



Summary :

Theodora's lineage was related to the eminent Byzantine families of the Doukai, Komnenoi and Angeloi. Theodora was born in around 1240 and passed away in 1303. She was the spouse of Emperor Michael VIII, with whom she had seven children. In certain incidents she appears to have been active politically. After Michael's death she renounced her husband's policy who sought to bring about the union of the Western and Eastern Churches. She was devout, making donations to monasteries and renovating several others on her own initiative.

Other Names

Theodora Doukaina Komnene, nun Eugenia

Date and Place of Birth

probably around 1240

Date and Place of Death

February 25 1303, Constantinople

Main Role

Empress

1. Biography

Theodora Palaiologina was the daughter of Eudokia Angelina and [John Doukas](#), son of the **sebastokrator** Isaac Doukas (who was brother of [John III Doukas Vatatzes](#), the emperor of the byzantine [empire of Nicaea](#) (1222-1254)). Theodora is thought to have been born in c. 1240.¹ As her father died early, Theodora was an only child. In 1253/4 the Emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes, brother of her grandfather from her father's side, "who loved her as his own daughter",² married her with the then thirty-year old Michael Palaiologos, already a prominent general, the later emperor [Michael VIII](#) (Nicaea/Constantinople 1258-1261/1261-1282). From this marriage to Michael Theodora had seven children: Manuel (died at an early age), Andronikos, the later [Andronikos II](#) (1282-1328), Constantine, Theodore, Eirene, Anna and Eudokia.

2. Empress

In the year 1258, soon after the death of [Theodore II Laskaris](#) (1254-1258), Michael Palaiologos came to power in the Empire of Nicaea, at start as a *de facto*, soon becoming a *de iure* ruler. After January 1, 1259³ Michael and Theodora were crowned in [Nicaea](#). In August of 1261 the couple entered the recently [recaptured Constantinople](#), where Michael was crowned anew in the [Hagia Sophia](#), possibly early in the fall of the same year, perhaps together with Theodora.⁴ During that same fall Constantine was born, receiving the sobriquet Porphyrogenitos (i.e. the Purple-born). During the same year the marriage of the imperial couple entered a crisis over the emperor's affair to Anna-Constantia Hohenstaufen. Michael VIII was contemplating divorcing Theodora and marrying Anna Hohenstaufen, on the pretence of political necessity, but the patriarch [Arsenius Autoreianos](#) (1254-1259, 1261-1265) threatened him with excommunication in case he went on with his plans, thus Michael was forced to retreat.

We have some evidence that indicate Theodora was political active during Michael's reign (1259-1282); these pertain to certain events. We know she took an active part in the effort to arrange the marriage of her daughter Anna to Milutin,⁵ the son of the Serbian king Stefan Uroš I/Simon (1243-1276/1280). In 1279 Michael VIII asked Theodora's advice on the marriage of their daughter Eirene to the Bulgarian tsar John III Asen (1279-1280). [Pachymeres](#) also reports certain occasions in which the empress interceded on behalf of persons who had invited the emperor's disfavour, managing to alleviate their punishment (e.g. the cases of Kaloeidas, Michael Strategopoulos).⁶

3. Devotion and care for the monasteries



According to [George Akropolites](#), Eudokia Angelina, Theodora's mother, had inspired in her a deep devoutness.⁷ As an empress, Theodora remained true to the ideals of her youth. She expressed her devotion through her constant care and large donations to monasteries, especially to the monastery of [Panagia Lembiotissa](#) close to [Smyrna](#), and to the monastery of St John the Theologian on the [isle of Patmos](#). Today, apart from some testimonies on her now lost *orismoï*, some original documents of hers have been also preserved.⁸ We can gather that she took decisions in her own right and issued formal *orismoï* which she implemented through her personal employees, sometimes acting completely independently from her emperor-husband. In her field of activity she was energetic and dynamic. The documents issued in her name are public legal documents, enjoying validity on a par with those issued by co-emperors.⁹ There is also the impression that during Michael VIII's rule the entire [island of Kos](#), or at least a large part of it, belonged exclusively to Empress Theodora.¹⁰

With the respect to Michael's pro-union policy, there is indirect evidence that Theodora, as a loyal spouse, supported her husband's choices, although in fact she was sympathetic to the cause of the anti-unionists.¹¹ Her Orthodox beliefs were expressed more openly after Michael's death.

4. Widowhood

Following Michael VIII's death (in December 1282), his son and heir Andronikos II, dramatically reversed his father religious policy and repudiated the Union of the Churches. This fact posed a dilemma for Theodora, for she was torn between the memory of the husband and her desire to fall in line with her son's stance, which she considered proper. Theodora finally renounced the Union officially in the [Council of 1283](#) at Vlachernai with the issue of a *chrysobull*.¹² In return, the clergy started commemorating again her name in the liturgies. This act of hers invited the admiration of later anti-unionist writers; [John Eugenikos](#) went as far as calling her a 'saint' and believed that it was she who influenced Andronikos II into reversing his father's policy.¹³ It appears, however, that Theodora generally agreed with her son's political choices, although there are cases where her overtures to her son proved fruitless, as in the case of the Porphyrogenitos Constantine Palaiologos, of whom Andronikos was wary and thus kept him into a confinement of sorts.

Her initiatives and the care she exhibited for the renovation and restoration of monasteries and other establishments of the capital did not diminish during her widowhood. We should note that during this period we have the restoration of the [Monastery of Livos](#) (i.e. Lips monastery founded in the 10th century - modern Fenari Isa Camii) and the foundation of a nunnery dedicated to the Virgin Mary. She also composed a new *typikon*, while she added to the monastery complex another church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, as well as a small *hospital*. Theodora destined the monastery as a resting place for her and the Palaiologoi family in general. Apart from this, Theodora contributed to the restoration of the monastery of Ss Cosmas and Damian, as well as of the church of the Panagia at *Mikra Romaïou*.

Theodora Palaiologina fell ill in 1303 and died on February 25 of that same year.¹⁴ Before her death she became a nun, taking on the name Eugenia.¹⁵ Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328) organized a grand funeral for her in the new church of St John the Baptist. Theodora's *monody* was composed by [Theodore Metochites](#).¹⁶

1. In *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, IX (Wien 1989), no. 21380, p. 71, there is no mention of her date of birth. Talbot, A.M. "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) [=Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan], p. 295, gives an approximative date of c.1240, which is more or less accepted.

2. Grégoire, H., "Imperatoris Michaelis Palaeologi de Vita sua", *Byzantion* 29-30 (1959-1960), p. 451.

3. Wirth, P., "Die Begründung der Kaisermacht Michaels VIII. Palaiologos", *Jahrbuch der osterreichischen Byzantinistik* 10 (1961), pp. 87-89, 91.

4. Geanakoplos, D.J., *Emperor Michael Palaeologos and the West, 1258-1282: A Study in Byzantine-Latin Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959; repr.



Hamden 1973), p. 121.

5. Γεωργίου Παχυμέρη, *Συγγραφικαί ιστορίαι*, ed. Failler, A., *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques II* (Paris 1984), p. 453. Cf. Failler, A., "Le projet de manage d'Anna Palaiologina avec Milutin de Serbie", *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi I*. (=Miscellanea Agostino Pertusi I Bologna 1981), pp. 239-249, and Maksimović, Lj., *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije, VI* (Beograd 1986), pp. 22-30.

6. See Γεωργίου Παχυμέρη, *Συγγραφικαί ιστορίαι*, ed. Failler, A., *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques, II* (Paris 1984), p. 621 on Kaloeidas and p. 617 on Michael Strategopoulos.

7. Γεωργίου του Ακροπολίτου του μεγάλου λογοθέτου χρονική συγγραφή, A. Heisenberg, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera I* (Lipsiae 1903,) p. 101.

8. The archives of the monastery of Patmos contain documents signed by Empress Theodora dating to between 1259 and 1269; these pertain to the concession of the monastery of Christ on Cos to the monastery of Patmos as a metochi (dependency); see Βρανούση, Ε., *Βυζαντινά Έγγραφα της Μονής Πάτμου Α Αυτοκρατορικά* (Αθήνα 1980), documents nos. 31, 36.

9. All these documents were the subject of a separate study; see Barisio, F., "Povelje vizantijskih carica", *Zbornik radova Vizantologskog instituta* 13 (1971), pp. 146-158.

10. Μ. Νυσταζοπούλου-Πελεκίδου (ed.) *Βυζαντινά Έγγραφα της Μονής Πάτμου Β': Δημοσίων λειτουργιών* (Αθήνα 1980), document no. 70, note 1.

11. Talbot, A.-M., "Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael Vni", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) [=Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan], p. 297.

12. Petrides, S., "Chrysobulle de l' imperatrice Theodora (1283)", *Échos d'Orient* 14 (1911), p. 26.

13. Λάμπρος, Σπ., *Παλαιολόγεια και Πελοποννησιακά Α'* (Αθήνα 1912), p. 130.

14. Some of the issues pertaining to the dating have been solved by A. Failler, "Chronologie et composition dans l' Histoire de Georges Pachymérés", *Revue des Études Byzantines* 48 (1990), p. 51, note 177.

15. Gouillard, J., "Le Synodicon de l'orthodoxie", *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), p. 101, 864.

16. As far as we know, this monody has not been published and is kept in Wien (gr. 95, fols. 179r-189r).

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Glossary :

	chrysobull (gold seal) Imperial document of the Byzantine state which was so named because it bore the gold seal of the emperor.
	hospital The word is a philological form initiated by Justinian I (527-565) (meaning: treatment of the disease) and it originally referred to those xenodocheia, institutes for diseased, which could afford operating theatre (sic trauma). From the middle byzantine period onwards the hospitals commonly formed part of the monastic institutions.
	monody Literary work of oratorical character which was also a memorial speech.

**prostagma**

A kind of Byzantine imperial document, also known as *horismos*. As for its content, it was usually a short administrative order to an imperial functionary or a trusted person. It was usually written on wide paper, without the signature and the seal of the Emperor, but at the end of the document the imperial *menologema* (statement of month and indiction with the value of imperial signature) was added in red ink.

**sebastokrator**

Honorary title of the Byzantine court. The office was established in 1081 by Alexios I Komnenos for his elder brother Isaac, equivalent to the one of regent

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Quotations

Theodora Palaiologina resorts to the Patriarch to prevent Michael VIII from divorcing

Ταῦτα δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως βουλευομένου καὶ σοφιστικῶς λέγοντος –ἐπειθε γὰρ ὁ ἐκκαίων ἔρως, καὶ μάλλον παρὰ τῆς δεσποίνης Ἄννης περιφρονούμενος–, ἡ βασιλὶς Θεοδώρα πυθομένη χαλεπῶς εἶχεν ἐνέγκαι, εἰ, δέσποινα ἐστεμμένη οὐσα καὶ γνησία γυνή... τοιαῦτα πάθοι ἀπολειφθεῖσα, στερηθεῖσα μὲν τοῦ ἀνδρός, στερηθεῖσα δὲ καὶ τῆς βασιλείας καὶ πάσης ἀπεροριμένη τιμῆς, τὴν δ' ἀντίζηλον ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας ὀρώσα συμβασιλεύουσαν τῷ ἀνδρὶ. Ὅθεν καὶ πρὸς τὸν πατριάρχην πέμψασα ἵκετεύει τοιαύτην συμφορὰν ἀμῦναι ταύτη καὶ νόμων θείων ὑπερμαχεῖν ἀξιοῖ· ὅς δὴ μαθὼν καὶ ἀγάμενος, εἰ τοιούτοις ἐπιχειροῖ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἀνέδην τῶν ἀθίκτων ἄπτεται, ὡς καὶ τοὺς κειμένους νόμους ἐθέλειν καταπατεῖν, αὐτὸς τοιοῦτος μὴ νομιζόμενος πρότερον, δεινὰ ἐποίει καὶ διεμήνυε, τὸ μὲν ὄνειδίζων, τὸ δ' ἐπισείων ἐκείνῳ καὶ τὴν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀγανάκτησιν.

Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques*, I (Paris 1984), p. 247.



Michael VIII reduces the sentence of John Strategopoulos after the intervention of Theodora

... προθήμενος ἐκτυφλοῦν ἐκείνον, ταῖς τῆς δεσποίνης δυσωπίαις –ἦν γὰρ αὐτανεψία ἐκείνου– καὶ παρὰ γνώμην ἀνεχετίζετο, ἐκείνῳ μὲν καὶ ἔτι τὴν ποινὴν ἀνήρτα...

Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques*, II (Paris 1984), p. 617.

Theodora Palaiologina intercedes to reduce the sentence of Kaloeidas

Τεκμηριοῖ δὲ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν Καλοειδᾶν γεγονός... ὄν, ἐπεὶ μόνον ἔχων τοιοῦτον ἔαλω, οὔτε τὸ εὐλαβὲς ἔσφριζεν... τῶν ὀμμάτων στερεῖν κελεύων, μόλις τὰ τῆς κολάσεως εἰς τὸ ἀνεκτότερον περιόστα διὰ τὴν τῆς δεσποίνης συχνὴ ἰκετεῖαν.

Failler, A. (ed.), *Georges Pachymérés relations historiques*, II (Paris 1984), p. 621.

Chronological Table

ca. 1240: Birth of Theodora

1253/1254: Marriage with Michael Palaiologos

1259-1303: Theodora becomes empress

1260-1269: Donations to the monastery of St John the Theologian on the isle of Patmos

1261: Settlement in the recently recaptured Constantinople

1267-1269: Active participation of Theodora in the effort to arrange the marriage of her daughter Anna to the Serbian prince Miilutin

1282: Death of her husband Michael VIII

1283: The union is renounced

1303: Death of Theodora