



Summary :

Member of the nobility during the Palaiologan period, born in around 1240 in the Empire of Nicaea; died in 1300 in Constantinople. She was a person of varied interests: an author and member of the closed circle of scholars of the Palaiologan Renaissance, she maintained a book-copying workshop in the monastery of St Andrew which she had restored, while she also participated actively in the political and ecclesiastical debates of her time.

Other Names

Theodora Komnene Kantakouzene Palaiologina Raoulaina, Theodora Kantakouzene Palaiologina Raoulaina, Theodora Kantakouzene, Theodora Komnene Kantakouzene

Date and Place of Birth

c. 1240, Empire of Nicaea

Date and Place of Death

1300, Constantinople

Main Role

protovestiarissa

1. Biography

Theodora was born in around 1240 in the [Empire of Nicaea](#). She was the daughter of the **meas domestikos** John Kantakouzenos and [Eirene Palaiologina](#), sister of the later Emperor [Michael VIII Palaiologos](#). She had three sisters, Anna, Maria and Eugenia. Her family belonged to the circle of the imperial court. Theodora would have received schooling at home, like all the aristocratic women of her time, probably by a private tutor.¹

In 1256, following the recommendation of the Emperor [Theodore II Laskaris](#), Theodora was married to the **meas domestikos**, **meas stratopedarches** and **protovestiarios**, [Georgios Mouzalon](#); he originated from a rising family.² Mouzalon, acting as a representative of the young king [John IV Laskaris](#), was murdered in 1258 at the Sosandra monastery by foreign mercenaries hired by Michael Palaiologos.³ Following Mouzalon's murder, Theodora was married to John Raoul Komnenos Doukas Aggelos Petralifas, member of a noble family, **protovestiarios** of Michael VIII Palaiologos. From that point on Theodora is called Kantakouzene Palaiologina Raoulaina and she receives the title of *protovestiarissa* (female for her husband's title). Exhibiting the vanity that often characterizes members of the Byzantine nobility, she calls herself "Theodora, niece of the Roman Emperor, Theodora of the Kantakouzenos, Angelos, Doukas, Komnenos, Palaiologos family, and spouse of John Raoul Doukas Komnenos, the *protovestiarios*". From this marriage she had two daughters, Eirene Raoulaina, the later wife of Konstantinos Palaiologos Porphyrogennitos, and Anna.⁴ Theodora was widowed for the second time sometime before 1274, when her second husband, John Raoul, passed away. She died in 1300 at [Constantinople](#), in the [monastery of St Andrew](#).

2. Religious and political activity

Already before the death of her second husband, Theodora apparently had forged ties with prominent figures of Constantinople's intellectual and political milieu, as indicated by the consolation letter addressed to her by [Manuel Holobolos](#), an official (rhetor) in the Patriarchate.⁵ After her husband's death, following the example of her mother who was already a nun under the name Eulogia, she too became a nun and her public presence grew more intense.

Theodora vehemently opposed Michael VIII Palaiologos' policy, who sought to bring about the Union of the Western and Eastern Churches. After the Second Council in Lyons (1274), together with her mother, who was also strongly opposed to the union, they turned against the emperor seeking to obstruct the implementation of his policy.⁶ Manuel and Isaac Raoul, brothers of her late



husband John, also figure prominently in this attempt. Because of their stance, Theodora and her mother were exiled to the fortress of St George, on the coasts of the Pontic Sea.

After Michael's death (1282), his heir [Andronikos II](#) follows a completely different ecclesiastical policy, so Theodora and her mother return to Constantinople. Although she is said to have been a follower of the former patriarch [Arsenios Autoreianos](#), her stance during the [feud](#) of the [arseniatai](#) was moderate and does not indicate any close ties to the arseniatai movement. Once again together with her mother, she participated in the Council of [Adramyttion](#) (1284), in an abortive attempt to alleviate the disputes. In the meantime she had forged close ties with the new patriarch [Georgios Kyprios](#) (Patriarch Gregorios, 1283-1289), and she is considered his spiritual child.

In around 1284, Theodora renovated the monastery of St Andrew in Krisei⁷ and turned it into a nunnery, where she spent the remainder of her life. At this monastery, in a chapel she founded for this purpose, she relocated the remains of Arsenios Autoreianos from [Hagia Sophia](#), after obtaining the permission of Andronikos II. It was to this monastery (monydriion of Aristenon) to which Georgios Kyprios sought refuge after his resignation from the patriarchal throne (1289).

The last public action of Theodora Raoulaina is recorded in 1295 when, together with the brother of her former husband Isaac Raoul, they were sent by Andronikos II to negotiate with [Alexios Philanthropenos](#), who had rebelled in Asia Minor, following his victorious campaigns against the Ottoman Turks. Unfortunately her mediation failed, and Philanthropenos, after the quenching of his rebellion, was blinded.

3. Intellectual activity

Theodora was a cultured woman of exceptional erudition, and this fact made her stand out among the other women of her time. Her learning and her interests were not restricted to a single field, but included the topics of liberal and religious education: she became a prominent copyist; she maintained a significant library; she was close to the most important figures of the letters and composed original works as well.

Theodora's original work was the *Vita* of the brothers Theophanes and Theodore the «Graptoi»,⁸ confessors of the Church, who participated in the [Iconoclasm](#) dispute on the side of the iconophiles and were punished by Emperor [Theophilos](#). Theodora probably studied their story either because of her synonymity to Empress [Theodora](#), who annulled her husband's iconoclastic policies, or because she had identified the Graptoi with her husband's brothers Manuel and Isaac Raoul, who were persecuted for religious reasons (because they opposed the Union of the Churches).

This *Vita* betokens the author's erudition and her intimate knowledge of Classical literature. The text contains allusions to [Homer](#), Hesiod, Aeschylus and Euripides, Herodotus, Plato and [Dionysius of Halicarnassus](#). She also often quotes passages from the Holy Scriptures, especially from the works of the prophets of the Old Testament, but she does not make any references to the Church fathers. She is also fond of using proverbs.

Her work as a copyist is also worthwhile. Several manuscripts are connected with her. One of this, in her own hand, contains the *Orations* of [Aelius Aristides](#);⁹ nowadays this is kept in the Vatican Library (Cod. Vat. gr. 1899).¹⁰ A second manuscript attributed to her is a copy of [Simplicius](#) commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.¹¹

Theodora possessed a large personal library, which she took with her in the monastery of St Andrew, where she enriched it further. Among other works, it contained a volume with Thucydides' works,¹² as well as a 12th-c. manuscript containing the four Gospels commented upon by Theophylaktos of Ochrid;¹³ this she donated to the monastery of Great Lavra on Mt Athos in 1300.¹⁴ She is also said to have been the sponsor of a book-copying atelier; 15 codices produced in it were found in her possession. This atelier was known as 'Palaiologina's atelier'.¹⁵



Theodora was recognized as a compeer in a circle which included the most radiant figures of the letters of her time, persons which she conversed and corresponded with. Her letters have not survived, although [Maximos Planoudes](#) speaks with admiration of her epistolary style. Planoudes, one of the scholars close to her, dedicated three letters to her, where she is described as "Theodora, most wise among women".¹⁶ A letter of Planoudes addressed to Theodora survives; its subject is the copy of a text on harmonics. Georgios Kyprios addressed several letters to her, while he also played a formative role in the development of her intellectual outlook. Kyprios was considered her spiritual father, and possibly through his help she became well-versed in Classical literature and widened her own intellectual interests. This is the answer to the question how could a woman with no higher education stand her own in a circle of intellectuals and, furthermore, produce original intellectual work. Two of the letters addressed to her by Nikephoros Choumnos also survive: he calls her "wise".¹⁷ Finally, [Gregoras](#) describes her as a woman extremely devoted to education.¹⁸

1. There is no information on her tutor. This conclusion results from her later presence in the field of the letters.
2. This marriage is indicative of Theodore's policy of placing in key positions, through marriages, members of the lesser nobility. See Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymeres Relations historiques* 1, CFHB 24/1-2 (Paris 1984), p. 41.
3. According to Pachymeres' account, Theodora was the only woman who did not panic and opposed the mercenaries, causing the wrath of her uncle Michael. See Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymeres Relations historiques* 1, CFHB 24/1-2 (Paris 1984), pp. 63-89.
4. Papadopoulos believes that Theodora had a son from her first marriage with Georgios Mouzalon, that is Theodore Mouzalon, *grand logothetes* of Andronikos II. See Papadopoulos, A.Th., *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen 1259-1453* (Munich 1938), p. 20.
5. See "Επιστολή του σοφωτάτου ῥήτορος παραμυθητική πρὸς τὴν πανευγενεστάτην κυρὰν Θεοδώραν Παλαιολογίαν τὴν Ραούλαιναν, ὅτε τὸν θάνατον ὑπεδέξατο ὁ εὐγενέστατος αὐτῆς ἀνὴρ, ὁ πρωτοβεστιάριος", in Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, Α., *Ιεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη I*, (St. Petersburg 1891-1899), p. 345.
6. On Theodora's stance and the troubles it caused for Michael VIII Palaiologos with respect to the union of the Churches, see Loenertz, R.-J., "Memoire d'Ogier, protonotaire, pour Marco et Marchetto nonces de Michel VIII Paleologue aupres du Pape Nicholas III. 1278 printemps-été", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 31 (1965), pp. 374-408. Also, Nicol, D.M., "The Greeks and the union of the Churches: The report of Ogerius, protonotarius of Michael VIII Paleologos", in Nicol, D.M., *Collected Studies I: Byzantium: its ecclesiastical history and relations with the western world* (London 1972).
7. The monastery was dilapidated; it was dedicated to St Andrew of Crete, in the area of Constantinople called Krise. See Janin, R., *La geographie ecclesiastique de l'empire byzantin* ²1 (Paris 1969), pp. 28, 31.
8. See Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. (ed.), *Vita Ss Theophanis et Theodori*, in *Ανάλεκτα Ιεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχνολογίας* 4 (Jerusalem 1897), pp. 185-223, and 5 (Jerusalem 1898), pp. 397-399 [= Halkin, F., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 3, no. 1793).
9. Aelius Aristides (117 or 129 AD to 189) was an orator of the Second Sophistic. In the debate on the relative value of Philosophy vis-à-vis Rhetoric he sided against Plato, arguing for the primacy of Rhetoric. This position perhaps made him popular in Byzantium, where his works were copied and commented upon. He was widely used by the scholars of the Late Byzantine period, among others by Maximos Planudes, Thomas Magistors and Chortasmenos.
10. This manuscript contains the following versified inscription: "και την Αριστείδου δε τήνδε την βίβλον/ γραφείσαν ἰσθι παρὰ της Θεοδώρας/ καλῶς εἰς ἄκρον γνησίως εσκεμμένην/ Ρώμης νέας ἀνακτο(ς) ἀδελφῆς τέκος/ Καντακουζηνῆς ἐξ ἀνάκτων Ἀγγέλων/ Δουκῶν φυείσης Παλαιολόγων φύτλης/ Ραούλ δάμαρτος Δούκα χαριτωνύμου/ Κομνηνοφύους πρωτοβεστιάριου". See Turyn, A., *Codices Graeci Vaticani saeculis XIII et XIV scripti amorumque notis instructi* (Vatican City 1964), pp. 63-65; Λάμπρος, Σπ., «Σύμμικτα», *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 10 (1913), pp. 347-8; Λάμπρος, Σπ., «Επιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη», *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 13 (1916), pp. 414-21.



11. Today this codex is kept in the Historical Museum of Moschow. For further reading see Fonkic, B.L., "Zametki o greceskich rukopisjach Sovietskich chrnailisc", *Vizantijskij Vremennik* 36 (1974), p. 134.
12. Today this codex is kept in Munich (Monac. gr. 430).
13. The scholar-archbishop of Bulgaria in the late 11th century.
14. Today this codex is kept in Paris (Coislin. gr. 128).
15. This group contains seven Gospels, three Breviaries, three Psalters, a New Testament and a copy of the Acts of the Apostles. See Buchthal, H. - Belting, H., *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople: An Atelier of Late Byzantine Book Illumination and Calligraphy* (Washington D.C. 1978), pp. 100-121.
16. Λάμπρος, Σπ., «Επιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη», *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων* 13 (1916), pp. 414-421.
17. Boissonade, F., *Anecdota nova* (1844), repr. Hildesheim 1962, pp. 91-92.
18. Schopen, L. (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia* 1, CSHB (Bonn 1829), p. 178.

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Glossary :

	arsenitai
Followers and supporters of patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos, who had excommunicated Michael VIII Palaiologos. Michael managed to get rid of Arsenios in 1265; from that time, Arsenios' followers were at odds with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, refusing to recognize Arsenios' successors to the patriarchal throne. Politically they supported the Lascarid dynasty and opposed the dynasty of the Palaiologoi. The dispute was resolved in 1310.	
	mezas domestikos
Supreme military commander of the imperial army. High-ranking title which was generally given to close relatives of the emperor.	
	mezas stratopedarches
Superior officer responsible for the provision of equipment and supplies for the military forces of the byzantine empire of Nicaea.	
	protovestiaris
(and protovestiarites) Honorific title given to high-ranking officials and future emperors during this period. The protovestiaris was originally responsible for the imperial wardrobe, but in the 9th-11th centuries the holders of the title could command an army or conduct negotiations with foreign states.	

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Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, Α., *Ιεροσολυμιτική Βιβλιοθήκη* I (St Petersburg 1891-1899), p. 345 («Επιστολή του σοφωτάτου ρήτορος παραμυθητική προς την πανευγενεστάτην κυράν Θεοδώραν Παλαιολογίαν την Ραούλαιαν, ότε τον θάνατον υπεδέξατο ο ευγενέστατος αυτής ανήρ, ο πρωτοβεστιάριος»).

Λάμπρος, Σπ., «Επιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη», *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων* 13 (1916), pp. 414-21.

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Quotations

Maximos Planudes' epigram on the Church of Aghios Andreas, which Theodora Raoulaina renovated

Στίχοι εις τον ναόν του Αγίου Ανδρέου
ον ανήγειρεν η πρωτοβεστιαρία ηρωελεγειοι
Μαξίμου του Πλανούδη

Πειθομένη σε δόμοισιν εν ουρανόισιν αληθώς
ψυχή ναιετάειν, Ανδρέα κλεινότατε,
και τω σώματι σείο νεών εδομήσατο τόνδε,
κάλλεσιν ουρανόις εν χθονί λαμπόμενον,
η πάσαις ενί θηκυτέρησι σοφή Θεοδώρα
αμφοτέρων τε λόγων κύδος αναψαμένη.
Η γενέτης μεν ήην Καντακουζηνός Ιωάννης,
μήτηρ δ' Ευλογίη αξίη ευλογίης,
σύγγονος ούσα Παλαιολόγου Μιχαήλ βασιλήος,
ου γόνος Ανδρόνικος πλείον άνακτος άναξ,
κοινωνός βίότου δε Ραούλ πέλεν Ιωάννης,
τιμήν ειληφώς πρωτοβεστιαρίου.
Αύτη χηροσύνην έστερξεν αμέμπτως.
έτρεφε νωλεμέως Χριστόν εν ενδεέσι,
δόγματος ορθοτόμοιο χάριν πάθεν άλγεα πολλά,
τίμα και φιλίην ει τις εφημεριών.
Τοίη τω τοιώδε τοιόνδε σοι είσατο νηόν,
Ανδρέα, και συ χάριν πλούσιον αντιμέτρει.

Λάμπρος, Σπ., «Επιγράμματα Μαξίμου Πλανούδη», *Νέος Ελληνομνημων* 13 (1916), pp. 414-21.

Chronological Table

c. 1240: birth of Theodora

1256: marriage with Georgios Mouzalon

1258: Mouzalon is murdered by mercenaries hired by Michael Palaiologos

c. 1260: Theodora marries John Raoul Komnenos Doukas Angelos Petralifas

1274: John Raoul dies

after 1274: Theodora becomes a nun

after 1274: Theodora is exiled to the fortress of St George in the Pontus

1282: Theodora returns to Constantinople

1284: Theodora participates in the Council of Adramyttion



1284: renovation of the monastery of St Andrew in Krisei

1289: Georgios Kyprios finds refuge in the monastery

1295: Theodora participates in the imperial delegation to Alexios Philanthropenos

1300: death of Theodora

Auxiliary Catalogs

Editions

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