



## NYMPHAION: A BYZANTINE PALACE IN EXILE

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This article deals with the ruins of a Byzantine palace, dated to the thirteenth century, which is situated near Izmir in western Asia Minor, Turkey. The aim here is to analyze the architectural design of the building and to summarize additional written evidence about the site. Both examinations, framed by the method of *Residenzenforschung*, will help to place the building into the history of Byzantine Asia Minor after the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

### Historical Context

The disastrous event of the Fourth Crusade and the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders brought the Byzantine Empire to a temporary end in 1204. Based on its Roman heritage, the empire was, in every respect, centered upon its capital; thus, with the loss of its head, the unity of the Byzantine territory fell apart. The capital had been the guarantor of safety and the symbol of self-identity; the sudden loss of Constantinople was a situation that had never been expected. There was absolutely no experience of how to organize—how to live in—the empire without the imperial center. The surviving Byzantine elite had to flee to various parts of the provinces, where smaller Byzantine realms emerged during the following years.

In Asia Minor, Constantine and Theodore Laskaris immediately started to organize resistance against the crusader army, first from Nicaea, close to Constantinople. Here, in 1208, Theodore re-established the Byzantine patriarch and was crowned emperor, which is why this Byzantine realm is usually known as “the Empire of Nicaea,” which lasted from 1204 until 1261. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, John III Vatatzes (1222–1254), who secured the realm in Asia Minor and led it into a short period of flourishing prosperity. Most likely under his reign, an imperial residence was built at Nymphaion, in the southern part of the territory, some four hundred kilometers away from Nicaea and close to the city now called Izmir. The ruin is standing even now in quite good condition, although it has not yet been integrated thoroughly into the history of the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In the long run the emperors of Asia Minor

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<sup>1</sup> Semavi Eyice, “Le Palais byzantin de Nymphaion près Izmir,” in *Akten des XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongresses, Munich 1958*: 150–153; an extended version of this paper was published in: *Belleten* 25 (1961): 1–15; Tatiana Kirilova Kirova, “Un palazzo ed

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prevailed against their rivals in Epiros and Trapesunt (Trabesond) for the reconquest of Constantinople. Under the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos the city was reconquered in 1261 and the Byzantine Empire re-established, which marks the end of the period in exile.



Map 1. The Laskarid realm around 1215.

## Methodology

The aim of the research presented here was to integrate the so-called palace of Nymphaion into the history of the Laskarid period.<sup>2</sup> To achieve this goal, the architectural design of the building was analyzed and accounts in written sources were examined in order to gather information about its purpose and usage. The

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una casa di età tardo-bizantina in asia minore,” *Felix Ravenna* 103–04 (1972): 275–305; Hans Buchwald, “Laskarid Architecture,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 28 (1979): 263–296. (Henceforth: Buchwald, “Laskarid Architecture.”) These articles focus on art historical analysis, but neglect the function and meaning of the building in the Laskarid period.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on my MA thesis of the same title submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies at CEU, Budapest, in 2006.



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method of *Residenzenforschung* was applied, which made it possible to combine written and archeological sources and to assess not only the architectural design, but also its function and meaning, within the realm. *Residenzenforschung* was developed by Western medievalists in order to understand sovereignty based on *Reisekönigtum*—itinerant kingship—in medieval kingdoms. It focused on places that were regular stations on the *itinerata* of a ruler and examined what activities and events the ruler organized during his stay and how he built up his residence both physically and institutionally. At first sight, it does not seem to fit the Byzantine world, since Byzantine rule was not based on itinerant kingship and sovereignty was not located in several places of a territory. In Byzantium, imperial power resided in Constantinople, but exactly this location was lost for almost sixty years. Thus the question can be posed: How was a reign organized in Asia Minor during the period in exile, when the former imperial center was out of reach?

The topographical organization of Laskarid sovereignty has not yet been analyzed thoroughly. Nymphaion with its Byzantine palace is an excellent starting point because the choice of Emperor John III Vatatzes to settle there might reveal how the realm was structured differently than before. By the choice of Nymphaion as one imperial residence, the emperor and the patriarch, who remained in Nicaea, were separated from each other by around 400 km. It was the only period in Byzantine history when the two main branches of the empire were not settled in the same city. *Residenzenforschung* is a new approach that has not been used before in this context. It can provide a framework to examine the period from a fundamentally different perspective, not focusing on the final result (the reconquest of Constantinople), but on the intermediate period of exile itself in an analysis of the system of rule that was practiced in this Byzantine realm. It is known that the new situation lasted for more than two generations. What new system of rulership was invented and where was it centered, if it was centered at all?

Two monographs have focused on the Byzantine realm in Asia Minor. Alice Gardner's account of the political events from 1204 until the recapture was written in 1912; Michael Angold, writing in 1975, concentrated on the society and administration system in the period of exile.<sup>3</sup> In neither perspective on the Laskarid period were archeological sources an essential part of the research. Applying *Residenzenforschung* to this particular building shows that the

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<sup>3</sup> Alice Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea: The Story of the Empire in Exile* (London: Methuen, 1912; reprint, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964); Michael Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Lascarids of Nicaea (1204–1261)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).



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evaluation of archeological sources adds a new perspective on the Laskarid period which might change somewhat the general impression of the “period in exile.”

## Setting

Turkish Kemalpaşa lies 30 km eastwards of Izmir, the ancient harbor city Smyrna, on the rim of a valley; to the west rises the mountain slope of Ulu Dağ.<sup>4</sup> Not much is left of the Byzantine site Nymphaion and no excavation has ever been done there. The remains of a Byzantine fortress complex consisting of ruins of towers, walls, and a gate stand here on a hill which rises above the modern settlement to the south. In contrast, the so-called palace of John III Vatatzes is situated in the level area of the town center on the main road that comes from Izmir. It was discovered and first identified as a Byzantine monument by Edwin Freshfield in 1886.<sup>5</sup> He suggested, based on the account of Georgios Akropolites, that this building was the palace of Nymphaion built by Emperor John III Vatatzes (1224–54)—an interpretation which has been widely accepted among scholars.<sup>6</sup>

The building was conceived as a simple, rectangular hall with a ground floor and three upper levels. It has survived in quite good condition: three walls are still standing partially up to the third floor.<sup>7</sup> The ground floor seems to have

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<sup>4</sup> The descriptions are based on my visit to Kemalpaşa in May, 2005. The pictures presented here were taken by myself during this survey.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin Freshfield, “The Palace of the Greek Emperors of Nicaea at Nymphio,” *Archaeologica* 49 (1886): 382–390 (henceforth: Freshfield, “The Palace”). For him it was easy to connect the spot with the description of Akropolites, since due to the remaining Greek population it still had preserved its Greek name: “About fifteen miles or thereabout from Smyrna, a little to the right of the high road on the northern slope of Tactalu, is a village called by the Greeks Nymphio...” Edwin Freshfield, “The Palace,” 382. It was renamed Kemalpaşa only during the shaping of the modern Turkish state, after the last Greek inhabitants had departed.

<sup>6</sup> So far no final proof for the identification of the building has been assembled. Although all the clues suggest a firm connection between the building and Emperor John III Vatatzes, this can only be considered a hypothesis based on the historical context of that area and stylistic elements of the monument.

<sup>7</sup> Whether more annexes were attached to the building is not known. Since modern houses erected in the last decades now surround the monument, the chance of finding further Byzantine remains in the neighborhood is diminished. Even if one agrees with the observation of Freshfield’s report (from the 1880s) saying that “all that is left of the palace is the central hall” (Freshfield, “The Palace,” 386), it cannot be excluded comp-



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the greatest inner height; the upper floors diminish in height slightly towards the top. The long sides of the hall are oriented roughly east-west, the short sides north-south. The roof and interior construction have collapsed and today fill the whole ground floor up to the first floor. At first sight one sees the typical dominant Byzantine masonry mixture of equal-sized stone and brick-mortar layers, which gives the building its regular striped appearance. The rows of windows of the three upper floors, incorporated into the eastern and western walls, are symmetrical both horizontally and vertically and add to the strict regular character of the façade.

### Architectural Analysis

#### *Façades* (Figs. 1–3)

At first sight, as detectable on the ground plan, the architectural design is quite symmetrical and clear: two axes, one north-south and the other east-west, provide a simple structure. The longitudinal sides of the building, approximately 25 meters, are a little more than twice the length of the narrow sides, about 11.5 meters. Four windows are set symmetrically in each longitudinal side, opposite each other; they are open to the outside in narrow apertures of only 2–3 centimeters and widen toward the interior. At ground level in the central space of the longitudinal eastern side, a break measuring around three meters in height, between three and four meters at the bottom and slightly narrower at the top, is presumably the indication of the former entrance of the building. The original frame of the entrance door has not survived.<sup>8</sup> The northern wall has collapsed down to ground floor level due to an inner stairway, which created a hollow space inside the wall (*Fig. 2*). Otherwise the design of the interior on the ground floor level cannot be analyzed, since the other three walls are standing and the interior is filled with rubble and earth up to the first floor.

The three upper floors are done in alternating layers of stone and brick, but the ground-floor façade consists of massive white ashlar (*Fig. 2*). The western façade is the best-preserved (*Fig. 3*). The narrow window openings on

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letely that other Byzantine buildings were erected around the remaining one. What should be stressed here is that further buildings, if they ever existed, did not survive, probably because their execution was of lower quality than that of the palace.

<sup>8</sup> A similar gap can be found on the opposite side in the western wall, differing from that on the eastern wall in shape: it is triangular, the peak oriented toward the top, with a wall filling remaining in the gap. Due to lack of space I will not explore the suggestion of a double entrance here.



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ground-floor level can hardly be detected from a distance; the windows integrated into the upper levels, on the other hand, are quite striking.<sup>9</sup> Two windows to each side and one double window, a so-called *bifora*, are set into the masonry of the first floor. This window-pattern seems to have been repeated at the second level as well; although this cannot be established with certainty since the upper frame enclosing the windows has not survived. The third floor cannot be examined, since the collapse of the roof affected the structure of what seem to have been formerly existing windows. Probably there was a repetition of both the middle *bifora* and the outer single windows, or possibly six equal-sized windows in a row. No frame, arcade or the like emphasizes any of the windows on the whole façade; apart from the opening itself the façade is plain and the layers of stone and brick are the only decorative elements.

The eastern façade survived in its entirety only up to the first floor; only a small remnant of the second floor remains. The window solution of the western façade was not mirrored on the first floor: six windows were placed into the wall equidistant to each other; a *bifora* can be excluded here (*Figs. 1 and 4*).

The narrow southern façade still exists on the ground and first floor levels, but on the second and third levels only the corners are still standing (*Fig. 4*). This is the only part of the building where a *spolium* can be seen: a marble plate incorporated into the closing layer of the ground level in the southwest corner.<sup>10</sup> Two huge windows dominate the first floor; the frames are no longer intact, but compared with the inner surface the construction is clearly visible. On both corners the masonry projects up quite high, whereas the space above the windows of the first floor has collapsed.

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<sup>9</sup> It can be seen on the photographs that although the place and shape of the windows can be identified, none has survived intact, meaning that the frame of each window has already been destroyed. One can still see the thick masonry between the outer windows and the broken remains of what was the frame of the central windows—probably separated only by a small column. Thus, a *bifora* can be suggested based on the remaining structure of the central windows.

<sup>10</sup> This detail has not been mentioned so far in the literature. Further investigation was not possible because of the height and the fence construction in front of the building, but from the pictures I have taken it seems that the present bottom side of the plate is carved. Whether this might be a helpful indication concerning the dating, or other aspects, must remain open at this point.



*Fig. 1. Palace of Nymphaion, eastern façade.*



*Fig. 2. Palace of Nymphaion, interior from the north.*

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*Fig. 3. Palace of Nymphaion, western façade.*



*Fig. 4. Palace of Nymphaion, interior facing the southeastern corner.  
(All pictures taken by the author)*





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### *Interior (Fig. 4)*

The materials used for the inner walls are the same as those used for the outer ones: stone, brick, and mortar. However, the arrangement of these materials differs depending on the construction. Bricks and mortar were used for several vaulting solutions, whereas small stone and brick layers form the plain surfaces of the inner walls. The huge stone ashlar that were the flooring for each level, and also incorporated into the important carrying frames such as pilasters and the inner wall of the staircase, can still be seen.

Although the triangular windows can be seen on the ground level, the frame constructions around them are heavily damaged; it is impossible to reconstruct the inner space without excavation. However, a part of the central space on the ground floor can better be observed since the level of rubble is lower there.

Two remnants of narrow arches can be seen on the eastern wall between the probable entrance on the ground floor and the central windows of the first floor, which according to their shape are remnants of cross vaults (notice the arches above the entrance on *Fig. 4*). In the space between these two arches stands a remnant of an extensive arch which is approximately 2 meters wide and leads to the interior of the building in the form of a tunnel vault. A similar construction is visible below the *bifora* of the corresponding western side, which suggests that a complex vaulting system covered the entrance space on ground level. What is clearly visible on the photographs is that the level of the three arches does not correspond with the flooring of the first level. In other words, here, above the east-west axis, the height of the flooring is somewhat higher than on the southern and northern parts due to the arches: One needed to climb up some stairs to reach the central space from the northern or southern spaces.

On first floor level, two features catch the eye of the viewer immediately: huge arches cover the central windows on the long east and west sides, as well as the two windows to the south. From the setting of the bricks it can be seen that these are traces of a barrel vault along the north-south axis and a cross vault covering the east-west axis.

Since this building is considered the temporary residence of a Byzantine emperor, the question of a throne or other imperial seat is implied. If the flooring on the first floor had a pedestal along the east-west axis as described above, the preferred place for an imperial seat would have been the space above the entrance on the first floor on the eastern side. As the wall at this place is quite plain and the space between the windows wide enough, the back of a chair would have fit the space there. In front of the seat the opposite *bifora* opens towards the outside and would also have emphasized the space. Pilasters protrude from the wall between the two outer windows to the north and south on each long side. They carried smaller underpitch vaults that fit into the barrel vault.



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On the first floor, the northern wall contains the remains of a vaulted staircase. Embedded in the northwestern corner at the height of the second floor, a narrow sloping vault formed of brick and mortar in a small niche indicates the location of the staircase. Its direction points upward, but there are not enough surviving remains from the vaulting to reconstruct its exact course. A similar corresponding construction, although somewhat lower, is detectable on the opposite side; here the structure is more destroyed. As Buchwald has already suggested, a staircase here with two flights seems possible, one flight integrated into the northern wall and the other parallel inside the building.<sup>11</sup> Since the first floor is quite high, two flights even seem to be necessary to use the staircase without too much effort. How the staircase on the following level continued is impossible to say due to the structural damage. Pilasters can be detected in parts of the second floor, which indicates that this level was also vaulted. However, the preservation of this level is too poor for an accurate analysis.

Remnants of the third floor that have survived on the western side show that no pilasters were elaborated here; the surface between the windows is plain. Therefore a vaulted ceiling can be excluded. As this was probably the last level, the solution of a light ceiling construction made out of timber seems likely.<sup>12</sup>

Evaluating the façade of the building, the austere, pure geometrical appearance is striking at first sight. Red and white colors dominate the walls; the regular horizontal stripes are not interrupted by any usual features like blind arcades or variations in the arrangement of brick and stone. Sober simplicity and architectural modesty prevail in this edifice. The fact that the building is a single construction, judging by the plain surfaces, never connected to any other structures or walls, adds to the modest architectural character.

The building was erected in one single phase and the use of different materials was connected to static reasons or indicates a decorative usage. Arches and pilasters that indicate the vaulting system are incorporated into the masonry in such a way that it is clear they were not later additions; the same is true for the staircase. From the planning and construction phase on, each vaulted ceiling and the staircase was already part of the building.

### **Written Evidence**

The additional examination of written sources is crucial for deriving a more complex picture of Nymphaion and the function of the building, including its place in the Laskarid realm. The work of Georgios Akropolites will be used as

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<sup>11</sup> Buchwald, "Lascarid Architecture," 265, especially note 19.

<sup>12</sup> Buchwald, "Lascarid Architecture," 266.



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the primary history for the Laskarid period. He was born in 1217 in Constantinople and moved to the Laskarid realm in 1233, where he was John III Vatatzes' protégé.<sup>13</sup> The chronicle of Akropolites covers the whole period in exile from 1204 until 1261 and must have been written in the 1260s after the reconquest of Constantinople.

All in all, Nymphaion is mentioned in seven different contexts throughout his work: One pertains to the reign of Theodore I Laskaris; four pertain to the reign of John III Vatatzes, one to the reign of his son Theodore II Laskaris and one further to the dominion of the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos.<sup>14</sup> In none of them is Nymphaion as a town or the palace itself the focus of his report; the only place it comes up is embedded in issues related to the emperors. Yet, by evaluating these side remarks a characterization of Nymphaion can be based on solid ground. To summarize his remarks in an overview, the passages will be surveyed here thematically.

It is striking how often Akropolites mentions that the emperor returned to Nymphaion for the winter period. It should be emphasized here that this habit is reported not only for one, but for three out of the four emperors of the period in exile.<sup>15</sup> After campaigns, the emperors preferred to return to winter quarters at Nymphaion and remain there until spring. Once, Akropolites even explains the travel to Nymphaion with the remark that this is the usual practice of the emperor during the winter period. From this it can be inferred that the ruler and his entourage moved back not only in those cases when it is mentioned, but they came to Nymphaion regularly. Additionally, one should keep in mind that the emphasis on Nymphaion as a winter residence also means that other places might have been used during other seasons of the year on a regular basis. Otherwise Nymphaion would have appeared in the chronicle simply as *the* residence.

Nymphaion is mentioned twice as the place to celebrate Easter; one passage pertains to the report of the death of John III Vatatzes (which will be given below), the other to Michael VIII Palaiologos.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Due to lack of space, other historians and charters which add to the impression given by Akropolites are omitted here.

<sup>14</sup> *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, ed. August Heisenberg, ed. and corr. Peter Wirth, vol. I, *Historia, Breviarium historiae, Theodori Scutariotae Additamenta* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1978) (henceforth: *Acropolita*, ed. Heisenberg) §15, §41, §47, §48, §52, §60–61, §84.

<sup>15</sup> *Acropolita*, ed. Heisenberg: §41 and §47 (John III Vatatzes); § 60 and 61 (Theodore II Laskaris); §84 (Michael VIII Palaiologos).

<sup>16</sup> *Acropolita*, ed. Heisenberg, §52 reports the celebration of Easter within the last half year of John III Vatatzes; §84 connects diplomatic negotiations of Michael VIII



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The only passage that mentions the imperial palace at Nymphaion itself can be found in the account of the death of John III Vatatzes; it provides the *terminus ante quem* for the erection of the building.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of this passage, in 1254, the emperor was staying in Nicaea, having just returned from the East. During the night he had an apoplectic stroke and lost his ability to speak. After suffering two nights in Nicaea, despite his bad state he urged his subordinates to bring him back to Nymphaion for the procession of Palm Sunday. Akropolites reports that he reached Nymphaion in time for the procession and for Easter; he stayed in his palace in Nymphaion the whole summer. He had further strokes, sometimes in his palace; his servants set up tents for him in the imperial garden. He died at the beginning of November and was buried in the monastery of Sosandra, which he had founded, close to Nymphaion.<sup>18</sup> Akropolites closes this passage with the acclamation of his son, Theodore, as his successor, who then went eastwards from Nymphaion.

The emperor's strong desire to return to Nymphaion is quite remarkable, which can be explained by his imminent death: He wanted to prepare himself in the most pleasant place. The arrangement of tents outside of the palace could indicate that he did not want to be carried by his servants in the building, which, with four levels and quite a narrow staircase, may have been painful for him, as well as degrading for a powerful emperor, to die in such a way. Arranging the burial place near Nymphaion stressed the area around even more, an alternative burial place could have been Nicaea, where the seat of the patriarch was situated and where Theodore I Laskaris had been buried. It was also at Nymphaion that the new emperor, the son of John III Vatatzes, was acclaimed.

To sum up: Akropolites reveals several important aspects connected to the imperial usage of Nymphaion during the period in exile within the framework of

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Palaiologos with his staying at Nymphaion, from where he moved on after celebrating Easter. It can only be assumed that Easter marked the end of the winter period and was therefore celebrated at Nymphaion customarily.

<sup>17</sup> Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, §52.

<sup>18</sup> This is not reported by Akropolites in this context, but in Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, §74, describing the death of his son and successor Theodore II Laskaris, who was buried at the same place four years later. Although August Heisenberg, "Kaiser Johannes Batatzes der Barmherzige," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 14 (1905): 160–233 (concerning Sosandra, see 166–171), discussed a possible location of the monastery and Buchwald, "Laskarid Architecture," 263, especially notes 8–10, tried to find it in the hills between Izmir and Kemalpaşa (see these articles for the relevant sources for Sosandra), the monastery could not be located. At the time of preparing this study Sosandra is only known as a foundation of John III Vatatzes and as burial place for him and his son through written testimony.



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*Residenzenforschung*. He reports that Nymphaion from the reign of John III Vatatzes was a common winter and resting location, where a palace was standing at least at the time of John III Vatatzes' death. Nymphaion was a possible location for the celebration of Easter, the acclamation of a new emperor, and its neighboring imperial monastery served as a burial site.

Seeing it from a wider perspective, Nymphaion played an important role for certain imperial actions, for Nymphaion was like other sites in the Laskarid territory that served as important locations for the emperors of the realm. This cannot be elaborated here at length, but at least an impression can be given. In one passage, where Akropolites states that Nymphaion was the usual winter residence, he also mentions Lampsakos—reconquered by John III Vatatzes in 1224–1225—as being the place for the emperor during the summer.<sup>19</sup> This was probably due to the military campaigns on the sea route to the Hellespont, for which Lampsakos was the starting point. Lampsakos was further a meeting place between the emperor and the Bulgarian tsar; the marriage between Theodore II Laskaris and the Bulgarian Princess Helena was also celebrated here.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, at Pegai, situated next to Lampsakos on the Sea of Marmara, a marriage was arranged between the granddaughter of John III Vatatzes and the son of his opponent, Michael of Epiros. It is reported in another context that John III Vatatzes and Michael VIII Palaiologos spent part of the year at Pegai.<sup>21</sup>

John III Vatatzes moved his imperial mint from Nicaea, where it had been situated since Theodore I Laskaris, to Magnesia near Nymphaion. The patriarch, on the other hand, remained in Nicaea, where the imperial school was also settled—the one Akropolites himself attended on the recommendation of John III Vatatzes.

Within this context, it becomes apparent that Nymphaion held a crucial position within the Laskarid territory, but it was not necessarily the only place from which the emperor acted as a sovereign. Thus, the function of Nymphaion as an imperial residence can only be understood in the context of the political landscape within the whole Laskarid territory.

### Conclusion

The main aim here has been to widen the scope of studies focused on the palace of Nymphaion and to reintegrate the building into the history of the Laskarid realm by applying an interdisciplinary approach. Since *Residenzenforschung* includes

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<sup>19</sup> Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, §41.

<sup>20</sup> Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, §33.

<sup>21</sup> Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, §49.



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aspects that had not even been asked yet in the context of the palace of Nymphaion, it seemed fitting in this particular case.

Referring to the written evidence for Nymphaion, it can be stated that this site had a clear and important position within the Laskarid realm. It was built soon after the Laskarid territory was established as the imperial winter residence and used as such by three emperors until the reconquest of Constantinople. It seems that the emperors developed a regular travel route through their territory and rested in several defined locations at certain periods of the year. Nymphaion can therefore be considered as one major site among several others. This means that for the first time in Byzantine history imperial power was not concentrated in one place, but was exercised through imperial itinera.

The common title of the realm as the “Empire of Nicaea” therefore seems more and more misleading. Nicaea was certainly an important city within the territory, since it housed the patriarch during the period in exile, but it was not the single center within the realm like Constantinople was before 1204.

The building itself, although formally erected as an imperial residence, does not show features that are commonly associated with Byzantine imperial architecture. The emphasis was given to safety and modest architecture—no wings, no balconies, no atrium inside, no colonnade—the list of what the architecture of the Nymphaion palace does not provide is quite long. The concept of the palace—simple architecture, efficient, but far from being a wasteful, luxurious imperial residence—seems to fit the image of John III Vatatzes. His behavior and attitudes show a Byzantine ruler who differed from the usual image of Byzantine emperors. Anecdotes like the fourteenth-century report of Gregoras, who tells about the chicken farm of John III Vatatzes and the “egg-crown” of the empress, bought from the profits of the farm, loom large in the historic view of this unusual Byzantine emperor.<sup>22</sup> When were the Byzantines at any point in their history led by a ruler who played at being a farmer, pushing his nobles to do the same? The Laskarids created a new type of imperial Byzantine dominion, small in territory and moderate in self-representation. The design of the palace adds to this impression.

The framework of *Residenzenforschung*, combined with textual and archeological evidence, illuminates the winter residence at Nymphaion. The palace offers a key to understanding the territorial organization of Laskarid sovereignty during the period in exile and beyond.

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<sup>22</sup> *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia*, 2, 6, 2, ed. and tr. into Latin by Ludwig Schopen and Immanuel Bekker, vol. 1 (Bonn: Weber, 1829).