Authoring : *Radic Radivoj*
Translation : *Βελέντζας Γεώργιος*
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Summary :

Eirene Palaiologina was the elder sister of Emperor Michael VIII. She was born before 1220 and died in 1284. She was married to the pinkernes John Kantakouzenos and had four daughters, while after the monarch's death she became a nun under the name Eulogia. She expressed some political ambitions and tried to influence her brother's policies. However, as a fanatic opponent of the union of the Churches, she finally disagreed with him.

Other Names

Eirene Komnene Palaiologina, nun Eulogia

Date and Place of Birth

before 1220

Date and Place of Death

1284

Main Role

aristocrat, nun

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1. Biography

Eirene Palaiologina was born before 1220. She was the daughter of the megas domestikos Andronikos Palaiologos and Theodora, and the elder sister of Emperor Michael VIII. Circa 1240, she married the pinkernes John Kantakouzenos Komnenos Angelus and bore four daughters: Theodora, Maria, Anna and Eugenia.[1] Her husband died as monk Ioannikios before 1257, and after she was widowed, Eirene became a nun in 1261 or shortly earlier, under the name Eulogia.[2] Later on, she actively participated in the conflict between the supporters and the opponents of the Union of the Churches until she died, in 1284.

2. Sources

The Byzantine sources report Eirene twice. In the work of George Pachymeres, there is a stirring and tender story about the way the elder sister Eirene used to lull her brother Michael with a song, praising him as the future emperor who would enter Constantinople through the Golden Gate.[3] In general, Pachymeres reports that both sisters of Michael, Martha and Eirene (Eulogia), and particularly Eirene, took care of their young brother.

Eirene is also reported in sources by George Akropolites, on the occasion of the tumultuous events of the summer of 1261, when the forces of Nicaea, under the command of strategos Alexios Strategopoulos, recaptured Constantinople from the Latins. According to Akropolites, Emperor Michael VIII, in Meteorion at the time, was unaware of the events. Suddenly, during the night, there was a rumour that Constantinople was free. The news was announced by a young man, who was at the service of Eirene: while he was on his way from Bithynia, he learnt all about the recapture of Constantinople. Eirene did not hesitate to inform her brother. She found him sleeping and was wondering how to act, fearing that he might be upset if she suddenly announced the news. Thus, she touched him and told him: 'my king, you have finally captured Constantinople', adding 'raise, my king, because Jesus has offered you Constantinople'.[4]

3. Political Attitude

Eirene fostered her own political ambitions and had some influence on her younger brother. It is well known that it was people of her environment that urged Emperor Michael VIII to secure the rights of his son, Andronikos II, at the expense of young John IV Laskaris' rights over the throne. Thus, the fortuneless boy, son of Emperor Theodore II Laskaris, was later blinded. Eulogia's role in the conviction of the competent strategos Ioannes Makrenos, who was blinded by order of the emperor, is also known

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When the Bulgarian tsar Constantine Tih (1257-1277) lost his wife, he was married to the daughter of Eulogia, Maria. The wedding must have taken place in the late 1268 or the early 1269.[5] The fact that the Bulgarian tsar became her son-in-law, offered Eulogia the opportunity and the power to achieve some of her ambitions in the following years.

4. Against the Union of the Churches

The mutual affection between Michael VIII and his elder sister suffered because of a crucial matter: the Union of the Churches. In 1273, Eulogia was directly opposed to the union her brother advocated. What is more, she became one of the reference points for those against the union. Due to this attitude, she spent some time in exile: her brother exiled her at the stronghold of St. Gregory, in the bay of Nicomedia.[6] The conflict between the two reached to the point of Eulogia forbiding the emperor's widow, Theodora, to pray for Michael VIII when the latter died.

Eirene did not hesitate to turn her daughter Maria, the tsarina of Bulgaria, against her uncle. An interstate conflict was then provoked: Michael VIII did not cede to the Bulgarians the cities he had promised them, Anchialos and Mesembria and, as a result, Maria incited her husband against Byzantium. Moreover, Maria and Eulogia sent, possibly in 1276, a certain Joseph Katharos to Jerusalem, to Patriarch Gregory,[7] so that the latter would persuade the Egyptian sultan Rukn al-Din Baybars I to attack the Byzantine emperor, with the help of the Bulgarians. The Egyptian ruler rejected the proposal because he considered the unfamiliar Bulgarians an unreliable ally. The Bulgarians could not rely on the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch either, since these two were living in Constantinople and were under the protection of the emperor.

When Michael VIII died (1282), the Byzantine ecclesiastical policy changed. His son and successor, Andronikos II, adopted a radically different view on the issue of the Union of the Churches. Among the counsellors of the new emperor was his aunt Eulogia, who continued to influence him until she died.

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1. Nicol, D.M, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100-1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington 1968), ? 18, pp. 25-26, reports that there was probably yet another daughter whose name we ignore. However, the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit IX* (Wien 1989), see entry 'Παλαιολογίνα Ειρήνη Κομνηνή' no. 21360, p. 67, mentions only four daughters.

2. A. Failler, (ed.) *Georges Pachymérès relations historiques* I (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 14, Paris 1984), pp. 179-181.

3. A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérès relations historiques* I (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 14, Paris 1984), pp. 179-181.

4. A. Heisenberg (ed.), *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* 1 (Leipzig 1978), p. 184.

5. A. Failler, 'Chronologie et composition dans l'Histoire de Georges Pachymérès', *Revue des études byzantines* 39 (1981), pp. 207-211.

6. *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* IX (Wien 1989), see entry 'Παλαιολογίνα Ειρήνη Κομνηνή' no. 21360, p. 67.

7. A. Failler, 'Chronologie et composition dans l'Histoire de Georges Pachymérès', *Revue des études byzantines* 39 (1981), pp. 235-236.

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Glossary :

megas domestikos

Supreme military commander of the imperial army. High-ranking title which was generally given to close relatives of the emperor.

pinkernes

[also pikernes or epikernes, possibly from the Latin pincerna, a word deriving from the greek verb *epikerannymi*, meaning to mix (wine)]). Cup-bearer of the palace. Official at the personal service of the emperor. In the Late Byzantine years, the pinkernes was a very honorary title, while in the 14th century it was awarded to very important figures, such as Alexios Philanthropenos.

strategos ("general")

During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state´s provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.

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Quotations

George Akropolites refers to Eirene with respect to the events of 1261

'Περὶ γοῦν τὸ Μετεώριον τότε σκηνουμένου τοῦ βασιλέως ἐξαπίνης φήμη τις νύτκτωρ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν περιεβόμβησεν ἀκοάς. Ἡ δὲ φήμη παρὰ παιδαρίου τινὸς τῆς αὐταδέλφης τοῦ βασιλέω τῆς ὀνομαζομένης μὲν Εἰρήνης, διὰ δὲ τοῦ μοναδικοῦ σχήματος μετανομασθείσης Εὐλογίας, ἐκ τῶν τῆς Βιθυνίας μερῶν παρ' αὐτὴν ἀφικομένου, ὡς καθ' ὁδὸν ἐμαμαθήκει παρά του, παρὰ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν στρατευμάτων ἁλῶναι τὴν Κωνσταντίνου. Ὡς εἶχε γοῦν τάχους ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως αὐτοκασιγνήτη παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα ἀφιγμένη καταδαρθάνοντα τοῦτον εὗρε, καὶ ἠρέμα πως ἐκίνει αὐτὸν χειρί, ὅπως ἄν γε καὶ γρηγορήσειεν, ἰσχνοτέρᾳ τῇ φωνῇ ὑπολέγουσα ὡς 'κατέσχες, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν' καὶ πολλάκις τοῦτο εἰρήκει, καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπέμενε μηδέν τι πρὸς ταύτην ἀνταποκρινόμενος. ὡς δὲ τὸν λόγον μετέβαλε καὶ εἰρήκει. 'ανάστηθι βασιλεῦ, ὁ γὰρ Χριστὸς ἀπεχαρίσατό σοι τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν'. τῆς κλίνης ἀναστὰς καὶ τάς χεῖρας εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνας 'τοῦτον μεν" ἔφη "τὸν λόγον, ὦ ἀδελφή, καὶ αὐτὸς δέχομαι.'.

A. Heisenberg, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera, 1*, (Leipzig 1903), 86. 1-20

Chronological Table

before 1220: Birth of Eirene

c. 1240: Marriage to John Kantakouzenos

before 1257: Death of John Kantakouzenos

1261 or earlier: Eirene becomes a nun under the name Eulogia

1273: She is against Michael's VIII policy regarding the Union of the Churches

1276: Attempt to turn the Egyptian sultan against Byzantium

1284: Death of Eirene-Eulogia