and the country was thrown into turmoil. Exploring the causes of evil, the author also presents a set of negative characteristics, hubris being the darkest end of the spectrum. “La greigneur partie des hommes n'aiment pas les orgueilleux”³⁷ writes Theodore. That is why the author often asserts that he is not writing the treatise out of the desire for vain glory.³⁸ Vanity as the chief vice is ascribed to Theodore Metochites, the counsellor of Andronikos II.³⁹

³⁰ L. cit.

³¹ *Les Enseignements* ..., 52.

³² *Ibidem*, 70.

³³ L. cit.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 91.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 81.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 95.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 88.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 24, 35.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 108.

The author disapproves of acting on the spur of anger which blinds human nature.⁴⁰ "Envie qui vient de haine est racine de tous maulz",⁴¹ he goes on to say. Envy and hatred give rise to conflicts which is illustrated by the family quarrel of both Andronikos. Metochites also serves as an example in the author's criticism of greed. Theodore says that "avarice aveugle les hommes et leur oste le senz".⁴² He denounces cruelty and dishonesty towards enemies. "Je conseille que vous ne leur démontrés nulle cruauté ou felonnie".⁴³

The text is an example of Christian didacticism. The catalogue of virtues adopted by the author contains three theological virtues and four cardinal virtues. Negative features are in major part cardinal sins. Theodore describes himself as "escrivain crestien",⁴⁴ invoking the basic ethical values of Christianity that were passed on to him in home education. The author was 36 when writing the text, so it was a mature work. In his treatise Theodore admits that his departure for Montferrat as a young man brought him a rather difficult experience. He had to get used to the country that was so different "tant en meurs comme en language".⁴⁵ The source proves that in spite of all the discrepancies between the Greek world that he left and the Latin world that he encountered, Theodore expresses a strong attachment to universal moral patterns which were respected throughout the Christian world regardless of political or religious divisions and differences in manners. The text yields to the analysis from a variety of angles, e. g. it abounds in examples borrowed from Old and New Testament or from the history of ancient Greece. Its message could also be compared with "Consuetudines feudorum" so as to find out to what extent the treatise follows the feudal code of contemporary Europe. The percentage calculation of Greek and Latin share in the shaping of the text is not relevant to the analysis. Whatever the size of components in the cultural hybrid,⁴⁶ the most important thing is Theodore's interpretation of cross-cultural Christian code and of the recognized *savoir-vivre*. Linguistic analysis of the text in term of author's vocabulary is rather tricky exercise. The work survived in French translation exclusively, whereas

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 53.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 60.

⁴² Ibidem, 52.

⁴³ Ibidem, 105.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 43.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 33.

Theodore's actual text in Greek and Latin versions was lost. Jean de Vignay, the French translator would insert his own remarks, which makes the actual text even more elusive.

It would be worthwhile to seek analogy between "Enseignements" and the message offered by "Les Miroirs des Princes". In this way, Theodore's models might be provided with a richer background. Such research would be essential if one wanted to focus on the paragon of leader and ruler. Since I am more interested in the family relations I'd rather compare the treatise with "Enseignements" by Saint Louis. Amazingly, both works revolve round similar concerns, even though they vary in size and they spring from different circumstances. "Enseignements" by French king is a succinctly formulated set of injunctions addressed to his son Philip the Bold. Written in 1267, at the end of Louis's life, the text is a record of the king's experience.⁴⁶ Louis speaks about the love of God and the need to listen to God's word. "Chier fils, – he says – la premiere chose que je t'enseigne si est que tu mets tout ton cuer en Dieu amer, quar sans se nus ne se puet sauver".⁴⁷ He also adds: "ecoute volontiers les sermons et en apert (which means in official way) et en privé".⁴⁸ The king advocates the practice of good deeds and urges the son to abstain from every evil: "aime tout bien et hé tout mal en quoi que se soit".⁴⁹ He advises Philip to welcome good fortune and accept adversities with humility. "Se Dieu tenvoie aversite, sueffre la en bonne grace et en bonne pacience (...) Se il te donne prosperite, si l'en merci humblement".⁵⁰ Louis stresses respect for parents. "A ton pere et a ta mere dois tu honneur et reverence a parler et garder leurs commandemens".⁵¹ He asks his son not to wage wars against Christian rulers. Also he praises peaceful solutions: "guerres et contens, soient tien, soient a te sougies apaise ou plus tost que tu pourras".⁵²

⁴⁶ Geoffroy de Beaulieu, *Les Enseignements de Saint Louis*, (in:) *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. XX, ed. P. G. M. Daunou and J. Naudet, Paris 1840, 26–27.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 26 B.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 26 D.

⁴⁹ L. cit.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 26 B–C.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 27 A.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 27 A–B.

In comparison with Louis's work, the treatise is a longer text that reflects a different attitude. We can, however, detect the principles of a family code phrased in a similar way as the French king's advice. The shared basis of the upbringing i. e. the Bible, was the source of universal values that operated both in the Catholic West and the Orthodox East. Thus, Theodore of Montferrat's text does not anticipate Machiavelli's "Prince" whose chief task was to show the ways of retaining limitless power. The treatise is basically concerned with family advice perpetuating suitable patterns of behaviour in a community. "Les Enseignements" by Saint Louis is a set of father's injunctions. "Chier fils, je te doins toutes les beneïcons que bon pere et piteus puet donner a fis".⁵³ "Les Enseignements" by Theodore of Montferrat reflects the son's endeavour to mitigate the conflict between the grandfather and grandson. What pervades the work is the need to restore the family ethos of the Palaiologos which turned out to be an ideal model rather than actual reality during the civil war. None of the chroniclers who were well disposed towards the court presents a model of conduct that would be comparable to the image in Theodore's work.

Theodore, an offspring of a mixed marriage is treated by specialists as a completely latinized prince. In the light of his text, however, he seems to be equally devoted to Byzantium and to the West. He inhabits both worlds, and he is not troubled by the schism. Home education proved powerful enough to let the affection for the East and the West prevail. Theodore's treatise is of great importance for the scholars who deal with mixed marriages and their effect on children's upbringing. The text shows that the principles of Christian ethics were a firm bond in the combination of Western and Eastern cultural patterns. The encounter of both worlds was not such a shock as other sources might suggest. In fact, the narrative sources often emphasize the cultural shock of Latin princesses who were married off to Byzantine princes. Still, the texts like Theodore's treatise prove that assimilation was possible, largely due to the Christian code of moral principles respected by the West and the East, and transformed into the basis of a family ethos.

The reading of Theodore's treatise implies that it was mother's behaviour rather than father's that shaped his vision of a good ruler. Describing Yolanda's response to the events at Montferrat, Theodore stresses the quickness of decision, consistence in action and political wisdom. Exposed to the classic Byzantine upbringing and also to the

⁵³ Ibidem, 27 B.

distinct influence of the Latin mother, Theodore was able to cope with the political mission of ruling Montferrat. Yolanda was confident to it. She could send the son off to Italy where he would not be a complete stranger. The spirit of western civilization was familiar to him, due to her. The education he had received at the Byzantine court included respect for the universal code of principles observed throughout Christendom regardless of the Church schism. Due to such patterns, both worlds were not as alienated from each other as is sometimes thought.

The patterns of conduct presented by Theodore proved to be too important a set of values to be destroyed as a result of the civil war. Theodore got involved in the struggle purposefully. He wished to voice his viewpoint, stressing the fact that the conflict should never have happened. Grandson should have obeyed grandfather according to the principle of respect and obedience towards one's elders, which was an element of Christian code.

Ironically enough, this set of principles was written down by the man who diverged from the ideal. At odds with vassals in his own country, beset by financial difficulties, not to say debts, Theodore envied Metochites his far reaching influence at the court. But, as Max Scheler wittily put it, no one expects the signposts to follow the way they show.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. M. Ossowska, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany* (The Knights' Ethos and Its Modifications), Warszawa 1986, 12.