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AUGUSTA CATHERINE OF BULGARIA IN A LETTER OF MICHAEL PSELLOS

Abstract: This paper examines Psellos's Letter No. 1 from the critical edition of Stratis Papaioannou, addressed to augusta Catherine of Bulgaria. The aim of this study is to explain the letter — as a valuable testimony of Byzantine cultural heritage — in the context of the political and social history of eleventh-century Byzantium, and to translate it into English together with scholarly commentary. By comparing historical material, the paper also analyses the manner in which the augusta is represented in the epistle in question. Furthermore, on the basis of a comparative analysis of data from this epistle and from other works of Psellos in which augusta Catherine is mentioned, the paper seeks to define more closely the influence of augusta Catherine on the state policy of Byzantium during the last years of the reign of Isaac Komnenos, and to clarify the relationship between the empress and the court philosopher.¹

Key words: letter, Michael Psellos, 11th century, augusta Catherine of Bulgaria, Emperor Isaac Komnenos

Composition, dating, and purpose of the letter

Among the precious historical and literary legacy of Michael Psellos — the outstanding Byzantine politician, philosopher, and rhetorician of the eleventh century — is an epistolographic collection made up of letters addressed to the very summit of the Byzantine secular and ecclesiastical elite. The focus of this study is Psellos's letter to augusta Catherine of Bulgaria, wife of Emperor Isaac Komnenos (1057–1059).² Psellos's letter was composed during the reign of Emperor Isaac Komnenos, when the augusta and the emperor were away from the capital. The purpose of Psellos's letter is to express his deep personal

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² Michael Psellus, *Epistulae I*, ed. S. Papaioannou, Berlin–Boston 2019, no. 1, 1–3.

sorrow at not being in the company of the imperial couple. The letter is a valuable source on Byzantine imperial ideology, in which the philosopher emphasises the Bulgarian imperial origin of the augusta, who, by marrying a Byzantine emperor, became still more exalted. This paper presents the first translation of the letter into English.³

The compositional scheme of Psellos's letter to Catherine is as follows. In the opening section, Psellos writes to Catherine that he longs continually to see the imperial couple in the City, and stresses that he finds their absence very difficult to bear. In the middle section, the philosopher says that he consoles himself by writing letters to Catherine, since he is deprived of face-to-face conversation with her. Psellos also sent the empress a trusted monk, who conveyed his concern for the emperor's health. The rhetorician weaves the central part of his address out of panegyric verses addressed to the emperor and the empress. He underscores that Catherine is a woman of imperial descent — alluding to the Bulgarian line that descends from the dynasty of Samuel — who, by marrying the emperor of the Romans, an emperor of higher rank in the Christian hierarchical order than her family, gained even greater prestige. Psellos emphasises that his care for the imperial couple and the eloquence directed to them is a small recompense for the many services he has received from Catherine. He prays for favourable replies from her and the emperor, stressing once again that he owes them a great deal for his career advancement. In the closing section, Psellos urges the emperor to enjoy himself more, for he has heard that Isaac is absent not for the hunt but on account of administrative affairs. At the very end of the letter, the philosopher wishes the imperial couple long years of successful rule.

Historical context

Catherine of Bulgaria was the eldest daughter of the last Bulgarian emperor, John Vladislav (1015–1018), and the wife of the Byzantine emperor Isaac Komnenos.⁴ After the Byzantine emperor Basil II the Macedonian (976–1025) subdued Samuel's state in 1018, his successors became grandees in the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Basil II took care to integrate the Bulgarian elite into Byzantine society through marriages. If one bears in mind that the brothers Isaac and John Komnenos were protégés of Emperor Basil II, the fact that Isaac

³ The content of Psellos's letters is not unknown in scholarly circles, since English-language summaries exist, as well as translations of the letter into Russian and Serbian — M. Jeffreys *Summaries of the Letters of Michael Psellos*, ed. M. Jeffreys — M. D. Lauxtermann, *The Letters of Psellos. Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*, Oxford University Press 2017, 365; P. V. Bezobrazov, *Vizantiiski pisatel' I gosudarstvennyi deiatel' Mikhail Psell*, Moscow, 1890; 2nd ed. Ia. N. Liubarskii, *Dve knigi o Mikhaile Pselle*, St Petersburg 2001, 89–90 (Russian Cyrillic); J. Šaranac Stamenković, *Igre oko carigradskog prestola. Dolazak na vlast Konstantina X Duke*, Niš 2022, 253–255 (Serbian Cyrillic).

⁴ On John Vladislav, see in more detail S. Pirivatrić, *Samuilova država. Obim i karakter*, Beograd 1997, 123–128 (Serbian Cyrillic). On Catherine of Bulgaria, see V. Stanković, *Komnini u Carigradu (1057–1185). Evolucija jedne vladarske porodice*, Beograd 2006, 99–101 (Serbian Cyrillic).

Komnenos married the eldest daughter of the Bulgarian emperor speaks unambiguously to the high status the Komnenos family enjoyed in Byzantium,⁵ as well as to how highly the Bulgarian ruling family was regarded in the Byzantine state.

After the death of Emperor Basil II, a turbulent period of successions on the throne set in. These changes of power were accompanied by political intrigue and often by gratuitous brutality. After Empress Theodora (1055–1056), the last legitimate representative of the Macedonian ruling house, appointed her official Michael Stratiotikos (1056–1057) as heir to the Constantinopolitan throne, the hitherto fairly well-controlled ambitions of the highest Byzantine elite surfaced. The most distinguished families competed with one another for the Byzantine throne and for the highest positions in the Empire. Following the so-called revolt of the eastern strategoi in 1057, the united Anatolian military (provincial) aristocracy elected Isaac Komnenos as emperor.⁶ In collusion with the distinguished and powerful families of the capital, Isaac was crowned Byzantine emperor.

After two years of rule — overwhelmed by illness, without a direct male heir, disappointed with the final outcome of his reforms, aware that a great many subjects were dissatisfied with his policies, embittered against his erstwhile collaborators and supporters of his rule, distrustful of his brother and his family, irritable and dispirited — Isaac Komnenos abdicated in favour of Constantine Doukas, his comrade-in-arms and friend.⁷

⁵ Pirivatrić 1997, 197; B. Krsmanović, *Uspon vojnog plemstva u Vizantiji XI veka*, Beograd 2001, 287–288 (Serbian Cyrillic); Stanković 2006, 11. In the section of the *Chronographia* devoted to the revolt of the eastern strategoi in 1057 and Isaac's rise to the Constantinopolitan throne, Michael Psellos states that Isaac Komnenos “did not stand out by birth alone” from the other participants in the revolt, but also “by his regal bearing and nobility of thought, and by firmness of spirit” (προεῖχε γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς οὐ τῷ γένει μόνον. ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ τυραννικῷ εἶδει. καὶ τῷ γενναίῳ τῆς γνώμης. καὶ τῷ σταθῆρῳ τῆς ψυχῆς), see Michael Psellus, *Leben der Byzantinischen Kaiser (976–1075)* Chronographia, ed. R. D. Reinsch, Berlin – München – Boston 2015, 578. In his *Synopsis Historion*, describing the revolt of Bardas Skleros against the reign of Basil II, John Skylitzes mentions Manuel Erotikos, whom the ruler sent to defend Nicaea against the usurper in 978, noting that Manuel was “a man of a family renowned both for nobility and for courage” (ἐκ γένους τε ἄνδρα καὶ ἐπ' ἀρετῇ διαβόητον καὶ ἀνδρείῳ); see Ioannis Scylitzae *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, Berolini et Novi Eboraci 1973 (CFHB), 323. On Manuel Erotikos Komnenos, see Krsmanović 2001, 152–153 (with a survey of earlier literature). In the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene says of her great-grandfather Manuel that Emperor Basil II appointed him “stratēgos autokratōr of the entire East” (στρατηγὸς αὐτοκράτωρ τῆς ἑώρας ἀπάσης); see Annae Comnenae *Alexias*, ed. D. R. Reinsch – A. Kambylis, Berlin 2001, 324. Writing about the beginnings of the Komnenos family, Caesar Nikephoros Bryennios reports that “that celebrated Manuel” traces his lineage to the Komnenoi (Μανουὴλ ἐκείνου τοῦ πάνυ, ὃς ἐς Κομνηνοὺς ἀναφέρων τὸ γένος); see Nicéphore Bryennios, *Histoire*, éd. P. Gautier, Bruxelles 1975 (CFHB IX), 75.

⁶ Krsmanović 2001, 181–187.

⁷ Šaranac Stamenković 2022, 23–55.

*Translation of the letter
To the Lady Catherine*

My holy Lady and God-crowned Empress, I long for Your imperial dignity and I ceaselessly desire to behold you while you dwell in the City.⁸ Yes, by the pride I take in God in You. And do not disbelieve me, who am writing — just as you never showed any distrust toward me, even if the devil would have it otherwise.

I long for You when you are present in the City. But when you have left the City and have gone out even for a little while, I cannot bear it; it is as if a fire has nested in my soul, burning and consuming it. And I am powerless to endure the separation.

Being unable in any other way to be in the company of Your Majesty, I console myself with letters addressed to You; for I consider that I am speaking with You by way of letters. For this reason I have sent to Your imperial Majesty a suitable monk. And being emboldened I ask: “How is the great luminary, the emperor of the world, and especially my emperor? How is the light of my heart, the joy of my soul, the unsullied flower of delight, the intelligible Sun?”

And then I inquire also about Your Majesty: How fares she who is truly empress, clothed in golden fringes of virtues, arrayed in many-coloured robes, who also bears the blood of the Bulgarian imperial bloodline, and yet in the greater Roman Empire has succeeded in gaining glory?; how do you fare, who are radiant life?. And do not be surprised that I often ask; for having received tens of thousands of benefits from your imperial Majesty — a tender glance, benevolence, an aristocratic disposition toward me — I bring a small return-gift, a small question and a small offering to you.

And may your replies be joyful to me: that you are happy, that you are well-disposed, that you rejoice in a healthy emperor. Yes, my Christ and Emperor, may things be thus with You; as I too wish it (and God alone knows the hidden thoughts of the heart), and as You wish it and pray for it. And since I have enjoyed many benefits of the most philanthropic emperor, I would never deny it; rather I cry out at the top of my voice in a great and splendid tone: I have been deemed worthy of honours, of the rank of proedros, of fellowship, of conversation, and of many other things. But not for all these things do I so long for him, but for his innate virtues and for his care in all matters.

But persuade him, if possible and at this very moment, to experience pure enjoyment. For, as we hear, he has not gone outside the City to hunt, but to attend to the problems of the state; nor to slay wild beasts, but to solve the problems of the sekretikoi. Let him, however, reflect on his conduct. May Your rule be long-lived — a rule that increases the affairs of the Romans — and may Your rule govern the state well and lead it along the right path.

⁸ The translation of the letter into English is published here for the first time and is based on the critical edition Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 1–3.

Analysis of the content of the letter and Catherine's exalted origin

At the very beginning of the letter, Psellos addresses Catherine with “My holy Lady and God-crowned Empress” (Δέσποινά μου ἁγία καὶ θεόστεπτε βασιλίς).⁹ In letters addressed to Eudokia Makrembolitissa, wife of Emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067), Psellos addresses the augusta as “the best of all women” (ὃ πασῶν ὑπερτέρα γυναικῶν),¹⁰ “kindly-disposed Lady” (ὃ φιλάγαθε δέσποινα),¹¹ “victor over the entire female race” (ὃ πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ γένος νικήσασα),¹² and my “holy Lady and empress of the whole world” (ἁγία μου δέσποινα καὶ παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου βασίλισσα).¹³ In the imperial oration dedicated to Eudokia Makrembolitissa, the rhetorician calls the augusta “empress of virtues” (τῷ βασιλίδι τῶν ἀρετῶν).¹⁴ When Psellos's manner of addressing Catherine is compared with his address to augusta Eudokia, it is evident that he is more intimate, more direct, more affectionate, and more devoted toward Eudokia Makrembolitissa. This is borne out by the fact that Psellos not infrequently, in all his writings, emphasises his “spiritual kinship” with Eudokia Makrembolitissa.¹⁵ In two places in the imperial oration addressed to Theodora, the last representative of the Macedonian dynasty, however, Michael Psellos apostrophises the augusta as “most divine empress” (ὃ θειοτάτη βασίλισσα).¹⁶ In other words, he addresses her in roughly the same manner as augusta Catherine. It can therefore be concluded that the court rhetorician maintained a more restrained, more professional relation — one full of reverential awe — toward augustae Theodora and Catherine.

In the letter under consideration, Psellos emphasises that the augusta never expressed any doubt about his loyalty, even though certain courtiers attempted to slander him.¹⁷ However, that this detail is not entirely accurate is attested by Psellos's verses from the epistle addressed to Isaac Komnenos. In them, a feeling of unease and occasional anxiety frequently shows through, because he feared that the ruler might at any moment come to doubt his sincerity.¹⁸ One should not lose sight of the fact that in 1057 Emperor Michael VI

⁹ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 1, 1¹.

¹⁰ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 157, 417²–418³.

¹¹ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 157, 421⁸⁷.

¹² Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 153, 415³–4.

¹³ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 155, 416¹–2. Cf. Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 156, 417¹.

¹⁴ Michaelis Pselli, *Orationes panagyricae*, ed. G. T. Dennis, Stuttgart–Leipzig 1994, no. 12, 124²–3.

¹⁵ Psellos insists in other sources as well — in the letter addressed to Emperor Constantine X and in his historiographical work the *Chronographia*, in the section describing Eudokia's reign — that the augusta is his niece (ἀνεψιάν), that is, that he is her “uncle” (θεῖός); see Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 83, 179¹²; Psellos, *Chronographia*, 730, 732. Cf. J. Šaranac Stamenković, *Pselov odgovor na optužbe Evdokije Makremvolitise*, ur. D. Antić – I. Becić, *Vranjski glasnik – Povodom 60 godina Narodnog muzeja u Vranju*, Vranje 2021, 34–35 (Serbian Cyrillic).

¹⁶ Psellus, *Orationes panegyricae*, no. 12, 118².

¹⁷ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 1, 14^{–5}.

¹⁸ Psellus, Epistulae I, no. 137, 365⁴–9

Stratiotikos sent Michael Psellos, as his envoy and a man of his confidence, to negotiate with Isaac Komnenos, then the usurper of the divinely-given imperial authority.¹⁹ Only a few months later, Psellos became the most intimate friend of Isaac Komnenos, the new emperor.²⁰ It is precisely to this — Isaac Komnenos's having accepted him as a close associate and shown him friendship — that the philosopher bears witness in the letter written for Catherine.²¹

That Michael Psellos was deprived of the favour of the imperial couple toward the end of Isaac's reign is attested by the letters addressed directly to the emperor. Namely, while Isaac and Catherine were reflecting on what to do regarding the discontent of the inhabitants of the Empire over Isaac's reforms, Psellos sent them a letter in which he asks Isaac: "In what have we Byzantines so sinned, or how have we offended you, great and divine Sun and emperor, that we have been condemned to so long a night — which lasts many days and is entirely dark and unlit — that we are deprived even of the radiance of the Moon?"²² It is notable that Psellos uses solar imagery and compares Komnenos to the Sun (and Catherine to the Moon), as he does in the letter composed for Catherine.²³ Besides the pagan motif of the Sun, Psellos in the letter to Catherine compares the ruler to a flower, to light, and to joy.²⁴

In the epistle addressed to Isaac, the philosopher stresses that he is inconsolable because he dwells far from the emperor's "brilliance and splendour" (τῆς σῆς πόρρω καθεστῶς μαρμαρυγῆς καὶ λαμπρότητος), "neither seeing his face, which radiates far, nor hearing his voice" (οὔτε σου τὸ τηλαυγὲς ὄρων πρόσωπον, οὐ τῆς γλώττης ἀκούων).²⁵ Psellos can think of no effective way to assuage his grief. He hyperbolically emphasises that he has shed almost all his tears.²⁶ The philosopher mournfully relates: "Oh, from how many goods have I been driven! Of what enjoyment have I been deprived! And I have committed no injustice with respect to your affairs; rather I have offered you my soul and made it dependent on your life and your breath."²⁷ Psellos indicates that he cannot bear the distance from the ruler, but that he does not pine for "a brighter

¹⁹ For details, see Krsmanović 2001, 213–225.

²⁰ Šaranac Stamenković 2022, 185–196.

²¹ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 229–32.

²² Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 383¹–5.

²³ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 2¹⁶.

²⁴ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 2¹⁵–16.

²⁵ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 383⁷–9. The comparison of the ruler with the sun, and of the ruler's wife with the moon, was also used by writers of the states that emerged after 1204 and inherited the Byzantine tradition. Thus, for example, John Apokaukos, in a letter addressed to Maria Doukaina, wife of the Thessalonian ruler Theodore Doukas (1215–1230), compares her to the moon and her husband to the sun; see D. Dželebdžić, *Pisma Jovana Apokavka Teodoru Duki*, ZRVI 45 (2008), 129 (Serbian Cyrillic). On the pagan topos of comparing the Byzantine emperor with the sun and the empress with the moon, see N. Radošević, *Nikejski carevi u savremenoj im retorici*, ZRVI 26 (1987), 81 (Serbian Cyrillic); N. Radošević, *Konstantin Veliki u vizantijskim carskim govorima*, ZRVI 33 (1994), 8 and n. 5 (Serbian Cyrillic); E. Vries – van der Velden, *La lune de Psellos*, Bsl 57/2 (1996), 239–256.

²⁶ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 384¹⁹–20.

²⁷ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 384¹⁵–18.

retinue” — rather, what torments him is solely that he has been deprived of his privileges by Isaac Komnenos himself, not by some other Byzantine emperor.²⁸ He dares to beg for the emperor’s company and underscores that he “does not flee from conversation with him” (οὐ φεύγω τὴν ὁμιλίαν).²⁹ In his desire to convey how hard it is for him to suffer the punishment of not being in the emperor’s proximity, Psellos humbly suggests to Isaac that he apply “lighter” penal measures: to kill him with a sword, or to cast him into the sea or the fire. In that way his pain would vanish, and he would finally realise that he is no longer in the emperor’s favour.³⁰ From what has been said, it is evident that Michael Psellos, toward the end of Isaac’s reign, tasted the fate he had feared. Aware that Komnenos, by his highly unpopular reforms, had turned almost the entire population against himself, and wishing to retain his influence and prestige at court, Psellos aligned himself with the current in Byzantium that favoured a peaceful change of rulers.³¹ Still, on the basis of the stylistic expression, sentence constructions, and the very content of the letter addressed to Catherine, it is clear that at the moment the philosopher was writing to the augusta he was still in the favour of the ruling couple, Isaac and Catherine.

It is evident that Psellos did not take it lightly that Isaac Komnenos and Catherine of Bulgaria were acquainted with his activities and that they had deprived him of their friendship and favour in the last months of their reign. Yet even at the moments when he was aware that a change on the throne was inevitable, and when he was working in favour of the future ruler of the Byzantine Empire, Michael Psellos strove to remain on good terms with Isaac and Catherine. Regardless of the fact that Isaac Komnenos voluntarily handed the throne over to Constantine Doukas, the Komnenoi did not forgive the court philosopher for having very consciously begun to work in favour of the new imperial couple Doukas–Makrembolitissa even before they had ascended the Byzantine throne.³²

In parallel with the pagan motifs, Psellos uses Christian elements in the letter under consideration. Thus he addresses Isaac as his “Christ and emperor” (Χριστέ μου καὶ βασιλεῦ)³³ and as “emperor of the whole world” (ὁ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλεύς),³⁴ by which he has in mind the Byzantine imperial ideology, according to which at the head of the Roman Christian order stood the Byzantine basileus. In connection to this, Skylitzes Continuatus recorded that Emperor Isaac liked to joke with Catherine, telling her “that she had previously been a slave, and that he had now freed her” (Ἐπισκώπτων δὲ τῇ γυναικὶ ἔλεγε δούλην μὲν εἶναι πρότερον, νῦν δὲ ἤλευθερώσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ).³⁵ It is hard to say

²⁸ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 384^{34–35}.

²⁹ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 385^{48–51}.

³⁰ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 142, 384^{28–32}.

³¹ Šaranac Stamenković 2022, 194.

³² Šaranac Stamenković 2022, 196.

³³ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 226–27.

³⁴ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 114.

³⁵ Byzantium in the Time of Troubles. The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057–1079), ed. *W. J. Nesbitt – E. McGeer*, Leiden–Boston 2020, 52.

whether behind these words of Isaac there is perhaps a condescending attitude of a Roman toward a representative of the Bulgarian imperial family, which had at one time threatened the only Empire “under the protection of the Most High.” That the Byzantine elite nevertheless held the empress’s distinguished origin in very high regard is attested by the verses from Psellos’s letter to augusta Catherine translated above, in which it is stated that she is “truly empress, clothed in golden fringes of virtues, arrayed in many-coloured robes, who also bears the blood of the Bulgarian imperial bloodline, and yet in the greater Roman Empire has succeeded in gaining glory” (Πῶς ἔχει ἡ τε ὡς ἀληθῶς βασιλίς, ἡ χρυσοῖς κροσσωτοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν περιβεβλημένη, πεποικιλμένη, ἡ καὶ ἐκ γένους βασιλείον αἷμα λαχοῦσα, καὶ κρείττονι αὐθις βασιλεία τὴν προλαβοῦσαν νικήσασα εὐκλείαν).³⁶ It is noticeable that Psellos draws on the well-known imperial psalm that describes the beauty of the Hebrew king and his queen.³⁷ By this, Psellos presents Isaac Komnenos and Catherine as the embodiment of the biblical ideal of the God-chosen king and queen. By using the adverb ἀληθῶς, Psellos intimates that it is they — not the king and queen of the

³⁶ Psellos, *Epistulae* I, no. 1, 217–20. Cf. Pirivatrić 1997, 136. The attitude of Byzantine writers toward Samuel’s state (976–1018) and toward the title of its rulers depended on the nature and purpose of their works, as well as on the themes they treated, while their chronological distance from the events was not of decisive importance. Scholarship has identified three distinct approaches to Samuel’s state on the part of Byzantine writers. One must distinguish between Byzantine authors who spoke mainly of Byzantine–Bulgarian military operations in the period from 976 to 1018; then writers who described kinship ties between members of Byzantine imperial families and Samuel’s descendants; and finally, authors who write about the revolt of Peter Deljan — for details, see B. Krsmanović – A. Loma, Georgije Manjakis, ime ΓΟΥΔΕΛΙΟΣ i Pselova „skitska autonomija”, *ZRVI* 36 (1997), 255–258 (Serbian Cyrillic). Byzantine writers who describe military actions between Byzantium and the Bulgarian state in the period from 976 to 1018 proceed from the state-legal ideology of the Byzantine Empire, and therefore do not call Samuel and his successors emperors and do not recognize the existence of their state. For example, Kekaumenos calls Samuel a “tyrant” (ὁ τύραννος Βούλγαρος Σαμουήλ) (Kekavmen, *Sovety i rasskazy. Pouchenie vizantiiskogo polkovodfisa XI veka*, pod red. G. G. Litavrin, Sankt-Peterburg 2003, 266 (Russian Cyrillic); *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije* III, ur. Lj. Masimović, Beograd 2007², 196 (Serbian Cyrillic)), while John Skylitzes calls him a rebel; see *Scyl.* 256. Cf. *VIINJ* III, 59. Byzantine writers who describe kinship ties between members of the Roman imperial families and Samuel’s descendants address Samuel as emperor and emphasize the imperial descent of his offspring. Byzantine authors who describe Peter Deljan’s revolt of 1040 write about the actual state of affairs in the time of Emperor Basil. Thus Skylitzes, describing the joining of Alousianos, son of John Vladislav, to the revolt of 1040, stresses that he had “imperial blood” (βασιλικὸν αἷμα); see *Scyl.* 413. Cf. *VIINJ* III, 153. Michael Psellos reports that Peter Deljan tried to connect himself “with those who a little earlier had ruled and reigned over the entire people” (τοὺς πρὸ μικροῦ τοῦ παντὸς γένους ἄρξαντάς τε καὶ βασιλεύσαντας); see Psellos, *Chronographia*, 220; *VIINJ* III, 221. Opposing his friend Alousianos to the acclaimed emperor Peter Deljan, Psellos says of Alousianos that he is the son of one who “earlier was emperor of the people” (οὗτος δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐγεγόνει τοῦ ἔθνους); see Psellos, *Chronographia*, 226; *VIINJ* III, 222.

³⁷ Ps 44:10, 14 (LXX).

imperial psalm — who are the true archetypes of the biblical king and queen. With this in view, one may perhaps speak of Michael Psellos as the founder of a Komnenian ruling ideology grounded in the *Holy Scripture*.³⁸

Catherine's illustrious origin is also attested by Michael of Devol, in his supplement to the account of John Skylitzes, when he writes that the wife of Isaac Komnenos was "the daughter of Vladislav, emperor of Bulgaria" (Αἰκατερίναν τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦ Βλαδισθλάβου τοῦ Βουλγαρίας βασιλέως).³⁹ Nikephoros Bryennios too was aware that Catherine traced her descent from the Bulgarian ruling family, but he mistakenly addresses her as the elder daughter of "Samuel, emperor of the Bulgarians" (βασιλέως Βουλγάρων Σαμουήλ).⁴⁰

It is certain that Isaac Komnenos, upon his accession to the throne, proclaimed Catherine empress and sebaste (ἀγούσταν ἀναγορεύει σεβαστήν).⁴¹ In other words, he appointed his life companion as augusta (εἶτα τὴν μὲν τοῦ βίου αὐτῷ κοινωνὸν Ἀγούσταν ἀηγόρευσε).⁴²

At the very end of the letter addressed to Catherine, Psellos wishes the ruling couple a long reign and a happy life, and anxiously tells the augusta that he fears for Isaac's health, since he has information that the emperor did not leave the capital for pleasure — for a hunting trip — but on account of state problems. The philosopher, in the *Chronographia* as well, confirms that Isaac Komnenos in his free time occupied himself with hunting, and that he often "thrust spears into bears and boars" (τῆ βολῆ τῆς λόγχης ἐπὶ τὰς ἄρκτους καὶ τὰς ὄς χρώμενος).⁴³

Catherine's role during the reign of Isaac Komnenos and her spiritual life

In a letter addressed to Emperor Isaac Komnenos while he was on campaign against the Pechenegs, Psellos stresses the augusta's significant role during his reign: "But do not think, most divine emperor, that you yourself have achieved success in the war. For the empress fought in it alongside you — a great statue and an ornament of the female race. And I am not flattering — God

³⁸ Given Psellos's masterful use of the Bible for Byzantine imperial ideology, Kaldellis's conclusion that Michael Psellos was an anti-Christian-oriented scholar can rightly be called into question; see A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 1999, 185–197. For further details on the architects of Komnenian ideology, see Stanković 2006, 179–222.

³⁹ Scyl. 492. Cf. VIINJ III, 168.

⁴⁰ Bryenn., 77. Cf. VIINJ III, 236–237 and n. 2 (B. Radojčić). Describing the role of Maria, granddaughter of John Vladislav and wife of Andronikos Doukas, at the court of the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081), Bryennios says that on her father's side she traced her descent from "Samuel, emperor of the Bulgarians" (τὸν βασιλέα Βουλγάρων τὸν Σαμουήλ); see Bryenn., 219. Cf. VIINJ III, 241–242; Alexias, 69. Cf. VIINJ III, 369–370.

⁴¹ Scyl. Cont., 38.

⁴² Ioannis Zonarae epitome historiarum III, ed. Th. Büttner-Wobst, Bonnæ 1897, 666.

⁴³ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 676. Cf. M Repajić, *Mihailo Psel i njegovi junaci. Studija ličnosti Hronografije Mihaila Psela* (unpublished doctoral dissertation), Beograd 2016, 35 (Serbian Cyrillic).

is my witness — but I am not able to convey the whole truth about her. Did she not send the Mother of God with you on campaign, interceding for you before Her, beseeching Her on your behalf? What tears did she not shed, and how many nights did she not spend in vigil together with her daughter in prayer to the Theotokos? The struggle is common to you both, and the victory too is common.”⁴⁴ It is certain that the augusta, in the company of her daughter Maria, by her deep faith in the Lord and “by her prayers,” succeeded in helping the God-chosen Byzantine emperor to protect the state.

The role of Catherine of Bulgaria in the state policy of the Empire is not mentioned in the historiographical sources until the moment when Isaac’s remaining in power was called into question. Michael Psellos in his *Chronographia* states that augusta Catherine of Bulgaria was greatly disturbed at the time her husband was deliberating on the successor to the throne.⁴⁵ According to the data in the *Chronographia*, it seems that the empress was most disturbed by the news that Isaac would abdicate and become a monk. Catherine is reported to have complained to her husband: “Do you not pity leaving us alone? What kind of soul will you have, now abandoning the palace, making me a wretched widow and our daughter a sorrowful orphan? ... Should you live on in your new guise, our life will become worse than death” (εἶτα δὴ, οὐκ οἰκτεῖρεις τῆς ἐρημίας ἡμᾶς; ποδαπὴν δὲ καὶ ψυχὴν ἔχων, σαυτὸν μὲν ὑπεξάγεις τῶν βασιλείων. ἐμοὶ δὲ δυσφορωτάτην ἐγκαταλιμπάνεις χηρείαν. ὀρφανίαν τε βαρυτάτην τῇ θυγατρὶ; καὶ οὐδ’ ἀρκέσει ταῦτα ἡμῖν ... ἡμῖν δὲ πικροτέρα τοῦ θανάτου διαμενεῖ ἡ ζωή).⁴⁶ Augusta Catherine accused Psellos of being directly responsible for Isaac’s decision.⁴⁷ According to Psellos’s words, the empress tried to dissuade Isaac from taking the tonsure, promising him at the same time that if he recovered she would take upon herself all his sins: “I myself will be the advocate for all your sins before the judges and before God. Your deeds will go unpunished, let the worms devour me, let the deep darkness cover me, and the flames of fire burn me” (καὶ ἀναδέχομαι τῷ ἐμῷ τραχίλῳ ὅποσα σοὶ διημάρτηται. κὰν μὲν ἀνασταίς, ἔχω δὴ τὸ ζητούμενον καὶ ποθοῦμενον, εἰ δ’ οὖν, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ σε ἀπολογήσομαι τῷ δικαστῇ καὶ Θεῷ ὧν διημαρτήκεις αὐτός. καὶ σοὶ μὲν τὰ πεπραγμένα ἀνέγκλητα εἶη, ἐμὲ δὲ, ὑπὲρ σοῦ ἠδέως ἂν καὶ σκόληκες διασπάσαιντο. καὶ σκότος τε ἐπικαλύψοι βαθὺ. καὶ πῦρ ἐξώτερον διαφλέξειε).⁴⁸ Only after Empress Catherine had reconciled herself to the fact that she could not dissuade her husband from his desire for the monastic tonsure did she express her apprehension concerning Isaac’s successor. She asked that Isaac appoint as successor some intelligent man loyal to him, who would, during his lifetime, show him due respect, and would behave toward her as a son

⁴⁴ Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 139, 375^{86–93}.

⁴⁵ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 684, 686.

⁴⁶ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686. Cf. Krsmanović 2001, 267–268. The continuator of Skylitzes gives an entirely opposite picture of the augusta’s reaction to Isaac’s decision to take monastic tonsure. He says that Isaac Komnenos took the habit, but began to doubt the correctness of his action because he felt better. Nevertheless, he withdrew to the Studios Monastery because augusta Catherine wholeheartedly supported him in this.

⁴⁷ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 684.

⁴⁸ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686.

(ἀλλ' ἡμῖν γε διάδοχον τῆς βασιλείας τὸν εὐνοϊκώτατόν σοι καὶ εὐμενέστατον ποίησον, ὅπως ἂν καὶ σοὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα συντηρήσειε ζήσαντι. κάμοι γε ὅποσα παῖς χρηματίσειε.).⁴⁹ Prompted by her words, Isaac Komnenos turned to Constantine Doukas.⁵⁰ In other words, augusta Catherine of Bulgaria was not opposed to the choice of her husband's successor.

From the account of the Skylitzes Continuatus, it may be concluded that at one moment Emperor Isaac Komnenos regretted having become a monk. "Komnenos, having put on the monastic garb, briefly regretted having done so" (Ὁ δὲ Κομνηνὸς ῥάκια μοναχικὰ περιβαλλόμενος, ἐπ' ὀλίγον γνωσιμαχίσεως...). He thought that he might perhaps pull through, for he was aware that his illness had pushed his ability to rule to the very limits (εἴ πως ἀνεθείη τῆς νόσου, ἐπεὶ περ ἔγνω κατ' ἄκρας ταύτη ἀλούς). Still, Isaac reached the Stoudios Monastery even though overwhelmed by illness (ἔτι τῇ νόσῳ τρυχόμενος τὴν τοῦ Στουδίου καταλαμβάνει μονήν), because in this he had the wholehearted support of augusta Catherine, who promised him a heavenly reward for his renunciation of the earthly empire (πολλὰ καὶ ἀγούστης Αἰκατερίνης συμβαλλομένης αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸ προκειμένον καὶ τῇ τῆς ἐπιγείου βασιλείας ἀποβολῇ τὴν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἀπόλαυσιν ἐπαγγελιομένης αὐτῷ). Having given himself over to monastic life, he showed complete obedience to the hegoumenos of the monastery, even serving as doorkeeper and in other obediences, accepting everything with great meekness and humility (πᾶσαν ὑπακοὴν πρὸς τὸν ἐν τῇ μονῇ ἡγουμενεύοντα ἐνδεικνύμενος, ὡς καὶ θυρωρὸς γενέσθαι καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ὑπηρετήσαι διακονίαις διὰ πολλὴν ἐπιείκειαν καὶ μετριοφροσύνην καταδεξάμενος).⁵¹ In simple terms: after he had put on the monastic habit, the emperor wavered (thinking that even without obedience to God he might succeed in resisting death), but augusta Catherine encouraged and urged him to renounce the earthly empire for the sake of the heavenly one.

It is known that Manuel, son of Isaac and Catherine, died before his father's accession to the throne. Their daughter Maria took the monastic habit during her father's reign, before Isaac fell ill and began considering abdication. According to Psellos, Maria received the monastic tonsure in the prime of life.⁵² As Skylitzes Continuatus attests, Isaac Komnenos, because of a kidney ailment, avoided sexual relations with Catherine — that is, he turned to a life of

⁴⁹ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686. Nikephoros Bryennios, inspired by the *Chronographia*, deliberately places his patroness Anna Dalassene — rather than augusta Catherine of Bulgaria — at Isaac's sickbed; see Stanković 2006, 101; L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*, Cambridge 2012, 149; L. Orlov Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's Alexiad: Emergence of a Personal History*, Amsterdam 2019, 280. Bryennios preserves Psellos's framework (a Komnenian woman, full of pain, sorrow, anxiety, and fear, advises the ailing emperor on what to do and how) and develops it in accordance with the needs of the Komnenian dynasty (Anna Dalassene is offended, furious, and embittered because the emperor did not heed her advice, on account of which the Komnenoi lost power. That is, Isaac, by ignoring the words of the infallible Anna Dalassene, called into question the prosperity of the Komnenos family).

⁵⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686.

⁵¹ Scyl. Cont., 50.

⁵² Psellos, *Chronographia*, 682.

abstinence. Although his physicians, for reasons of health, advised him to have sexual relations with his wife, he refused.⁵³ It should be borne in mind that Isaac and Catherine were in their mature years when they came to power. In other words, upon their coming to the Byzantine throne they had no living direct male heir, and there were no prospects that the empress would bear a child.

Given that Catherine had lost her son before coming to power, that her daughter had taken the veil at an age when she was ripe to start a family, that Catherine herself was no longer able to bear children, that — according to Skylitzes Continuatus — she encouraged Isaac to take monastic tonsure, and that the sources mention the augusta always turned in prayer to the Mother of God and to Jesus Christ, the question arises:

Did Catherine of Bulgaria have any reason to remain on the Byzantine throne at the moment when it was becoming clear that her husband would no longer be emperor of the Romans? The logical answer to this question is that she had no reason to remain on the throne.

Michael Psellos bears witness to Catherine's attitude toward secular and monastic life in the imperial proclamation of the accession of Constantine X Doukas, issued in November/December 1059, which was addressed in the name of the Byzantine ruler to the offices of the judges in the *themata* across the Empire: "The Lady Catherine also considered following Isaac at once and becoming a nun, but I opposed her, entreating her greatly, even though she is more resolute than any persuasion. Nonetheless, since she still dwelt in the world, out of respect toward her and toward the basileus, so as not to deprive them of imperial acclamation, we recommended to all in your *thema* that they proclaim the *oikonomia* and providence on our behalf, that they gather about themselves in their *thema* the nobles and select men, and in this way acclaim the praise: 'Many years to Catherine the great empress and *imperatrix* of the Romans, and many years to Constantine the great basileus and *imperator* of the Romans.'" ⁵⁴

The new ruler, Constantine X Doukas, according to the imperial proclamation, expressed the wish that empress Catherine should remain at court, and showed her every honour. Although from the imperial proclamation it may be concluded that Constantine X did not succeed in dissuading the augusta from her decision, at the time when the change on the Byzantine throne was announced Catherine had still not taken the monastic tonsure. It seems certain that augusta Catherine of Bulgaria not only supported her husband in his desire for a more exalted life (as the Skylitzes Continuatus attests in the *Chronicle*, and as Michael Psellos denies in the *Chronographia*),⁵⁵ but that she herself was also determined to take the monastic habit.

Besides the imperial proclamation of Constantine X, Skylitzes Continuatus too says that empress Catherine of Bulgaria turned to the spiritual life. Augusta Catherine and her daughter Maria took the monastic habit and lived in the quarters of the Myrelaion, "embracing every monastic ascetic practice" (Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ

⁵³ Scyl. Cont., 50.

⁵⁴ P. Gautier, *Basilikoi logoi inédite de Michel Psellos*. Sicularum Gymnasium Anno 32/2 (1980), no. 11, 763⁵⁵⁻⁶⁷.

⁵⁵ Scyl. Cont., 48, 50; Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686.

βασιλις Αικατερίνα και ή ταύτης θυγάτηρ Μαρία τήν τρίχα κειράμεναι διήγον έν τοίς παλατιοίς του Μυρελαίου, πάσαν άσκησιν μοναδικήν μετερχόμεναι).⁵⁶ From the account of Skylitzes Continuatus one gets the impression that augusta Catherine and Maria, mother and daughter, took the veil simultaneously in the monastery of the Myrelaion, after Isaac's abdication. According to Psellos's testimony in the *Chronographia*, however, it may be concluded that Maria had already taken the veil at the time when Isaac decided to give up power and name his successor: "and the daughter of the imperial couple (she too is beautiful in both respects [aristocratic and virtuous], and her hair was cut before the proper time, but even after the tonsure she is amber-coloured and at the same time ruddy, and by her monastic habit she exalts both qualities on high)" (ή τε τοίν βασιλείου θυγάτηρ (ώραία δέ και αύτη κατ' άμφω. και πρό ώρας έκτετμημένη. αλλά και μετά τήν τομήν ήλεκτρώδης τε όμου και πυρσή. και τῷ σχήματι άμφω κατασεμνύνουσα)).⁵⁷

Augusta Catherine's devotion to monasticism is also attested by the fact that the empress herself said "that nothing was strange to her" when she exchanged the earthly empire for the heavenly one (Έλεγε δέ και ή βασιλις Αικατερίνα μηδέν ξένον έπ' αύτη γεγενήσθαι βασιλείαν βασιλείας άλλαξαμένη).⁵⁸ In addition, empress Catherine and emperor Isaac Komnenos restored the all-venerable Church of John the Forerunner — something which, in the words of Skylitzes Continuatus, should be viewed as a Herculean labour (Κατεκόσμησαν δέ και άμφοτέροι, αύτή τε και ό βασιλεύς, τόν πάνσεπτον του Προδρόμου ναόν, ά καταλέγειν και κατά λεπτόν διεξιέναι άθλος Ηράκλειος).⁵⁹

After Isaac's death, empress Catherine — monastic name Xenia — held a memorial service for the emperor every year, to which she also invited other monks, as well as all the ascetics of the Stoudios Monastery. Sensing that her end was drawing near, she held, as usual, the annual memorial for the emperor, but ordered that everything be set twice as generously as customary. When the astonished hegoumenos came to her and asked the reason for the doubling, she answered him: "Because, O venerable one, I could not tell you whether I shall be among you again next year, since God can arrange our life otherwise, and

⁵⁶ Scyl. Cont., 50.

⁵⁷ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 682. Psellos plays masterfully with words. The daughter of the imperial couple is a beautiful woman in her prime (hence the adjective *ώραία*, which denotes a beautiful woman in her mature, best years, not a young girl), but in full bloom she took the veil, which for the philosopher is definitively "before the proper time" (for tonsure), i.e., *πρό ώρας*. The lexeme *έκτετμημένος* is a technical term for a eunuch, i.e., one whose genitalia have been excised. The feminine form of the term makes no sense, but clearly shows Michael Psellos's contemptuous attitude toward monastic tonsure (the standard verb is *άποκείρω*), which he experiences as the mutilation of human beings and the making of eunuchs.

⁵⁸ Scyl. Cont., 52. The continuator of Skylitzes states that the empress's monastic name was Helena. Michael of Devol, however, gives the correct monastic name of empress Catherine — Xenia. Cf. VIINJ III, 175 and n. 4 (B. Radojčić). It is interesting, moreover, that the continuator of Skylitzes describes the augusta's devotion to the spiritual life using the adjective *ξένον*, which can certainly be connected with the empress's monastic name Xenia — the name *Ξένης*.

⁵⁹ Scyl. Cont., 52.

as is dear to Him.” Her words came true — she passed away, and was deemed worthy to be buried among the brethren of the monastery, in the cemetery of the Stoudios Monastery.⁶⁰

In Psellos’s *Chronographia* and Attaleiates’s *History* there is no report at all about the monastic tonsure of augusta Catherine of Bulgaria, nor about her devotion to the spiritual life.

It is certain that Skylitzes Continuatus had at his disposal a source — today unknown to scholars — that was close to augusta Catherine and that provided an exhaustive picture of her attitude toward the spiritual life. On the assumption that this source conveys the truth, and that Skylitzes Continuatus reliably draws his information from it, Psellos’s statement in the *Chronographia* — that augusta Catherine was opposed to her husband Isaac Komnenos’s taking the monastic tonsure — can justifiably be called into question. It is scarcely likely that the Skylitzes Continuatus, four decades after the death of the imperial couple Komnenos, would consciously have introduced falsehoods concerning the spiritual life of augusta Catherine. There is no valid reason for it.

Concluding remarks

Regardless of Psellos’s statements in the *Chronographia* about Catherine’s opposition to Isaac’s renunciation of the throne and his taking the tonsure,⁶¹ the fact is that Catherine of Bulgaria refused to remain in power together with Constantine Doukas, although this was offered to her. It is precisely the actual state of affairs at the Constantinopolitan court that Michael Psellos communicates in the name of the new emperor Constantine X to the judges in the *themata* and to the inhabitants throughout the Empire: empress Catherine wishes to take the monastic habit together with her husband. Constantine Doukas urges and begs her to remain on the throne. Catherine, however, was unshakeable in her decision. In the course of Doukas’s “negotiations” with Catherine, Psellos composes the imperial oration on the appointment of the new ruler and sends it out to be proclaimed. In it, augusta Catherine and the new emperor are praised. Moreover, it is clear that Constantine Doukas in his rule gives primacy to empress Catherine.⁶² It is quite probable that Catherine was very well-disposed toward Constantine Doukas, and that it was with her knowledge that the change on the throne was announced, together with the joint rule of Doukas and herself. Accordingly, Psellos’s statements that Catherine asked Isaac for a reliable and steadfast successor who would behave toward her as a son can be taken as accurate.⁶³ The philosopher’s testimony about Catherine’s accusing him personally

⁶⁰ Scyl. Cont., 50, 52. Cf. VIINJ III, 175 (B. Radojčić).

⁶¹ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686.

⁶² Gautier 1980, no. 11, 763^{55–67}. A hypothesis exists in scholarship that Catherine managed to secure an independent position vis-à-vis her husband and the new emperor Constantine X Doukas, and that she was the bearer of imperial legitimacy; see Stanković 2006, 100.

⁶³ Psellos, *Chronographia*, 686.

for Isaac's decision to abdicate, and the anecdote about the empress's pleading with Isaac not to leave the throne and not to take the tonsure, should be viewed from the angle of a rejected and offended court official.

Empress Catherine remained on the throne with Constantine Doukas just long enough for the transfer of power from Isaac Komnenos to Doukas to be completed peacefully and successfully, and for the new emperor to familiarise himself with the state's legacy. Thereafter Catherine followed her husband and devoted herself to the spiritual life. Out of respect and gratitude, Constantine Doukas often visited them.⁶⁴

Michael Psellos sent his letter to Catherine of Bulgaria while he was in her favour and her husband's — probably during the first half of Isaac Komnenos's reign. Psellos was sincerely grateful for the chance that Isaac had given him, since he had been an official of the previous emperor, to whom Isaac had been opposed. For this reason, the philosopher strives to place all of his rhetorical skills, at the highest level, in the service of Isaac and Catherine. In the letter to Catherine, with a skilfully woven imperial psalm, Psellos intimates that Isaac and Catherine are the true archetypes of the biblical king and queen. It may therefore rightly be considered that Michael Psellos laid the foundation for a Komnenian ruling ideology grounded in the *Bible*.

⁶⁴ Bryenn., 85.

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АВГУСТА ЕКАТЕРИНА БУГАРСКА У ПИСМУ МИХАИЛА ПСЕЛА

Тежиште истраживања у раду односи се на писмо Михаила Псела за августу Екатерину бугарску, жену цара Исака Комнина. Пселово писмо настало је током прве половине владавине Исака Комнина, док је филозоф био у милости августе и њеног мужа, када се владарски пар налазио ван престонице. Циљ Пселовог писма је да исказе своју личну дубоку тугу јер није у друштву цара и царице. Писмо је драгоцен извор о ромејској владарској идеологији у коме филозоф наглашава бугарско царско порекло августе која је удајом за византијског цара постала још узвишенија. Рад доноси први превод писма на енглески језик.

У уводном делу Псел пише Катерини да има жељу да стално виђа царски пар у граду, те наглашава да веома тешко подноси њихово одсуство. У средишњем делу филозоф казује да се теши писањем писама за Екатерину будући да је ускраћен за разговор лицем у лице са њом. Такође, Псел је слао царици монаха од поверења, који је преносио његову забринутост за царско здравље. Ретор централни део говора тка од панегиричних стихова упућеним цару и царици. Подвлачи да је Екатерина жена царског порекла, мислећи на бугарско порекло које води од Самуилове лозе, те која је удајом за цара Ромеја, цара вишег ранга у хришћанском хијерархијском поретку у односу на њену породицу, стекла још већи углед. Псел подвлачи да је његова брига за царски пар и благоглагољивост упућена њима мала награда за многе услуге које је добио од Катерине. Молио се за позитивне одговоре од ње и цара, наглашавајући још једном да им веома дугује за напредовање у каријери. У завршном делу Псел убеђује цара да треба више да ужива јер је чуо да Исак није одсутан због лова, већ због административних послова. На самом крају писма, филозоф је царском пару пожелео дуге године успешне владавине.

Михаило Псел је био искрено захвалан за шансу коју му је Исак дао, будући да је био службеник претходног цара Михаила VI Стратиотика, чији је Исак био противник. Из тог разлога се филозоф труди да све своје реторске вештине на највишем нивоу стави у службу Исака и Катерине. У писму Катерини вешто утканим царским псалом Псел наговештава да су Исак и Екатерина прави архетипови библијског цара и царице. Стога се с правом може сматрати да је Михаило Псел ударио темељ владарске идеологије Комнина засноване на *Светом писму*.