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## WHEN WAS BYZANTINE EMPEROR MANUEL I KOMNENOS BORN? A STUDY OF CONTRADICTIONARY SOURCES

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*Abstract:* This paper investigates the birth date of Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, analyzing conflicting accounts of historical sources. The sources provide two primary narratives: the eulogies of Theodore Prodromos and Michael Italikos, which align Manuel's birth with his father John II Komnenos' ascension in 1118, and the account of John Kinnamos, who suggests a birth year around 1122, based on Manuel's age during the Battle of Neokaisareia. This analysis is further enriched by examining the feast days of several saints named Stephen, as referenced by Prodromos. The paper seeks to reconcile these divergent perspectives, exploring the implications of each for our understanding of Manuel's life and reign. The study underscores the challenges in Byzantine historiography, where historical facts intertwine with literary motifs.

*Keywords:* Manuel I Komnenos, Theodore Prodromos, Michael Italikos, John Kinnamos, Byzantine Historiography, Birth Date Controversy, Historical Chronology, Byzantine Empire, Medieval Historiography, Cultural and Literary Topos

### Introduction

The Byzantine Empire was a nexus of medieval and classical civilizations. Among its rulers, Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) stands out for his efforts to reinstate Byzantine dominance in the Mediterranean. However, the exact date of his birth remains a matter of speculation due to conflicting accounts from primary sources like Michael Italikos, Theodore Prodromos, and John Kinnamos. This paper aims to clarify the uncertainty surrounding Manuel's birth date, which is pivotal for understanding his reign and its historical significance. By examining these sources, particularly Kinnamos' less-explored account, alongside the more commonly cited eulogies, this study seeks to determine the most probable date of birth for Manuel I. The paper will offer a comparative analysis of these primary sources against the backdrop of secondary literature, shedding light on the complexities of historical factuality and literary topoi in Byzantine literature.

## Analysis of the Sources

In John Kinnamos' account, the only reference to Emperor Manuel I Komnenos' age is found in his description of the Battle of Neokaisareia in 1140. Kinnamos refers to Manuel as being "not yet eighteen".<sup>1</sup> This implies a birth year of 1122 or later, suggesting a younger age than other sources claim. Kinnamos, known for his detailed chronicles, may have had reasons to present Manuel as younger, possibly to emphasize his early military prowess.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, considering that the classical tradition used inclusive reckoning for age calculation — whereby a person of 17 would be regarded as 18 — it could be plausible to propose the year 1123 as a *terminus post quem* (if we accept Kinnamos' data for Manuel's age). This assertion is supported by Kinnamos' final comment on the reign of John II Komnenos, which gives a reign of 25 years and 8 months. This duration is consistent with the inclusive reckoning system, which runs from 15 August 1118 to 8 April 1143.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to another significant source, Michael Italikos offers a different perspective. Italikos, in his *basilikos logos* dedicated to the young emperor Manuel I Komnenos, describes Manuel as having the epithet "born in purple", like Achilles' "child of Thetis" which refers to an imperial birthright.<sup>4</sup> This also suggests that he was the only one of his brothers to be born in the purple after John II Komnenos's accession on 15 August 1118, and a line later Italikos draws a parallel with his father, John II Komnenos, who was also born in purple.<sup>5</sup> At a later point in the sermon<sup>6</sup> he speaks of the birth of Manuel, which took place on the same day as the beginning of his father's reign.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Theodore Prodromos provides an intriguing account in a poem written to Manuel in *versus politicus*, linking Manuel's birth to the feast day of a certain Saint Stephen, symbolically connecting imperial and religious elements.<sup>8</sup> He describes Manuel as a rose "blossoming from the empress," possibly

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1 tr. Brand 1976, p.26 v.3

2 εἰ ὀκτωκαίδεκα οὐπω γεγρονῶς ἔτη τηλίκους ἑαυτὸν παραβάλλειν κινδύνους τολμᾷ. Kinn. p.21 v.23–24

3 ἐφ' ὅλοις πέντε καὶ εἴκοσιν ἐνιαυτοῖς καὶ μηνὶν ἑπτὰ Ῥωμαίων ἄρξας. Kinnam. p.29 v.1–2; for inclusive reckoning of time in antiquity cf. Treadgold 2020 *passim*, Bowersock 1971 p. 75

4 ἅμα γάρ τις Πορφύρας εἶρηκε τόκον καὶ αὐτίκα σε περιφανέστατα κατεσήμενεν, ὥσπερ ὁ τὸν τῆς Θέτιδος εἰπὼν τὸν Ἀχιλλέα ἐδήλωσεν; Gautier 1972, p.278 v.14–16

5 Σὺ τε γὰρ ἔφυς ἀπὸ τῆς περιτύστου Πορφύρας καὶ ὁ φύσας ἐκεῖθεν ἐξέφυ, ὥσπερ οἶμαι φυλαττούσης τῆς τύχης τὰ τῆς διαδοχῆς τοῦ γένους ἀκαινοτόμητα. Gautier 1972, p.278 v.17–19

6 Gautier 1972, p.279 v.7–17

7 καὶ ἡ τῆς βασιλείας ἀρχὴ ἀρχὴ γίνεται καὶ τῆς σῆς εἰς τὸν βίον παρόδου τε καὶ συστάσεως. Ἄμα τε γὰρ ὁ πατήρ σοι καὶ βασιλεὺς ἀνεζώννυτο τὴν τοῦ κράτους ἀρχὴν καὶ σὺ τῆς γαστέρος ἐξερρήγνυστο. Gautier 1972, p.279 v.10–11

8 Ἐν ἐπισήμῳ γεννηθεὶς ἡμέρᾳ στεφανίτου / Ἀνδρὸς ὁσιομάρτυρος καὶ νικητοῦ Στεφάνου, / Καὶ στεφηφόρος γέγονας ὁμοῦ καὶ στεφανίτης; Miller 1881, p.760 v.114–116

on a feast day, and later "taking the double crown of rule and victory".<sup>9</sup> The connection of Manuel's birth to the feast day of a significant religious figure aligns with the Komnenian dynasty's efforts to legitimize their rule through associations with orthodoxy and could bolster the sacred nature of the emperor's authority.

## Discussion

The scholarly debate surrounding the birth date of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos has been shaped significantly by Konstantinos Varzos,<sup>10</sup> who, following Gautier,<sup>11</sup> cites Theodore Prodromos and Michael Italikos as proof that Manuel was born on 28 November 1118. This date has since been adopted by all the literature, including in Paul Magdalino's monograph on Manuel I Komnenos<sup>12</sup> or the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium.<sup>13</sup> However, despite their in-depth examination, Varzos and Gautier completely overlook Kinnamos' narrative and don't refute it, which (if Manuel did indeed have his 18th birthday in 1140) would put his birth at some time around 1122.

However, the date of birth, which is occasionally inferred in earlier scholarship, is derived from Kinnamos' narrative. For example, Victor Langlois, in his commentary to his translation of the Chronicle of Michael the Great, supports Kinnamos' chronology by attributing an age of 58 to Manuel at the time of his death in 1180.<sup>14</sup>

Susanne de Jongh, in her 1937 dissertation, leans towards Kinnamos' date, yet she does not consider the accounts of Prodromos or Italikos.<sup>15</sup> This selective engagement with sources raises questions about the comprehensive analysis of historical data.

Furthermore, de Jongh identifies an additional excerpt within Kinnamos' work, which mentions Manuel's age. Specifically, Kinnamos recounts that "at sixteen, he [Manuel] often made barbarians captive by his own hands" (Brand

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9 Καὶ γὰρ τῆς πανηγύρεως τῇ τότε τελουμένης / Τοῦ στεφανίτου μάκαρος καὶ νικητοῦ Στεφάνου, / Ὡς ῥόδον ἀπὸ κάλυκος βλαστάνεις τῆς δεσποίνης, / Καὶ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν τελετὴν τοῦ στεφανώμου πάλιν / Λαμβάνεις τὸ διάδημα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, / Καὶ σὺν αὐτῇ τὸν στέφανον τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν τροπαίων. / Ἐξ ὅτου γὰρ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος ἀπέπτη, / Ἐκτοτε σὺ κεκράτηκας καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐπέβης, / Καὶ στέφος εἵληφας διπλοῦν τοῦ κράτους καὶ τῆς νίκης. Miller 1881, p.760 v.120–128

10 Varzos 1984, 205, n.13

11 Gautier 1972, 278, n.13; Gautier 1969, 258–260.

12 Magdalino 2002, 244.

13 Manuel I Komnenos. in: *ODB*, 2005.

14 "Manuel mourut en 1180, âgé de 58 ans. Nicéas fixe la date de sa mort au 24 septembre (Nic., VII, 7). Il avait régné 37 ans et demi." Langlois 1868, 345, n.2

15 De Jongh 1937 p.67, n.2; cf. Varzos 1984, 412, n.3

81).<sup>16</sup> This narrative situates itself during the 1149 reclamation of Kerkyra from Roger II of Sicily, ostensibly to illustrate Manuel's valor, bordering on temerity. However, the term "barbarians" remains ambiguous regarding the specific adversaries involved, and given that Emperor John II had conducted numerous military campaigns during the 1130s, this reference proves inconclusive for determining Manuel's exact birth year.

Gautier excludes the protomartyr Saint Stephen and identifies the feast as that of Saint Stephen the Younger (28 November), without mentioning other saints.<sup>17</sup> Adding to this complexity, the Synaxarion of Constantinople provides an invaluable liturgical perspective, cataloging over thirty feast days associated with various figures named Stephen.<sup>18</sup> The term ὁσιομάρτυς used by Prodrōmos is particularly enlightening, directing our attention to specific monastic or ecclesiastical figures. Nevertheless, in the Synaxarion the term ὁσιομάρτυς is not associated with any Saint Stephen; instead, the term ὁσιος frequently pairs with πατήρ, including instances involving martyred saints.

To further elucidate the liturgical context to which Prodrōmos refers, the table below offers a comprehensive listing of the feast days for saints named Stephen, as recorded in the Synaxarion of Constantinople. This table additionally includes saints who are commemorated alongside others with whom they shared martyrdom—a detail that Prodrōmos would likely have mentioned. However, for the sake of completeness, their inclusion was deemed necessary. Feast days specific to martyred saints and related terms are highlighted in bold when no other saints are named. Emphasis in bold is not applied to the Protomartyr Saint Stephen, who, despite having multiple commemorations beyond his principal feast on 27 December, is excluded by Gautier. Prodrōmos would likely have specifically noted him had he been discussing the protomartyr; nevertheless, he is included here to ensure a comprehensive account. The first column specifies the date of the feast, bracketed numbers indicate the saints' position on that day in the Synaxarion, and the Greek text describes the feast as it appears in the edition published by Delehay:

|              |     |   |
|--------------|-----|---|
| <b>3 Sep</b> | (5) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ὁμολογητοῦ Στεφάνου, ἡγουμένου Τριγλείας. |
| <b>7 Sep</b> | (3) | <b>ἄθλησις</b> τοῦ <b>ἁγίου ἱερομάρτυρος</b> Στεφάνου πάπα Ῥώμης.         |

<sup>16</sup> ἀμέλει καὶ ἑκατάδεκα ἐνιαυτῶν πολλάκις ἐνὸς χειρὸς οἰκείαις ζωγρείαις παρέσχετο βαρβάρους. Kinn. p.99 v.20–21.

<sup>17</sup> “Il résulte de ce passage que l'autocrator est né le jour de la fête de l'hosiomartyr Étienne, qui ne peut être dans le calendrier byzantin qu'Étienne le Jeune (28 novembre) et non pas Étienne le protomartyr (27 décembre) et qu'il a, par une coïncidence mystérieuse, été couronné à la même date. Autrement dit, il est né un 28 novembre et a été couronné un 28 novembre.” Gautier 1969, 259.

<sup>18</sup> Delehay 1902, 1165–66

|               |     |  |
|---------------|-----|--|
| 16 Sep        | (5) | ἡ ἀνάμνησις τῆς εὐρέσεως τοῦ λειψάνου τοῦ ἁγίου <ἀποστόλου> καὶ πρωτομάρτυρος Στεφάνου.  |
| 28 Oct        | (8) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου τοῦ Σαβαΐτου ἀνεψιοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ.  |
| 29 Oct        | (3) | μνήμη τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων καὶ μαρτύρων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου, Ἰωάννου τοῦ προδρόμου καὶ βαπτιστοῦ, Στεφάνου τοῦ πρωτομάρτυρος, Βαρνάβα τοῦ ἀποστόλου, Ἰωσήφ τοῦ πατριάρχου καὶ Κλεώπα, Τροφίμου, Δορυμέδοντος, Κοσμᾶ, Δαμιανοῦ, Βάσσης καὶ τῆς συνοδίας αὐτῶν. |
| 19 Nov        | (6) | μνήμη τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου, Στεφάνου καὶ Ἰακώβου ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου.  |
| 22 Nov        | (3) | ἄθλησις τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων Μάρκου καὶ Στεφάνου.  |
| <b>28 Nov</b> | (1) | <b>Ἀθλησις</b> τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου τοῦ νέου.  |
| 9 Dec         | (2) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου τοῦ νεολαμποῦς, τοῦ ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ Ἀντίπα κειμένου.   |
| <b>11 Dec</b> | (5) | (μνήμη ...) τοῦ ἁγίου <b>μάρτυρος</b> Στεφάνου ἐν Κωνσταντιναῖς.   |
| 27 Dec        | (1) | Ἀθλησις τοῦ ἁγίου ἀποστόλου καὶ πρωτομάρτυρος καὶ ἀρχidiaκόνου Στεφάνου, ἐνὸς τῶν ἐπτὰ διακόνων.   |
| 28 Dec        | (3) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ θαυματουργοῦ Στεφάνου.   |
| 8 Jan         | (5) | μνήμη τοῦ ἁγίου πρωτομάρτυρος Στεφάνου.  |
| 14 Jan        | (2) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου τοῦ κτίσαντος τὴν μονὴν τοῦ Χηνολάκκου.   |
| 26 Feb        | (3) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου Στεφάνου, τοῦ συστησαμένου τὸ γηροκομεῖον τῶν Ἀρματίου καὶ τοῦ Σάγματος.   |
| <b>26 Mar</b> | (4) | μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου ἡγουμένου Τριγλείας τοῦ ὁμολογητοῦ.   |
| 26 Mar        | (6) | (μνήμη ...) τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου τοῦ Ξυλινίτου.  |
| <b>31 Mar</b> | (6) | ( <b>ἄθλησις</b> ...) τοῦ ὁσίου Στεφάνου τοῦ θαυματουργοῦ.   |
| 18 May        | (3) | μνήμη Στεφάνου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ἀδελφοῦ χρηματίσαντος Λέοντος τοῦ βασιλέως.  |
| 24 May        | (2) | ἄθλησις τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ Χριστοῦ μαρτύρων Μελετίου τοῦ στρατηλάτου καὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ Στεφάνου κομήτων καὶ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν σὺν αὐτοῖς μαρτυρησάντων μυρίων χιλίων διακοσίων ὀκτὼ σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις.  |
| 27 May        | (6) | (μνήμη ...) τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις Στεφάνου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως.  |
| 7 Jun         | (2) | μνήμη τῶν ὁσίων πατέρων ἡμῶν Ἀνθίμου πρεσβυτέρου καὶ Στεφάνου τῶν Σπουδαίων, πλησίον τῶν Φλορεντίου.   |
| <b>5 Jul</b>  | (6) | ( <b>ἄθλησις</b> ...) τοῦ ἁγίου <b>μάρτυρος</b> Στεφάνου τοῦ εἰς τὸ Ῥήγιον Καλαβρίας κειμένου καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ ἁγίων μαρτυρησάντων.  |
| 18 Jul        | (6) | μνήμη τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Στεφάνου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τοῦ ἐξ Ἀμασείας μετατεθέντος.  |

|        |     |  |
|--------|-----|--|
| 2 Aug  | (1) | Ἡ ἀνακομιδὴ τοῦ τιμίου λειψάνου τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐνδόξου πρωτομάρτυρος καὶ ἀρχιδιακόνου Στεφάνου. |
| 2 Aug  | (2) | ἄθλησις τοῦ ἁγίου ἱερομάρτυρος Στεφάνου πάπα Ῥώμης καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ.                           |
| 13 Aug | (3) | μνήμη τῶν ὁσίων πατέρων ἡμῶν Σεργίου καὶ Στεφάνου εἰς τὸν Μῶλον.                               |

In the list presented, the term ὅσιος is frequently encountered, alongside ἱερομάρτυς and ἅγιος μάρτυς, which suggests that the feast referenced by Pro-dromos may also pertain to other commemorations such as Saint Stephen the Confessor of Triglia (3 September and 26 March), Pope Hieromartyr Stephen I (7 September), Saint Stephen of Constantiae (11 December), or Saint Stephen of Rhegion (5 July). It is noteworthy that the term νικητής is exclusively employed in the Synaxarion on the feast of Saint Vincent, as an explanation of the name Vincentius.<sup>19</sup>

However, it warrants mention that a lexical proximity search within the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae for the terms ὁσιομάρτυς and Στέφανος predominantly retrieves references to Στέφανος ὁ νέος. Significantly, the third novel of Manuel I Komnenos himself refers to St. Stephen the Younger as ὁσιομάρτυς.<sup>20</sup> This evidence substantiates that 28 November 1118 is the most probable, albeit not the sole, birthdate for the emperor, assuming the accounts of Prodrornos and Italikos are accepted as factual.

John Kinnamos, as per his own admission,<sup>21</sup> maintained a close personal relationship with Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, making it highly plausible that he was well-informed about the emperor's exact date of birth. This detail is particularly significant considering Manuel's documented interest in astrology, a field where precise birth dates hold considerable importance.<sup>22</sup> Given that the birthdays of emperors were usually celebrated with public ceremonies at court, it stands to reason that Kinnamos would have been privy to the exact date of the emperor's birth by virtue of his presence.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Kinnamos' depiction of Manuel as younger than other accounts suggest may not be a mere oversight but a deliberate narrative choice. This hypothesis gains further credence when considering the historical context: Alexander the Great was 18 years old during his first notable military accomplishment at the Battle of Chaironeia. Kinnamos' narrative seems to intentionally draw parallels between Manuel and Alexander, possibly to enhance the emperor's stature by likening him to the

19 Βικέντιον γὰρ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τὸν νικητὴν λέγουσι. Delehaye 1902, 414.

20 Ἡ α' τοῦ Νοεμβρίου, διὰ τὸ τοὺς θαυματουργοὺς Ἀναγύρους Κοσμᾶν καὶ Δαμιανὸν ἐορτάζεσθαι. ἡ η', διὰ τὸ τὴν σύναξιν τῶν Ἀσωμάτων τελεῖσθαι. καὶ ἡ κη', διὰ τὸ τὸν ὁσιομάρτυρα Στέφανον τὸν νέον πανηγυρίζεσθαι. Macrides 1984, 152.

21 cf. Kinnam. p.290 v.22 – p.291 v.3

22 cf. N. Chon. *Hi.* p.95 v.22 – p.96 v.6

23 For imperial birthdays see the 10th century *De ceremoniis* Book I, chapter 61 (= Vogt 1939, 86–87.)

renowned Macedonian ruler. This comparison is explicitly made in a passage where Kinnamos lauds Alexander's bravery in a manner akin to his depiction of Manuel, suggesting a deliberate rhetorical strategy to elevate Manuel's image.<sup>24</sup> This interpretation is supported by Tollius Cornelius' commentary in his *editio princeps*, where he remarks on the similarity of Kinnamos' account to the writings of Curtius Rufus, known for his works on Alexander.<sup>25</sup>

The tendency to draw parallels between Emperor Manuel I Komnenos and Alexander the Great may reflect a broader imperial cultural policy aimed at enhancing Manuel's stature, since Kinnamos is not the only one to draw parallels between Manuel and Alexander. This comparison is further reinforced in Theodore Prodromos' poem, where he juxtaposes Manuel with historical and mythical figures, including Alexander, Heracles, and King David, using vibrant imagery to elevate Manuel's achievements.<sup>26</sup>

The codex Plut.70.37, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript, housed in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, is another significant source that merits attention. This codex contains Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Historia Alexandri Magni* and notably commences with an account of Alexander the Great's achievements at the age of 18.<sup>27</sup> Given the age of the manuscript, it is possible that Kinnamos read it and was influenced by it.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that when describing the events in Neokaisareia, Niketas Choniates, who often echoes Kinnamos,<sup>28</sup> does not mention the age of Manuel, whom he also describes extensively in later books. This omission becomes even more intriguing considering Choniates does recount the

24 οὐκ οὐδὲ τὴν Ἀλέξανδρου τόλμαν ἐπαινεῖν ἔχω, ὁπότε μὴ σὺν τύχῃ τὰ κατὰ τὸν ἄνδρα διεξετάζοιμι, εἰ μή τις διδοῖ τι καὶ ἡλικία νεότητος. Kinnam. p.52 v.2 – p.52 v.4

25 „Huc facit Q. Curtii Rufi de Alexandro elogium: *fatendum est, cum plurimum virtuti debuerit, plus debuisse fortunae; quam solus omnium mortalium in potestatem habuit.*” Tollius 1652, 333.

26 Ἀκμάζων ἦν Ἀλέξανδρος, ἀλλ' ἔτρεψε Δαρεῖον, / Ἀνθεῖς καὶ σὺ τὸν ἱουλον, ἀλλὰ σουλτάνον τρέπεις, / Τὸν δυνατὸν ὁ κραταιὸς, τὸν παλαιὸν ὁ νέος.; v144–149 Καὶ πάλαι τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον τις καταπλήξαι θέλων / Πρὸς Πέρσας εἶπεν ἑκατὸν ἓνα καὶ μόνον ἔχειν, / « Ἀλλ' εἰς καὶ μόνος μάγειρος κριοῦς χιλίρως κτείνει, » / Ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀντέλεξεν ὁ Μακεδὼν ἐκεῖνος; / Ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ παρὰ πολλῶν ἀκηκοὺς τοσαῦτα / Χιλίους εἰς ἐδίωξας, οὐ φήσας ἀλλὰ πράξας. Miller 1881, p.760 v.106–108; Ἐπτά σατράπαι τοῦ Περσῶν δυνάστου τοῦ Δαρείου, / Εὐρόντες τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον πεσόντα πρὸς ταῖς ὄχθαις / Τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Γρανικοῦ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν Τρωάδα, / Ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης προσβολῆς ἡττῶνται συμβαλόντες, / Τοῦ σοῦ δὲ κράτους φεύγουσι μακρὰν ἀρχισατράπαι / Πολλοὶ καὶ πόλυδύναμοι κατὰ τὴν πρώτην μάχην. / Τόπος ἐστὶ καλούμενος Ἰσσοὺς ἐν Κιλικίᾳ, / Ὅπου καὶ πρὶν ἐσκήνωσεν ὁ μέγας αὐτοκράτωρ, / Καὶ πᾶσαν ἐδουλώσατο τὴν χώραν τῶν Κιλικίων· / Ἐκεῖ Δαρεῖον ἔτρεψεν ὁ Μακεδόνων ἄναξ, / Σὺ δὲ παρὰ τὰ πρόθυρα καὶ τῶν Περσῶν τὰς πόλεις / Καὶ τοῦ σουλτάνου τὰς αὐλὰς ἐπήξω τὴν αὐλαίαν, / Καὶ κατακράτος τὸν στρατὸν αὐτοῦ κατετροπώσω. Miller 1881, p.760 v.171–183

27 περὶ ὀκτὼ καὶ δέκα γεγονὼς ἐτῶν cf. <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/16602/> and <https://archive.ph/NT9yI> (accessed: 15:53 29/12/2023)

28 cf. Nikolopoulos 2014

physical punishment received by Manuel's father, Emperor John II, within the imperial tent — an incident that Kinnamos chooses to omit. Such divergences in their accounts lend support to the notion that Kinnamos' specific reference to Manuel being 18 years old at the time may be more of a rhetorical topos rather than an accurate historical record.

Although the authenticity of eulogies is often viewed with skepticism due to their inherently laudatory nature, it is noteworthy that in this instance, both eulogies converge on the same date. However, given the contextual and stylistic nuances of these sources, Kinnamos' portrayal of Manuel's age as 18 could itself be a historical topos, employed for its symbolic resonance rather than its factual accuracy.

## Conclusion

The investigation into Emperor Manuel I Komnenos' birth date transcends a simple determination of a chronological fact, unfolding into an intricate exploration of historical narratives, cultural influences, and interpretive biases. Considering the available sources, a birth date between 1118 and 1119 emerges as the more probable scenario, even if it cannot be established with absolute certainty to the exact day, as previous literature has done. However, it should not be forgotten that the sources are contradictory on this point, and the court historian of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, John Kinnamos, points to a later date of birth. In both cases Manuel remains *porphyrogennetos*, i.e. born in purple, which also had political significance in the Komnenos-dynasty.

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