

**THE REIGN OF LEO VI (886-912)
PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND
POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES**

Shaun F. Tougher

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
by Shaun F. Tougher
Department of Mediaeval History
University of St Andrews**



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ABSTRACT

Leo VI (886-912) is an emperor who has suffered from a hostile and inadequate press. He has been portrayed as a weak and careless emperor, known mainly for his dubious parentage and marital exploits. This thesis questions these popular perceptions of Leo, and attempts to present a more realistic account of the emperor and the politics of his age. The aspects of the reign tackled focus on essential elements of Leo's life and rule, presented in a rough chronological framework, and the themes of personal relationships and political ideologies are recurrent. Chapter One examines Leo's relationship with Basil I and his attitude to his Macedonian heritage. Chapter Two considers the fate of the monumental figure of Photios at the emperor's hands. Chapter Three deals with the position and role of the 'all powerful' Stylianos Zaoutzes during the first half of the reign. Chapter Four ponders the origin and meaning of Leo's 'wise' epithet. Chapter Five focuses on the emperor's four marriages. Chapter Six turns to the course of foreign affairs during the reign, concentrating on Bulgaria and the Arab navy, and considers the emperor's attitude towards these military problems. Chapter Seven examines the emperor's relationship with his senatorial officials, focusing on two distinct groups, eunuchs and the generals who originated from families of the eastern frontier. Finally Chapter Eight addresses the tense relationship that existed between Leo and his brother and co-emperor Alexander. What emerges from a consideration of these aspects of Leo and his reign is that this is an emperor who does not deserve the popular perceptions that still persist about him. He was an emperor who forged a 'new' and distinctive imperial style, a style that should not deceive us; he may have been literate, sedentary and city-based, but he was also forceful, strong-willed and conscientious.

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A special debt of gratitude is owed to all those who gave support and encouragement throughout the evolution and completion of this thesis. Thanks are primarily due to my supervisor Paul Magdalino, whose patience and wisdom have been invaluable, and whose example has been inspiring. The help freely and cheerfully given by Ruth Macrides has also been highly prized; together she and Paul have made my St Andrews experience a rewarding and happy one. The transition from undergraduate to postgraduate can be a difficult process, and for her advice and guidance during the early stages of my postgraduate life, and her continued concern, I am extremely grateful to Constanze Schummer. The friendly interest and assistance of Michael and Mary Whitby has also been a welcome source of encouragement. Beyond St Andrews, the Byzantine community in Belfast headed by the marvellous Margaret Mullett, to whom I owe my introduction to the Byzantine empire, offered constant support, and also a special working environment for two years. Of this community particular thanks must go to my undergraduate and postgraduate colleague Barbara Hill, who was a continuous source of empathy, news, good humour, and excuses to eat.

Much appreciated support has also been forthcoming from non-Byzantinists. In St Andrews William Kay provided particular encouragement. Back home the continued friendship and indulgences of Anne Blacker and Jeffrey Brown have been highly valued. Finally my family has been a source of comfort, and in particular I owe an immense debt to my mother, who has offered constant and inestimable support and assistance. I hope that in the future I will have the opportunity to return such kindness.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AASS</i>	Acta Sanctorum
<i>AB</i>	Analecta Bollandiana
<i>ABSA</i>	Annual of the British School at Athens
<i>AJA</i>	American Journal of Archaeology
<i>BMGS</i>	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
<i>BNJ</i>	Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher
<i>BSI</i>	Byzantinoslavica
<i>Byz</i>	Byzantion
<i>BZ</i>	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
<i>CFHB</i>	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
<i>CSHB</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
<i>DOP</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
<i>DOS</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Studies
<i>DOT</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Texts
<i>EHR</i>	English Historical Review
<i>EO</i>	Échos d'Orient
<i>ESC</i>	Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations
<i>GRBS</i>	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
<i>Hell</i>	Ἑλληνικά
<i>JÖB</i>	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
<i>JWarb</i>	Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
<i>OC</i>	Orientalia Christiana
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graeca
<i>PO</i>	Patrologia Orientalis
<i>PRIA</i>	Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy
<i>REB</i>	Revue des Études Byzantines
<i>RESEE</i>	Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes
<i>ROC</i>	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
<i>SBN</i>	Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici
<i>Script</i>	Scriptorium
<i>SK</i>	Seminarium Kondakovianum
<i>TM</i>	Travaux et Mémoires
<i>ZRVI</i>	Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Instituta

INTRODUCTION

In the gallery of emperors who reigned over the Byzantine empire during its long life of more than a thousand years the figure of Leo VI (886-912) is surely not unfamiliar to those who are conversant with the history of Byzantium. He was the heir of Basil I (867-886) the founder of the Macedonian dynasty, one of the longest surviving dynasties in Byzantine history, which only expired in the eleventh century with the death of its last representative the empress Theodora in 1056. Everyone knows that Leo's parentage is a moot point; it is undeniable that his mother was Eudokia Ingerina, but was his father her lover Michael III (842-867) or her husband Basil the Macedonian?¹ Likewise it is notorious that Leo married four times in succession, causing ecclesiastical conflict that outlasted the temporal boundary of his reign.² This emperor is also familiar because of his achievements that make him an inescapable figure for the study of the legal, literary and military history of Byzantium.³ Yet beyond these points what is generally known about Leo and his

¹See for instance C. Mango, 'Eudocia Ingerina, the Normans and the Macedonian Dynasty', *ZRVI*, 14-15 (1973), 17-27, repr. *Byzantium and Its Image* (London, 1984), XV; E. Kislinger, 'Eudokia Ingerina, Basileios I. und Michael III', *JÖB*, 33 (1983), 19-136; C. I. Toul, 'Περὶ τῆς νοθογενείας τοῦ Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ', *Parnassos*, 21 (1979), 15-35; P. Magdalino, 'Basil I, Leo VI, and the Feast of the Prophet Elijah', *JÖB*, 38 (1988), 193-196; N. Adontz, 'La portée historique de l'oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Leon VI le sage', *Byz*, 8 (1933), 501-513.

²The tetragamy crisis tends to dominate accounts of Leo's reign. For instance R. J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610-1071* (London, 1966), devoted a separate section of his history to the problem, whilst C. Diehl, *Byzantine Portraits*, tr. H. Bell (New York, 1927), included a chapter entitled 'The Four Marriages of Leo the Wise' in his work that focused on certain personalities in Byzantine history.

³There is of course overlap between these areas. Leo is one of the major figures in the history of Byzantine law due to the fact that he succeeded in fulfilling his father's project of editing and compiling the Justinianic corpus in Greek, the *Basilika*, and that he produced his own collection of Novels: see A. Schminck, "'Frömmigkeit ziere das Werk". Zur Datierung der 60 Bücher Leons VI', *Subseciva Groningana*, 3 (1989), 79-114; *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern* (Frankfurt, 1986); M. T. Fögen, 'Legislation und Kodifikation des Kaisers Leons VI', *Subseciva Groningana*, 3 (1989), 23-35; 'Gesetz und Gesetzgebung in Byzanz. Versuch einer Funktionsanalyse', *Ius Commune*, 14 (1987), 137-158, esp. 148-152; N. van der Wal and J. H. A. Lokin, *Historiae iuris graeco-romani delineatio. Les sources du droit byzantin de 300 à 1453* (Groningen, 1985), esp. 78-89. Unlike his father Basil, Leo did receive a literary education from his youth, and during his life he wrote and delivered orations, homilies, hymns, and poems, and some of these works have survived: see J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études sur Léon VI', *TM*, 5 (1973), 181-242, esp. 181-207; P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, tr. H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1986), esp. 238-239; A. Vogt and I. Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Léon VI le sage', *OC*, 26 (1932), 5-79. Leo also produced handbooks which have the strong didactic flavour that is so typical of the literary productions of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, the most famous being his military manual the *Taktika*, a work that is indispensable to historians of Byzantine military history and that initiated a resurgence of such military manuals within Byzantium in the tenth century: see Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', esp. 206-242; A. Dain and J.-A. de Foucault, 'Les stratégestes byzantins', *TM*, 2 (1967), 317-392, esp. 353-363; P. Magdalino, 'The Non-Judicial Legislation of Leo VI', forthcoming. Regarding Leo's works of literature it is to be hoped that his homilies soon find a new editor, and that the editing of the *Taktika* done by R. Vari, *Sylloge Tacticorum Graecorum*, III, *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 2 vols (Budapest, 1917; 1922), down to Constitution 14. 38 is carried through for the rest of the work.

reign? Certainly it is a common perception that he was rather feeble when it came to practical military matters, and that the Bulgarians and Arabs were able to run rings round him because he had no foreign policy.⁴ As for internal affairs it is often presumed that he was under the thumb of unethical favourites.⁵ Leo has even suffered the shame of being dismissed as rather 'colourless'.⁶ Quite simply such observations are superficial and inadequate, and in fact save for a few specific areas the reign of Leo VI has not been subjected to the same degree of appreciation as has been afforded to his more famous father and son, Basil I and Constantine VII.⁷ It is these two figures that tend to come to mind when one thinks of the early history of the Macedonian dynasty, the first as its energetic establisher, the second as its great literary figure and myth-maker.⁸ It is indeed a striking fact that of the emperors who reigned from 867-959 Leo VI is the only one amongst them who has not in this century received a study devoted to his life and times.⁹ This lack of a comprehensive study of his reign only serves to perpetuate the fundamental misapprehensions that still exist about his person and reign, and it is this void in the documenting of the history of the early days of the Macedonian dynasty that has inspired this thesis.

Although there is a lack of a major tome about this emperor, this does not mean that no significant work has ever been produced on Leo VI and his reign, just that this work has appeared piecemeal. There are certainly several scholars from this century who have devoted their considerable abilities to examining aspects of the

⁴R. Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria. A Comparative Study Across the Early Medieval Frontier* (London, 1975), 57.

⁵Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 57; Runciman, *Romanus Lecapenus*, 16; Diehl, *Portraits*, 173.

⁶C. Mango, 'The Legend of Leo the Wise', *ZRV*, 6 (1960), 59-93, esp. 59, repr. *Image*, XVI.

⁷For the reign of Basil I we have A. Vogt, *Basile I^{er} empereur de Byzance (867-886) et la civilisation byzantine à la fin du IX^e siècle* (Paris, 1908). The reign of Constantine VII, which had an uncertain beginning due to Constantine's youth and the exercise of power by other figures, is the focus of study for A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* (London, 1973), and the collection of papers in *Κωνσταντίνος Ζ΄ Πορφυρογέννητος καὶ ἡ ἐποχὴ τοῦ*, ed. A. Markopoulos (Athens, 1989).

⁸However see I. Sevckenko, 'Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus', *Byzantine Diplomacy*, edd J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 167-195, who presents the literary achievements in a more realistic light. Yet the fact that he has to do so serves to underline the popular perception of Constantine VII.

⁹For Basil I and Constantine VII see n. 7 above. The thirteen-month rule of Alexander I (912-913) is documented by P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Emperor Alexander's Bad Name', *Speculum*, 44 (1969), 585-596, repr. *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), XV. The life and reign of the usurper of Constantine VII's imperial power Romanos Lekapenos (920-944) has been scrutinised by S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign. A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1929). The fact that these reigns have all been the focus of study does not however mean that these emperors require no further attention; our knowledge and understanding of Byzantium is improving all the time. It is also a curious fact that the emperor whose reign is so intimately connected with the emergence of the Macedonian dynasty, Michael III, has not yet received a study devoted to his person. In the nineteenth century Leo VI was the object of a study by a scholar writing in Russian and from a particular angle: N. Popov, *The Emperor Leo the Wise and his Reign, Considered from an Ecclesiastic Point of View* (Moscow, 1892).

life and times of this emperor. Vogt, who wrote a study on the reign of Basil I, did not indulge Leo to this extent, contenting himself with an examination of his early life from his birth to his accession.¹⁰ And together with Hausherr he produced an eagerly awaited study, edition and translation of Leo's *Epitaphios* on his parents.¹¹ Throughout the early decades of this century Grégoire produced many a vital study on the literature that touched on Leo's reign.¹² In the thirties Grumel made crucial headway in settling many of the dubious points of chronology regarding Leo's reign.¹³ The field of naval history formed the distinctive background of Dolley's many, but often flawed, articles on the period.¹⁴ Vasiliev's contribution to our understanding of the reign lies in the field of foreign affairs, with especial regard to the Arabs and the Russians.¹⁵ In the seventies there appeared a fascinating study by Grosdidier de Matons on Leo the author, which focused in particular on three of his texts.¹⁶ In more recent years Leo's legal work and ideology have been examined by Schminck¹⁷, and several significant studies by Magdalino have focused on aspects such as literature, art, ceremonial, and the particularly mysterious political act of the transfer of the Bulgarian markets from Constantinople to Thessalonica, thus shedding much light on the character of Leo and his reign.¹⁸ But above all these scholars there tower two figures who have made major contributions to the study of the reign of Leo VI, and they are Romilly Jenkins and Patricia Karlin-Hayter. One

¹⁰A. Vogt, 'La jeunesse de Léon VI le sage', *Revue Historique*, 174 (1934), 389-428.

¹¹Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison'.

¹²See for instance H. Grégoire, 'Saint Démétrianos, évêque de Chytri (île de Chypre)', *BZ*, 16 (1907), 204-240; 'Les Acta Sanctorum', *Byz*, 4 (1927-1928), 791-812; 'La vie de saint Blaise d'Amorium', *Byz*, 5 (1929-1930), 391-414; 'L'oraison funèbre de Basile I', *Byz*, 7 (1932), 626-633; 'Le communiqué arabe sur la prise de Thessalonique (904)', *Byz*, 22 (1952), 373-378; 'La carrière du premier Nicéphore Phocas', *Hell*, 4 (1953), 232-254.

¹³V. Grumel, 'Chronologie des événements du règne de Léon VI (886-912)', *EO*, 35 (1936), 5-42; 'Notes de chronologie byzantine', *EO*, 35 (1936), 331-335; 'Notes chronologiques. La révolte d'Andronic Doux sous Léon VI. La victoire navale d'Himérius', *EO*, 36 (1937), 202-207.

¹⁴R. H. Dolley, 'A Forgotten Byzantine Conquest of Kypros', *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique. Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, fifth series, 34 (1948), 209-224; 'The Historical Significance of the Translation of St Lazaros from Kypros to Byzantion', *Byz*, 19 (1949), 59-71; 'The Date of the St Mokios Attempt on the Life of the Emperor Leon VI', *Mélanges Henri Grégoire, Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, 10 (1950), 231-238; 'The Lord High Admiral Eustathios Argyros and the Betrayal of Taormina to the African Arabs in 902', *SBN*, 7 (1953), 340-353.

¹⁵A. A. Vasiliev, 'The Second Russian Attack on Constantinople', *DOP*, 6 (1951), 161-225; *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, *La dynastie macédonienne (867-969)*, French edition M. Canard (Brussels, 1968); II, 2, *La dynastie macédonienne (867-969), Extraits des sources arabes*, tr. M. Canard (Brussels, 1950).

¹⁶Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études'.

¹⁷See n. 3 above, and also A. Schminck, "'Rota tu volubilis". Kaisermacht und Patriarchenmacht in Mosaiken', *Cupido Legum*, edd. L. Burgmann, M. T. Fögen, A. Schminck (Frankfurt, 1985), 211-234.

¹⁸P. Magdalino, 'The Bath of Leo the Wise', *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1984), 225-240; 'Elijah': 'The Bath of Leo the Wise and the "Macedonian Renaissance" Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology', *DOP*, 42 (1988), 97-118; 'Saint Demetrios and Leo VI', *BSI*, 51 (1990), 198-201; 'Non-Judicial'.

only has to look at the titles and contents of each of their collections of articles in the *Variorum Reprints* series to realise the extent of their importance in the study of Byzantine political history of the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁹ It is to these two scholars that any researcher of the early Macedonian period must come, as I did in the course of my work on Leo VI, and it was through them that I found a rather different emperor than the one more usually encountered. For Jenkins Leo was a 'great' emperor, but whose greatness 'does not lie on the surface', not in spectacular military victories but in less visible 'counter-measures' that 'were both permanent and salutary'.²⁰ Further, Jenkins perceived that Leo was a man of great 'tenacity of will'.²¹ Karlin-Hayter, a student of Grégoire, also had a more positive, and I would say realistic, view of Leo and his reign, which she particularly emphasised in a paper addressing Leo's handling of foreign affairs.²² She demonstrated that it was mistaken to dismiss Leo 'as a supine and feeble sovereign who left government to a series of deplorable favorites, devoting himself exclusively to wife-trouble and impractical theorizing', and she asserted that 'there is abundant evidence that Leo was very much an acting ruler'.²³ There is no doubt then that Jenkins and Karlin-Hayter constitute the Byzantinists who are most familiar with Leo's reign and most appreciative of its character and that of the emperor, but their observations do not seem to have been noted by all, for it was in 1975 that Browning stated that Leo VI had 'no taste for military matters, and worse still, no foreign policy'.²⁴ It is thus a great pity that Jenkins did not survive to write his intended study of the reign of Leo VI²⁵, and that Karlin-Hayter's important assessments of Leo VI and other figures and facets of the ninth and tenth centuries are not gathered in a single narrative but are scattered in the commentary of her invaluable edition of the *Life of Euthymios*.²⁶ It is this lack of an extended analysis of the political history of Leo's reign as a whole that I wish to go some way towards filling in this thesis.

However I do not wish to give the impression that this thesis will simply be the work that Jenkins never wrote and that Karlin-Hayter has not yet written. Firstly there is not room in a thesis to present a comprehensive narrative covering every aspect of the life and reign of Leo VI, and thus I have had to be selective in the areas

¹⁹R. J. H. Jenkins, *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries* (London, 1970); P. Karlin-Hayter, *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981).

²⁰Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 201, 210.

²¹Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 215.

²²P. Karlin-Hayter, 'When Military Affairs Were in Leo's Hands'. A Note on Byzantine Foreign Policy (886-912)', *Traditio*, 23 (1967), 15-40, repr. *Studies in*, XIII.

²³Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 20.

²⁴Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 57.

²⁵See C. Mango, 'Introduction', *DOP*, 21 (1967).

²⁶P. Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae Cp. Text, Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Brussels, 1970).

I have chosen to investigate. Secondly, although I have great admiration for the work that Jenkins did and Karlin-Hayter has done on this period, I do not always find myself in agreement with their opinions. Sometimes this is because views of Byzantine history and society have altered, and sometimes simply because I am not convinced by their arguments. For instance with regard to the former case in recent years there has developed a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the political groupings within Byzantium and of the biases which could motivate certain groups.²⁷ Thus it is no longer sufficient, or indeed accurate, to simply state as Jenkins did that the military aristocracy were opposed to the rule of Leo VI.²⁸ The case of Jenkins's views on the plots of the military aristocracy against Leo brings me to an example of his work that is simply unconvincing. He attempted to explain the puzzling flight of the eunuch Samonas, a palace official who was apparently particularly close to the emperor, back to his native Arabian empire as a stage-managed drama that would enable this ally of Leo VI to discover what the plotters amongst the military aristocracy were hatching in conjunction with the Arabs against the emperor.²⁹ This theory has not met with widespread acceptance, and is doubted by Karlin-Hayter herself, but as yet no other interpretation of the events has been offered.³⁰ As for Karlin-Hayter one specific instance where I have trouble accepting her arguments is when she insists on the reliability of the evidence of the *Life of Euthymios* concerning both Stylianos Zaoutzes, a key figure in the early years of the reign of Leo, and Nikolaos the sometime patriarch of Constantinople.³¹ What troubles me about this is that it is perfectly evident that Stylianos and Nikolaos were opponents and enemies of the saintly Euthymios, and the author of the *Life* is thus naturally biased against them. What compounds Karlin-Hayter's acceptance of this evidence is that she prefers it over evidence from other sources that tell a different story and which have no such obvious bias. To some extent it was these factors, the development in our understanding of Byzantine history and society and the areas where I was at variance with the opinions of previous scholars of the period, that influenced my choice of subjects for the chapters of the thesis. Another decisive factor was the impulse to cover elements of the reign that I felt had simply not received as much attention as they deserved, such as the fall of the patriarch Photios on Leo's accession, the emperor's particular attachment to

²⁷See for example J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)* (Paris, 1990), who highlights the regional bias of Byzantine families and the allegiances that existed between various groupings; V. N. Vlyssidou, *Εξωτερική πολιτική και έσωτερικές αντιδράσεις την εποχή του Βασιλείου Α΄* (Athens, 1991), who shows that the western policy of Basil I was seriously undermined by the negative attitude towards it of some of those officials he chose to implement it.

²⁸R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Flight of Samonas', *Speculum*, 23 (1948), 217-235, repr. *Studies on*, X.

²⁹Jenkins, 'Flight'.

³⁰Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, *Commentary*, 177.

³¹See for example Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, *Introduction*, 58-60.

eunuchs, the relationship between Leo and the senatorial order which is characterised as being good, Leo's own reputation for wisdom, and the infamous hatred between Leo and his brother Alexander. In short I aimed to write a thesis that would fill the gaps or flaws that I felt there were in the existing literature, a thesis that would give a fuller and more rounded picture of Leo and the political history of his reign.

Regarding the structure of the thesis I have endeavoured to arrange the chapters so as roughly to give a chronological progression from Leo's birth in 866 to his death in 912. Thus Chapter One addresses the problem of the relationship between Basil and Leo, which I have tackled in a less usual way by detailing what we know of their attitudes towards each other, rather than trying to prove if Leo was illegitimate or not. Chapter Two is concerned with Photios's fate at the hands of his ex-pupil, who deposed, exiled and tried him during the first year of his reign. Chapter Three is devoted to the figure of Stylianos Zaoutzes who was the emperor's right hand man for much of the early reign, and I try to estimate how accurate it is to consider Stylianos as the ruling force throughout this period. In Chapter Four there is a momentary break from the political history of the reign as I investigate Leo's contemporary reputation as a wise man, which is usually only briefly alluded to in assessments of the reign, or else forms a small part of the consideration of the figure known as Leo the Wise. Chapter Five deals with a familiar feature of the reign, the tetragamy crisis, but attempts to take a different angle by tracing Leo's marital problems from their origin and by highlighting the ruthless manner in which the emperor sought to attain his desires. The focus of Chapter Six is military affairs. Although this is an area already admirably treated by Karlin-Hayter I felt it deserved further emphasis given that the lessons of her article do not seem yet to have been learnt by all, and to a certain degree I also felt that Karlin-Hayter did not go far enough in rehabilitating Leo's reputation. Chapter Seven was inspired by the commonly found image of the good relationship between the emperor and senators, and looks particularly at two groups amongst the senatorial order who feature prominently in the reign, the palace eunuchs and the military aristocrats of the eastern frontier. And finally in Chapter Eight I turn my attentions to Leo's brother Alexander who was his co-emperor and eventual heir, despite the reputed animosity between them. From this basic outline of the chapters it should be clear why one half of my sub-title to the thesis is designated 'Personal Relationships'. As for the 'Political Ideologies' this is most obviously a reference to Chapter Four, but will be found to be equally applicable to the other chapters. For instance Chapter One and Chapter Eight dwell particularly on Leo's attitude to his Macedonian heritage; Chapter Two touches on the ideological conflict between Leo and Photios; Chapter Three concerns the image of Stylianos Zaoutzes that the sources have preserved, an

image that serves an ideological purpose; Chapter Six alludes to certain ideological attitudes towards war, and Chapter Seven takes as its starting point the ideological relationship between emperor and senate. However the issues of 'Personal Relationships' and 'Political Ideologies' are ultimately secondary to the main thrust of the thesis, which is to show that Leo VI, as Jenkins and Karlin-Hayter both appreciated, is not an emperor to be underestimated.

The fundamental problem at the root of inadequate appreciations of the reign of Leo VI is the sources, as Jenkins and Karlin-Hayter recognised.³² For the study of the reign the two major sources are the chronicle of Symeon the Logothete and the *Life of Euthymios*, and each of these has its own peculiar slant. Taking the chronicle first it is quite clear that this source is hostile to the Macedonian dynasty.³³ It seems that the Logothete, who compiled his chronicle in the mid-tenth century, was a partisan of Romanos Lekapenos, the usurper who rudely interrupted the reign of Constantine VII, and his chronicle, the most significant part of which is the period from 813 (where the chronicle of Theophanes broke off) down to the year 948, is sympathetic to this figure at the expense of the Macedonians. According to Jenkins for the years 867-913, the period comprising the reigns of Basil and his two sons Leo and Alexander, the Logothete relied for his chronology on a series of annals³⁴, and Jenkins also asserts that 'The Logothete's selection of incidents is undoubtedly dictated by dislike of the Macedonian emperors'.³⁵ Although the Greek text of the Logothete chronicle has not survived it has been preserved basically by the variant versions of it, such as the chronicles of Theodosios of Melitene, Leo Grammaticus, and the Continuator of George the Monk.³⁶ Other more distinct variants are the chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon (which is much more condensed, contains regnal years and has an extreme bias against Photios) and that of Theophanes Continuatus (which contains pro-Macedonian versions of the reigns of Michael III and Basil I, and continues down to the year 963, but basically copies the Logothete version of the reign of Leo VI, though it adds some anecdotes favourable to the military aristocracy).³⁷ It was the Logothete who first recorded the scandal

³²Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 198; Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 15; *Studies in*, iii.

³³For the Logothete chronicle see Toynbee, *Constantine*, Annex I, 606-612; G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, tr. J. Hussey, second edition (Oxford, 1968), 147, 210; Runciman, *Romanus Lecapenus*, 1-2; J. B. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire from the Fall of Irene to the Accession of Basil I (A. D. 802-867)* (London, 1912), Appendix III, 455-459.

³⁴R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Chronological Accuracy of the "Logothete" for the Years A. D. 867-913', *DOP*, 19 (1965), 91-112, repr. *Studies on*, III.

³⁵Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 96.

³⁶*Theodosius Melitenus*, ed. T. Tafel (Munich, 1859); *Leo Grammaticus*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1842); *Georgius Monachus Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1838). For reference purposes it is this last version which I shall treat as my main chronicle.

³⁷For Pseudo-Symeon see *Symeonis Magistri Annales*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1838); A. Markopoulos, *Ἡ Χρονογραφία τοῦ Ψευδοσυμεῶν καὶ οἱ πηγές της* (Ioannina, 1978); Toynbee, *Constantine*, 609-612. For Theophanes Continuatus see *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I.

that Eudokia Ingerina was still the mistress of Michael III after her marriage to Basil the Macedonian, and that Basil's sons Constantine, Leo and Stephen were in fact the children of Michael. It is the negative image of the reign of Leo VI (which is actually nearly two and a half times longer than the Logothete's account of the reign of Basil I³⁸) conjured up by the Logothete that still plagues modern accounts of it; Leo persecuted the innocent Photios, was led astray by Stylianos Zaoutzes and Samonas, and was largely powerless against the military threat of the Bulgarians and the Arabs. Quite simply the Logothete was determined to say nothing good about this emperor, and unfortunately Leo never received the eulogistic treatment that Constantine VII ensured was lavished on Basil³⁹, even though Constantine does state within the biography of his grandfather that he wished to continue the story of the Macedonian dynasty down to his own day.⁴⁰

However the other major source for the reign, the *Life of Euthymios*, does convey a more positive image of the emperor. It seems that this biography of the monk Euthymios (c. 832-917)⁴¹, the spiritual father of Leo VI, was written between the years 920-925 by someone who had had an insider's perspective on court affairs during the reign; Karlin-Hayter asserts that the *Life* contains 'the personal reminiscences of an eye-witness', pointing to the vivid and life-like details contained within the biography, particularly regarding the emperor himself.⁴² One very memorable episode that is related is the unexpected visit of the emperor to the monastery of Euthymios at Psamathia when the monks were at dinner, and Karlin-Hayter observes that 'The most lively and picturesque scenes in Psamathia leave Euthymios more remote than Leo'.⁴³ Certainly although Euthymios is the true hero of the *Life* the emperor also emerges as a sympathetic figure, human and tragic with all his flaws and crises on show. He is in turns arrogant, humble, proud, deflated, angry, distraught, mischievous and dignified. There is no doubting the value of this source for a better understanding of Leo and his reign. And yet when it comes down to it the source is quite limited in scope, for essentially it is concerned not with relating all manner of information about Leo's reign, but with explaining how Euthymios had come to be patriarch in place of Nikolaos, and how it was that he supported the granting of economy to the emperor in the matter of his fourth

Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1838); Ostrogorsky, *State*, 210; R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Classical Background of the Scriptorum Post Theophanem', *DOP*, 8 (1954), 13-30, repr. *Studies on*, IV; 'Constantine VII's Portrait of Michael III', *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique. Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, fifth series, 34 (1948), 71-77, repr. *Studies on*, I.

³⁸Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 96.

³⁹This *Vita Basilii* forms Book Five of the chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus (*TC*, 211-353).

⁴⁰*VB*, 211-212.

⁴¹See Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 31, n. 2.

⁴²For date and authorship see Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 10, 34-37.

⁴³Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 35.

marriage; it was concerned with the explaining of 'a situation that was not easy to explain' in the aftermath of Nikolaos's triumph as 'the champion of morality' in 920.⁴⁴ The *Life* is further limited by other factors. There are certain lacunas within the text; it is missing both its beginning and its end and there are three gaps in the middle. Thus, most importantly for us, it is missing an account of how Euthymios came into contact with the imperial family and became Leo's spiritual father, his role in the episode of Leo's imprisonment, and accounts of the death of Stylianos Zaoutzes, the coronation of Constantine VII, the death of Leo VI, the accession of Alexander I and the restoration of Nikolaos to the patriarchal throne.⁴⁵ I believe there is a further limitation to the *Life*, and that is its untrustworthiness when it comes to describing the deeds and characters of the two main opponents of Euthymios, Stylianos Zaoutzes and Nikolaos, a point I have already touched on above. For most the truthfulness of this source is unassailable; Karlin-Hayter notes that de Boor thought the *Life* to be so fair 'as to be magnanimous', whilst she herself describes it as 'remarkably truthful', and this despite her observation that it is 'essentially a skillful defense of Euthymius'.⁴⁶ It is all very well to point to the early date of the *Life* and the evident familiarity of the author with events and episodes from the reign, but this is hardly a guarantee of honesty. Karlin-Hayter's trust in the author led her to accept that Stylianos Zaoutzes was indeed an all-powerful force from the very beginning of Leo's reign, an allegation I aim to disprove, and which she herself was not entirely convinced by, for she notes that 'the *V. E.* certainly exaggerates Leo's non-participation' in the purge against Photios and his family in the opening stages of the reign, which the *Life* fully ascribes to Stylianos.⁴⁷ And as for the case of Nikolaos Karlin-Hayter believes the *Life* when it asserts that he was in league with the rebel general Andronikos Doukas, and that Doukas had already defected to the Arabs by Christmas 906 when Nikolaos was still patriarch, although both the Byzantine and Arab chronicles indicate that Doukas only defected after the fall of Nikolaos in February 907.⁴⁸ Indeed Karlin-Hayter is adamant that the chronology of the *Life* is always to be favoured over that of the Logothete chronicle, and this despite the fact that Jenkins demonstrated that the Logothete is chronologically accurate for the years 867-913.⁴⁹ Thus when it comes to the major sources for Leo's reign on the one hand we are faced with a hostile chronicle, whilst on the other we have a vivid but not unbiased saint's life, whose main preoccupation

⁴⁴Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 9.

⁴⁵Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 30-32.

⁴⁶Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 9.

⁴⁷Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 58.

⁴⁸Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 59-60.

⁴⁹See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La mort de Théophano (10. 11. 896 ou 895)', *BZ*, 62 (1969), 13-18, esp. 18-19, repr. *Studies in*, XI; Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy'.

is the tetragamy. It is this fact that accounts for the poor publicity that Leo VI and his reign have received. Yet as both Karlin-Hayter and Jenkins knew, this is not the whole picture. Jenkins observed that beyond the Logothete chronicle 'there is a cloud of other witness to the essential goodness of his [Leo VI] character and to the soundness of his policies', whilst Karlin-Hayter noted that there is 'a variety of other sources' that 'refuses to fit [the] picture' that is delineated by the two major sources.⁵⁰ It is to a consideration of these other key sources for the reign that I now wish to turn.

Several of the authors of sources that date to or concern the reign of Leo VI are actually officials who served the emperor, and many of them are well known for their own roles in Byzantine history. However the first author under examination was an emperor himself, Leo's own father Basil. There have come down to us two parainetic texts, that is addresses of advice, that are written as if from the emperor Basil I to his son and heir Leo VI.⁵¹ These texts owe much to previous examples of this genre such as Isocrates's *To Nicocles* and *To Demonicus*, but they are especially indebted to a sixth-century AD example, that of the parainesis of Agapetus, a deacon of Hagia Sophia, to the emperor Justinian I (527-565).⁵² Concerning the two paraineseis written to Leo it is important to be aware of several points. Firstly they were probably written between 879-883, after the death of Basil's eldest son and expected heir Constantine and before Leo's disgrace and imprisonment due to charges of intended patricide. Further Basil in fact may not be the actual author, and the patriarch Photios is the favourite candidate for this role. Thirdly we should not expect the texts to be concerned with concrete details of how to be a good emperor and govern well; we are strictly in the realms of ideology here, though sometimes we may suspect a certain phrase or comment to have particular relevance to political actualities. Despite this the texts do have value for our study of Leo's life and reign, for they are a particularly good barometer for the political atmosphere, and also ideology is a crucial factor to consider in the assessment of the reign of any emperor.

The next author that concerns us is Philotheos, who served the emperor as an *atriklines*, that is an official whose task was to organise imperial feasts and ensure that the correct order of precedence was observed with respect to the guests who

⁵⁰Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 198; Karlin-Hayter, *Studies in*, iii. See also Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 15.

⁵¹For these texts see *PG* 107, xxi-lx.

⁵²For Agapetus, his text, its connection with those of Basil I, and paraineseis in general see *PG* 86, 1163-1186; E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford, 1957), esp. 54-80; I. Sevckenko, 'Agapetus East and West: The Fate of a Byzantine "Mirror of Princes"', *RESEE*, 16 (1978), 3-44; P. Henry III, 'A Mirror for Justinian: The *Ekthesis* of Agapetus Diaconus', *GRBS*, 8 (1967), 281-308; I. Cicurov, 'Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit in den byzantinischen Fürstenspiegeln des 6.-9. Jahrhunderts', *Cupido*, 33-45.

were invited to these occasions. It was in this capacity that in September 899 Philotheos compiled the text known to us as the *Kletorologion*, a text that describes the order of precedence that was in use in the imperial palace in Constantinople at that time, and the various feasts that occurred throughout the course of the Byzantine calendar, with the stated object of creating a handbook for the members of Philotheos's own profession.⁵³ This text is the basic element in our understanding of the middle Byzantine imperial administrative system, particularly as it existed at an exact moment in time in the reign of Leo VI.⁵⁴ Yet the text also casts light on other aspects of the reign. For instance it amply testifies that the emperor was already renowned for his wisdom by this date, and also gives some indications why this was so; it reveals the changes that Leo VI made in certain ceremonies and in the order of precedence; it reveals the high proportion of feasts celebrated throughout the year that had as their focus the glorification of the Macedonian dynasty, but also suggests that the memory of Michael III was promoted; and it also casually indicates that the empress Zoe Zaoutzaina, Leo's second wife, was still alive in September 899. Thus this text has more interest than has perhaps been appreciated.

One of the most intriguing figures in the reign of Leo VI is Leo Choiosphaktes, a diplomat and relative of the emperor. His career was already in progress under Basil I, whom he served as *mystikos*, but it was under Leo that he came to particular prominence, as a successful ambassador to the courts of Bulgaria and Bagdad, as a suspected Hellene, and as a letter writer and poet.⁵⁵ Several of his letters from the course of his career have survived, together with some letters of those men he had contact with, and these letters give greater depth to certain episodes of the reign. For instance we have the correspondence between Choiosphaktes and the Bulgarian leader Symeon from the negotiations in the aftermath of the Byzantine defeat in 896; the letters between Choiosphaktes and his friends whilst he was still in Bagdad in 906 on a mission to conclude a peace between the Byzantines and the Arabs, but also to bring back writs of economy from the eastern patriarchs for the fourth marriage of the emperor; and finally the pleas for liberty Choiosphaktes sent to Leo VI after his exile towards the end of the reign. These letters contain a wealth of valuable details, such as the recognition of the emperor's skill in astronomy, the outcome of the embassies that Choiosphaktes was involved in, and some of the factors that led to his own fall and exile. A certain amount of Choiosphaktes's poetry has also survived, and this too adds greatly to our knowledge of Leo VI and his reign. For instance his poem for the occasion of

⁵³For Philotheos and his text see N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (Paris, 1972), esp. 65-235.

⁵⁴See J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (New York, 1958). orig. publ. London, 1911.

⁵⁵See G. Kolias, *Léon Choerosphactès magistre, proconsul et patrice* (Athens, 1939).

the unveiling of the palace bath built by the emperor has, thanks to the studies of Magdalino⁵⁶, revealed much of the further dimensions of the reign that we simply cannot get from our reading of the chronicles. Choiosphaktes also wrote poems on the occasion of one of the emperor's weddings, the coronation of Constantine VII, and the deaths of Leo the Philosopher, Photios, and the patriarch Stephen.⁵⁷

Arethas is also a key figure from the reign, as well as being an extremely important commentator upon it.⁵⁸ Originally from Patras it seems that Arethas came into contact with Leo through Basil I, who had a strong link with Patras through his Peloponnesian patroness Danelis. Throughout the reign, and beyond, he is found wearing many different hats, and his writings document them all. Before becoming archbishop of Caesarea he is found as the author of orations for certain court occasions in the years 901-902, and these orations are extremely important, for they represent the few panegyrics on Leo VI that we possess, and they also reflect key events such as the appointment of Nikolaos as patriarch in March 901, the translation of the relics of Lazaros to Constantinople by the emperor, and certain incidents in the field of foreign affairs.⁵⁹ However Arethas soon became an enemy of the emperor over the question of the fourth marriage, and he was in fact the leading figure amongst the opposition, and from this period in his career we have several of his letters voicing his disapproval.⁶⁰ Yet after the opposition lost the battle when the emperor won his economy from the pope and the eastern patriarchs in 907, Arethas was reconciled with those he once opposed, and in his writings from this phase he is found justifying his apparent change of side.⁶¹ It was during this period of realignment with the imperial will that Arethas composed a vicious assault upon the exiled Leo Choiosphaktes who had been writing to the emperor and trying to persuade him to liberate him. This tract was called *Choiosphaktes* or *Cheater-Hater* (Μισογόνης), an allusion to the *Beard-Hater* of Choiosphaktes's pagan literary hero the emperor Julian (361-363), and was designed to prevent the emperor

⁵⁶Magdalino, 'Bath'; 'Revisited'.

⁵⁷See T. Bergk, *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, III (Leipzig, 1882), 356-358; P. Matranga, *Anecdota Graeca*, II (Rome, 1850), 561-565; S. G. Mercati, 'Intorno all' autore del carne εις τα εν Πυθόοις θερμά', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 10 (1923-25), 212-248; Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, Appendice.

⁵⁸For Arethas's writings see *Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariensis Scripta Minora*, ed. L. G. Westerink, I (Leipzig, 1968); II (Leipzig, 1972).

⁵⁹For the orations and their importance see R. J. H. Jenkins with B. Laourdas and C. A. Mango, 'Nine Orations of Arethas from Cod. Marc. Gr. 524', *BZ*, 47 (1954), 1-40, repr. *Studies on*, VI. See also *ASM*, II, 1-48.

⁶⁰See R. J. H. Jenkins with B. Laourdas, 'Eight Letters of Arethas on the Fourth Marriage of Leo the Wise', *Hell*, 14 (1956), 293-372, repr. *Studies on*, VII; *ASM*, II, 49-112. Also of crucial importance for this period are the letters of Arethas's pupil and ally, Niketas David: see *ASM*, II, 149-174; L. G. Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian on the End of the World', *Essays in Memory of Basil Laourdas* (Thessalonica, 1975), 177-195, esp. 178-180, repr. *Texts and Studies in Neoplatonism and Byzantine Literature* (Amsterdam, 1980), 357-375, esp. 358-360.

⁶¹See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Vita S. Euthymii', Appendix, *Byz*, 25-27 (1955-1957), 747-778; 'New Arethas Texts for the Historical Study of the Vita Euthymii', *Byz*, 31 (1961), 273-307.

giving in to the exiled diplomat.⁶² It is a fascinating document, both for its brutal animosity and for what it reveals about the reasons for Choïrosphaktes's disgrace. His writings after the death of Leo VI are also of interest, for the effects of the tetragamy crisis continued to be felt, especially as Nikolaos had returned to the patriarchal throne and set about ousting those that had replaced him and his clergy. Again Arethas conducted a war of words.⁶³ During this phase he also wrote another pro-economy document, but in another format, and this is his funeral oration on Euthymios, who died in 917.⁶⁴ This text fills in some of the blanks of the *Life of Euthymios*, such as the early career of Euthymios, as well as further detailing the crimes of Nikolaos and Alexander. Certainly in the study of the reign of Leo VI an appreciation and knowledge of Arethas's writings plays a vital part, as Jenkins acknowledged, and as is clear from Dolley's erroneous conclusions based on his dating of the arrival of the relics of Lazaros in Byzantium, a dating that did not take into consideration the vital testimony of Arethas.⁶⁵

Another figure that features prominently in the tetragamy crisis is Nikolaos, who was patriarch from 901-907 and again from 912-925, and he too has left behind a corpus of letters and documents.⁶⁶ He was a friend of Leo from his youth, being his fellow student and spiritual brother, and he had a lengthy career under the emperor, becoming his *mystikos* near the start of the reign and then patriarch. Thus we could expect great things from his writings, but it is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of them, that is his letters, date from his career after Leo's death, and this fact has prompted the suggestion that his earlier letters may have been destroyed in the course of the dispute over the fourth marriage of the emperor.⁶⁷ However some of the surviving letters do refer back to events of Leo's reign, and of particular importance is one that was written soon after Nikolaos's return to the patriarchal throne in 912, in which he sets forth his version of the tetragamy affair to the pope.

⁶²See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas, Choïrosphaktes and the Saracen Vizir', *Byz*, 35 (1965), 455-481, esp. 468-481, repr. *Studies in*, IX; *ASM*, I, 200-212. It is interesting to note that Constantine the Rhodian also wrote a work reviling Leo Choïrosphaktes: see Matranga, *Anecdota*, II, 624-625; G. Downey, 'Constantine the Rhodian: His Life and Writings', *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of A. M. Friend* (Princeton, 1955), 212-221, esp. 213; Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 68-69.

⁶³See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'New Arethas Documents III', *Byz*, 32 (1962), 117-127; 'New Arethas Documents IV', *Byz*, 32 (1962), 387-487. P. Karlin-Hayter, 'New Arethas Documents V', *Byz*, 34 (1964), 49-67, Introduction repr. *Studies in*, VIII.

⁶⁴See *ASM*, I, 82-93; M. Jugie, 'Homélie mariales byzantines', *PO*, 16 (1922), 427-589, esp. 486-489; Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 592-593.

⁶⁵Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 226; Dolley, 'Translation'.

⁶⁶For Nikolaos and his writings see *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters*, R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, *DOT 2, CFHB 6* (Washington DC, 1973); *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople. Miscellaneous Writings*, Text and Translation by L. G. Westerink, *DOT 6, CFHB 20* (Washington DC, 1981).

⁶⁷*Nicholas. Letters*, xxx. It is a curious fact that none of Photios's letters date to the reign of Leo VI either, and further virtually none of the correspondence of the emperor himself has survived. Could the fire that broke out in the patriarchal archives at Hagia Sophia in 912, for which see *GMC*, 870-871, account for any of these important gaps?

In other letters Nikolaos alludes to military events and church affairs during the reign. Of the other writings of Nikolaos there are some that do date from the reign and have particular value for its study. For instance we have a homily on the fall of Thessalonica that he seems to have delivered shortly after this event, in which he is critical of the government's response throughout the events leading up to the disaster.⁶⁸ We also possess the list of precedence of the metropolitans and archbishops within the empire that he compiled between 901 and 904, which is naturally of interest.⁶⁹ Thus although we must regret the evident gap in Nikolaos's corpus of letters those works that he has left behind that do touch on the reign are of great value.

Yet we do not have to rely simply on the testimony of Leo's officials, for the emperor himself was a prolific writer as I have already indicated. It seems that Basil I was particularly keen that his offspring should benefit from the education that he had never received, and at one point Photios became tutor to the imperial children. Leo certainly exercised his pen in a broad range of fields; he wrote guides on military matters, compiled and produced collections of laws, wrote homilies, orations, hymns and poems, and also composed a guide on the spiritual life for monks.⁷⁰ Whilst all the examples of these works that survive are of relevance to our appreciation of Leo and his reign it is clear that amongst them several stand out as being of key importance. Those of his homilies and orations which have been recognised as being of particular historical interest are his funeral oration on his parents, his speech on the installation of his brother Stephen as patriarch, and his homily on the feast of Elijah, since the funeral oration delivered in 888 reveals Leo's public attitude to his Macedonian origins, the speech on Stephen's installation indicates that not everyone was happy with this appointment, and the Elijah homily revolves around his imprisonment in 883 and his release in 886, and reveals that Leo saw himself as deserving of his punishment. Of Leo's legal work his collection of Novels, that is new laws, is most significant for it reveals the emperor's own attitude to various issues, highlights points of ideology, and attests to the important position of Stylianos Zaoutzes during the early reign, for most of the Novels are addressed to

⁶⁸Another source that is of direct relevance to the fall of Thessalonica in 904 is the work of John Kaminiates: see *Ioannis Caminiatae De Expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ed. G. Böhlig, *CFHB 4* (Berlin, 1973). This source is one that Karlin-Hayter made much use of in her study of foreign affairs during Leo's reign, 'Military Affairs', yet it is problematic. Although it is written as if from the perspective of a figure who was present in the city when it fell and was then taken prisoner by the Arabs there is reason to believe that it was not actually written until the fifteenth century, though it may have been adapted from an account that was contemporary: see A. P. Kazhdan, 'Some Questions Addressed to the Scholars who Believe in the Authenticity of Kaminiates' "Capture of Thessalonica", *BZ*, 71 (1978), 301-314; V. Christides, 'Once Again Caminiates' "Capture of Thessaloniki", *BZ*, 74 (1981), 7-10. Given the dubious nature of this text I have preferred to rely on other more certain testimony in my examination of military affairs during the reign of Leo VI.

⁶⁹See J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris, 1981).

⁷⁰See n. 3 above, and Chapters Four and Six below.

him. Also of supreme importance is the *Taktika*, Leo's handbook on war for his generals. Although this work was based on previous manuals, especially that of the sixth-century *Strategikon*, it has much to offer to an appreciation of the emperor and his reign; it contains some references to episodes from the reign, reveals Leo's attitudes on several matters but most obviously that of war and the military situation during his reign, and above all proves that this was an emperor who was concerned about foreign affairs. As such it is of central importance to Chapter Six, and analysis and further discussion of the work will be found there.

As noted above it is a sad fact that Constantine VII never managed to produce or commission an account of his father's reign in the way that he had for that of his grandfather. However there are works of Constantine and his milieu surviving that do add to our knowledge of the life and deeds of Leo VI. The most significant of these must surely be the guide about foreign affairs that Constantine produced for his own son Romanos II between 948-952, the work known as the *De Administrando Imperio*.⁷¹ It is this text that is so vital in proving that Leo's military record is not quite as appalling as the Logothete makes out. Amongst the stories relating to military affairs in the west, north and east of the empire of Leo VI its information revealing the work he did in creating and reorganising themes and his intense diplomatic activity with Krikorikios of Taron, an Armenian leader, are of especial note. It also touches upon more domestic matters, containing episodes relating to two of Leo's chief aides, Samonas and Himerios, and detailing the building of two imperial galleys by the emperor. Constantine's *Book of Themes* is also of interest, since it too relates Leo's importance in the creation and development of some themes, and it also mentions people and episodes known from the reign.⁷² The *Book of Ceremonies* is naturally significant in that it records ceremonies that Leo was involved in, either as a participant or as an augments or creator.⁷³ It was in this work that Philotheos's *Kletorologion* was preserved, and it also reveals that Leo had commissioned Leo Katakalon to produce a work on imperial expeditions, which Constantine VII later found and exploited.⁷⁴ It records information on other military matters too, such as the Cretan expedition organised during Leo's reign. And although Leo did not get his own *Life*, he does feature in

⁷¹*Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio*, I, *Text and Translation*, Gy. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest, 1949); *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio*. II, *Commentary*, R. J. H. Jenkins (London, 1962).

⁷²See A. Pertusi, *Costantino Porfirogenito De Thematibus* (Vatican City, 1952); *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus*, III, *De Thematibus*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB (Bonn, 1840), 11-64.

⁷³*Constantinus Porphyrogenitus*, I, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. I. I. Reiske, CSHB (Bonn, 1829); A. Vogt, *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète. Le livre des cérémonies*, I, *Texte* (Paris, 1935); I, *Commentaire* (Paris, 1935); II, *Texte* (Paris, 1967); II, *Commentaire* (Paris, 1967).

⁷⁴For Constantine's use of the work of Katakalon see J. F. Haldon, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, CFHB 28 (Vienna, 1990).

that of Basil, as an imperial son and heir whose particular qualities were mildness and wisdom, depicted in mosaic and educated by Photios, as the client and heir of Basil's own Peloponnesian patroness Danelis, and above all as the innocent and passive victim of Basil's detested favourite Theodore Santabarenos.

For the reign of Leo VI the *Life of Euthymios* is not the sole hagiographical work to which we can make appeal, and it these others that I shall consider now. Undoubtedly the most significant is the *Life of Theophano*, the emperor's sainted first wife.⁷⁵ The author of this text, a friend of Theophano's family, describes not only the life and death of the empress, but is especially concerned to relate the benefits the saint brought to his family in the way of miraculous cures from their ills. What is most striking about this *Life* is that makes no mention of the tension between Leo and Theophano, and it is as Rydén observes 'a quite competent cover-up of sad historical facts'.⁷⁶ However its real interest lies in the information it has to offer about episodes in Leo's early life, such as his marriage to Theophano, his imprisonment and the circumstances of his release. And what is most remarkable about the text is that it preserves a positive image of Stylianos Zaoutzes, and thus would appear to date from the early part of the reign when Stylianos was still in Leo's good books, or at least that it has preserved an early version of the *Life*.

Most of the other existing *Lives* touch on Leo and his reign in a much less direct fashion. The *Life of Constantine the Jew* is of note since towards its end it includes an episode relating to Leo's imprisonment.⁷⁷ It records that Constantine, a converted Jew who became a monk and resided on Mount Olympos, happened to be paying a visit to Constantinople at the very time when Leo was languishing in prison under the threat of death. At this time Constantine predicted to those monks with whom he was staying that Leo would be released, accede to the throne on his father's death, and that his subjects would benefit from his rule.⁷⁸ What is striking about this episode is that it is described with such pro-Leo sentiment; again he is the innocent victim, again he is loved by the populace of Constantinople, and his future rule is described in approving terms, all of which inspires the conclusion that the author of the *Life* lived during Leo's reign.⁷⁹ The *Life* is further interesting as it mentions an episode where Leo's sister Anna consults Constantine.

⁷⁵E. Kurtz, 'Zwei Griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI', *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St-Pétersbourg*, eighth series, *Classe Historico-Philologique*, III/2 (1898), 1-65.

⁷⁶L. Rydén, 'New Forms of Hagiography: Heroes and Saints', *The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers* (Washington DC, 1986), 537-551. esp. 545-546.

⁷⁷AASS, Nov IV, 627-656.

⁷⁸The *Life* does not say that Constantine interceded with Basil for Leo's release as G. P. Majeska, 'The Body of St. Theophano the Empress and the Convent of St. Constantine', *BSI*, 38 (1977), 14-21, asserts. This undermines his argument that the monastery of St Constantine that Theophano built was to Constantine the Jew as a sign of her gratitude; there was no need for her to be grateful to this man.

⁷⁹Grégoire, 'Acta Sanctorum', 804-805. On the *Life* see also Rydén, 'Forms', 547.

Several episodes in the *Life of Blasios* also involve the emperor.⁸⁰ Blasios was a native of a suburb of Amorion, and had served in Constantinople as one of the patriarch Ignatios's clergy, before ending up in Rome via Bulgaria, where he stayed for eighteen years, only returning to Constantinople in the reign of Leo VI when Antony Kauleas was patriarch (893-901). He took up residence in the Studite monastery, where he was eventually buried and where his *Life* was written, probably around 930.⁸¹ Blasios's contact with the emperor began on his return to Constantinople, and the author of the *Life* reveals several interesting pieces of information when describing their relationship. He asserts that Leo was a customary calligrapher, that he had seen Blasios in a dream, and that he issued Blasios with a chrysobull protecting the rights of his monastery on Mount Athos. The *Life* is also of interest in what it reveals about other episodes and figures from the reign. It refers to a barbarian assault on Demetrias, it talks of the Studite monastery and its abbot Anatolios, and it also mentions the patriarch Antony Kauleas. All of these details make this text an important document for our study.

When it comes to the *Life of Theoktista*, the story of a woman taken prisoner from Lesbos by the Arabs in the early ninth century but who managed to escape on the island of Paros, we are fortunate to know the name of the author, Niketas the *magistros*, who is a familiar historical figure.⁸² He became the father-in-law of Romanos Lekapenos's son Christopher, and was subsequently exiled for urging this young man to oust his father and take power for himself. Niketas tells us that he heard the story about Theoktista during a stop off on the island of Paros during a diplomatic mission to Crete in the time of Leo VI. Beyond this mention of a mission, it is his comments about the details of his own life and his attitude to Leo's reign that are most significant. He asserts that he served his apprenticeship in the navy under the great Himerios, and that the fortunes of the Byzantine empire had died upon the demise of Leo VI. Such an attitude contrasts starkly with the gloomy vision of the Logothete, yet Niketas is not alone in his opinion, for the writer of a homily upon the peace concluded with the Bulgarian empire in 927 looks back upon Leo's reign as a golden age of peace and prosperity.⁸³

It is certainly notable that all the above *Lives*, just like that of Euthymios, convey an extremely positive image of Leo VI. The one exception to this rule is the conjectured *Life of Niketas David*, conjectured because this text only exists in

⁸⁰AASS, Nov IV, 656-669.

⁸¹Grégoire, 'Blaise', 413-414.

⁸²AASS, Nov IV, 221-233. See also Rydén, 'Forms', 546. For Niketas see L. G. Westerink, *Nicétas magistros. Lettres d'un exilé (928-946)* (Paris, 1973).

⁸³See R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Peace with Bulgaria (927) Celebrated by Theodore Daphnopates', *Polychronion. Festschrift Franz Dolger zum 75. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg, 1966), 287-303, repr. *Studies on*, XXI.

fragmentary form.⁸⁴ The evident hero of these fragments is the figure of Niketas, the one time pupil of Arethas and one of the most vociferous opponents of Leo's fourth marriage.⁸⁵ Thus it should be no surprise that in this text the emperor is portrayed as a sinning and savage tyrant, in the mould of iconoclastic persecutors and martyr-making governors. Here Leo is certainly not 'most wise', but in fact 'most lewd'. Yet the fragments are of undoubted interest when one gets beyond the stereotypes. We learn of Niketas's trials and imprisonment under Leo, but also of the emperor's concern for assuring the succession of his son Constantine porphyrogennitos, for it is alleged that Leo had intended to remove Alexander from the running and create Himerios *epitropos* for the imperial child.

In addition to these single *Lives* there are collections recording the feast days of various saints and events, where a small entry is usually also included giving details upon these subjects. The most notable of these is the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, which was probably compiled under the emperor Constantine VII. In this text we can find much information touching on the reign of Leo, such as details about his brother Stephen, the patriarch Antony Kauleas, the empress Theophano again, the eunuch Constantine, and the relics of Lazaros that were brought to Constantinople by Leo.⁸⁶ There is however one striking absence, that of Euthymios. Another curious feature is the episode that concerns the curing of the empress Zoe, Leo's second wife, by the laying on of the relic of the girdle of the Virgin, an episode that has particular chronological ramifications.⁸⁷

Turning now to non-Byzantine authors and texts there are several that deserve mention. Of these the most significant is the Arab chronicler Tabari.⁸⁸ Tabari, who died in 923, chronicled events from the beginning of the world down to 910 AD, and informs us of many military and diplomatic events that happened during Leo's lifetime. His testimony is certainly a much appreciated addition to what the Logothete has chosen to record. One other Arab historian worthy of

⁸⁴See B. Flusin, 'Un fragment inédit de la vie d'Euthyme le patriarche?', *TM*, 9 (1985), 119-131; 10 (1987), 233-260.

⁸⁵For Niketas see also Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian'. Niketas himself was an active literary figure during Leo's reign, and one of his most notable works is the *Life of Ignatios*, *PG* 105, 489-574. This *Life* is noted mainly for its hostility to Photios, but it also alludes to military failures and ecclesiastical scandals affecting the empire, and these are taken as references to the reign of Leo VI: see R. J. H. Jenkins, 'A Note on Nicetas David Paphlago and the *Vita Ignatii*', *DOP*, 19 (1965), 241-247, repr. *Studies on*, IX.

⁸⁶AASS, Propylaeum Novembris.

⁸⁷See Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 13-14. The episode also appears in the *Menologion of Basil II*, *PG* 117, 13-614, esp. 613, but most significantly in a homily of Euthymios, Leo's spiritual father. For this homily and Euthymios's other works see M. Jugie, 'Homélies mariales byzantines', *PO*, 16 (1922), 427-589, esp. 463-514; 19 (1925-26), 287-526, esp. 439-455.

⁸⁸See *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 1, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, tr. and ann. F. Rosenthal (New York, 1989); vol. 37, *The Abbasid Recovery*, tr. P. M. Fields, ann. J. Lassner (New York, 1987); vol. 38, *The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad*, tr. and ann. F. Rosenthal (New York, 1985). See also Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II. 2, 4-23.

specific mention is Masudi (896-956), who often has snippets of unique information to offer us on Byzantino-Arab affairs during Leo's reign, no doubt picked up during his wide ranging travels; it is known that he even met Leo of Tripoli in 921, a man who caused the Byzantines so much grief as an effective naval commander.⁸⁹

Of the western writers the one who has most to say about Leo is the famed Liudprand of Cremona, who seems to have picked up stories about this emperor during his diplomatic visits to the city of Constantinople, particularly that of 949 to the emperor Constantine VII.⁹⁰ From the pages of his *Antapodosis* Leo leaps out as a mischievous figure, suggesting that his behaviour evinced by his surprise visit to Psamatia recorded by the *Life of Euthymios* was more typical than we might otherwise guess. Liudprand also fascinates with his details on the Bulgar Symeon, Leo's archenemy.

Another foreign text that stands out as being particularly noteworthy, since it refers to Byzantium's relations with Russia during Leo's reign, is the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. This is a twelfth century document written in Slavonic, and here we read of the assault of Oleg the prince of Kiev upon the Constantinople of Leo VI in 907, and the treaties that resulted from this attack.⁹¹ Given the unusual nature of this text its evidence was once hotly debated and denied, but thanks to the work of Vasiliev it is now generally accepted that this information does have historical validity.⁹²

The above survey of sources has by no means been exhaustive, for I have sought simply to highlight those that are of especial significance for the study of the reign of Leo VI. Certainly beyond these major sources I have briefly described there is in addition a wealth of other items that have relevance and importance, such as letters, poems, inscriptions, seals, coins, documents, works of art, and incidental notes in other chronicles, histories and saints's *Lives*. Notice and discussion of these I have left to the main body of the thesis itself, the Chapters, where indeed those texts and authors already singled out for particular mention shall themselves receive further analysis. It is now time to turn to these very Chapters.

⁸⁹Masudi. *The Meadows of Gold. The Abbasids*, tr. P. Lunde and C. Stone (London, 1989); Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, esp. 31-43. For other pertinent Arab historians see Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2.

⁹⁰See *Die Werke Liudprand von Cremona*, ed. J. Becker, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* (Hanover and Leipzig, 1915).

⁹¹*The Russian Primary Chronicle*, tr. and edd. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, first edition (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1953).

⁹²See Vasiliev, 'Second Russian Attack'.

CHAPTER ONE

MACEDONIAN OR AMORIAN?

When the emperor Basil I died on 29 August 886 AD the continuation of the Macedonian dynasty was entrusted to his son Leo, together with his brother Alexander in the position of co-emperor. Basil had established his dynasty at the expense of the Amorian house, the caesar Bardas being murdered in 866, and the emperor Michael III in 867. Basil had originally intended to pass on imperial power to his eldest son Constantine, but had had to turn to his second son Leo upon the death of his heir-apparent in 879. As every Byzantinist knows the accession of Leo as the Macedonian heir is heavy with irony, for it is said that he was not the son of Basil, but of the assassinated Michael, since Basil's wife Eudokia Ingerina had been his mistress. Thus some historians of Byzantium have observed that in 886 the Amorian house regained the throne, and the Macedonian dynasty in reality died with Basil.¹ It has even been intimated that this taint of illegitimacy which affected Leo accounts for the hostile attitude Basil displayed towards him throughout his life.² The origin of these beliefs is the inescapable comment of the chroniclers who follow the Logothete that Leo, who was born in the autumn of 866, was the son of Michael and Eudokia.³ It is this statement that lies at the root of all debates over the parentage of Leo, debates which are concerned with either trying to prove the assertion or refute it.⁴ However recently a more interesting approach to the allegation has been pursued by Karlin-Hayter.⁵ She considers the rumour itself, addressing such questions as who circulated it, when and why. She notes that it is only the anti-Macedonian sources who give this item of information, believes that the rumour was current whilst Michael III still lived, and concludes that the story

¹This view has been most recently reasserted by P. Schreiner, 'Réflexions sur la famille impériale à Byzance (VIII^e-X^e siècles)', *Byz*, 61 (1991), 181-193, esp. 186. See also Vogt, *Basile*, 425.

²See for instance Runciman, *Romanus*, 40.

³*GMC*, 835; *LG*, 249; *Ps. Sym.*, 681. The exact date of Leo's birth is not agreed upon by the chroniclers. Whilst they concur about the year the Continuator of George the Monk states that Leo was born on 1 September, Pseudo-Symeon just says September, and Leo Grammaticus gives 1 December. Adontz, 'Portée', 504, notes that Leo himself in a homily on the rededication of the church of St Thomas, which had burnt down at the start of his reign, indicates that his birthday lay some days before the feast of St Thomas (which was celebrated on 6 October), and thus argued that Leo was born towards the end of September or the beginning of October. However Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 389-390, viewed such a conclusion as arbitrary, and maintained the dating of 1 September, pointing out that this is the date most strongly indicated by the chroniclers. Grumel, 'Notes de chronologie', 331-333, however pointed out that Leo says his birthday was on the dedication day itself, and as there is evidence that the encaenia day was celebrated on 19 September we are thus able to conclude that Leo was born on 19 September 866.

⁴See Mango, 'Eudocia'; Kislinger, 'Eudokia'; Toul, 'Νοθογενείας'.

⁵P. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'enjeu d'une rumeur. Opinion et imaginaire à Byzance au IX^e s.', *JÖB*, 41 (1991), 85-111.

was meant to humiliate Basil. She also notes that even if one could prove that either Basil or Michael was Leo's father this would only be a biological fact. Ultimately it is irrelevant who his father was, for what matters is how Basil and Michael treated Leo, and conversely how Leo treated them. Thus in this chapter it will not be my concern to add to the list of Byzantinists who have argued over the sterile 'Basil or Michael' question, but to examine the relationship between Basil and Leo to gain a more accurate view of their attitude towards one another, and ultimately I hope that this will tell us more about dynastic issues than any assertion about Leo's parentage.

Certainly studies on the problem of Leo's parentage in the past have not only been misguided, but the issue itself has been inadequately treated. It has rarely been noted that the allegation of illegitimacy is raised not only against Leo, but also against all of Basil's sons bar Alexander. This last son was spared as Michael could not possibly have been his father, for Alexander was born several years after Michael's death. The simple fact is that if a son was born to Basil that Michael could have fathered the chroniclers state that he had fathered it.⁶ It seems as if Byzantinists have been guilty of focusing the rumour too sharply upon Leo's head, for Basil's other sons Constantine and Stephen were also touched by it. Immediately then we are faced with the paradox that if Basil hated Leo because he suspected he was Michael's son, why then did he apparently love Constantine so much? Historians have answered this dilemma by ingeniously asserting that Constantine was not mothered by Eudokia, but was the product of the union of Basil and his first wife Maria, whom Michael had forced him to separate from in order to marry Eudokia.⁷ Therefore Basil loved Constantine because he was a genuine son. Constantine can thus be cleared of the smear whilst it has stuck to Leo. Yet can we maintain the argument that Constantine was a son by a previous marriage when no source exists stating that this is the case? As far as the chroniclers are concerned Constantine was a son of Michael, but evidence from elsewhere has been brought to bear on the issue. It is believed that Basil married Eudokia in 865, after Basil's promotion to the office of *parakoimomenos*. If Constantine was born of this marriage, it is argued, he could not possibly have been old enough to accompany Basil on his eastern campaign in 878, and so he must have been a child of the first marriage.⁸ We may however take issue with the date of Basil's marriage to Eudokia, which has been supplied by the regnal years that Pseudo-Symeon provides. The union is located in the tenth year of Michael's reign, which Pseudo-Symeon evidently begins with the removal of Theodora from the position of regent in 855.

⁶Although Stephen was born after the death of Michael it seems that Eudokia was pregnant with him at the time of Michael's murder: see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 99.

⁷See Adontz, 'Portée', 509. For Basil's separation from Maria see *GMC*, 828.

⁸For the campaign see *VB*, 278. For its date see Haldon, *Three Treatises*, 268-269.

Yet it seems that Pseudo-Symeon's indications of date have little validity, and have indeed been seen as worthless by Jenkins and Karlin-Hayter.⁹ It appears that all we know is that the marriage followed Basil's promotion to the office of *parakoimomenos*, an office which had become vacant on the fall from favour of Damianos.¹⁰ Damianos had been an ally of Bardas against the logothete of the drome Theoktistos, but their relationship had soured when Damianos refused to pay Bardas the honour due to him as caesar. It appears that Bardas became caesar on 12 April 864¹¹, and it seems reasonable to suppose that Damianos refused to honour Bardas soon after this elevation. Could Basil and Eudokia thus have been married earlier than has been supposed?¹² It should be noted that even the sequence of events as recorded by the Logothete for the reign of Michael III is open to doubt, and Jenkins has referred to its 'chronological incongruities'.¹³ In addition it seems likely that Basil entered into Michael's service around 857, and thus delaying the marriage to 865 begins to look peculiar.¹⁴ Michael himself had married Eudokia Dekapolitissa in 855¹⁵, and Leo VI in his *Epitaphios* on his parents is able to state that the union of Basil and Eudokia occurred not long after this.¹⁶ Thus there seems to be enough doubt concerning the date of the marriage of Eudokia and Basil to allow for Constantine to be old enough to go on campaign with his father. Yet, more fundamentally, is it really impossible that Constantine went on campaign at the age of thirteen or fourteen? Perhaps we should not be so hasty to reject such an occurrence. Leo VI himself in his *Taktika* advocates the training of sons of officials and soldiers by taking them on campaign, referring to these sons as 'noble whelps', a metaphor that Constantine VII uses of his uncle when relating his participation in the campaign of 878.¹⁷ Ultimately I can see no reason to believe that Constantine could not have gone on campaign as a boy of premarriageable age, and more importantly I believe that he was a son of Eudokia and not of Maria.¹⁸ For what it is

⁹See Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 91, n. 3; Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 17.

¹⁰For Damianos and his fall see *GMC*, 821-822; 827.

¹¹For this date which is gleaned from Italian testimony see E. Stein, 'Post-consulat et ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙΑ', *Mélanges Bidez, Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales*, 2 (1934), 869-912, esp. 899-900, n. 2; C. Mango, 'When was Michael III Born?', *DOP*, 21 (1967), 253-258, esp. 256, n. 17, repr. *Image*, XIV. Bury, *Eastern Roman Empire*, 161, n. 5, taking the year supplied by Genesios and the day by Pseudo-Symeon placed Bardas's elevation to the honour of caesar on the sunday after Easter in 862.

¹²Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 391, does note that the date of the marriage of Basil and Eudokia is uncertain.

¹³Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 95. See also the comments of Mango, 'Born', 253.

¹⁴For the date of Basil's entry into Michael's service see N. Adontz, 'L'âge et l'origine de l'empereur Basile I (867-886)', *Byz.* 8 (1933), 495-500, esp. 493.

¹⁵See Mango, 'Eudocia', 19.

¹⁶Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 54, 6-9. Of course it is unwise to attach chronological significance to such an expression in rhetoric.

¹⁷*PG* 107, 1072-1073, 20. 214; *VB*, 278.

worth pro-Macedonian authors such as Leo VI, Constantine VII, and Genesios do not even mention Maria's existence. Constantine treats all his aunts and uncles as children of Basil and Eudokia, whilst Leo goes so far as to say that Eudokia and Basil had not been married before their union with each other.¹⁹ Thus we are left with the paradox that although Constantine and Leo could both be suspected of being sons of Michael, Basil was apparently able to love Constantine and hate Leo. It seems that we should have different criteria to explain Basil's attitude towards Leo²⁰, but more fundamentally than this, we must reconsider the nature of their relationship.

Before examining Basil's attitude towards Leo, we must address the theory proposed by Mango that Michael III himself considered Leo to be his son.²¹ He proposes that when Eudokia became pregnant in 866 Michael wanted to secure this child as his heir, for he had had no children by his wife Eudokia Dekapolitissa. Michael sought to make Leo an imperial child by forcing Basil and Eudokia to marry, and then taking Basil as his co-emperor in May 866 (which had necessitated the death of Bardas in April 866), before the birth of the bastard child. Mango points out that the chroniclers record under the same entry as the birth of Leo the fact that Michael held chariot races at the palace of St Mamas, and he views these as celebrations to mark the birth of Michael's son. The advent of Leo then also explains why Michael and Basil fell out; Basil had become dispensable. But can this theory hold water? It seems to be too far fetched, to have too many holes. Why would Michael go to such convoluted lengths to acquire an heir? Could he not have adopted Eudokia's child when it was born? How did he know it was going to a male child anyway? Surely he would have waited to see what sex the child was before he undertook any action, for a female child would have been worthless. Is this theory sufficient to account for the liquidation of Bardas? It seems that others wished to remove the caesar for reasons of their own, and Michael himself may simply have felt that his uncle was beginning to threaten his own position. Were the chariot races really to celebrate Leo's birth? We can certainly argue that the races took place long

¹⁸As noted by Kislinger, 'Eudokia', 129, there is no indication that Constantine ever married. As most boys could expect to be married once they reached the age of fifteen it must be wondered if Constantine ever reached this age. This could indicate that he was born in 864 at the earliest. Adontz, 'Portée', 509, argued that Constantine must have been born around 855 since his marriage to the daughter of the western emperor Louis was arranged in 870 or 871, but it seems more likely that this was a case of an engagement between children.

¹⁹VB, 333; 335; Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 54, 9-11. We may of course doubt their testimony given their obvious bias.

²⁰As Toynbee, *Constantine*, 595, so shrewdly states 'Parents do sometimes have different feelings towards sons who are each other's full brothers...A difference of character and temperament is as likely as a difference of mothers to account for Basil's partiality for Constantine and aversion from Leo'.

²¹Mango, 'Eudocia', 24.

after the birth of Leo, for they witness Michael's threat to replace Basil.²² If they had occurred in the autumn of 866 would we really expect Basil to wait a year before striking down the fickle emperor? More telling than these is our conclusion that Constantine was also a son of Eudokia, a fact the anti-Macedonian chroniclers take for granted. Why then should Michael attach so much importance to the birth of Leo, if Constantine could have been his child also? Therefore we conclude that Michael was not concerned about having an heir, but about taking a new favourite to replace Basil, Basiliskianos.²³ What Michael was preoccupied with in 866-7 was his co-emperor, not the son of his co-emperor. Thus there seems to be no evidence that Michael viewed Leo in a paternal light, and this in itself is telling.²⁴ Having dealt with Michael's supposed views on Leo we need now to begin our examination of how Basil treated his second son.

Basil I came to imperial dominance with the murder of Michael III at the palace of St Mamas in 867 on the night of 23 September. The Amorian house that had been established by Michael II in 820 was replaced by the Macedonian dynasty. The securing of this dynasty lay in the effective rule of Basil and the nomination of his sons as imperial colleagues and heirs. Constantine VII was in no doubt about the strong dynastic base that Basil sought to establish, for he records that when Basil processed to Hagia Sophia on his accession he was followed by a chariot which transported Eudokia with their two sons Constantine and Leo.²⁵ Constantine also records the coronation of Constantine and Leo, an event by which Basil, he says, wanted to forestall any revolts by establishing a strong dynasty.²⁶ However we may suspect that Constantine has simplified and idealised the early history of Constantine and Leo, for no other source tells us of the accession ceremony or the joint coronation. It appears that Constantine was crowned in 868, whilst Leo may have been crowned in 870 at the time of the feast of Epiphany, for he appears in the records of the session of the anti-Photian council dated 12 February 870 as commencing the first year of his reign.²⁷ Thus although Constantine may have distorted the early imperial career of his father his point holds true; Basil did associate his two eldest sons in imperial power at an early stage and from an early

²²See Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 392.

²³*GMC*, 835.

²⁴Also we should not forget the belief of some Byzantinists that Michael was in fact sterile: see Adontz, 'Portée', 510; Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 198-199.

²⁵*VB*, 256.

²⁶*VB*, 264.

²⁷See Stein, 'Post-consulat', 898, n. 2; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 401-402. Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 401, n. 1, observes that 'Il n'est pas absolument sûr que le couronnement de Léon ait eu lieu le 6 janvier. Il a pu l'être quelques jours auparavant, le jour de Noël. Une seule chose est certaine, d'après l'indiction fournie par les actes du Concile de 869-870, c'est que le couronnement de Léon eut lieu au début de la IIIe indiction'.

age. So far we can detect no anti-Leo sentiment on the part of Basil, and indeed he seems to treat him as a genuine son.

This impression finds confirmation in the recording of a little met ceremony in Constantine VII's *Book of Ceremonies*.²⁸ The ceremony is entitled *All that must be observed at the koureuma of a child of the emperor*, and forms part of a sequence of ceremonies relating to the birth and baptism of imperial children. A general description of the ceremony is given, and then the specific case of Leo is recorded. This rite served to create ties of spiritual or artificial kinship between the imperial child and those who acted as sponsors (*anadochoi*), the same term used of baptismal sponsors.²⁹ The ceremony was centred on the oratory of St Theodore adjacent to the Chrysotriklinos, and here the patriarch would clip the child's hair, and then present some of it to each of the sponsors who were queuing up. Vogt appears to be the only Byzantinist who has commented upon this event of Leo's early life.³⁰ Initially he viewed it in a negative light, seeing it as an attempt by Basil to disqualify Leo from imperial power as he was not a son of his. Referring to what he describes as Leo's tonsure he states that 'L' Empereur [Basil] espérait, sans doute, empêcher par là cet importun de revendiquer jamais son droit à l' héritage paternel'.³¹ However Vogt came to change his views on the import of this rite completely, apparently affected by the publication of Leo's *Epitaphios* on his parents. No longer does he see the ceremony as an attempt to bar Leo from the throne, but as a public recognition by Basil that Leo was indeed his son.³² It seems that Vogt was initially distracted by the idea that the hairclipping signified a tonsure with all its usual implications, and only later realised that the ceremony was about creating ties not only with the clergy but most importantly with those acting as the sponsors. In Leo's case those receiving his hair are identified as Leo Krateros the *strategos* of the Anatolikon theme, together with his theme officials, and also an unnamed *strategos* of the theme of Cappadocia with his staff.³³ It is unclear as to why Basil should have wanted to create spiritual ties between Leo and these men, but it seems certain that we should view the ceremony in a positive light as Vogt came to do, though there is no need to accept his view that Basil was making an

²⁸*De Cer.*, 620-622.

²⁹For baptismal sponsorship see R. Macrides, 'The Byzantine Godfather', *BMGS*, 11 (1987), 139-162.

³⁰But see also M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 234.

³¹Vogt, *Basile*, 59.

³²Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 397-399.

³³Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 398, thought that the text was corrupt and concluded that the Anatolikon *strategos* was simply Leo, whilst the Cappadocian *strategos* was Krateros. At the start of Leo's reign we find a Krateros as one of the judges in the trial of Photios: see *TC*, 355.

explicit public statement about the parentage of Leo; rather, it is implicit, revealing that Basil did indeed look upon him as a genuine son.

What is less clear is the dating of this ceremony. What age was Leo at the time? Vogt certainly places the event early in Leo's life, before the coronation of 870. In his commentary on this ceremony Reiske opined that the hairclipping occurred on the eighth day after baptism, citing Goar's *Euchologion*.³⁴ However the description of the ceremony indicates that Basil was sole emperor when the clipping took place, so it cannot have occurred on the eighth day after Leo's baptism as Michael would still have been the emperor. Unfortunately we know of no other examples in Greek Byzantine sources, though a similar event is recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis*.³⁵ Here we are told that Constantine IV (668-685) sent locks of the hair of his sons Justinian and Heraclius to the newly appointed pope Benedict II and the clergy and army of Rome.³⁶ Since Benedict became pope in 684 we can deduce that Justinian must have been about 16 years old when his hair was sent to Rome.³⁷ As for Heraclius the date of his birth appears to be unknown. Of course we cannot say if this incident was typical, but at least it indicates that we should not automatically think that the clipping of Leo's hair occurred when he was still a child. Perhaps the term *koureuma* indicates that this was a ceremony that occurred when imperial children came of age, but without other examples we are at a disadvantage. Nevertheless we can conclude that whenever this rite occurred it reveals that Leo was not being discriminated against, but was in fact being designated as a genuine imperial child whose welfare Basil was concerned for.

So far it appears that Basil was content to recognise Leo as an imperial son, although it was clearly the eldest son Constantine that he regarded as the heir apparent. Further confirmation of this view is granted when the birth of Alexander in c. 870 is considered.³⁸ Although the chroniclers record that Alexander was the first genuine son of Basil this supposed fact seems to have had no effect on the emperor. He does not cast Constantine or Leo aside in favour of the new boy, but maintains them in their established positions. If Basil had any grounds to suspect

³⁴*Constantine Porphyrogenitos, II, De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae, Commentary*, I. I. Reiske, CSHB (Bonn, 1830), 731.

³⁵I am indebted to Ruth Macrides for this reference, and for her assistance in clarifying the meaning of this rarely encountered rite. Did the rite have pagan origins? P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, tr. B. A. Archer (Cambridge, 1990), 43, talking of the Christians who suffered during the reign of Julian (361-363) mentions a certain Diodoros 'in charge of the construction of a church, who ordered that the long curls of little boys be cut so that later the family would be unable to consecrate them at the sacred festival marking the end of childhood'.

³⁶*The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis), Translated with an Introduction*, R. Davis (Liverpool, 1989), 79.

³⁷Ostrogorsky, *State*, 129, indicates that Justinian II was born c. 669.

³⁸*GMC*, 841. For the date of Alexander's birth see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 97; Adontz, 'Portée', 506.

that Constantine or Leo were sons of Michael he does not seem to have been bothered about it. It appears that Alexander was only crowned after the death of Constantine in 879, suggesting that Basil had been content with his two co-emperors. Stephen, who was born and baptised in 867, also did not have an imperial role, being destined for a career in the church.³⁹ Thus the advent of a new male child did not upset the *status quo*, which was only altered with the death of the heir apparent in 879.

The impression that family relations were settled and regular throughout the 870s finds ample support in our sources. It was probably within this period that Basil undertook the construction and decoration of the imperial apartment known as the Kainourgion, which has been documented by Constantine VII in his account of the building achievements of his grandfather.⁴⁰ In a chamber off the central space of the apartment there was put up a mosaic celebrating the Macedonian dynasty. Basil and Eudokia were depicted enthroned, wearing their imperial regalia, and round the building were also represented the 'children they had in common'. Both the male and female children were included in the mosaic, 'adorned with imperial vestments and crowns'. A further mosaic depicted the entire family again, this time venerating the cross, the parents uttering a prayer of thanks for their children, and the children a prayer for their parents. These mosaics present a strong image of family unity and solidarity, an image of a righteous and God-appointed dynasty. They are undoubtedly propagandistic, but reveal to us exactly how Basil wished his family to be seen.⁴¹

In commenting upon these mosaics Constantine made much of Basil's desire to educate his children, and indeed we know that to this end he appointed as their tutor one of the most famous intellectuals of the day, Photios.⁴² However it is often observed that this teaching post cannot have lasted long, for soon after Photios's rehabilitation with the Macedonian court in the early 870s he was again back in his old job as patriarch, following the death of Ignatios in 877. Stephen seems to have had a longer tutelage with Photios than his brothers, for the old intellectual was

³⁹For Stephen's baptism see *GMC*, 840. He was baptised in Hagia Sophia on Christmas day, and he journeyed back to the palace in a chariot drawn by white horses, the *praipositos* Baanes holding him whilst Basil distributed consular largesse. This ceremony clearly shows Basil glorifying in the birth and baptism of Stephen, so once again we are led to conclude that Basil was not publicly concerned about the rumoured parentage of his sons. Thus we should not see Stephen's dedication to the church as an indication of his supposed Amorian origin, but as a brilliant political ploy of Basil to make use of a spare son, perhaps in the thought that one day this son would secure the patriarchate.

⁴⁰*VB*, 331-335. This section has been translated by C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972), 196-8.

⁴¹How did reality live up to the image? Whilst I have no doubt that the origins of Basil's sons was not a burning issue, we should remember that all was not so smooth. Basil's daughters seem to have been confined to life in a monastery, whilst Eudokia was said to have had an affair with the master of the augusta's table, Niketas Xylinites; see *VB*, 280; *GMC*, 843.

⁴²*VB*, 276-277.

entrusted with his clerical training, and Stephen ended up as Photios's *synkellos* by the time of Basil's death.⁴³

Further evidence of Basil's concern for his sons can be reflected in those relationships that the emperor formed for his children. Photios was not only the teacher of Basil's children, he was also a godfather to one of the sons.⁴⁴ The question of which son is debatable, for it could be either Constantine or Leo. We can deduce this from the fact that it is in a letter to Basil during his first exile at Skepi that Photios alludes to the spiritual relationship.⁴⁵ Since Basil quickly removed Photios from the patriarchate on his accession to power after the death of Michael we can assert that both Stephen and Alexander are ruled out as candidates. Leo was the first child of Basil that could claim to be purpleborn since Basil only acquired an imperial role in the May before Leo's birth in the autumn of the same year, so perhaps this makes him a more likely candidate than Constantine. We certainly know that a relative of Photios's, Nikolaos, was a spiritual brother of Leo, and they are also described as 'fellow students'.⁴⁶ It has been postulated that they were fellow students by virtue of the fact that they were both taught by Photios, and despite their age difference it seems clear that they were taught at the same time, for Leo asserts that he knew Nikolaos's character well from their time as students together.⁴⁷ Presumably it was Basil as father of Leo who had the power to form this tie of spiritual kinship, just as Danelis had united her son John with Basil at Patras in the Peloponnese.⁴⁸ Photios may also have exerted himself to bring about this spiritual relationship, aware of the benefits of attaching his relative to a son of the emperor.

Another key relationship that was formed in Leo's youth was that with the monk Euthymios, with whom Leo had a love-hate relationship throughout his life. Euthymios had the role of Leo's spiritual father, which seems to mean that he acted as his religious mentor, his moral conscience.⁴⁹ When we first encounter Euthymios

⁴³*GMC*, 848-849.

⁴⁴See Macrides, 'Godfather', 158.

⁴⁵See *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, I, edd. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink (Leipzig, 1983), 133. 2-7; D. S. White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople* (Brookline, Massachusetts, 1981), 164.

⁴⁶*VE*, 11. 30. R. J. H. Jenkins, 'A Note on the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 2 (1963), 145-147, repr. *Studies on*, V, proposed that Nikolaos was in fact not a relative of Photios's but a servant from Italy, but this theory has been contradicted by Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 163.

⁴⁷Jenkins, 'Nicholas Mysticus', 145, states that Nikolaos was born in 852. Perhaps we should imagine a teaching situation like that which Photios held at his house before becoming patriarch, where all level of students met together: see Lemerle, *Humanism*, 229-230.

⁴⁸*VB*, 228. For spiritual kinship in general see E. Patlagean, 'Christianisation et parentés rituelles: le domaine de Byzance', *ESC*, 33 (1978), 625-636, repr. *Structures, sociales, famille, chrétienté à Byzance IV^e-XI^e siècle* (London, 1981), XII.

⁴⁹On spiritual fatherhood see H. J. M. Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood* (Leiden, 1990), esp. 52-58.

in his *Life* he already has this function, and it clearly predated Leo's imprisonment in 883. Euthymios had come to be based at the monastery of St Theodore outside Constantinople, having arrived here after stints on Mount Olympos and a monastery near Nikomedeia facing the gulf of Astakenos.⁵⁰ It seems most likely that it was Basil who formed the relationship between Leo and Euthymios, probably at some stage when Ignatios was holding the office of patriarch for the second time (867-877), for Euthymios alludes to Ignatios as his master.⁵¹ Euthymios may indeed have been spiritual father to all Basil's children, for the *Life* indicates that Stephen looked upon Euthymios in the same way that Leo did.⁵² We cannot be certain about his relationship with Constantine or Alexander, though he does argue Alexander's case against Leo, after the emperor had separated his brother from his wife.⁵³

A further relationship that was created by Basil for Leo was that with the future archbishop of Caesarea, Arethas. Arethas himself describes his relationship with the emperor Leo as one that was not 'of recent growth or freshly planted in friendship's soil, but old-established, of his father's planting'.⁵⁴ It may be conjectured that Arethas had made the acquaintance of Basil in his home town of Patras when the future emperor visited the Peloponnese, at the time of his famous meeting with Danelis. It seems then that Basil acted as a patron of Arethas at Constantinople, and thought it appropriate that Leo and Arethas, both evident bibliophiles, should share each other's company; perhaps a threesome was formed with Nikolaos, for he also became a friend of Arethas.⁵⁵

Another friendship that may have been fostered by Basil for his son was that with the *oikonomos* of the monastery at Pege, Matthew. We learn about this man in a fourteenth-century text relating the miracles connected with the churches of the Theotokos at Pege, which forms an appendix to the *Life of Euphrosyne the Younger* written by Nikephoros Kallistos.⁵⁶ A chapter of the account relates how Matthew was exiled to a monastery in Chrysopolis by Basil on the basis of some slander. However the Theotokos came in a dream to both the abbot of the monastery and to Basil, and subsequently Matthew was restored, and then became a friend of the emperor and those in the palace, and ended up as an intimate of the emperor Leo.

Thus there seems to be significant testimony to the fact that throughout Leo's early life Basil was actively concerned for his educational, spiritual, intellectual and political welfare. These are hardly the acts of a man viewing a child

⁵⁰See ASM, I. 84. 28 - 85. 1; Jugie, 'Homélie mariales', I, 464-465.

⁵¹VE, 135. 33-34.

⁵²VE, 23. 2.

⁵³VE, 55. 20-26

⁵⁴See ASM, I. 14. 28-31; Karlin-Hayter, 'Historical Study', 300-301.

⁵⁵See Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 341.

⁵⁶See *De sacris aedibus deque miraculis Deiparae ad Fontem*, AASS, Nov III, 883-884.

as a cuckoo in his nest, and we are compelled to take the view that Basil treated Leo favourably. This view is confirmed by the events that ensued after the sudden death of the heir apparent Constantine in 879.

As far as Basil was concerned, it was his son Constantine that was bound to succeed him as emperor after his death. Leo may have had a share in the imperial position, but it was Constantine who was to reign. If Constantine had succeeded his father, we can imagine that Leo would have remained as insubstantial a figure under Constantine as Alexander under Leo. It was Constantine that Basil had taken on campaign to Syria, to train him up to the life of a military emperor⁵⁷; it was Constantine who had shared in the triumph that was celebrated in Constantinople in 878 on the return from Syria.⁵⁸ Thus when Constantine succumbed to a fever on 3 September 879 Basil's plans and expectations were shattered.⁵⁹ Some historians, both Byzantine and modern, believe that the death of Constantine had a devastating effect upon Basil. The Byzantine proponents of this view are the anti-Macedonian chroniclers, and Jenkins subscribed to their interpretation, pushing it to the conclusion that Basil went mad.⁶⁰ Basil is portrayed as giving in to his grief at the loss of Constantine, succumbing to the evil influences of those nearest to him, Photios and Theodore Santabarenos. Basil's excessive sorrow has been taken as confirmation of the belief that Constantine was the favourite of his sons, for only the death of such a favourite could produce such depression. Yet perhaps both these stances need to be reconsidered.

Certainly Constantine is referred to in the sources as the beloved son of Basil, but then again Leo can also be described so, for instance in the acrostic of Basil's *First Parainesis*. Yet the sources do rightly stress that Constantine was Basil's first born son, and this may explain his grief better. We can understand his sheer shock at losing his eldest child, whom he had so carefully reared and confidently expected to be his heir. Basil's actions upon Constantine's death do reveal that he had held Constantine in esteem, but this does not mean he did not esteem his other children also. It was at this time that the mausoleum of Constantine the Great which was attached to the church of the Holy Apostles was revived as the burial site of the imperial family, and it became the tomb of the Macedonian

⁵⁷VB, 278.

⁵⁸See Haldon, *Three Treatises*, 140-147. Haldon translates here Constantine VII's 'Record of the victorious return of the Christ-loving emperor Basil from campaign in the regions of Tephrike and Germanikeia'.

⁵⁹VB, 345; GMC, 844. For the date see F. Halkin, 'Trois dates historiques précisées grâce au Synaxaire', *Byz*, 24 (1954), 7-17, esp. 14-17.

⁶⁰Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 195-197. Naturally, the pro-Macedonian sources do not subscribe to this view. Constantine VII, VB, 345-346, says that Basil was able to control his grief manfully, inspired by the example of Job.

dynasty.⁶¹ Basil also honoured Constantine's memory by creating him a saint through the co-operation of the patriarch Photios⁶², and the memory of a Constantine the New recorded in the *Synaxarion* would seem to confirm this.⁶³ In the *Life of Ignatios* Basil is credited with building churches and monasteries dedicated to this son, and the chronicles record that one monastery was built upon the site where Theodore Santabarenos had conjured up a phantasm of Constantine for Basil.⁶⁴ It has even been argued that the period of mourning for Constantine was six months, from 3 September 879 to 3 March 880.⁶⁵ We may also note that the surviving coinage from Basil's reign does reveal a marked concentration upon Constantine, and Grierson argues that certain coins seem to be commemorative issues for Constantine.⁶⁶ We can certainly see that the death of Constantine did have an effect upon his father, and we would expect as much, but again I would stress the vital factor as being the destruction of Basil's expectations. We should surely be wary of following Jenkins who opines that 'Basil went out of his mind, and continued during the next seven years to be subject to fits of derangement', and we shall see below that Jenkins is far too easily led to the corollary view that the 'disappointed father Basil, who had never cared for him [Leo], now developed a violent dislike of the bookish youth, and treated him with brutality and contempt'.⁶⁷

Despite the setback of Constantine's death the Macedonian dynasty did not grind to a halt, and Leo became central to its survival, for he was now heir apparent.⁶⁸ Along with the promotion of Leo there are other signs that Basil had not lost his dynastic marbles. It was on 1 May 880 that his greatest ecclesiastical construction was ceremoniously opened, the New Church.⁶⁹ Amongst the heavenly figures to whom this church was dedicated were included two of particular significance, the archangel Gabriel and the prophet Elijah. It was the latter who had foretold the rise of Basil to imperial power, and was thus held in especial honour by the Macedonian dynasty.⁷⁰ Another item of art produced at this time reveals that the Macedonian dynasty and its ideology were still flourishing, and this is the illustrated

⁶¹P. Grierson, 'The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042)', With an additional note by Cyril Mango and Ihor Sevckenko, *DOP*, 16 (1962), 3-63. Constantine's mausoleum had last been used in 518 for the burial of Anastasios I.

⁶²*PG* 105, 573.

⁶³See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Quel est l'empereur Constantin le nouveau commémoré dans le Synaxaire au 3 septembre?', *Byz*, 36 (1966), 624-626.

⁶⁴*PG* 105, 573; *GMC*, 845-846.

⁶⁵See Halkin, 'Trois dates', 16. However the dating of the sixth session of the Photian council to 3 March is not certain: see V. Grumel, 'La VIe session du concile photien de 879-880. A propos de la mémoire liturgique, le 3 septembre, de l'empereur Constantin le nouveau', *AB*, 85 (1967), 336-337.

⁶⁶P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (London, 1982), 179.

⁶⁷Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 195-197.

⁶⁸Perhaps the hairclipping rite occurred at this juncture.

⁶⁹See P. Magdalino, 'Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I', *JÖB*, 37 (1987), 51-64.

⁷⁰*VB*, 222.

manuscript of the homilies of Gregory Nazianzus.⁷¹ The illustrations in the manuscript include portraits of certain members of the dynasty. In one image Basil, dressed in imperial regalia, is shown being handed the labarum by Elijah on his right, and being crowned by Gabriel on his left. Another image shows the empress Eudokia flanked by two sons, Leo on her right, in the position of greater distinction, and Alexander on her left.⁷² Thus these works of art testify to the continuation of the dynasty and its ideology in vigour.

It seems credible that we can date to the period of Leo's rise to the position of heir apparent the *First Parainesis* that was written to him as if from Basil. Like its sixth-century model, the *Ekthesis* of Agapetus, the work is divided into distinct chapters, having sixty-six compared to Agapetus's seventy-two. The acrostic device used by Agapetus, whereby the initial letters of each chapter form a phrase, is also employed by Basil, spelling out the message *Basil emperor of the Romans in Christ for his beloved son and co-emperor Leo*. The work treats Leo as the heir apparent, and is concerned to instruct him how to be a good emperor, how he must act, what his priorities should be and ultimately how he will achieve the immortal empire after having presided over the mortal one. This is no practical handbook on how to rule the empire, but a highly moralistic, ideological and idealistic work, as we would expect from this genre of writing. The over-riding theme of the work is that of mortality and immortality, in contrast to Agapetus's theme of philanthropy.⁷³ This work has obvious significance for our study of Basil's attitude to Leo, for it indicates that the emperor, whether he wrote the parainesis or not, was content to publicly acknowledge Leo as his beloved son and successor. Indeed Vogt, believing in the view that Basil and Leo were not on good terms, was so confounded by this obvious indication that he was led to the conclusion that Leo had forged the parainesis himself.⁷⁴ He found it suspicious that the parainesis indicates Leo as Basil's sole heir, for he expected that Alexander should have been addressed also. In addition he pointed to parallels between the parainesis and Leo's *Epitaphios* on his parents, taking this as an indication that Leo was the author of both works. But Vogt was needlessly puzzled. Alexander is not alluded to as to all intents and purposes Leo was the heir, just as Constantine had been before. The similarities between the

⁷¹See S. der Nersessian, 'The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus Paris GR. 510. A Study of the Connections between Text and Images', *DOP*, 16 (1962), 175-228. The manuscript is believed to have been a gift to Basil from Photios: see L. Brubaker, 'Politics, Patronage, and Art in Ninth-Century Byzantium: The *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B. N. GR. 510)', *DOP*, 39 (1985), 1-13.

⁷²See H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1929), Section III; I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The Portraits of Basil I in Paris gr. 510 (With Two Plates)', *JÖB*, 27 (1978), 19-24.

⁷³For the identification of the theme of philanthropy in Agapetus see Henry, 'Mirror', 300. Could the theme of Basil's work have been inspired by the recent tragedy of Constantine's death?

⁷⁴Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 408-410.

two texts are due not to the fact that they share the same author, but that they share similar themes; the *First Parainesis* is a guide on how to be a good emperor, the *Epitaphios* is an account of how someone had been a good emperor. We may also consider the point that it was perfectly possible for Leo to be addressed as 'beloved' even if this was not the case in reality; such an expression is surely inherent in the genre. Vogt's views are however a poignant reminder that accepted perceptions about the relationship between Leo and Basil have affected the reading of the evidence to a drastic degree.

Whilst Basil was thus preparing Leo mentally for his eventual succession, he was also concerned with the physical necessities of the future emperor. The death of Constantine had brought it home to Basil that the survival of his children could not be taken for granted. The family needed to be expanded and secured through marriage; the birth of grandsons was required to maintain the dynasty in the future. Thus at some date between the death of Constantine and at least nine months before Leo's imprisonment in the summer of 883, probably in 882⁷⁵, the marriage of Leo to Theophano was arranged and accomplished.⁷⁶ Taken with the evidence of the *First Parainesis* this union confirms the belief that Basil was content to have Leo as his heir, and makes a mockery of the contention that Basil was merely biding his time until he could put Alexander on the throne.⁷⁷ There is absolutely no indication that Basil had any reservations concerning Leo's suitability as his destined successor. The marriage rather confirms that Basil had placed the future of the dynasty in Leo's hands. When the empress Eudokia died it was Leo's wife Theophano who stepped into her shoes and became the *augusta*⁷⁸; all indications were that Leo would in like manner become *augustus* on Basil's death. And yet the marriage does mark a watershed in imperial relations, not because of Basil's hatred of Leo, but because of Leo's reaction to it; he was now a young man with ideas of his own.

Thus far our examination has been concerned to assess Basil's attitude to Leo, mainly because it is the common view that he detested this son. Rather we have found that Basil treated Leo in an apparently positive way. Matters only begin to deteriorate due to Leo's resentment of his father's authority. It is Leo's wilful personality that leads to trouble. However we need to examine this deterioration in relations carefully to assess its exact nature, so as to avoid making sweeping

⁷⁵For this date see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 101.

⁷⁶For details on this union see Chapter 5. Jenkins has argued the case for 882 as the wedding year: see his 'Chronological Accuracy', 101.

⁷⁷Vogt, *Basile*, 61.

⁷⁸*VT*, 7. 7-10.

conclusions concerning the attitudes of Leo and Basil towards each other at the end of the latter's reign.

As asserted above, it was Leo's union with Theophano that marked the beginning of dynastic strife. In the *Life of Euthymios* Leo attests that he was forced to marry this girl against his will 'in dread of my father and in extreme distress'.⁷⁹ It certainly appears that Leo had no say in the choice of his bride, for the *Life of Theophano* reveals that it was the empress Eudokia who selected Theophano for her son, and that Basil simply confirmed her choice.⁸⁰ As the father of the family Basil thus had the final say and the authority to enforce the decision. But in acting thus Basil was not behaving tyrannically but in the accepted paternal fashion, and we would not expect youthful Byzantine imperial bridegrooms to have a say in who their bride was to be.⁸¹ It thus appears that Leo was the one acting out of order in evidently resisting the decision that his parents had come to. The nub of the matter was that Leo had his own opinion as to who his bride should be, for it seems that he had already formed a friendship with the daughter of one of Basil's officials, Stylianos Zaoutzes. Theophano suspected that this friendship between Leo and Zoe Zaoutzaina, which continued after the marriage, was more than platonic, and informed Basil of her suspicions.⁸² Basil was enraged at this information, and Leo recounts what action his father took against him; without listening to Leo's explanation of the matter Basil grabbed him by the hair, threw him to the floor, and beat him until he streamed blood. After this he gave orders that Zoe was to be married against her will to Theodore Gouzouniates. When recounting these events to Euthymios Leo asserts that Zoe was innocent, thus indicating that there was no affair. We can imagine that this incident did cause Leo to resent both his father and his wife, but we should not be too hasty to read into Basil's violence against Leo a general reflection of his attitude concerning him. Basil acted impulsively, in the manner of the strong man that he is so well attested as being. His actions must be understood as a reaction to the knowledge that Leo was bringing the dynasty into disrepute, thus undermining it. Basil had had enough scandal to last him a life time⁸³, and had no desire to see his son endanger his own position. Leo may indeed not have committed adultery, but the rumour that he had was cause enough for

⁷⁹*VE*, 41. 16-19.

⁸⁰*VT*, 5-6.

⁸¹This lack of choice on the part of the bridegroom is certainly a fundamental characteristic of those unions that were said to have been the result of bridesshows: see W. T. Treadgold, 'The Bride-Shows of the Byzantine Emperors', *Byz*, 49 (1979), 395-413.

⁸²For this episode see *VE*, 39. 32 - 41. 8.

⁸³The scandals are listed as follows: Eudokia Ingerina was said to have been the mistress of Michael III; Basil was supposed to have had Michael's sister Thekla as a lover; perhaps even Basil and Michael were seen as lovers; Basil was implicated in the murder of Bardas in 866, and the murder of Michael in the following year; all of Basil's sons except Alexander were reputedly the sons of Michael and Eudokia; during Basil's reign Eudokia apparently had an affair with Niketas Xylinites.

Basil's evident concern. Basil acted not out of hate for Leo but in a rage at the shame that was being brought upon the family. Basil may have been spurred also by Leo's own apparent wilfulness in neglecting the wife that had been chosen for him in favour of Zoe. It is important to note that Basil did not renounce Leo after this incident, again revealing his ultimate decision to have him as his successor.

It may be that the *Second Parainesis* was produced during this phase in the relationship between the emperor and his intended heir. It is a much shorter text than the *First Parainesis*, with no acrostic and no separate chapters, but again it consists of ideological and moralistic observations. This time its theme seems to be on how Leo can please God, which may reflect the fact that Leo had done something displeasing. It is clear that Leo was married at the time of its composition, for he is advised to be a limb for his wife, and significantly the corollary to this is that he should not eye up another man's woman. In conjunction with this phrase Leo is warned to avoid scandals. This parainesis thus conveys the feeling that a crisis has passed, but that Leo must take care to behave in future. It is also a public statement that Basil still wished Leo to succeed him as the head of the dynasty. Thus with Leo duly warned and Zoe Zaoutzaina safely married off Basil probably hoped that their relationship would be ended and never again prove to be a problem, but ironically he had actually intensified the bond between them, for both Leo and Zoe now found themselves in undesired marriages.

It has thus become clear that in the matter of the relationship between Basil and Leo it is the latter who is the crucial factor in any antagonism, for it is he who rocks the dynastic boat. We have seen that Basil was content to have Leo as his heir, and showed no apparent concern over the question of his parentage. Even after beating Leo Basil still maintained him as heir apparent, though he could have replaced him with Alexander if he had wanted to. Regarding Leo, it is certain that he resented the choice of wife that had been made for him, but more than that we cannot say on the evidence up to this point. So when we next find Leo as a suspected would-be patricide, what should our reaction be? Unfortunately the nature of the evidence merely clouds the issue. All the accounts have basically the same story to tell, and all are on Leo's side.⁸⁴ We are told that Leo was concerned about the evil influence that Theodore Santabarenos was having on his father, and did not conceal his revulsion for this satanic wizard. Theodore thus feared that Leo would turn Basil against him, and so hatched a plot to discredit Leo. He advised the young emperor to secrete on his person a knife, so that he would have this ready to aid his father if he came under threat from wild animals or human enemies when riding

⁸⁴VB, 348-349; GMC, 846-847; Ps. Sym., 697-699; VT, 7-8; *Life of Constantine the Jew*, AASS, Nov IV, 648.

out.⁸⁵ We are then asked to believe that Leo followed the advice of this man that he so detested, wearing the knife within his boot, inside his leggings. Theodore then informed Basil that his son was plotting against him, and for proof of this all he had to do was ask for a knife the next time he was riding out and see what happened. Thus the drama reached its conclusion as Theodore had intended, but nobody seems to have stopped to contemplate that the fact that Leo produced the knife pointed rather to his innocence. Basil was convinced of Leo's guilt and stripped him of his imperial position, then confined him in the palace apartment called the Pearl for the period of three years.⁸⁶

Whatever we make of this story one thing is clear, and that is that Leo was suspected of plotting against his father, and he and his friends suffered for it.⁸⁷ Leo's *protovestiaros* Niketas Helladikos was beaten, whilst unspecified 'others' were punished and exiled. One key ally that is named in the plot is the domestic of the schools, Andrew. He was removed from his post while on campaign in the summer of 883. It is clear that the *magistros* Stephen also suffered at this time. Thus by the time of his fall in 883 it looks as if Leo had formed a distinct group of friends and allies around himself, but whether they were guilty of plotting against the emperor is another matter. However Leo himself in his oration on the feast of St Elijah conveys not the anger of an innocent man at an unjust imprisonment, but the resignation of a guilty sinner, as Vogt has already pointed out.⁸⁸ Indeed Vogt dismissed the story of the plot as it is presented by the Byzantine sources, and concluded that Leo had indeed plotted to kill his father. If this is true, if Leo was not the victim of a frame-up (which we should not rule out), we need to ask why did he hatch this plot. Was Leo aiming to restore the Amorian house? We will have cause to return to this issue below, but I will conclude that this was never his intention. It is more likely that Leo had come to resent his father, and was impatient to become sole emperor. Basil's position as emperor may have become insecure so that Leo felt he had to act quickly to secure the dynasty by becoming emperor himself. Leo could also have been worried about the influence of Theodore and Photios over his father, and have been suspicious of their objectives. Ultimately we do not know exactly what the circumstances of Leo's fall in 883 were, but I would hesitate to state that he intended to kill Basil, though this is what his intentions were read as.

⁸⁵Pseudo-Symeon does vary from the other accounts on these details. He says that Theodore gave the knife to Leo for his own security against beasts. This version thus seems less incredible.

⁸⁶For the length of the imprisonment see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 101-102. *VT*, 8. 5, adds the information that his wife and daughter were also confined with Leo.

⁸⁷The story of a plot seems also to have reached the Arabs, for *Tabari*, vol. 37, 145, records the death of Basil both under the year 883 and in its proper place of 886: see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 103.

⁸⁸Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 428. See also Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 191.

Leo's fall in 883 was however not the end of his imperial career under Basil, for on the feast of St Elijah in 886 his father did restore him to his previous position. Once again it is clear that Basil was set on having Leo as his heir, and there seem to have been a multitude of factors affecting his decision. Our sources do point to certain agents who were working on Leo's behalf. Firstly Leo seems to have been the recipient of divine aid. The *Life of Theophano* reports that whilst they were in captivity Leo and Theophano were visited by a vision of St Demetrios, who was sent by God to reveal to them that they would be released and restored to their former honour.⁸⁹ A further messenger foretelling Leo's liberation was Constantine the Jew, who happened to be in Constantinople whilst Leo was in prison under threat of death.⁹⁰ A similarly divine explanation for Leo's release is provided by the *Life of Euthymios*, which suggests that the prayers and predictions of Leo's spiritual father had played a part in effecting his deliverance.⁹¹ However we may prefer to seek the active agents of Leo's release. Constantine VII and Pseudo-Symeon relate much the same story as each other, pointing to senatorial pressure upon Basil to reach a final decision about Leo, either to find him guilty or innocent and take the relevant action.⁹² They report that it was a certain palace parrot that spurred them on to this request by its constant lament for Leo. The other chroniclers assert that it was Basil's faith in St Elijah that led him to restore Leo on the feast day of the heavenly patron of the Macedonian dynasty.⁹³ It is however the *Life of Theophano* that provides the most extensive account of how Basil came to release Leo.⁹⁴ The key agent was Stylianos Zaoutzes, the commander of the emperor's bodyguard, and the reported conversation between him and Basil reveals several factors influencing the decision to free Leo. We are told that Stylianos only went to speak to Basil on the matter once Theodore was no longer in Constantinople. It is made apparent that Basil's reign was in crisis, for he had fallen ill and had not been seen in public, and this had caused discontent in the city among the senate and the people, who are represented as desiring the restoration of Leo. It is also evident that Basil had become subject to plots, and ultimately he only releases Leo because he fears there would be an uprising if he did not do so. Whilst we may have reservations about this account due to its evident favouritism towards Leo, several of the factors it presents are confirmed elsewhere. Most importantly we know that in 886 a senatorial plot

⁸⁹VT, 10. 10 - 11. 5.

⁹⁰AASS, Nov IV, 648.

⁹¹See VE, 7. 11-17; Karlin-Hayter, VE, Introduction, 48.

⁹²VB, 350-351; Ps. Sym., 698-699.

⁹³GMC, 847. This version is also related by Ps. Sym., 698.

⁹⁴VT, 11. 6 -14. 2. Karlin-Hayter, VE, Introduction, 48, opines that the account of Leo's restoration by the *Life of Theophano* 'inspires confidence'.

had been hatched against Basil, which was led by John Kourkouas.⁹⁵ That Basil had become ill in 886 is confirmed by his biographer.⁹⁶ It thus looks as if the ailing Basil was forced to restore Leo so as to secure the future of the dynasty. We may however wonder why Basil had to restore Leo; why could he not simply have had Alexander as his heir? It thus seems that the stories about Leo's popularity may contain some truth.⁹⁷

Thus it was that on 21 July 886 Leo was once again seen in public as emperor to be. The day of this display of reconciliation was evidently chosen carefully, for it was one of great importance for the Macedonian dynasty, since it commemorated their patron Elijah. The implication is clear; the Macedonian dynasty had ridden a crisis, but was now set to maintain the imperial rule that had been foretold by a divine agent. Unity was the message of the day, which Basil saw through despite his initial panic at the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd to the reappearance of Leo.⁹⁸ Yet it seems clear that Basil had only restored Leo through necessity; the thought that Leo had contemplated killing him appears to have soured his view of his son, as is understandable. How their relationship would have fared in the future can only be surmised, for just over a month later Basil was dead.

The manner of Basil's death is agreed upon by most of our sources⁹⁹, though they vary in their degrees of detail. The chroniclers recount that Basil died of wounds sustained through a bizarre hunting accident; he was lifted off his horse upon the antlers of a great stag.¹⁰⁰ The biographer of Basil agrees that the emperor became ill after a fall during a hunt, but does not refer to the role played by the stag.¹⁰¹ The most detailed account is found in the *Life of Euthymios*.¹⁰² We are informed that the hunt was taking place in Thrace in the regions of Apameia and Melitias, and Basil abandoned his entourage in his pursuit of the leader of a herd of deer. The stag turned on Basil and carried him off on its antlers, where he was trapped by his belt. When Basil's horse was found riderless the hetaireiarch

⁹⁵*GMC*, 847, which spells John's name as Krokoas, but Kourkouas seems to be the more accepted form. The plot was exposed on 25 March 886. John, who was domestic of the hikanatoi, had the support of sixty-six senators and officials, one of whom is identified as Michael the hetaireiarch. Since Stylianos was hetaireiarch when he approached Basil to plead Leo's cause it appears that he had replaced the fallen Michael.

⁹⁶*VB*, 351.

⁹⁷Karlin-Hayter, 'Rumeur', 102, ascribes this popularity of Leo to the belief that he was the son of Michael.

⁹⁸*VT*, 13, 25-33; *GMC*, 847. At the sight of Leo the crowd cried out their thanks to God for his restoration. The chronicles add that Basil commented to the crowd 'You thank God for my son? You will have to suffer many afflictions at his hand and go through painful days', but this is undoubtedly apocryphal, written later with the knowledge of the events of Leo's reign.

⁹⁹*VT*, 14, 3-4, is the notable exception, for it states that Basil died of illness and old age, and makes no mention of a hunting accident.

¹⁰⁰*GMC*, 848.

¹⁰¹*VB*, 351-352.

¹⁰²*VE*, 3, 1 - 5, 21.

Stylios and Prokopios the *protovestiaros* deduced what had happened and set off with the rest of the hunt to locate the emperor. The stag was eventually turned when the *hetaireia* blocked its path, and Basil was freed from his predicament when one of the bodyguards rode along side the stag and cut through his belt with a sword. However Basil did not show gratitude to his saviour, but ordered him to be arrested on the charge of attempted murder, and the chronicles record that he had him executed. The stag itself was not apprehended.

This fantastic account of Basil's accident has given rise to doubts about its authenticity. Vogt described the story as 'parfaitement absurde', and believed it to be a cover up for the murder of Basil devised by Stylios and Leo.¹⁰³ He also suggested that the bodyguard was executed by the plotters to prevent him from telling the truth. His theory finds support in the Arab evidence, for Tabari records that the sons of Basil murdered their father and placed one of themselves upon the throne.¹⁰⁴ Yet Vogt's version of events is flawed by the fact that Basil was not killed during the hunt, but died nine days later from his wounds. As Karlin-Hayter has so rightly observed, what is the point of a murder plot that leaves the victim alive.¹⁰⁵ We may also wonder why the plotters invented such a fantastic story if they wanted to conceal their hand in the incident. It would seem then that this account of Basil's accident is an elaboration upon the truth, and on this occasion Leo appears to be beyond any suspicion of attempted patricide. On Monday 29 August 886 he suddenly found himself emperor of the Byzantine empire.

It is only after the death of Basil that we can begin to assess Leo's attitude to his father and the Macedonian dynasty more clearly, for now he could pursue his own policies. Whilst his father had been alive he had had to follow his lead, and all that can be detected on his part was that he resented having to marry Theophano, unless we believe that he had indeed intended to kill his father in 883. Almost immediately it appears that Leo shows his true colours, for the first recorded act of his reign is the reburial of Michael III with imperial honours.¹⁰⁶ Leo dispatched the *stratelates* Andrew to Chrysopolis with an accompaniment of senators and clerics to fetch and escort back to Constantinople the body of the assassinated emperor, whose corpse had been entombed in the monastery of Philippikos.¹⁰⁷ The body was exhumed and laid in a casket of cypress wood, decorated honourably and royally, and brought back to the city across the sea. Leo and his brothers Alexander and

¹⁰³Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 426-428. Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 197, agreed with Vogt's theory, describing the story of the accident as 'incredible, because physically impossible'.

¹⁰⁴Tabari, vol. 37, 153.

¹⁰⁵Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 149.

¹⁰⁶GMC, 849.

¹⁰⁷The identity of the monastery is provided by the eleventh-century chronicler Skylitzes: see Ioannis Scylitzae *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. H. Thurn, *CFHB* 5 (Berlin, 1973), 172. 81.

Stephen then joined the funeral procession, and Michael was hymned to his grave in the mausoleum of Constantine the Great.¹⁰⁸

This act of Leo has been interpreted by Mango as a public admission that his real father was Michael, and thus ultimately as a denial of his Macedonian heritage.¹⁰⁹ Mango also seems to see significance in the fact that Leo appointed Niketas Xylinites, the man who was supposed to have had an affair with Eudokia Ingerina during Basil's reign and who had been punished with a tonsure, as the *oikonomos* of Hagia Sophia.¹¹⁰ Why should Leo have treated the enemies of his father in this honourable fashion, unless he was indeed anti-Macedonian? Further indications on the part of Leo that he was the son of Michael have been adduced by Magdalino.¹¹¹ He points out that Leo enhanced the importance of the palace church of the Pharos, which Michael III had built, by including it in his prescription for the ceremony for the feast day of St Elijah. He further notes that Leo may have transferred the celebration of imperial weddings to the Pharos from the chapel of St Stephen, and that he issued a *nomisma* portraying the Virgin of the Pharos on the obverse. Magdalino observes elsewhere that there is reason to think that under Leo Michael replaced Gabriel as the principal archangelic patron of the Nea.¹¹² All these points thus indicate that when Leo came to power it was his concern to link himself openly with the Amorian Michael, and so distance himself from the supplanting dynasty. In Mango's interpretation of Leo's pro-Michael policy he reaches the conclusion that the emperor eventually had to retreat from this stance, and reassert his links with Basil, and this is why he delivered his *Epitaphios* on his parents in 888, which subscribes totally to the Macedonian myth, more familiar from the account of the *Life of Basil*. However the evidence of the pro-Michael policy and the *Epitaphios* can be seen in an alternative and ultimately more convincing light.

Addressing the issue of the reburial of Michael first, as this appears to be central to the reading of Leo's policy, we find that not everyone agrees with Mango's interpretation. Dvornik stated that it was 'impossible to explain the first act of his [Leo's] government...except as a display of the young sovereign's petulance'¹¹³, but thankfully we can certainly contradict this view. Several Byzantinists have reached the contrasting conclusion that Leo was not attempting to

¹⁰⁸Michael's body was interred in a sarcophagus of Thessalian marble that had formerly held the bodies of Justin I (518-527) and his wife Euphemia, which Leo had appropriated from the monastery of the Augusta: see Grierson, 'Tombs', 44-46. Regarding the date of Michael's reburial we may conjecture that it occurred on the anniversary of his death, 23-24 September.

¹⁰⁹Mango, 'Eudocia', 26.

¹¹⁰Mango, 'Eudocia', 24-25; *GMC*, 843.

¹¹¹Magdalino, 'Elijah', 196.

¹¹²Magdalino, 'Nea', 56, n. 26.

¹¹³F. Dvornik, *The Photian Schism. History and Legend* (Cambridge, 1948), 245.

reject his Macedonian roots but in fact to improve the reputation of his dynasty which had come to power in such a bloody fashion.¹¹⁴ By confronting the spectre of Michael and laying it to rest with honour Leo was seeking to atone for the crime of his dynasty, and rid it of this ghastly shadow which cast such shame on the Macedonians. A comparable action can be seen at the start of the reign of Theophilos (829-842) when he punished the murderers of Leo V (813-820), a murder by which his father Michael had come to power.¹¹⁵ The death of Basil I in 886 marked the demise of the last of those who were involved in the plot to kill Michael, so now was the time for Michael's memory to be safely restored for the benefit of the Macedonian dynasty. It is indeed entirely possible that the rehabilitation of Michael had been requested by the dying Basil, who may have feared for his soul in the next kingdom.¹¹⁶ Quite simply the death of Michael was on the conscience of the Macedonians, and Leo finally expurgated their sin. It seems that Byzantinists have been led astray by the chroniclers, even though they themselves offer no explanation of the reburial. However they do present the reburial as the emperor's first act, whereas that was undoubtedly the burial of Basil.¹¹⁷ Of course this funeral was not a newsworthy event as it was not out of the ordinary.

How then are we to explain the other indications of Leo's pro-Michael policy if we have concluded that Leo was more concerned for the position of the Macedonian dynasty than the memory of Michael himself? Starting with the appointment of Niketas Xylinites to the office of *oikonomos* of Hagia Sophia we can read this as a typical Leonine act. Throughout his reign the number of people who fell from grace but were then later restored is high (though perhaps this is a typical trait of Byzantine history in general); in this light the appointment of Niketas is not unusual or significant. He had suffered for his alleged offence under Basil, and now it was safe for Leo to avail himself of his talents again.¹¹⁸

Regarding Leo's evident preference for the church of the Theotokos of the Pharos it could be argued that this was not a sign that he was endeavouring to show

¹¹⁴Adontz, 'Portée', 510; Toynbee, *Constantine*, 596; Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 158; Kisliger, 'Eudokia', 136.

¹¹⁵*GMC*, 791.

¹¹⁶Both the author of the *Life of Basil the Younger* and Liudprand assert that Basil was troubled by the memory of Michael's death: see *PG* 109, 653-664, esp. 653-656; *Werke*, 9, 1-20.

¹¹⁷In connection with Michael's reburial it is interesting to note that Leo showed no similar veneration for Michael's sister Maria, for he stripped the silver plate off her sarcophagus: see *GMC*, 794.

¹¹⁸An alternative explanation could be that the chroniclers have confused two different men, for it is also recorded by them that Neatokometes was made *oikonomos* of the Great Church by Basil: see *GMC*, 842. Even if this is not the case this other incident has significance. Neatokometes was the alleged lover of Thekla, and when Basil was informed of this affair he had the man beaten and tonsured and made him a monk. However later Basil clearly favours him since he appoints him as *oikonomos*. Thus it looks as if Leo's action regarding Niketas should not be seen as sinister.

his allegiance to Michael, but rather his devotion to the Theotokos¹¹⁹; it also reveals on the part of the emperor a practical awareness that the Pharos church was a topographically convenient site for the various ceremonies that he created or altered.¹²⁰ We cannot say for certain that Basil had avoided the location of the Pharos anyway, for the proscription for the ceremony marking the dedication day of his Nea also includes the Pharos.¹²¹

Finally we come to the replacement of Gabriel by Michael. Magdalino does point out that only one source records that the Nea was dedicated to Gabriel¹²², whilst all the others name Michael, but the evidence of the image of Gabriel crowning Basil in the illustrated manuscript of the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus that was produced around 880 indicates strongly that Gabriel was the original object of Basil's devotion. The reason Magdalino gives for Basil's preference for Gabriel is that the archangel Michael was too evocative of Michael III.¹²³ Yet for Leo there was no longer any need to shy away from the memory of the assassinated Amorian, and so the archangel Michael replaced Gabriel. It seems that the archangel Michael was a much more common figure of devotion than Gabriel anyway, so perhaps his eclipse of Gabriel was a natural process. Again this fact has no significance regarding Leo's attitude to his parentage.

Having concluded that Leo was not deliberately expressing himself to be an Amorian rather than a Macedonian we are thus bound to contest Mango's view that the *Epitaphios* of 888 was his attempt to return to the Macedonian fold. Mango argued that Leo 'had gone too far in dissociating himself from his predecessor, in suggesting to all and sundry that he was not Basil's son' and thus he had to redress the balance for the 'interests of state and dynasty to be safe-guarded'.¹²⁴ This belief led Mango to characterise the *Epitaphios* as a 'a string of lies and half-truths', but this observation could be made of any panegyric; it is the nature of the genre rather

¹¹⁹For Leo's attachment to the Virgin see Schminck, 'Rota', 231. An indication Schminck did not pick up on can be found in a poem written c. 913 on the death of Leo: see I. Sevckenko, 'Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Scylitzes', *DOP*, 23-24 (1969-70), 185-228, esp. 198. 26-27.

¹²⁰The Pharos church was adjacent to the Chrysotriklinos, which Michael III had redecorated, and which was the focus point of imperial ceremony, since it was a gathering place for the emperor, senate and clergy. The Macedonian palace complex that Basil had begun with his Nea and Tzykanisterion was added to by Leo with his bath and the church and monastery of St Lazaros, and the Pharos was very much an integral part of this complex.

¹²¹See Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 215. 1-8; *De Cer.*, 118-121. Also it is by no means certain that Leo was solely responsible for introducing the new elements in the ceremony for the feast of St Elijah, for Basil is also credited with altering it: see Magdalino, 'Elijah', 193.

¹²²*VB*, 326.

¹²³However Karlin-Hayter, 'Rumeur', 104-105, n. 45, notes that Basil did build or restore churches of St Michael, so the argument that he was avoiding the name of Michael begins to look weak. Perhaps Basil was attracted to the figure of Gabriel since he was the messenger of good news, the good news in Basil's case being the rule of the Macedonians.

¹²⁴Mango, 'Eudocia', 26.

than Leo's insincerity that accounts for the character of the oration. It is equally misguided to interpret the panegyric as a confirmation that Leo was Basil's son¹²⁵, for this is the position that Leo had to take when writing the speech. Karlin-Hayter has seen it in a less pragmatic light, as perhaps representing 'a stocktaking corresponding quite possibly to the end of the period of purges' which marked the start of Leo's reign, when he was taking his revenge on those whom he believed to be his political enemies.¹²⁶ More recently she has expressed the view that Leo was trying to counteract the rumours that he was Michael's son.¹²⁷ Yet is it not possible that Leo's panegyric simply had no other motive than to praise Basil and honour the dynasty? Why is there this mania to extract so much historical significance from the *Epitaphios*? It appears to me that Leo had been asserting his Macedonian roots from the day he inherited the throne in 886; there is no point where he suddenly has to backpedal furiously. The *Epitaphios* was certainly not the first oration Leo had ever given where he presented himself as Basil's son. He had taken this stance in his speech marking the elevation of his brother Stephen to the patriarchate at Christmas 886.¹²⁸ We can also turn to Philotheos to see the mass of Macedonian ceremonies that were observed during Leo's reign. The inauguration of the Nea was commemorated every year on 1 May; on 20 July the feast day of Elijah was observed, and the celebrations continued for several days thanks to Leo; on 15-16 August the *synaxis* of St Diomedes was observed by the imperial court, which involved a trip to the monastic complex of St Diomedes that had played such a crucial part in the story of Basil's rise to prominence; on 29 August the memory of the dynasty-founder was commemorated, and the following day marked the *autokratoria* of Leo and Alexander.¹²⁹ Granted, Philotheos's list of feast days was only compiled in 899, but there is no reason to think that any of these feasts had lapsed or were not established in the early years of Leo's reign. Ultimately then I can see no reason why the *Epitaphios* of 888 should be felt to have the special significance of Leo asserting his Macedonian parentage; he seems to have been doing this from 886.

In conclusion then it appears that we can say that upon his father's death Leo did not seek to upset the dynastic achievements of Basil, but actually tried to improve the integrity of its right to rule by the honourable reburial of Michael. This act may in fact have symbolised the fusion of the Amorian and Macedonian houses that had already been proceeding apace. We should never forget the strong ties that

¹²⁵For this view see Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 10-12; Adontz, 'Portée', 508.

¹²⁶Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 166.

¹²⁷Karlin-Hayter, 'Rumeur', 105.

¹²⁸Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 200-207.

¹²⁹Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 215. 1-8; 215. 17 - 219. 11; 221. 5-9; 221. 10-19; 221. 20 - 223. 7.

did link these two dynasties together.¹³⁰ Basil's wife Eudokia Ingerina was of Amorian blood, as was Leo's own bride Theophano, who was related to Eudokia.¹³¹ Basil himself had even been adopted by Michael in 866.¹³² It is obvious that several of the Amorians were prominent members of Basil's court, including Photios, Leo Katakalon and Stephen the *magistros*. Further to these more familiar examples we can add that of Marianos the nephew of Bardas and Theodora, who was eparch of Constantinople under Basil.¹³³ Basil may even have become a substitute Michael for the surviving Amorians, given his dealings with Thekla¹³⁴, his visit to the dying Theodora¹³⁵, and his friendship with Photios. Perhaps the burial of Michael III in the mausoleum of Constantine the Great, which had become the tomb of the Macedonians, was a tacit recognition of the fact that Michael was an integral part of the dynasty. Thus rather than concentrating on the opposition of Amorian to Macedonian, of Michael versus Basil, we should be seeking out the essential unity of the two houses. Finally, I believe we can assert that the relationship between Basil and Leo did not turn on any question of parentage; we have seen that to all intents and purposes Leo was Basil's son. The real cause of conflict was Leo's desire to have his own way.

¹³⁰M. W. Herlong, *Kinship and Social Mobility, 717-959*, Ph. D Thesis (Washington DC, 1986), 217, is of the opinion that the Isaurians, Amorians and Macedonians can be seen as 'a single, diffuse dynasty, so strong were the ties of blood and marriage among them'.

¹³¹See Chapter Five below.

¹³²*VB*, 238.

¹³³*GMC*, 839.

¹³⁴*GMC*, 842.

¹³⁵See P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La mort de Theodora', *JÖB*, 40 (1991), 205-208.

CHAPTER TWO

THE END OF PHOTIOS

The reburial of Michael III was certainly one of Leo's first major acts as emperor; another was the deposition and confinement of the patriarch Photios. However unlike the rehabilitation of Michael's memory, the measure against Photios has not excited a significant amount of attention. Thus it is my intention in this chapter to consider Leo's termination of the famous patriarch's career, with the aim of understanding Photios's fate more accurately than we seem to at present, and more importantly, to see what this incident reveals about Leo VI and the beginning of his reign.

Photios is one of the most famous figures of ninth-century Byzantium, perhaps even of the span of the entire history of the Byzantine empire. He has earned his fame due to his part in ecclesiastical conflicts¹, and also as one of the major intellectual and literary figures of the so-called Macedonian renaissance.² Apart from the inadequate examination of his fate under Leo VI his life and career have received detailed attention. It seems that he was born around 810 into a notable family; his uncle Tarasios had been patriarch (784-806) under both Eirene (780-802) and Nikephoros I (802-811).³ During the period of second iconoclasm (815-843), when the veneration of the images of holy people was once again banned, his family suffered persecution since they were iconophiles, his father perhaps being the iconophile confessor Sergios.⁴ After the death of the iconoclast emperor Theophilos in 842 his wife Theodora and her son Michael III presided over the restoration of icons, and at this time Sergios's family could return to favour. Thus Photios came to prominence in the imperial bureaucracy, attaining the position of *protasekretis*.⁵ His ecclesiastical career only took off, albeit spectacularly, after Bardas and Michael III had put an end to the administration of the empress Theodora and the logothete of the drome Theoktistos in 856. In 858 Bardas found himself opposed by the then patriarch Ignatios, who refused to admit him into Hagia Sophia, since it was believed that the emperor's uncle was having an affair with his widowed daughter-

¹Dvornik, *Photian Schism*.

²Lemerle, *Humanism*, esp. 205-235; W. T. Treadgold, 'The Macedonian Renaissance', *Renaissances before the Renaissance. Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Treadgold (Stanford, 1984), 75-98.

³H. Ahrweiler, 'Sur la carrière de Photius avant son patriarcat', *BZ*, 58 (1965), 348-363.

⁴F. Dvornik, 'The Patriarch Photius and Iconoclasm', *DOP*, 7 (1953), 67-97; C. Mango, 'The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios', *Iconoclasm*, edd. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 133-140.

⁵For this post and its duties see Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 310-311; Bury, *Administrative System*, 97-98.

in-law.⁶ In response Bardas and Michael engineered Ignatios's deposition and confinement on the charge of treason, thus leaving the patriarchal throne empty. They then availed themselves of this opportunity to fill it with a kinsman of theirs, Photios himself. Photios owed this connection with the imperial family to a relative of his who was married to a sister of the empress Theodora.⁷ On 20 December 858 Photios was tonsured, and on the four following days he was successively ordained lector, sub-deacon, deacon and priest. On Christmas day he was consecrated as patriarch of Constantinople. The deposition of Ignatios and the sudden although precedented promotion of Photios did cause scandal and ecclesiastical division on an oecumenical scale, for Rome took up the cause of Ignatios. The division was finally ended during the reign of Leo VI, though at the council of 879-880 in Constantinople Photios was recognised as the legitimate patriarch, even by the papal delegates.

It seems likely that Photios owed his promotion rather more to the influential Bardas than to the emperor Michael. Michael is said to have quipped outrageously 'Theophilos [one of Michael's disreputable companions] is my patriarch, Photios is that of the caesar, and Ignatios that of the Christians'.⁸ It is notable that both Bardas and Photios did share an evident enthusiasm for education. Whilst still a layman Photios presided over a private school that was based in his house, and Bardas is famed for the establishment of the school at the Magnaura, which was headed by Leo the Mathematician, who held the chair of philosophy.⁹ The partnership of Bardas and Photios has certainly been noted and idealised by Byzantinists¹⁰, and we should conclude that the murder of the caesar in 866 left the patriarch in a less certain position. Yet he did maintain his post under Michael III and his partner Basil, and only fell from grace in 867 when he denounced the murder of the emperor his kinsman.

After deposing Photios Basil filled the vacant patriarchate with the previously ousted Ignatios, and Photios was condemned by the council of 869-870. However it seems that not long after his condemnation Photios had re-ingratiated himself with the new emperor, and even became tutor to Basil's children within the

⁶See F. Dvornik, 'Patriarch Ignatios and Caesar Bardas', *BSI*, 27 (1966), 7-22.

⁷The exact nature of the relationship is confused. *TC*, 175, indicates that Photios was the son of Eirene, a sister-in-law of Kalomaria, who was a sister of the empress Theodora. However Skylitzes, *Scylitzae*, 98, states that Photios was a brother-in-law of Eirene, a sister of the empress Theodora. Bury, *Eastern Roman Empire*, 156, n. 1, argued that the former version was correct, and that it had been misunderstood by Skylitzes and by modern historians. Mango, 'Liquidation', 137-138, has also commented on this problem. He concludes that whatever interpretation we place on the sources two facts are undeniable, 'that Photios's mother was called Eirene and that she was related by marriage to the imperial family'.

⁸See the *Life of Ignatios*, PG 105, 528.

⁹Lemerle, *Humanism*, 228-230; 183-185.

¹⁰Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 160-161.

palace. From surviving letters of Photios written during his exile at the Skepi monastery it appears that the ex-patriarch brought pressure to bear on the emperor to restore him, one letter referring to the ties that already bound them together, which reveals that both Photios and Basil had endeavoured to solicit each other's favour even before the death of Michael. Another letter also makes it clear that Basil still respected and needed Photios's intellect, for the court consulted him on passages from the Old Testament *Book of Kings*.¹¹ Other less objective explanations of Photios's rehabilitation circulated within Byzantium itself, and are recorded in two virulently anti-Photian works, the *Life of Ignatios* and the chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon. They take pleasure in reporting that Photios availed himself of trickery and magic to regain Basil's favour. The biographer of Photios's old rival Ignatios tells us how Photios forged a document relating to the genealogy and rule of Basil's family, and had it placed in the imperial library, where a friend of his was librarian. This friend then showed the document to the emperor, and asserted that only Photios would be able to understand it; thus Photios was consulted and found favour with Basil by interpreting the artefact in such a way as to delight the emperor.¹² Whilst this story may seek to cast Photios in a scheming light, it does reveal the reality of Basil's dependence on Photios for literary and ideological matters; it was Photios's forged document that gave Basil's dynasty eminent roots by connecting it with Tiridates the king of Armenia. The story related by Pseudo-Symeon is perhaps less revealing, alleging that Photios availed himself of the magical skills of Theodore Santabarenos to win Basil's favour; Theodore advised him to have magic water sprinkled on the emperor's bed by a chamberlain, and that this would bring about the emperor's favour.¹³ The truth may however be more mundane. As well as valuing Photios's mind it is possible that Basil simply wished to end the ecclesiastical division that centred on Ignatios and Photios by recalling Photios (who seems to have been popular and had a significant amount of support within Byzantine society¹⁴) and reconciling the two rivals, which apparently did occur following Photios's recall, when the patriarch and the ex-patriarch publicly expressed their reunification by exchanging the kiss of peace. When Ignatios died on 23 October 877 it was as a matter of course that his old opponent replaced him on the patriarchal throne three days later.

From this point on it seems that Basil no longer simply depended on the restored patriarch, but was in fact dominated by him. Every comments that 'From

¹¹ *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, II, ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink (Leipzig, 1984), 163-167.

¹² *PG* 105, 565-568.

¹³ *Ps. Sym.*, 694.

¹⁴ Dvornik, *Photian Schism*, 162; Vlyssidou, 'Εξωτερική πολιτική και έσωτερικές αντιδράσεις', 113-121.

877 to 886 the power of Photios in church and state was at its height. Basil, despite his early enmity, leaned upon him more and more even in political matters'.¹⁵ More recently Markopoulos, arguing that Photios is the author of a surviving poem of praise on the emperor Basil, has stressed how important Photios was to Basil as a creator of the emperor's ideology. He asserts that 'we can claim that the attribution of the poem to Photios is based not only on a philological examination of vocabulary and phraseology, but also on a consideration of the ideological world of the period of Basil, which laid the foundations for the ideology of the Macedonian dynasty. In this world it is Photios who shapes the policies which are to be followed'.¹⁶ In addition to the poem Photios wrote hymns for Basil; he may have commissioned the illustrated manuscript of the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus; and he has also been nominated as the real author of Basil's *First Parainesis* for Leo. In the wider sphere it was Photios that had control of the synod of 879-880; it was Photios that obliged Basil by recognising the emperor's dead son Constantine as a holy figure. It seems however that Photios wanted to go beyond the role of the mentor of the Macedonian dynasty; not surprisingly being the mouthpiece of an infamously uneducated emperor was not enough for a man of such evident ambition. It is well known that the law book named the *Eisagoge* that was produced in the name of Basil, Leo and Alexander which asserts the authority of the patriarch over that of the emperor has been credited to Photios himself.¹⁷ In this climate we can easily believe that Leo the heir to the throne, being rather more intellectually independent than his father, could have become alarmed at the power that the patriarch was wielding over Basil; perhaps Leo saw that his own future was endangered. The chronicles certainly take the line that Leo objected to the influence that his father was coming under in the form of Theodore Santabarenos, Photios's crony.

Like Photios Theodore was a protégé of Bardas, though for what reason or by what connection is not clear. Originating from Santabaris in Phrygia Theodore was placed by Bardas in the Studite monastery when he was in his youth, with the apparent intention of converting Theodore from Manichaeism to Orthodoxy. However our source, the anti-Photian chronicler Pseudo-Symeon, is quick to besmirch Theodore's reputation by alleging that he never did reject his former belief entirely.¹⁸ Eventually it seems that Theodore became the abbot of this monastery for

¹⁵G. Every, *The Byzantine Patriarchate 457-1204* (London, 1947), 125.

¹⁶A. Markopoulos, 'An Anonymous Laudatory Poem in Honor of Basil I', *DOP*, 46 (1992), 225-232, esp. 228-229. One wonders who was creating Basil's ideology during the early stages of his reign.

¹⁷For the *Eisagoge* and Photios's dominance of Basil see Schminck, *Rechtshbüchern*, 1-15; 'Rota', 211-227. See also Van der Wal and Lokin, *Droit byzantin*, 79-81.

¹⁸*Ps. Sym.*, 693.

the period 864-865, during the first patriarchate of Photios.¹⁹ When Photios fell in 867 on the accession of Basil Theodore, an evident partisan of the patriarch, also suffered expulsion from his monastery, though he had already been replaced as abbot by Sabas, a pupil of Photios.²⁰ Thus even at the beginning of Basil's reign the fates of Photios and Theodore Santabarenos were intertwined, and given the fact that they both had a patron in Bardas it seems likely that they would have been acquainted with each other through him, although the chronicles record that it was Leo Salibaras who introduced them.²¹ Perhaps their friendship only grew after Salibaras had performed the introduction; would Theodore really have been replaced with Sabas if Photios and Theodore had already become firm friends? The role that Theodore played in helping Photios regain Basil's favour has been recorded above, and it seems that by way of thanks when he regained the patriarchate in 877 Photios appointed Theodore as bishop of Euchaita, though as a partisan of Photios he would presumably have found his reward anyway. It was also at this time that Photios introduced Theodore to Basil, and the emperor was apparently greatly taken with the bishop and monk who reputedly possessed the power of magic and prevision; it was alleged that following the death of Basil's son Constantine in 879 Theodore's powers enabled him to conjure up a phantasm of the dead youth for the grief stricken father. It was against this carefully crafted backdrop that Leo suffered the revenge of Theodore when the young emperor voiced loud concern about the company his father was keeping and the effect it was having upon him, for the incident of the knife and Leo's fall soon followed.

As we commented in the previous chapter the story of the circumstances of Leo's fall are not convincing. Theodore has been painted in the darkest colours, whilst Leo has received a thorough whitewash. Are we to conclude that the story of the knife was later concocted in an attempt to clear Leo of the slur that he had plotted to kill his father? It looks as if Theodore has simply become the fallguy for the guilty emperor. And yet Leo is not the only figure to be exonerated from sin by the incredible story; the patriarch Photios is notable by his absence. Photios's only recorded involvement in the episode of Leo's disgrace is in fact as the defender of the fallen son, for he dissuaded Basil from carrying out his desire to blind Leo.²² However when we turn to the account of Leo's deposition of Photios and the subsequent trial it is clear that the patriarch was also accused of being behind Leo's removal from power, and it is Photios's conviction that Leo is most keen to secure.

¹⁹See the *Life of Nikolaos the Studite*, PG 105, 863-926, esp. 912; *Ps. Sym.*, 693. For the date see G. da Costa-Louillet, 'Saints de Constantinople aux VIII^e, IX^e et X^e siècles', *Byz.*, 25-27 (1955-1959), 783-852, esp. 807.

²⁰PG 105, 912.

²¹GMC, 845.

²²GMC, 846.

The tale of the knife may be a cover up, but it is surely as much concerned with protecting Photios as it is Leo.

It is undeniable that when Leo became emperor in 886 he did exact vengeance on Photios. The chroniclers report that he despatched Andrew the domestic of the schools, the same man who had been charged with bringing back Michael's body from Chrysopolis, together with John Hagiopolites the logothete of the drome to Hagia Sophia, where they ascended into the pulpit, announced the charges against the patriarch in the hearing of all, and then led Photios away; he was subsequently exiled to the monastery of the Armenianoï, also known as the monastery of Bordon.²³ The *Life of Euthymios* also reports the incident alleging that it was Stylianos Zaoutzes who was responsible for Photios's deposition, 'ignominiously banishing him and demanding his resignation', adding that 'it [the resignation] was had by force and he was banished from town and ordered to settle in the Hieria, as they are called, *incommunicado*'.²⁴ The detail that Leo extracted a resignation from Photios is confirmed by letters to and from pope Stephen (885-891).²⁵

Unfortunately for us the chroniclers do not state what the charges levelled against Photios were. We know that Photios was brought to trial in 887 on charges of treason²⁶, but these may not have been levelled against him in 886, for it is only after recounting the details of Photios's deposition that the chroniclers report that Leo was informed by his right hand men, Andrew the domestic of the schools and Stephen the *magistros*, of the plot that Photios and Theodore had hatched against him in order to acquire the throne for a relative of the patriarch.²⁷ The chroniclers may even hint that Andrew and Stephen invented the story out of spite, for it is noted that they had often been slandered to the emperor Basil by Theodore. Despite these reservations it may be that the charges against Photios in 886 had already consisted of accusations of treason, but Leo only felt confident enough to bring the matter to a trial after having heard the testimony of Andrew and Stephen. Alternatively the chroniclers may simply have delayed relating how Leo had been informed by Andrew and Stephen as it made a suitable introduction to the trial of

²³*GMC*, 849. The chroniclers do not agree on the name of the monastery; *LG*, 263, agrees with *GMC* calling it that of the Armenianoï, but *TC*, 353-354, names it as the monastery of Harmonianoï, whilst *Ps. Sym.*, 700, that of the Armeniakoi, adding that it was also called the monastery of Gordon. Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 57, n. 1, favours the identity provided by Pseudo-Symeon.

²⁴*VE*, 11. 19-23. Thus the monastery where Photios was confined must have been located in the Hieria, supposing that both the *VE* and the chroniclers are accurate.

²⁵For the letter of Stylianos Mapas of Neo-Caesarea to the pope see J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Venice, 1771), XVI, 425-436, esp. 432. For the pope's letter see Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, XVI, 435-438, esp. 436.

²⁶For dating the trial to 887 see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

²⁷*GMC*, 850.

887; the detail of the informing may thus be a 'cast back', in Jenkins's terminology.²⁸

The details of the trial itself are related by the chroniclers, and once again we can detect their concern to protect Photios, and it is only Pseudo-Symeon who pursues his own distinctive anti-Photian line. Theodore Santabarenos had to be summoned to Constantinople for the trial, for he had returned to Euchaita in 886 prior to Basil's restoration of Leo. Both suspects were then held at the palace of Pege, where they were guarded separately. This measure prevented them from colluding before the trial, but more importantly it seems that Photios was not meant to know that Theodore was also being held by the imperial authorities, so that his appearance at the trial would throw the ex-patriarch off his guard. It is also clear from the dialogue of the trial recorded by the chroniclers that Leo and his aides hoped that Theodore would betray Photios to them by implicating him in the plot. Leo himself did not preside when the trial was convened, but he entrusted the examination to faithful officials, who consisted of Stephen the *magistros*, Andrew the domestic of the schools, the patricians Krateros²⁹ and Goumer, and finally John Hagiopolites. As noted above the majority of the chroniclers do present Photios in a favourable light in their account of the trial; they still refer to him as the patriarch, and he is depicted as an honourable and dignified figure.

According to the chroniclers, at the start of the examination Photios is led out and seated with honour by the panel of inquirers, who then seat themselves. Andrew leads the inquiry, and initially establishes that Photios knows Theodore, whom he only recognises under the description of monk and archbishop of Euchaita, not as abbot.³⁰ Having established this point Theodore is then brought out before the panel, and he is interrogated by Andrew. Through Andrew a question from the emperor is posed: Where are the monies and things of my empire? This indicates that Leo believed that Theodore had taken advantage of Basil's attachment to him and had acquired monies and valuable objects that by rights belonged to the emperor. Theodore responds that they are wherever the emperor of the day (meaning Basil) gave them, and now that Leo seeks them he has the power to recover them from there. Andrew persists, and gets to the heart of the matter, asking Theodore whom he planned to make emperor when he advised Basil to blind Leo, a

²⁸Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 92-93.

²⁹The chroniclers are evidently in some confusion about whether Andrew and Krateros are separate people or one and the same, that is Andrew Krateros. *TC*, 355, indicates that they are separate individuals, whilst *GMC*, 850, indicates a single person. Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 398, n. 2, preferred the latter version, but I favour the view that they are two separate people; it seems significant that although Andrew has already been mentioned several times in the chronicles he has never before been given the name of Krateros.

³⁰Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 53, comments that 'for his [Theodore's] enemies he was nothing but an expelled monk. For Photios he has not lost his monk's quality'.

relative of his or of Photios. Theodore acts the innocent at this question, and Stephen then takes up the role of interrogator, asking Theodore if he was indeed innocent why then did he disclose to Leo that he would convict Photios of the charge. Confronted by this brutal assertion of his betrayal of Photios Theodore fell at the ex-patriarch's feet denying the accusation. If the inquisitors hoped that Photios would break down and confess his guilt at the revelation of Theodore's supposed treachery they were sadly mistaken; he maintained his dignity and reassured Theodore of his faith in him. Andrew's subsequent fury may convey his frustration in the face of the realisation that without Theodore's testimony Photios could not be convicted, and that the emperor would be displeased. Thus according to the majority of the chroniclers the trial did not achieve its purpose of securing the conviction of Photios, and Leo was indeed furious at finding no 'reasonable charge' against him. The emperor vented his rage on the doubly treacherous Theodore, having him beaten and banished to Athens where he was subsequently blinded.³¹ As for Photios the majority of the chroniclers add nothing more; the reader is thus left with the abiding memory that Leo was frustrated and that the ex-patriarch was not convicted of treason.

However as we have indicated one chronicle has a rather different vision of events, that of Pseudo-Symeon.³² This chronicler is in no doubt as to why Photios was expelled from the patriarchate and confined in a monastery; it was because his treachery had been discovered. The trial itself is covered in less detail but is entirely damning of both Theodore and Photios. It is simply stated that Andrew and Stephen brought an action against the treacherous pair for slandering Leo to Basil, and the senate duly condemned them. Theodore was beaten and exiled to Athens, whilst Photios was returned to the monastery of Gordon, where he died. Not for Pseudo-Symeon the honourable portrait of Photios, nor the unsuccessful trial. Indeed he is the only chronicler who bothers to record Photios's eventual death within the context of Leo's reign, no doubt with a great deal of satisfaction.

At this point we can turn to consider what we make of Leo's attitude towards Photios. Why did he depose him at the start of his reign? We could accept the chroniclers at face value and say that Photios was punished for his part in Leo's fall in 883, but we may have reservations given the nature of the evidence. Dvornik, who views Photios in a sympathetic light, sought to explain the patriarch's second deposition in 886 in terms of Moderates and Extremists, and indeed applied his theory of two opposing 'politico-religious' parties to further problems within

³¹This episode is also commented upon by *VE*, 9, 6-14. It records that Leo had intended to move Theodore from the prison of St Dalmatos and confine him in the Studite monastery. However the abbot of this monastery, Anatolios, protested to the emperor via Leo's spiritual father Euthymios, and thus Theodore ended up in Athens instead.

³²*P.s. Sym.*, 700-701.

Byzantine history. He says that these two hostile clans competed for supreme control over church and state, and describes their nature thus:

the Extremists were generally to be found among the monks, chiefly the reformed monks of the monastery of Stoudion, and their spiritual clients, the devout, the traditionalists and the ultra-conservatives, elements which in virtue of the norms that will prevail as long as there exists rich and poor, must necessarily preponderate among the leisured and bourgeois classes. The Moderates...belonged to classes more in touch with the humdrum of daily life and were for this reason more inclined to compromise. They also numbered many well-wishers among the secular clergy, who were in closer contact with the world than cloistered monks, and among higher clergy, who were conscious of heavier responsibilities. Intellectual circles were all the more in sympathy with the latter tendency as the Extremists persisted in their obstinate prejudices against all profane knowledge.³³

Applying this theory Dvornik views Photios's first deposition in 867 as a symptom of Basil's conciliatory policy towards Rome, the necessity of having to look for support amongst the opponents of Michael III, the extremists. The fact that Photios came out in opposition to Basil over the murder of Michael seems to carry no weight with Dvornik, who favours the view that Photios simply resigned. Basil's subsequent restoration of Photios in this scheme thus becomes a sign that the emperor had decided he preferred the support of the moderates, that it was of more use to him. Leo's plot against Basil that was exposed in 883 is also explained within this framework. Dvornik stresses that relations between Basil and Leo were bad, and he argues that this led the young emperor to plot to remove his hated father. Seeking support for his treachery he naturally turned to Basil's opponents, now consisting of the extremists. It was as the leader of the moderates that Theodore Santabarenos revealed Leo's plot to Basil, though one does wonder why Photios himself was not Dvornik's chief moderate. Further, not only did Leo hatch an extremist plot, but that of John Kourkouas is also presented in this light. When Leo came to power in 886 Dvornik asserts that the fall of Theodore and Photios is explicable by the fact that they were the inevitable victims of the extremists whom Leo had courted. The accusation against Photios and Theodore that they plotted against Leo is thus lightly dismissed, and Dvornik says it was a typical charge, for Bardas and Michael had used it against Ignatios in 858. For Dvornik everything is reduced to 'the old antagonism between the two politico-religious parties - the Extremists and the Moderates - that had striven for control over the political and religious affairs of the Empire'. Dvornik's views were taken on board by White, who comments that 'Leo VI underwent the same change of mind Basil I did, who courted extremists at the beginning of his reign but later returned to the moderates'.³⁴ Yet this theory can

³³Dvornik, *Photian Schism*, 9.

³⁴White, *Photios*, 36-37.

surely be discredited; enforcing such a formulaic analysis upon Byzantine history alone should alert our sensibilities. To explain everything at the level of two opposing groups is short-sighted, and we can easily challenge Dvornik's analysis, which fails to deal adequately with the evidence that Photios did hatch a plot against Basil's family. As noted above, it is much more likely that Photios fell in 867 since he came out in opposition to Basil after the murder of Michael. And far from turning back to the moderates Basil tried to unite all those in conflict by reconciling Ignatios and Photios in the 870s, and this policy of unification culminated in the synod of 879-880, though a splinter group did continue to remain unreconciled. Dvornik is on very shaky ground when he asserts that Leo turned to the extremist faction for support against his father, for there is little evidence to confirm this. The few figures that we know were suspected of being involved in Leo's plot can hardly be called extremists; Andrew, Stephen, and Niketas Helladikos were all men who were very much in touch with the realities of everyday life. Certainly after he came to power in 886 Leo did try to reconcile the splinter group that refused to acknowledge Photios as patriarch, but there is no evidence that Leo was involved with this group before he became sole emperor. Further Leo was only concerned about healing ecclesiastical division, he was not taking up the stance of an extremist. This is patently clear when we see whom Leo appointed to the patriarchate to replace Photios; his candidate was his own brother Stephen, a classic moderate if ever there was one.³⁵ In fact the elevation of Stephen to the patriarchate by Leo was as distasteful to the splinter group as Photios remaining in office, for Stephen had been trained by Photios. Thus Leo put his own interests before those of the so-called extremists. Quite simply Dvornik's analysis is patently inadequate; there is no simple theory to explain every facet of Byzantine history. The straitjacket of his perception allows for no variation, for no truth. Political motives are constantly underplayed in the quest to view everything as a case of moderate versus extremist, and we must reject such a formulaic interpretation of history. Ultimately Dvornik and White are blinded by their sympathetic attitude towards Photios, and this makes them reject any question of his involvement in a plot out of hand, without sufficient examination of the evidence.

Indeed Karlin-Hayter has already gone some way to discrediting Dvornik's concept of politico-religious parties.³⁶ She particularly asserts that party views did not rule people's actions; it was a matter of individual choice.³⁷ For her Photios's

³⁵The same could be said of Arethas. Here is a man who qualifies as a moderate as defined by Dvornik, yet he emerges as the leader of the opposition to Leo's fourth marriage.

³⁶P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Le synode à Constantinople de 886 à 912 et le rôle de Nicolas le Mystique dans l'affaire de la tétragamie', *JÖB*, 19 (1970), 59-101, repr. *Studies in*, XVI.

³⁷Karlin-Hayter, 'Synode', 90-93; 101.

fall cannot be explained as a product of 'the strife of the parties in Byzantium'.³⁸ Ostrogorsky too rejected Dvornik's explanation for the banishment of 'the powerful and self-willed Photius', and saw the main reason for this measure as Leo's desire to 'secure for himself unlimited control over ecclesiastical affairs'.³⁹ There is undoubted truth in this view, for as we have seen Photius aimed to be a greater power than the emperor himself, and Schminck certainly perceives Photius's fall as the result of Leo's own forthright concept of his role as emperor.⁴⁰ However this cannot be the whole story, for Leo had already secured the resignation of Photius and the promotion of Stephen before the ex-patriarch was brought to trial; why then was the trial necessary if the emperor had only been concerned with achieving ecclesiastical supremacy? For Karlin-Hayter the answer is simple. What the chronicles tell us is true; Photius was implicated in treason.⁴¹ This interpretation of events finds support in a recent study on foreign policy and internal responses during the reign of Basil I.⁴² Vlyssidou argues that Basil and Photius were actually opposed over what the priorities of the empire should be in the sphere of foreign policy. It is well attested that Basil was preoccupied with the desire to reassert the Byzantine presence in the west, but Photius was opposed to the ramifications of this policy. This conflict of interest had the consequence of setting Photius against the wishes of Basil, and he aimed to covertly thwart Basil's western ambitions. Within this scenario Leo's fall in 883 is explained as the result of the young emperor trying to protect his father from the scheming patriarch. Thus Vlyssidou believes the chronicles when they assert that Leo was the victim of a plot.⁴³ She also explains the plot of Kourkouas in this light, arguing that Photius was involved in it. Thus for Vlyssidou the fall of Photius would be explicable as the revenge of Leo, who had been framed by the patriarch and his allies. This is surely correct, given the evidence concerning the early reign of Leo VI that has not been preserved in the chronicles, but only in the *Life of Euthymios*. Here it is revealed that it was not only the patriarch and Theodore who suffered at the hands of Leo; retaliation was taken against the wider group of Photius's family and friends.⁴⁴ It is clear that we are dealing with a purge. Unfortunately the author of the *Life of Euthymios* is coy about naming names, and beyond Photius and Theodore he only adds that of Leo Katakalon, presumably as this detail does have a bearing on Euthymios's life, for

³⁸Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, Introduction, 57.

³⁹Ostrogorsky, *State*, 241, n. 1.

⁴⁰Schminck, 'Rota', 227-228.

⁴¹Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, Introduction, 57.

⁴²Vlyssidou, 'Εξωτερική πολιτική και έσωτερικές αντιδράσεις'.

⁴³The story of the plot of Photius and Theodore is also referred to by Stylianos of Neo-Caesarea: see Vogt, *Basile*, 157, n. 4; Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, XVI, 433.

⁴⁴*VE*, II, 14-25.

the emperor intended to build a monastery for his spiritual father at Psamathia on the confiscated land of Katakalon.⁴⁵ Katakalon is described as the former *drungarios* and a relative (συγγενῆς) of Photios, and his punishment consisted of deprivation of property, tonsuring and exile. As ever with the *Life of Euthymios* it is Stylianos who is credited with such harsh measures, and the author comments that 'he [Stylianos] did the same by others whom I willingly pass over', adding that 'in this way he dealt not with him [Photios] alone but with all his relations, depriving them of their property and tonsuring them'. Despite the attempts of the author of this *Life* to have us believe that Photios and his relatives merely fell through the malign action of Stylianos, it is clear that the purge was a genuine and intentional political act of Leo's early reign. This was no indiscriminate attack on the patriarch's family as the *Life* itself lets slip when it mentions an incident concerning Nikolaos, a relative of the patriarch and the spiritual brother and fellow student of Leo. Nikolaos had taken fright when he saw his relatives being punished by the new emperor, and had fled to the monastery of St Tryphon in Chalcedon to take refuge there as a monk. But when Leo heard of this he brought Nikolaos back to court and made him his *mystikos*.⁴⁶ It is also made clear that relatives of Leo Katakalon were still at large after his fall, for they were able to work for his recall.⁴⁷ Thus it looks as if those who were targeted for punishment were seen as genuine political opponents.

With regard to Katakalon the reason for his fall may be illuminated by the *Life of Ignatios*. This reveals that Leo Katakalon had been *drungarios* of the watch, and was *gambros* to the patriarch Photios, probably meaning his brother-in-law.⁴⁸ The hagiographer has a very low opinion of Katakalon, for like his kinsman Photios he was seen as an enemy of Ignatios and his sympathisers. Leo is described as 'the most cruel and harsh of all men', and he is likened to the fourth-century emperor Licinius who persecuted Christians.⁴⁹ His crime was his treatment of those who opposed communion with Photios after 26 October 877. What interests us however is the fact that Leo Katakalon was *drungarios* of the watch, an office which entailed the ensuring of the security of the palace and the emperor⁵⁰; Katakalon may thus have had some part in the exposing of Leo's 'plot' and his subsequent punishment. Also if there was a plot hatched against Basil by Photios and his friends and relatives the *drungarios* of the watch would have had a crucial role to play in this, as

⁴⁵For the story of the building of this monastery see *VE*, ch. 5.

⁴⁶On the position of the *mystikos* see P. Magdalino, 'The Not-So-Secret Functions of the *Mystikos*', *REB*, 42 (1984), 229-240; R. Guiland, 'Études sur l'histoire administrative de l'empire byzantin. Le mystique, ὁ μυστικός', *REB*, 26 (1968), 279-296; Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 324.

⁴⁷*VE*, 29. 26 - 31. 2.

⁴⁸*PG* 105, 569.

⁴⁹*PG* 105, 569.

⁵⁰For this office and its functions see Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 331; Bury, *Administrative System*, 60-62

we see from cases during Leo's own reign.⁵¹ It seems then that the evidence of the *Life of Euthymios* is of crucial importance in illuminating the action that was taken against Photios and Theodore in 886-887, which is only related in isolation by the chroniclers and in such a way as to raise doubts about the veracity of their account. Thus it is clear that at the start of Leo's reign there was a wide purge against those who were perceived to be guilty of treason.

One major consequence of the deposition of Photios was of course that a new patriarch had to be appointed. It seems that it had become common for the *synkellos*, the imperial official who liaised with the patriarch, to step into the patriarch's shoes after his death.⁵² When Photios came to be deposed in 886 the position of *synkellos* was in fact held by the emperor's own brother Stephen, and he duly became patriarch. It is Basil I who was responsible for the fact that Stephen had attained the office of *synkellos* by 886, for he took the decision to enter this son upon a church career.⁵³ Presumably Basil did have the intention ultimately to create Stephen as his patriarch. The ramifications of such a strategy are plain; the emperor whose son was patriarch effectively had total control of church and state, and thus would have little or no need to fear patriarchal opposition during his reign. The benefits of the scheme were certainly appreciated by Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944), for he made his son Theophylakt *synkellos* at Christmas 924, and then patriarch in 933.⁵⁴

However for Leo there was an obstacle to appointing his brother as patriarch, for Stephen was too young to hold the position. Canon law stated that the minimum age for becoming patriarch was twenty-five, and Stephen had only reached the age of nineteen by December 886.⁵⁵ Yet despite this hindrance Leo forged ahead, enforcing his will. Stephen was installed as patriarch in December 886, probably on Christmas eve.⁵⁶ The ceremony was performed in Hagia Sophia, Stephen being ordained by Theodore the archbishop of Caesarea, in the presence of the other archbishops.⁵⁷ The brief and basic entry in the chronicles conveys no controversy concerning Stephen's installation, but there exists other evidence relating to the

⁵¹Both John and Podaron who held the office of *drungarios* of the watch were implicated in plots against Leo VI: see *GMC*, 856; 859.

⁵²See Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 308; Bury, *Administrative System*, 116-117.

⁵³Leo touches on Stephen's dedication to the church by Basil in two of his works, his *Epitaphios*, and his homily on Stephen's accession to the patriarchate: see Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 64, 5-24; Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 205, 23-24.

⁵⁴See Runciman, *Romanus*, 67; 75-77.

⁵⁵This fact is revealed by a letter of Theodore Daphnopates concerning the appointment of Romanos's son Theophylakt as patriarch. Theophylakt was also not of the legal age, but Theodore cites the elevation of Stephen as a precedent: see J. Darrouzès and L. G. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopatès. Correspondance* (Paris, 1978), letter 2, 45, 56-57.

⁵⁶For the exact day of Stephen's installation see Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 191, n. 24.

⁵⁷*GMC*, 849.

event that does indicate that the ecclesiastical body did have its reservations about the promotion of Stephen. This evidence in fact comes from the pen of Leo VI himself, whose address on the occasion of Stephen's installation has been preserved.⁵⁸ Grosdidier de Matons comments that the unique historic interest of the discourse on the consecration of Stephen 'est l'indice...d'une opposition plus ou moins sourde d'une partie du corps épiscopal à la nomination du jeune patriarche et peut-être...de l'appui que l'empereur a trouvé à cette occasion dans le Sénat'.⁵⁹ He raises the question as to why the bishops would oppose the choice of Stephen; was it just because he was too young, or was it rather that they were expressing discontent at the replacement of Photios? We have already seen that Photios's clergy had a part to play in effecting his recall from exile in the 870s, so perhaps this is what they were trying to achieve in the 880s by opposing the selection of Stephen as patriarch to be. If this was so they patently failed in their aims for Leo did appoint Stephen in the face of their opposition. Of course there was a fundamental difference between the situation in the 870s and that of the 880s; on the former occasion Photios had also found support amongst the secular community in Constantinople, yet in 886 Leo is totally confident that he can take senatorial approval for granted. This difference could be explained by the fact that Photios's senatorial allies had shared his fate on the accession of Leo; effectively the senators in 886 were all Leo's men. Alternatively the senatorial support for Leo could be due to the fact that as a secular body the senators may have had less of a problem with the transgression of canon law and were willing to accept the imperial decision. Further it does seem unlikely that the figure of Stephen himself would have caused the clergy much concern, for he was basically one of Photios's clergy. Indeed the emperor's words indicate that Photios was not a factor at all in the ecclesiastical rumblings of discontent; rather, he is concerned to convince the bishops of the utter suitability of Stephen for the post.⁶⁰ Leo asserts that he and Stephen were born in close chronological proximity and that they grew up together, perhaps wishing to suggest that if he can be emperor then surely his brother can be patriarch. He also states that there is nothing in Stephen that is reproachful, but that 'au contraire, il a une vie surabondante en splendeurs et en beauté infléissable, de laquelle l'épousée immaculée, l'Église du Christ, a lieu de se réjouir. Cette affirmation de notre majesté reçue de Dieu ne vient pas de ce que nous sommes son frère...mais de ce que nous connaissons et honorons la vérité'.⁶¹ In the address Leo also uses the device of answering for the

⁵⁸Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 200-207; Akakios, *Λόγοι*, 160-163.

⁵⁹Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 199.

⁶⁰Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 203, 23 - 205, 21.

⁶¹Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 205, 6-10. Regarding Leo's relationship with Stephen it has often been assumed that they must have got on well as brothers, unlike Leo and Alexander, but

archbishops, thus giving himself the reply he wants to hear. Quite simply Leo overrode their opposition. Thus in the matter of appointing his brother as patriarch Leo achieved his goal by sheer determination and obstinacy.

Despite his youth it does seem that Stephen acquired popularity and a pious reputation. The *Life of Euthymios* comments that 'though he seemed young in years, yet was he perfect in understanding, piety and ever increasing virtue'.⁶² The *Life of Basil the Younger* describes Stephen as 'a man who was eminent in every virtue'.⁶³ The *Synaxarion of Constantinople* reveals that Stephen's memory was commemorated on 18 May, and the entry upon him notes that although he became patriarch when he was young he turned out well, being 'a sleepless guard and true shepherd'.⁶⁴ It appears that Stephen also maintained his post as *synkellos* whilst being patriarch, at least for a time, until his spiritual father Euthymios agreed to fill the office.⁶⁵ However Stephen's patriarchate, and the scheme for the imperial control of secular and ecclesiastical authority, was cut short by his premature death in 893.⁶⁶ Thus after having held the position of patriarch for just six years and five months he was laid to rest in the monastery τῶν Συκεῶν.⁶⁷ It seems that Stephen had poor health, so his death may not have been totally unexpected⁶⁸, yet it was surely still one of the major blows of Leo's early reign. The emperor now had to find someone to place in the patriarchate whom he could rely on to co-operate with him; Leo no doubt came to wish that Stephen still occupied the patriarchal throne in the time of the tetragamy crisis.

Yet our chapter does not end with the replacement of Photios by Stephen; although Photios fell in 886-7 there is more to be said concerning him in Leo's reign. Despite Pseudo-Symeon's efforts to make us think differently it is quite clear that at the trial of 887 Photios was not condemned; Leo was angry that no conviction against the ex-patriarch had been secured, and Theodore suffered the emperor's wrath. As a *persona non grata* it seems that Photios was returned to his

perhaps this is reading too much into the evidence. Yes, Leo did secure the patriarchate for Stephen, attesting warmly to his brother's character, but we should not forget that Leo was speaking with purpose in mind, the purpose being to secure the co-operation of the patriarchate throughout his reign; such an opportunity was not to be missed at any price, even the speaking of the truth. Stephen does remain rather a vague figure to us, we lack the evidence to gain a three dimensional impression of him. Further to his relationship with Leo he simply appears as a willing co-operator, being the addressee of Leo's Novels on religious issues, and assisting his brother in fostering good relations with Euthymios.

⁶²VE, 35. 4-6.

⁶³PG 109, 653.

⁶⁴AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 694.

⁶⁵VE, 21. 26 - 23. 9.

⁶⁶VE, 43. 17-19.

⁶⁷GMC, 849. TC, 354, names the monastery as that of Συκεῶν.

⁶⁸See the *Life of Basil the Younger*, which indicates that it was medical treatment for a persistent illness that led to Stephen's early death: PG 109, 653.

enforced retirement at his elusive monastery. Yet it seems that Photios did not remain reviled for the remainder of his life; Leo could afford to be magnanimous after the threat had been removed and punishment inflicted. We have already noted that the record of the trial in most of the chronicles presents Photios in a positive light, and Theodore is assigned the role of scapegoat in the story of the plot against Leo. The fallen patriarch also continued his career as a writer in the reign of Leo, though this does not constitute evidence that he was rehabilitated.⁶⁹ More significant is that Leo himself seems to present Photios favourably in his *Epitaphios* on his parents, a text which was probably written in 888. As we have seen the purpose of this work was to glorify Basil, and one of the reasons Leo gives for praising his father is the peace he brought to the church, which had been strife-ridden due to the opposition of Ignatios and Photios. Leo seems to ridicule Ignatios, calling him 'le prêtre parfait qui menait la lutte à la perfection'.⁷⁰ The emperor describes how Basil ended the strife (which he is careful to point out had pre-existed his father's reign, thus attempting to clear him of any blame for the trouble, which of course he had added to by deposing Photios in 867): 'L'Eglise tout entière étant exilée avec son Archevêque [Photios], il ordonne son retour et tous se retrouvant réunis, ils se donnent le main droite et par le symbole de la sainte charité, le très sacré baiser, la longue dissension est supprimé'. Leo then adds that just at this moment Ignatios died so 'l'Archevêque récemment revenu de l'exil reçoit le trône et le gouvernement de tout le corps sacerdotal', and then unity finally resulted. Thus it is clear that Leo viewed Photios as the legitimate archbishop, and as the instrument of ultimate unity, views which may strike us as odd given his attitude to the patriarch in 886-7. Grégoire was certainly puzzled by this apparent pro-Photios stance, and hence argued that the 'Archbishop' referred to in the text as being recalled must have been Ignatios, but this view cannot be maintained, for it simply does not fit with the information that follows.⁷¹ It could be argued that Leo merely takes this pro-Photios line as a means of praising his father, yet this is surely not the whole explanation for such an evidently positive image of his one time enemy; there is in fact further evidence suggesting that just as Photios's fall in 886 had been part

⁶⁹It seems that Photios revised and enlarged his *Mystagogia* after 886: see Dvornik, *Photian Schism*, 249. A. Markopoulos has argued that the famous *Bibliotheka* is also a work from the end of Photios's life: 'ΝΕΑ ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΗ ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ "ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗΣ" ΤΟΥ ΦΟΤΙΟΥ', ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ, 4 (1987), 165-181.

⁷⁰Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 62. 16. Toynbee, *Constantine*, 598, noted that the *Epitaphios* shows Leo as more friendly to Photios than to Ignatios.

⁷¹Grégoire, 'Oraison funèbre', 629. Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 166, was also struck by the attitude of the funeral oration towards Photios. She comments that the 'most fascinating feature' of the *Epitaphios* 'is the solemn praise of Basil for having procured union in the Church and of Photios by implication, since he is the "one shepherd" of the one flock under whom the faithful are at last united - a year or so after this same Photios has been forced by the orator to abdicate'.

of a wider purge against his circle, so his rehabilitation was part of a wider restoration of his family and friends.

Throughout Leo's reign we can see his habit of punishing his enemies, only to restore them within a few years; it seems that Photios's case was no different. Once again it is the *Life of Euthymios* that points the way to this conclusion, for it relates the case of the recall of Leo Katakalon, which has a direct bearing on Euthymios's life. We are told that certain relatives of Katakalon brought pressure to bear on the emperor through Euthymios when Leo was building a monastery at Psamathia for his spiritual father on territory that had been confiscated from Leo Katakalon. Leo subsequently recalled Katakalon and bought the territory from him, so that Euthymios would countenance accepting it. Katakalon soon became a leading official under Leo VI, appearing as the domestic of the schools in the 890s and 900s.⁷² Karlin-Hayter herself has proposed that the *Epitaphios* did mark a turning point in Leo's reign, reflecting the end of the period of purges, and Dvornik also noted the change, arguing that the funeral oration revealed Leo's new mood.⁷³ Photios's rehabilitation would also explain a facet of the *Life of Euthymios* that Karlin-Hayter noted, that such an evidently Ignatian author could write sympathetically about Photios.⁷⁴ It is also worth noting that in his funeral oration on Euthymios Arethas refers to Photios with honour.⁷⁵

Confirmation that Photios was rehabilitated comes upon his death, which Jenkins has stated occurred at the earliest in 893.⁷⁶ According to some of the chronicles, his body was permitted to be buried in Constantinople in the monastery of Eremia, an institution that he himself had had converted from a church to a nunnery.⁷⁷ Further, according to the virulently anti-Photian author of the *Life of Ignatios*, partisans of Photios after his death endeavoured to claim for him the

⁷²GMC, 855; DAI, I, 206. 50 - 208. 55.

⁷³Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 165-166; Dvornik, *Photian Schism*, 250. The chronicles, for instance GMC, 851-852, do record that Leo recalled Theodore Santabarenos (whom he had previously moved from Athens to the east) to Constantinople and granted him an allowance from the Nea Ekklesia, though they state that this happened many years after his exile.

⁷⁴Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 39; *Commentary*, 162-163. The attitude toward Photios may also be explained in other ways. Stylianos and Nikolaos are the real villains of the *Life*, and Stylianos punished Photios, so therefore Photios is perhaps bound to become sympathetic. Also the Ignatian sympathies of the author have been overplayed. Ignatios may have been Euthymios's master but Euthymios himself seems rather more 'moderate' than 'extremist'. Leo VI is also favoured by this author, despite his uncanonical behaviour, so thus the author appears 'moderate' too. These points only serve to highlight the dangers of talking in terms of 'moderates' and 'extremists', 'Ignatians' and 'Photians'; history is not as simple as that. Grégoire, 'Blaise', 414, also observes that Photios is not pilloried in the *Life of Nikolaos the Studite* or the *Life of Blasios*, even though one would expect him to be reviled by such 'Ignatian' texts. He took these omissions to suggest that public opinion was favourable towards Photios.

⁷⁵ASM, I, 92. 28-29. See the comments of Jugie, 'Homélie mariales', I, 488-489.

⁷⁶Jenkins, 'Note on Nicetas', 244. However he gives no explanation for this assertion.

⁷⁷GMC, 844; LG, 258.

'honour of sainthood'.⁷⁸ Given the entry in the *Synaxarion* recording Photios's memory on 6 February it seems that they must have succeeded, and we can only wonder what part Leo VI played in acknowledging the holy reputation of Photios.⁷⁹ Further, a leading member of Leo's court, the diplomat Leo Choiosphaktes, whose wife was a relative of the emperor, wrote poems commemorating the memory of several prominent contemporary figures, such as Leo the Philosopher and the patriarch Stephen, and he also wrote one on Photios.⁸⁰ The poem is entitled *Iambic Verses on Photios the Patriarch who is among the Saints*, and in it Choiosphaktes laments the passing of the compassionate intellectual Photios. He ends the poem with the final exclamation:

O Photios chief-shepherd of the church,
O golden-tongued and sweet-mouthed old man,
Whose body the tomb bears, but heaven your spirit.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from the poem seems to be that since an official and relative of the emperor could write such a work on the death of Photios the memory of this man must have been officially rehabilitated, that in effect it was safe to honour him so. It is apparent that Photios then did not remain in disgrace, but ultimately received honour and respect from the new emperor.

Yet Photios's passing does seem rather muted for such a great figure of Byzantine history; as we noted it is only Pseudo-Symeon who records his death during Leo's reign, and that maliciously. Leo may have rehabilitated Photios's reputation, but he certainly did not allow him back into the sphere of politics, and it surely is his absence from this area that accounts for his quiet passing. By the time of his death Photios was an old man anyway, as Choiosphaktes makes explicit in his poem; it has been estimated that Photios was born around 810, so when he died he was in his eighties. He may simply have reached the end of his career due to this factor of age, though we have seen that in his seventies under Basil he was still a controlling force. Perhaps it is more likely that Leo was far too wary to ever let his old enemy regain a political role. Further, Leo was not like his father Basil who had to rely on the intellect of others to shape the ideology of his rule, and be his spokesmen. Basil had simply become dependent on the intellectual crutch of Photios, but his son Leo was capable of standing without support; he had the ability to think and speak for himself, skills that his father had ensured he received, and which Photios had a share in imparting to him. Ultimately the end of Photios with

⁷⁸PG 105, 541.

⁷⁹AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 448. 19-23. The entry also states that the feast of Photios's memory was celebrated in the *propheteion* of St John the Baptist at the monastery of Eremia. For this monastery see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. Première partie. Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique. III. Les églises et les monastères*, second edition (Paris, 1969), 113.

⁸⁰Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, Appendix.

its concomitant elevation of Stephen is most significant for what it reveals about Leo. Here was an emperor with strong views, who knew what he wanted and was determined to get it. Thus Photios and his allies suffered swift purposeful punishment, and Stephen was elevated to the patriarchate in the face of ecclesiastical opposition. For Byzantines and Byzantinists alike, these events expose the nature of the emperor Leo VI.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DOMINATE OF STYLIANOS ZAOUTZES

As Jenkins has observed, in Byzantine popular memory the reign of Leo VI fell into two neat halves, each half being determined by the official who was seen to have been the dominant influence upon the emperor.¹ The eunuch Samonas was credited with supremacy in the second half of the reign, but it is the corresponding figure of the first half of Leo's rule (886-899), Stylianos Zaoutzes, that this chapter is concerned with. The Byzantine perception that Stylianos had effective control of the government of the empire has persisted amongst Byzantinists, and Karlin-Hayter asserts that 'The phrase used by Laurent: "Le tout-puissant Stylien Zaoutzes", is not too strong'.² The acceptance of this view naturally has automatic repercussions for the assessment of Leo VI and his reign, and indeed this emperor has been seen as weak, ineffectual, easily-led and indifferent to the cares of the empire.³ But how valid are such conclusions? A contribution to the answering of this question can be made by considering the position that Stylianos attained at Leo's court, and assessing the nature and extent of his power. By so doing it is hoped that a more accurate perception of Leo VI and his early reign will emerge.

Initially one needs to examine the origins of Stylianos and trace the steps by which he became Leo's leading official. It is clear that Stylianos did have certain connections with Leo's father Basil. Both men were Macedonian Armenians, that is their families were originally from Armenia but had come to be settled in the region of Macedonia. Such a link is probably sufficient to explain why Stylianos is then found as a functionary of the court of Basil I, but Adontz has theorized further upon their relationship.⁴ He noted that Basil had begun his career under the *strategos* of Macedonia, a man called Tzantzes, and thus he argues that the similarities in name between Zaoutzes and Tzantzes pointed to a connection between the two men, and suggested that Stylianos may in fact have been the son of Tzantzes. This, he said, would explain Basil's affection for Stylianos, since he was the son of his old commander. As further confirmation of his belief Adontz noted that Stylianos himself had a son called Tzantzes, concluding that this point was the 'argument décisif en faveur de notre conjecture'.⁵ The conjecture certainly lends depth to the

¹Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 107, n. 72.

²Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 150.

³Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 20, herself has commented upon these common characterisations of Leo.

⁴See Adontz, 'L'âge et l'origine', I, 482-483.

⁵Adontz, 'L'âge et l'origine', I, 483.

relationship between Basil and Stylianos, a depth that events seem to require, given Zaoutzes's apparent significance towards the end of this emperor's reign, when he was able to approach Basil and discuss the issue of Leo's imprisonment.⁶

It is not without interest that when Stylianos is first recorded as existing during Basil's reign it is only in as much as he is the father of Leo's love interest, Zoe Zaoutzaina. This is the famous incident when Theophano, recently married to Leo, believing that her husband was having an affair with this Zoe, informed her father-in-law of her suspicions. Basil acted swiftly and brutally, assaulting his son, and enforcing Zoe's marriage to a certain Theodore Gouzouniates. In passing it is clarified that Zoe was the daughter of Zaoutzes.⁷ One can only wonder what Stylianos's reaction to this incident was. How did he feel about the emperor marrying off his daughter so hastily? Had Stylianos even been aware of the relationship between his daughter and the emperor's son and heir, and if he had been, did it give him cause to reflect on how close he could become to the future emperor? Unfortunately it is difficult to gauge the exact nature of the relationship between Stylianos and Leo prior to this incident. Certainly Vogt's suggestion that Stylianos may have been Leo's tutor after Photios has no foundation.⁸ It may perhaps be assumed that Stylianos cannot have been too intimately tied to Leo by 883, for he was not amongst those friends of the heir-apparent who suffered in the aftermath of the exposing of Leo's 'plot' against his father. One is thus left with the impression that Stylianos's ties with Basil were stronger than those with Leo. However at the point of Leo's fall Zaoutzes may have had one eye on the future, for it is related that along with Photios he prevented Basil from blinding his son.⁹ The chronicle that relates this detail is of further interest, for it records the first office known to have been held by Stylianos, that of 'little hetaireiarch', that is he was the commander of a division of the imperial bodyguard.¹⁰

⁶VT, 11-13. It is VT, 11, 28, that reveals Stylianos's nickname to us, for Basil addresses him as 'the Ethiopian'. It is apparent that Zaoutzes's colouring was dark, for it is also alluded to in other texts. A. Sharf, 'A Source for Byzantine Jewry under the Early Macedonians', *BNJ*, 20 (1973), 302-318, esp. 304, gives a translation of a Jewish Vision of Daniel which says 'And there will reign together with him [Leo VI], but uncrowned, peacefully for the space of twenty-two seasons a dark one beloved by him'. This 'dark one' is obviously Stylianos. L. Rydén, 'The Portrait of the Arab Samonas in Byzantine Literature', *Graeco-Arabica*, 3 (1984), 101-108, esp. 107, conjectures that the 'Ethiopian' in the apocalyptic Life of Andrew the Holy Fool 'corresponds to the dark one...of the Vision of Daniel'. S. Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge, 1977), 180, n. 39, comments that 'The name 'Zaoutzes' is clearly derived from the Armenian word 'Zaoutch', meaning a negro'.

⁷For this episode see VE, 41, 1-8.

⁸Vogt, *Basile*, 423; 'Jeunesse', 404.

⁹GMC, 846.

¹⁰This office is a problem: why the 'little'? P. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'hétériarque. L'évolution de son rôle du *De Ceremoniis* au *Traité des Offices*', *JÖB*, 23 (1974), 101-143, esp. 117-118, repr. *Studies in*, XVIII, suggests that the adjective 'little' was used to denigrate Stylianos by an author who consistently blackens him and who favours Romanos Lekapenos, who is described as the 'great' hetaireiarch. This seems unconvincing; could it be that Stylianos was 'little' by virtue of being the chief of the bodyguard of the 'little' emperor, Leo himself?

When Zaoutzes is next encountered in 886 it is evident that he has been promoted, for he is no longer *protospatharios*¹¹; one may hypothesise that Stylianos filled the higher post on the fall of Michael the hetaireiarch who was implicated in the plot of Kourkouas which had been exposed in March 886.¹² It was whilst holding this office that Stylianos went to the ailing Basil to persuade him to release Leo from his palatial prison, and restore him to his imperial position. The source for this episode is the *Life of Theophano*, a text that is unique in preserving a positive image of Stylianos Zaoutzes. Thus, given this text's evident favouritism towards Stylianos, can we really believe its account of Leo's liberation in which Zaoutzes is the earthly saviour of the young emperor? Certainly none of the other sources touch on his role in this event. However given Leo's blatant preference for Stylianos within his own reign it is obvious that the emperor did feel some gratitude towards him, and this is explicable if the hetaireiarch had been an instrument of his release. One may suspect that the *Life of Theophano* has exaggerated Zaoutzes's part in Basil's change of mind, but it seems likely that it does preserve an element of truth, and it is compatible with Stylianos's reported part in the prevention of Leo's blinding. His role may have been inflated later due to the fact that he did become such a major figure in Leo's reign, and he is certainly not the only person credited with a part in Leo's liberation, or the only person to whom Leo was grateful for his release. As to why Stylianos would have been concerned to effect Leo's deliverance, one possibility is that he was aware of Basil's insecure position towards the end of his life, since he had become ill and there was evident discontent with his rule, and thus by securing Leo's release he wished to restore the stability of the Macedonian dynasty and in so doing secure his own position as a faithful servant of the family. If he was hoping that Leo would be grateful to him he was surely not disappointed. Another factor in Stylianos's concern may have been the knowledge that Leo was attached to his daughter. One does wonder how much contact Stylianos would have had with Leo during the period of the imprisonment, from the summer of 883 to that of 886. Perhaps in his capacity of hetaireiarch Zaoutzes did have a certain responsibility for the imprisoned Leo, and it could be that the dispossessed heir was able to win his favour and thus use him as an agent for his release. The *Life of Theophano* does indicate that the impounded Leo was ordered to be guarded¹³, and it is striking that when the vision of St Demetrios appeared to Leo and Theophano at night they initially thought that this military figure had been despatched by the emperor to kill them; perhaps such duties would have fallen within the sphere of the

¹¹*VT*, 11. 16.

¹²*GMC*, 847.

¹³*VT*, 8. 6.

hetaireiarch.¹⁴ It is also notable that Basil entrusted Stylianos with the liberation of Leo, perhaps indicating that he had been responsible for him whilst he was in prison.¹⁵ If these conjectures do carry any weight it appears that Leo did indeed have reason to be grateful to Stylianos in 886, and this would explain his subsequent popularity with the emperor. In fact he did not have long to wait before reaping his rewards, for just over a month later Basil was dead. However it is widely accepted that it was not Leo who was responsible for initially elevating Zaoutzes to a prime position within the administration but Basil, who as he was dying left Stylianos as guardian (*epitropos*) of his heirs.

Yet these fundamental beliefs, that Basil left Stylianos as *epitropos* and that he was a prime mover in Leo's administration from the very start of his reign, can be challenged. As these attestations of Stylianos's position and power at the beginning of Leo's rule come from the *Life of Euthymios* it is apparent that its evidence is being called into question. Granted, this source is of extreme importance for details of Leo's reign and does seem to preserve a startlingly realistic account of this emperor and other figures, but its details should not be uncritically accepted, given its evident bias against people who were enemies of Euthymios, such as Stylianos and Nikolaos. When its version of Leo's early reign is compared with those of other sources some interesting differences emerge. The *Life of Euthymios* tells us that Basil left Stylianos in charge of the empire, 'committing to him the direction of all matters, ecclesiastical and political'.¹⁶ When Leo then replaced his dead father he 'immediately appointed Stylianos Zaoutzes protomagistros, and not long after promoted him basilopator, and it was notorious that in this same Stylianos were vested control and responsibility for all decisions to be taken by the government'.¹⁷ Thus for the author of this *Life* Stylianos was responsible for all the governmental acts of the early reign; he was the force behind the purge of Photios and his relations, and it was he who ordered Theodore Santabarenos to be blinded.

When one turns to the other major sources for Leo's early reign one will see certain similarities, but also significant differences, between their accounts of Stylianos's position under Leo at the start of his reign and that of the *Life of Euthymios*. Taking the *Life of Theophano* first it is apparent that it too saw Zaoutzes as the administrator of the empire. We are informed that after Basil's death Leo busied himself with divine matters whilst Stylianos, who was after a short time proclaimed basileiopator, 'accomplished the public cares of affairs and the Roman

¹⁴VT, 10, 10-14. Just as Demetrios was the militaristic heavenly saviour of Leo so Stylianos was his militaristic earthly saviour; the parallels between Demetrios and Stylianos have been noted by Magdalino, 'Demetrios and Leo', 201.

¹⁵VT, 13, 9-11.

¹⁶VE, 5, 23-27.

¹⁷VE, 7, 3-7.

politeia was captured justly and with good laws and with piety'.¹⁸ But the difference in its perception of the character of Stylianos's government is not the only divergence; although the *Life of Theophano* favours Stylianos and is a source that has its origins in the period before his fall from grace it has no record of Basil leaving Zaoutzes as guardian of his sons, a fact that is even more peculiar when one considers the trouble it went to to convey Stylianos's intercession with Basil and his role as Leo's saviour. As far as the author of this text is concerned, it was Leo, not Basil, who was responsible for making Stylianos the governor of the empire.

The evidence of the chronicles further confounds the assertions of the *Life of Euthymios*. Only one of the chroniclers, Pseudo-Symeon, relates the detail that Stylianos was left as *epitropos* by Basil, but it seems that he took this piece of information directly from the *Life of Euthymios*, given that it does not fit with the account of the early reign that the chronicle tradition preserves.¹⁹ Karlin-Hayter has often defended the validity of the evidence of the *Life of Euthymios* against that of the chronicles, pointing to the relatively early date of the composition of the *Life* between 920 and 925, the fact that it was written by someone who was obviously well acquainted with the events and figures of the reign of Leo VI, and contrasting these details with the fact that the chronicles were only compiled in the mid-tenth century and have a very different nature.²⁰ Yet given Jenkins's assertion that the reigns of Basil I, Leo VI and Alexander described in the chronicles owe their details to Byzantine annals, it seems that these texts should preserve a more accurate account of the order and progression of events, and this is of the utmost importance for the consideration of Stylianos's career and status in Leo's early reign. The chronicles do not cast Zaoutzes as *epitropos*, nor do they even convey that he was Leo's right-hand man; it is quite clear that it was Andrew who filled this role. It was Andrew who was despatched to bring back Michael's body from Chrysopolis; it was Andrew who denounced Photios in Hagia Sophia, and was subsequently chief interrogator at the trial of the ex-patriarch and Santabarenos; it was Andrew who had been suspected of being Leo's chief ally in the 'plot' of 883. Certainly the chroniclers do record other figures who were allies of the young emperor in 886-887, like Stephen the *magistros* and John Hagiopolites, but Stylianos is not even found amongst this group. However he was obviously favoured, since he landed the job of logothete of the drome and the rank of *magistros* before Christmas 886²¹, but as yet it seems that he was not dominant. Thus it is undeniable that the *Life of*

¹⁸*VT*, 14. 16-20.

¹⁹*Ps. Sym.*, 699-700. For its dependance on the *Life of Euthymios* for this point see Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, Introduction, 11.

²⁰Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 17-19; *VE*, Introduction, 57.

²¹For this date see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

Euthymios has exaggerated Stylianos's career and his authority. It alleged that he immediately received the title of *protomagistros*, and then shortly after that the newly created office of 'basilopator', and not only do the chronicles prove this wrong, but so does another item of evidence, a seal of Stylianos. This object preserves an inscription that confirms the chronicle account of Zaoutzes's career; he is described as *magistros, anthypatos, patrikios*, imperial *protospatharios* and logothete of the drome. Laurent was fully aware of the implications of this artefact, stating that the inscription 'met en question l'affirmation de la *Vita Euthymii*...selon laquelle la dignité concédée par le monarque lors de son accession au trône aurait été celle de *protomagistros*'.²² Even the assertion that both the *Life of Euthymios* and the *Life of Theophano* make, that Stylianos soon became basileiopator, seems rather premature given that the chronicles indicate that he was promoted to this office between August 891 and May 893.²³ Thus far it is apparent that Stylianos was not immediately the major official of Leo's reign, that in fact his career progression is rather less sudden than some sources indicate. As for the emperor's growing favouritism towards Stylianos one can only conjecture about its cause. It was probably a combination of factors: the apparent death of Andrew, who disappears from history after the trial of Photios; perhaps Leo's disenchantment with those men who failed to convict Photios at his trial in 887; Leo's natural attachment to Stylianos as one of his saviours; and perhaps most significantly, the fact that it seems that Leo did begin an affair with Zoe Zaoutzaina in his early reign.

Before moving on to consider Stylianos's increasing prominence and the nature of his relationship with Leo, it is necessary to address the question as to why the *Life of Euthymios* would want to telescope Stylianos's career and exaggerate the extent of his power. Although one may accuse the *Life of Theophano* of a similar crime, its crime is much more readily understandable. It has a simplified historical narrative, and it also reflects a time when Stylianos was favoured by Leo VI. The chronicles and the *Life of Euthymios* however preserve the more typical image of Stylianos, that of the evil schemer. Notably these latter sources were produced several decades after the disgrace of Stylianos's family, who were caught plotting against the emperor. This event allowed for Zaoutzes to be reinvented as a villain to explain away the crimes, failings and unpopular acts of others, as we can see in the cases of Nikephoros Phokas the elder and Leo VI himself. To understand this phenomenon these cases will be considered further, starting with that of Nikephoros Phokas.

²²V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, II, *L'administration centrale* (Paris, 1981), 206.

²³Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

The chronicle of the Continuator of Theophanes has much more to say about Phokas than his colleagues, and it appears that he must have incorporated into his narrative a source that the others did not possess, a eulogistic account of the life of Nikephoros Phokas the elder. This man held the position of domestic of the schools under Leo VI after the death of Andrew, notably in the initial stages of the Bulgarian war of the mid 890s, the details of which are preserved by the chroniclers.²⁴ The emperor despatched Nikephoros Phokas as commander of the army and Eustathios Argyros as captain of the navy to Bulgaria to pressurize its ruler Symeon into making peace, with the help of the muscle of the Magyars. This strategy of the emperor's seemed to work, for the Bulgarian leader sent to Byzantium for a diplomat to come to him and arrange a truce, and then the Byzantine land and sea forces were withdrawn. But once this threat was removed Symeon immediately moved to war again, and inflicted a terrible blow on the Magyar allies of the Byzantines, and thus humiliated Leo VI. It is within the aftermath of this episode that the Continuator of Theophanes relates his unique information concerning Nikephoros Phokas. Amongst the extra details is one anecdote where it is alleged that Nikephoros, who is emphatically described as dear to the emperor, was approached by Stylianos, who offered him his daughter in marriage. Upon Nikephoros's refusal, reputedly for fear of attracting the suspicions of Leo, Zaoutzes was angered and brought charges against Nikephoros and had him removed from office.²⁵ As Grégoire already concluded this anecdote is untrustworthy, since it is based on romantic and legendary material.²⁶ It seems that it is deliberately casting Stylianos in the role of an evil schemer to explain away Nikephoros's fall from favour in 895, which was no doubt embarrassing for his prominent descendants. The more likely explanation of Nikephoros's demotion was that the emperor was venting his anger at the failure of the campaign on the commander of the Byzantine army.

A similar case of tampering with the account of historical events to shift blame onto Stylianos has been deduced by Magdalino with regard to the infamous episode of the Bulgarian market.²⁷ The chronicles tell us that through the intermediary of Stylianos's beloved eunuch slave Mousikos two Greek businessmen, Staurakios and Kosmas, acquired the rights to administer the Bulgarian market that was based in Constantinople. They then transferred the market to Thessalonica and extorted higher dues from the Bulgarian merchants, who complained about this to the ruler of their country, Symeon. The Bulgarian leader

²⁴*TC*, 357-359; *GMC*, 853-855; *LG*, 266-269.

²⁵*TC*, 359-360.

²⁶Grégoire, 'Carrière'. See also the remarks of Karlin-Hayter, *VE. Commentary*, 151.

²⁷Magdalino, 'Demetrios and Leo'.

then requested the Byzantine emperor to put a stop to this iniquitous behaviour, but Leo dismissed the protest as nonsense, due to his attachment to Stylianos, who was in turn attached to Mousikos. This out of hand rejection prompted Symeon to declare war on the Byzantines.²⁸ Thus the chronicles impress upon us that it was the corruption and influence of Stylianos that led to a conflict that troubled the empire for many years to come. Magdalino has however sought to explain the transfer of the market to Thessalonica in different terms. He shows that Leo had an especial devotion to St Demetrios, which was probably due to the vision of this saint that had come to him during his imprisonment with the cheering message of his future liberation and rule.²⁹ Working from the fact that upon his accession Leo rewarded all the agents of his salvation, Magdalino interprets the case of the Bulgarian market in this context. Thessalonica was the centre of Demetrios's cult, and moving the market there would benefit the city, its church and its saint. If one does interpret Leo's policy as an act of piety it is then much easier to understand why the emperor rejected Symeon's complaint so abruptly. Yet this policy was ill-fated for it did cause a horrendous and protracted war to break out, and it was this result that led to the 'official' version of the transfer of the market that we find in the chronicles, where blame is largely laid on Stylianos, and the part of St Demetrios is concealed. Thus Leo, just like the Phokas family, was capable of rewriting history to exonerate himself from censure at the expense of Stylianos Zaoutzes.

It is in such a light that the evidence of the *Life of Euthymios* can be viewed. As has been seen this text endeavours to present every evil and reprehensible governmental act of the early reign of Leo VI as a deed of Stylianos, and by so doing it excuses the emperor from any blame; thus it too must be accused of concealing the real explanation of events. But why does it seek to excuse Leo to Stylianos's detriment? It is worth noting that its author, although having Euthymios as his hero, does paint a very sympathetic portrait of the emperor, depicting Stylianos and Nikolaos as the real villains, even though Leo and his spiritual father did have their own fair share of conflicts. Karlin-Hayter has conjectured that the author was a member of the imperial court under Leo³⁰, and it may be that he did have a genuine liking for the emperor. A further factor may have been the nature of the text as hagiography; what the *Life* seeks to convey is the struggle between Stylianos and Euthymios for the prize of Leo's soul, a theme that was perhaps not unconsciously included. It should not be forgotten that one is dealing with hagiography and not conventional Byzantine historiography; the nature of the *Life*

²⁸GMC, 853.

²⁹VT, 10. 10-30.

³⁰Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 34-37.

can delude, witness Kazhdan, who described it as a Psamathian chronicle.³¹ The artistic licence of an edifying religious text is certainly at play. Stylianos and Euthymios are established as opposing forces; Stylianos is the political realist who subordinates everything to the securing and maintaining of earthly power, whilst Euthymios stands for Christian morality, and can see that terrestrial domination through force is ultimately worthless, for the quality of one's soul is all that matters. Euthymios and Stylianos symbolise the powers of good and evil, and Leo is caught between them in the dilemma common to all humans, whether to live one's life as one should or as one wants. The author thus apparently manipulates the history of Leo's reign to give it a Christian message, and it is this which perhaps explains why he is so insistent on Stylianos's absolute power, for he wants to depict Leo's dilemma in physical terms. Thus his assertion that Stylianos had excessive power can be questioned, and Karlin-Hayter has commented that the *Life* 'certainly exaggerates Leo's non-participation' in the purge of the early reign, though she asserts that 'The reality of power, by common consent of the sources, was, during the first years of Leo's reign, lodged with Zaoutzes'.³² It is this question of Stylianos's power and his developing relationship with the emperor that shall be returned to now.

Thus far it has been demonstrated that Stylianos was not immediately the leading figure in Leo's administration. However it is apparent from the *Life of Theophano* that Stylianos did come to be recognised by Leo himself as his right-hand man, aiding the emperor in running the state. How did this situation come about? On what was Zaoutzes's authority based? How absolute was his power? These are all questions which need to be addressed if we are to understand Leo and his early reign. Although Stylianos was certainly not initially dominant he did have a significant position at court; the emperor did promote him from the job of the commander of the imperial bodyguard to that of the logothete of the drome, a job of not inconsiderable importance.³³ This office in the ninth and tenth centuries entailed responsibilities involving diplomacy, ceremony and internal security. Miller was of the opinion that this office had attained its peak of importance in the early ninth century when it was held by Theoktistos (842-856), who is often perceived as the empress Theodora's prime minister. After the assassination of Theoktistos in 856 Miller believes the importance of the post declined, but he wonders whether the appointment of Stylianos to the office would 'seem to reverse this tendency towards

³¹See Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 6; 'Notes on the "Vita Euthymii"' *Byz.* 32 (1962), 317-322.

³²Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Introduction*, 58.

³³For the functions and significance of this office see D. A. Miller, 'The Logothete of the Drome in the Middle Byzantine Period', *Byz.* 36 (1966), 438-470. See also Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 311; Bury, *Administrative System*, 91-92.

mediocrity'.³⁴ However he concludes that Zaoutzes's prominence under Leo was 'not based on his logothetship...but in fact was owing to the office/rank with which he had been invested at the same time, that of *protomagistros*'.³⁵ Certainly it is clear that amongst the holders of the rank of *magistros* in late ninth century Byzantium there were two that did enjoy exceptional status, and this is expressed through the distinct functions that were assigned to them. One of these was indeed called the *protomagistros* (or simply the *magistros*), and he was the leading member of the senatorial order. Upon him would devolve responsibility for the imperial administration when the emperor was absent; the special duties of the other distinct *magistros* were connected with ceremonial participation.³⁶ However as we have seen the belief that Stylianos was created *protomagistros* at the same time as he became logothete can be disputed; he certainly attained the rank of a *magistros*, but there is no reason to believe that this indicated he was yet the leading *magistros*. However it seems that Miller's assertion that Stylianos's prominence was based on his rank as *magistros* does eventually prove to be true; in the dedication addressed to Stylianos recorded at the head of Leo's collection of novels, most of which are also addressed to him, the emperor describes Zaoutzes as the '*magistros* of divine offices', and elsewhere in the corpus of new laws he is also called δ μεγαλοπρεπέστατος μάγιστρος.³⁷ Thus Stylianos did come to be identified by his rank rather than by his office, and it seems that he ultimately did emerge as the prime 'effective' *magistros*, a position that had evolved out of the old office of *magister officiorum*.³⁸ However he rose even further than this in the imperial administration; Leo created for him the brand new office of basileiopatōr, the highest secular magistracy within the empire, which was only held once more in the history of Byzantium, by Romanos Lekapenos in 919.³⁹ As Jenkins has shown Zaoutzes must have acquired this office within the period 891-893, and it appears that he held it until his death in 899. Regarding this office it is apparent that Byzantinists have had difficulty explaining its name and its function. Bury asserted that 'The general care of affairs of state was recognized as belonging to this office'

³⁴Miller, 'Drome', 465.

³⁵Miller, 'Drome', 465-466.

³⁶For these two distinctive magisters see Bury, *Administrative System*, 29-33; Oikonomidēs, *Listes*, 294.

³⁷On these points see Schminck, 'Datierung', 91. For the Novels see Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*.

³⁸See Bury, *Administrative System*, 29. It seems that by identifying Stylianos as the *magister officiorum* Leo was being deliberately antiquarian.

³⁹For Leo's institution of the office see Oikonomidēs, *Listes*, 101-102; there Philotheos describes the office that was created by Leo as the 'first and greatest' of the offices of the imperial administration. For Romanos Lekapenos holding the office see *TC*, 394-395; Runciman, *Romanus*, 60.

and that the name meant 'empress's father'.⁴⁰ Grumel, demonstrating that Zaoutzes became basileiopator before the death of Theophano, and thus proving that one cannot explain the sense of the name through Leo's relationship with Zoe, saw in the name of the office a mark of Leo's esteem for his saviour who had delivered him from prison and re-established his right of succession to the empire.⁴¹ Jenkins stressed that the name had no marital significance, and opined that it was rather 'an honorary title implying spiritual parentage or guardianship of the sovereign'.⁴² It was Karlin-Hayter who rightly maintained that the name was not a rank but an office, and believed that it had the connotation of being the 'protector' and 'tutor of a youthful emperor'.⁴³ Oikonomidès stated that 'le basileopator avait les pleins pouvoirs administratifs, et était parfois considéré comme le tuteur du souverain'.⁴⁴ From these assessments of the office it is quite clear that Byzantinists have not really been sure of the exact function of the basileiopator; all they could do was look at the examples of the two men who held the office within Byzantium, Stylianos and Romanos, and deduce the responsibilities of the post from such a consideration. It is no wonder that the understanding of the office has proved so difficult and vague, for the chroniclers obscured the matter by deliberately linking the promotion of Stylianos to the new office of 'father of the emperor' with the fact that the emperor was having an affair with Zaoutzes's daughter.⁴⁵ Maybe even to contemporaries the creation and function of the new office was puzzling; they certainly differ in their spelling of the name of the office. Indeed Schminck has argued that it is wrong to accept the title of Stylianos's new office as meaning 'father of the emperor'; we should in fact spell the name 'basileiopator' (as I have been doing throughout this chapter) and not 'basileopator'.⁴⁶ Thus Stylianos was not 'father of the emperor' but 'father of the palace'. This reading certainly makes much more sense for several reasons. It dispenses once and for all with the false notion that Leo's relationship with Zoe Zaoutzaina had some bearing on the creation of the office; the idea that Leo at the age of at least twenty-five still needed a father figure to guide him in the affairs of state was patently absurd anyway; and it ties in very well with what we know of Stylianos's role at this time, for he both lived in the palace and was seen to be the emperor's right hand man with a degree of authority over the rest of the

⁴⁰Bury, *Administrative System*, 115.

⁴¹Grumel, 'Chronologie', 36-40.

⁴²Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

⁴³P. Karlin-Hayter and A. Leroy-Molinghen, 'Basileopator', *Byz.* 38 (1968), 278-281, esp. 279.

⁴⁴Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 307.

⁴⁵*TC*, 357; Grumel, 'Chronologie', 39-40.

⁴⁶See Schminck, 'Datierung', 108-109, n. 130. Schminck cites seal evidence, but perhaps it is worth noting that the *Life of Theophano*, a text that is well informed about the early career and popularity of Stylianos, does name him as basileiopator, and not basileopator like so many later texts: see *VT*, 14, 18.

imperial officials. Thus the name itself certainly suggests the unique degree to which Stylianos had risen in the imperial administration. As to the specific functions that the office entailed we are none the wiser; it may be that Leo simply desired to grant Stylianos an office of exceptional title to match the exceptional position and role that he had informally acquired. Thus throughout the early years of Leo's reign it is clear that Stylianos did become an increasingly eminent political figure. Yet does this necessarily indicate that he was all-powerful? What was his role in the governing of the empire, and how far did his authority extend?

As far as Miller was concerned Stylianos was indeed a wielder of power even before he attained the position of *basileiopatōr*, for he asserts that it 'added no practical influence to that which he already possessed'.⁴⁷ Indeed it seems that the collection of Novels which amply attests to the primary position that Stylianos held in Leo's administration were written before Zaoutzes reached this unique office, when he was the *protomagistros*.⁴⁸ But does the dedication in this collection of laws reveal anything about the extent of Stylianos's power? Ostrogorsky was of the opinion that Zaoutzes was probably the real author of the Novels, basing his conclusion on the sixth-century example of the emperor Justinian and his praetorian prefect John of Cappadocia and the fact that Leo legislated little after Stylianos's death.⁴⁹ If this were true it might indicate that Stylianos was indeed the ruling force behind Leo's throne. However Noailles concluded on the basis of the distinctive personal style of the Novels that only Leo VI himself could have written the collection.⁵⁰ Schminck has also rejected the theory of Stylianos's authorship of the Novels, though he does allow that Leo may have been stimulated in his legal work by Zaoutzes.⁵¹ One is still left however with the fact that Stylianos is the dedicatee of the collection; does that signify that he was all-powerful? It may be salutary to remember that although Stephen has seventeen of the one hundred and thirteen Novels directed towards him this is taken as proof that he was obedient to his brother's will; referring to Novel seventeen where Leo states that his brother left rulings on ecclesiastical matters to him, Karlin-Hayter comments that 'The impression one gets is that Stephen was as docile as had been hoped'.⁵² This view seems to undermine the notion that Stylianos is evidently powerful because most of the Novels are addressed to him. It seems rather more likely that Zaoutzes is the

⁴⁷Miller, 'Drome', 466.

⁴⁸Schminck, 'Datierung', 91.

⁴⁹Ostrogorsky, *State*, 245.

⁵⁰Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, vii-viii. For this view see also Van der Wal and Lokin, *Droit byzantin*, 86; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Aréthas et le droit d'asile. A propos d'un article récent', *Byz.*, 34 (1964), 613-617, esp. 615, repr. *Studies in*, VII.

⁵¹Schminck, 'Datierung', 97, n. 10. Certainly in Novel 92 Leo attests that Stylianos suggested this decree to him: see Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 303, 11-17.

⁵²Karlin-Hayter, *VE. Commentary*, 158.

addressee of the Novels that touch on secular matters, not because he is powerful, but because as *protomagistros* he was Leo's supreme secular official, just as Stephen, who was the addressee of the ecclesiastical legislation, was the supreme ecclesiastical official. Something of Stylianos's duties as Leo's supreme secular official may be revealed in an episode of the *Life of Euthymios* concerning Zaoutzes and Euthymios. It is related that although Euthymios had accepted the office of *synkellos*, taking it over from Stephen, he did not come into Constantinople from the monastery of St Theodore to fulfill his duties. Consequently Leo 'charged Zaoutzes with looking into the matter', and Stylianos wrote a letter reminding the lax *synkellos* of his duties.⁵³ From this incident it appears that Stylianos did have a recognised position as the leading imperial official whose duties included the responsibility of overseeing the functioning of his colleagues beneath him. Thus it could have appeared to contemporaries that Leo had transferred to Stylianos governmental functions that were usually the emperor's alone, that Zaoutzes did have a measure of imperial power. Perhaps it was Leo's realisation that Stylianos had acquired an exceptional position, even beyond that signified by the rank of *protomagistros*, that led him to create the new office of basileiopator. However thus far we have not found any reason to assert that Stylianos was all-powerful; we need to pursue our investigation further.

Of all the sources that insist on Stylianos's totality of power the *Life of Euthymios* is the most vehement. It was Stylianos who was in control of all affairs, political and ecclesiastical; it was Stylianos who deposed Photios and extracted a resignation from him; it was Stylianos who moved against the patriarch's relatives, confiscating their property, tonsuring them and exiling them; it was Stylianos who gave the order for Theodore Santabarenos to be blinded. But not only have we seen that the chronicles rather point to the fact that Leo himself and his early allies were behind the purge, the *Life of Euthymios* contradicts itself by clearly revealing to us the limitations of Stylianos's power; he does not always get his way. Karlin-Hayter was certainly not unaware of the fact that Stylianos could be thwarted by the emperor, but since she still believed the basic point of the *Life* that Stylianos was *epitropos* and had a significant role in the making of the policy of Leo's reign from its first day, she took this as evidence that Leo became restless with the domination of Stylianos and that his 'influence was more and more limited'.⁵⁴ Yet it may rather be that Leo was never so dominated as one has been led to believe. When one considers the evidence of the *Life* it is found that as early as Chapter Two one

⁵³VE, 23. 12-28.

⁵⁴Karlin-Hayter, VE, *Introduction*, 58-59; *Commentary*, 151, 155-156. However she also asserts that 'Leo was not only authoritarian but strong-willed, profoundly conscious of his responsibilities, determined to be well-informed and to pursue the course he considered suitable': VE, *Commentary*, 156.

encounters an incident that reveals that Stylianos did not have total control over the emperor. It is related that Zaoutzes was only moved to pursue the excessive purge against Photios and his relatives because Euthymios had persuaded the emperor to be reconciled with those who had already fallen victim to the new regime.⁵⁵ Stylianos thus acted out of anger at the influence of the emperor's spiritual father, and here begins the aforementioned contest between Zaoutzes and Euthymios for the prize of Leo's soul, a theme that leads the author to present the early reign as a polarised power struggle; but he cannot prevent the 'real' position peeping through his text, and thus one glimpses incidents that reveal the limitations of Zaoutzes's power. In the matter of the conflict between Stylianos and Euthymios Leo forced Zaoutzes to be reconciled with the monk⁵⁶; when it came down to it Stylianos had to please the emperor by following his wishes. A further example of the real situation is found in the recall of Leo Katakalon. When the emperor was building a monastery on Katakalon's confiscated property for Euthymios, the monk refused to countenance taking possession of it unless everything was above board, that is that Katakalon was recalled and the land paid for and legitimately acquired. Leo duly followed Euthymios's request, but Stylianos was furious at this turn of events, attacking the monk for favouring the enemies of the emperor.⁵⁷ When the shoe is on the other foot, and Leo acts in a manner that displeases or injures Euthymios the hagiographer stresses excessively that Stylianos had influenced the emperor's decision, but his efforts are rather unconvincing. When it is related that Euthymios opposed Leo over his proposed divorce from Theophano and the emperor then rejected his spiritual father and no longer sought his company, the *Life* somewhat unnecessarily adds by way of an explanation of this action that Leo was 'carried away to some extent by Zaoutzes' slanders'.⁵⁸ One can easily imagine that the emperor needed absolutely no encouragement to treat Euthymios in such a way. A similar example is encountered when Euthymios again opposed Leo in marital matters. After Theophano's death the emperor wished to marry Zoe Zaoutzaina, but his spiritual father refused to countenance such a union, so Leo exiled him to the monastery of St Diomedes for two years; once more the emperor's action is attributed to the encouragement of the basileiopator.⁵⁹ Yet it can be contested again that Leo needed no prompting from Stylianos to carry through such an act against the obstructive monk. For proof of such contestations all one has to do is look to the relationship of Euthymios and Leo after the death of Stylianos, for they still

⁵⁵VE, 11. 10-13.

⁵⁶VE, 21. 4-9.

⁵⁷VE, 29. 22 - 33. 4.

⁵⁸VE, 43. 12-16.

⁵⁹VE, 47. 1-35.

continued to disagree and fall out without any help from the basileiopatōr⁶⁰; the real reason for their arguments was Leo's self-will, as Euthymios himself is said to have recognised.⁶¹ In connection with the episode of the exiling of Euthymios to the monastery of St Diomedes due to his opposition to the emperor marrying Zoe Zaoutzaina it is instructive to note that although the *Life* depicts Stylianos doing his utmost to push through Leo's marriage to his daughter, it nevertheless transpires that he did not marry Zoe immediately after Theophano's death, but only after a significant chronological gap. It has been noted that Leo banished Euthymios to the monastery for two years, and from the chronicles it is known that Zoe Zaoutzaina was empress for one year and eight months.⁶² Yet when Euthymios did emerge from the monastery it is clear that Zoe was still empress⁶³; at this time he even witnessed a ceremony where a holy relic, the girdle of the Virgin, was removed from its casket and spread over Zoe in an attempt to rid her of an unclean spirit.⁶⁴ Such details revealing that Leo was not rushed into marriage with Zoe hardly convey or support the concept of the all-powerful Stylianos. Other details in the *Life* also point to the limitations of Zaoutzes's influence over the emperor. When Stylianos sought to denigrate Euthymios to the emperor as he wished to prevent Leo appointing Euthymios as patriarch in the wake of Stephen's death in 893, he could not do so openly, but instead paid one of the court mimes, Lampoudios, to ridicule the spiritual father of the emperor in the course of the after-dinner entertainments that the mimes usually provided. But Leo was not amused, and ejected Lampoudios from the court.⁶⁵ Such underhand activity hardly seems to indicate that Stylianos was the recognised governmental power of the day. Finally the *Life of Euthymios* indicates that Stylianos even plotted against Leo, an allegation we may doubt since it does come from such a virulently biased source, but it perhaps unconsciously reveals the truth that Zaoutzes was not the real power of Leo's early reign, that to secure domination he would have had to get rid of the emperor.⁶⁶ Thus although the *Life* seeks to portray Stylianos as all-powerful its own evidence does not support this assertion.

Turning to the evidence of the chronicles one can see that it too hardly leads to the conclusion that Stylianos was all-powerful. The story concerning the transfer of the Bulgarian market to Thessalonica has been reinterpreted to show that this was

⁶⁰See *VE*, 55. 20-34; 61. 35 - 65. 26.

⁶¹*VE*, 61. 18-20.

⁶²*GMC*, 857.

⁶³*VE*, 49. 11-25.

⁶⁴See Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 13-14.

⁶⁵*VE*, 43.17 - 45.13.

⁶⁶*VE*, 15. 8-13; 19. 23 - 21. 2; 37. 11-19.

not 'just a sordid tale of corruption and blind favouritism'.⁶⁷ The deposition of Nikephoros Phokas has likewise been re-read, and appears rather as punishment inflicted by the emperor due to the military success of the Bulgars, not as underhand revenge by Stylianos. Even if one takes these stories on their own terms one notes that Stylianos only has power through subversion and the favour of the emperor. The tale of the projected assassination of Leo whilst he slept at τὰ Δαμιανοῦ by certain relatives of Stylianos is of interest in that it marks a deterioration in the relations between the emperor and his basileiopator⁶⁸; Leo and Zaoutzes fell out, and were only reconciled by the *magistros* Leo Theodotakes.⁶⁹ Thus by the mid-890s, before Theophano's death, Stylianos's standing with the emperor was already compromised. It must have suffered further when the emperor personally exposed the corruption that the basileiopator effected through his agents Staurakios and Mousikos, for they took gifts from both generals and magistrates on behalf of Stylianos; Leo had these two men tonsured, but no punishment is recorded for Zaoutzes.⁷⁰ It seems that the basileiopator died soon after this incident anyway, not in the palace as the chroniclers record, but in his new home near the palace, as a scholion of Arethas reveals.⁷¹ Indeed Stylianos's relocation to a residence outside the palace is a further expression of his decreasing status with the emperor, and although Stylianos was never removed from his office it is hard to escape the impression that by the end of his life he was no longer a significant power; further, the evidence examined thus far indicates that the position he had held under Leo does not qualify him to be called all-powerful.

But before concluding on the extent and nature of Stylianos's power it is necessary to examine one striking facet of the administration of the empire during Leo's early reign that has already been touched on, the role played by Zaoutzes's relatives. The *Life of Euthymios* and the chronicles do reveal that they benefited from Stylianos's standing as the right-hand man of the emperor, and that some of them came to fill important posts at the centre of the empire, the imperial court. Does the fact that the emperor was surrounded by the family and friends of Zaoutzes add weight to the idea that he was all-powerful? The *Life of Euthymios* naturally construes the prominence of the relatives and friends of Stylianos in a sinister light, a perception Zaoutzes himself objected to. Fearing that he had already been slandered to Leo by Euthymios as dangerously ambitious, Stylianos confronted the emperor about the accusations in an attempt to deny them, saying "I know, sire,

⁶⁷Magdalino, 'Demetrios and Leo', 200.

⁶⁸For Damianos's place see Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 84.

⁶⁹*TC*, 360-361.

⁷⁰*GMC*, 857.

⁷¹Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 152.

that your mouth-happy monk...will have produced information about me, lyingly telling your Majesty 'He is planning to seize power, to which end he showers on his friends and relations high posts and promotions'".⁷² This incident suggests that Stylianos himself must have conferred the offices and titles, but could this really have happened given that imperial ceremony usually accompanied such elevations? Are we to imagine that Leo transferred such duties onto Stylianos? It seems incredible; and even if it was true the emperor must surely have been aware that it was happening. By whatever means it occurred it is clear that it is a fact that the family and friends of Stylianos did acquire positions within the imperial administration, a confirmation that comes from the chronicles. Stylianos's old office of hetaireiarch came to be filled by Nikolaos, who was his son-in-law.⁷³ Two sons of Nikolaos are also found with positions at court; Podaron became the *drungarios* of the watch upon the removal of John after the emperor's life had been endangered at τὰ Δαμιανοῦ in around 894/5, whilst Basil is found as *epeiktes* soon after the death of his aunt Zoe Zaoutzaina in 899/900.⁷⁴ Other relatives of Stylianos are mentioned in passing too, though we do not know what offices or titles they held, if any. Some are named as participants in the plot at Damianos's place, though the chroniclers differ in the details they report. Theophanes Continuatus says that Stylianos's son Tautzes and 'the others' plotted Leo's death; the Continuator of George the Monk calls the son of Stylianos Tzautzes; Leo Grammaticus says the son of Stylianos was Tzantzes; Skylitzes names Leo the son of Zaoutzes and Christopher ὁ Τζάντζης.⁷⁵ When the Continuator of George the Monk and Leo Grammaticus narrate the final destruction of the Stylianos family after their plot against the emperor was suppressed in 900 they cite among the accomplices two other names, John and Stylianos.⁷⁶ One should also not forget Stylianos's daughters. Zoe became augusta in 898, and if there is any truth in the story of Nikephoros Phokas's fall Stylianos may have had another daughter, unless Zoe's first husband Theodore Gouzouniates was already dead by the time of this marriage proposal. Another daughter is apparent from the fact that Nikolaos the hetaireiarch was Stylianos's son-in-law. Turning away from Stylianos's relatives to his friends we have one striking example, that of Antony Kauleas who became patriarch in 893. It is the *Life of Euthymios* that reveals their association, when it relates that upon the

⁷²VE, 19, 26-32.

⁷³Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 143. TC, 361.

⁷⁴GMC, 856; 857-858. *Scylitzae*, 179, 73, names Basil *epeiktes* as an ἀνεμὸς of Zaoutzes. Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 339, describes the *epeiktes* as someone 'qui veille à ce que les chevaux et les bêtes de somme soient bien traités et équipés'.

⁷⁵TC, 360; GMC, 856; LG, 269-270; *Scylitzae*, 178, 59-60. On the family of Stylianos see Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 143.

⁷⁶GMC, 859; LG, 273.

death of Stephen 'the fight Zaoutzes put up was beyond description, to advance a creature of his own as patriarch; for he feared lest the emperor propose Euthymius, his familiar, to the Church'.⁷⁷ Although the author is careful not to name Stylianos's creature here it seems that he must have been the candidate who was eventually successful, Antony Kauleas; Euthymios may have been *synkellos* but he did not step into Stephen's shoes. The connection between Stylianos and Antony finds confirmation in the chronicles, where it is recorded that after his death Stylianos was buried in the monastery of Kauleas.⁷⁸ The explanation for their relationship is lacking, but perhaps one should see in Stylianos the figure of Antony's mysterious benefactor; sources on Kauleas's life and career relate an incident where a miraculous patron donated to the charitable Antony a vast sum of money with which he performed even greater acts of philanthropy and thus earned for himself such a reputation that he became an ideal choice for the patriarchal throne.⁷⁹ Thus it is clear that Zaoutzes had relatives and friends in high secular and religious offices, but it can be disputed that this made him all-powerful. When one looks at the evidence further it is apparent that Stylianos does not seem to have extracted much benefit from the situation. Taking the case of his patriarch first it may come as a surprise that when it came to the marriage of Leo with Stylianos's daughter Zoe Zaoutzaina, Antony was no pliant agent; in fact Kauleas did not bless the couple, and the palace priest who did, Sinapes, was deposed.⁸⁰ With regard to Stylianos's relatives, leaving the case of Zoe aside for the moment, it seems that they did not ultimately add to Zaoutzes's power. Certainly one would imagine that they had Leo exactly where they wanted him, with the imperial security offices all filled by relatives of the emperor's right-hand man. But in reality there seem to have been certain tensions between Stylianos and his relatives that in fact undermined his own position and reveal their dissatisfaction at the limitations of their power. The fact that plots were hatched against Leo by members of Stylianos's family whilst he was still alive may indicate that they felt that they did not have enough power, that indeed Stylianos was not Leo's master. In the instances of the two plots it is also

⁷⁷VE, 43.17-22.

⁷⁸GMC, 857. On Kauleas's monastery see Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 39-41. It seems that there also existed a monastery of Zaoutzes which may have been built by Stylianos's wife: see T. Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, II (Leipzig, 1907), 289. 1-4. Leo VI delivered orations on churches that had been built by Stylianos and Antony Kauleas, and it seems likely that these churches were part of the monastic complexes of these men: see Akakios, *Λόγοι*, 243-248; 274-280; A. Frolov, 'Deux églises byzantines d'après des sermons peu connus de Léon VI le sage', *REB*, 3 (1945), 43-91; Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 202-205.

⁷⁹See the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 461. 1 - 462. 23; also the *Life of Antony*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Monumenta Graeca et Latina ad Historiam Photii Patriarchae Pertinentia*, I (St Petersburg, 1899), 1-25, esp. 11. 16-22. Perhaps Stylianos was transformed into the mysterious back street benefactor so as to prevent Antony being tainted by Stylianos's subsequent evil reputation.

⁸⁰GMC, 856-857.

apparent that Stylianos himself was not directly involved, again indicating that his relatives were discontent with the *status quo*; perhaps they felt frustrated because Zaoutzes was not making as much of his position as he could. One gets the impression that Stylianos was indeed loyal to the emperor and had no wish to oust or replace him. Evidence of tension within the family is further evident in the account of the aftermath of the Damianos plot. Having escaped his planned death Leo replaced the *drungarios* of the watch John with Podaron, the son of Nikolaos the hetaireiarch. It was this Nikolaos, specifically named as a friend of the emperor, who informed Leo of 'all the hidden things' about Stylianos, and after this Zaoutzes and the emperor were temporarily estranged.⁸¹ Yet as we have seen Nikolaos was in fact Stylianos's son-in-law, and Podaron who was Nikolaos's son was thus Stylianos's grandson. The conclusion is inescapable that division within the family did exist and Nikolaos wished to increase his standing with Leo at the expense of his father-in-law. From these family connections it is apparent that one cannot conclude that Stylianos was all-powerful. Returning to the instance of Stylianos's daughter Zoe, who was Leo's mistress, and then became his wife and *augusta* in around 898, it may be expected that her connection with the emperor did give Stylianos a certain measure of power. However although it has already been tentatively suggested that Leo's relationship with Zoe may indeed have been a factor in his attachment to Stylianos, there is no evidence to suggest that it gave Zaoutzes dominion over the emperor. Indeed it is notable that when Zoe did finally marry Leo in 898 Stylianos had already passed the peak of his standing with the emperor; the fact that his daughter became *augusta* does not seem to have altered this situation. Perhaps this indicates that Leo was able to view Stylianos objectively despite his passion for Zoe. It was only fourteen months after the marriage that Zaoutzes died.

Thus in conclusion one can say that Zaoutzes did become the major secular official under the emperor, but he did not have this position right from the beginning of Leo's reign. It is dubious that Basil I did leave Stylianos as *epitropos* for his heirs, and it does seem that other men were more prominent in Leo's early administration. His standing with the emperor did increase due to a number of factors, such as the disappearance of other officials and perhaps Leo's attachment to his daughter Zoe. Even before the office of *basileiopator* was created for him it seems clear that Stylianos had already become the emperor's right-hand man, for he appears to have attained the rank of *protomagistros*, being recognised as the leading secular official and to some degree as governor of the empire. As such his position was remarkable, but hardly allows one to conclude that he was all-powerful. Evidence in fact shows that Stylianos was not able to do as he pleased, he was still

⁸¹TC, 361.

obliged to follow the will of the emperor. Incidents indicating Stylianos's abuse of power can be read as later invention with the purpose of excusing others from censure, and in the case of the *Life of Euthymios* also as part of its purpose to edify. The fact that Stylianos can be found acting in an underhand or corrupt manner also indicates that he was not all-powerful; and like all the other magistrates who resorted to bending or breaking the rules he could still be reprimanded by the emperor. Ultimately his authority was based on the extent to which Leo valued and trusted him, the degree of which does seem to have declined even before the emperor's marriage with Zoe Zaoutzaina. Thus if one concludes that Stylianos was indeed not all-powerful it is then entirely wrong to see Leo as weak and indifferent to the administration of the empire. He may have elevated Stylianos to an exceptional magistracy and delegated administration to him but his ultimate authority was never in doubt; as Karlin-Hayter neatly puts it, the emperor 'governed through' Stylianos Zaoutzes.⁸² Thus Leo should no longer be permitted to be obscured by the smoke screen of the evil basileopator, but should be recognised as being responsible during the first half of his reign for governmental actions, both good and bad.

⁸²Karlin-Hayter, *VE. Introduction*, 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE REALITY OF LEO THE WISE

One of the most striking features about the emperor Leo VI was that he was known for his wisdom (*sophia*); indeed no other Byzantine emperor before or after him had such an extensive reputation for this quality. Thus it is curious to find that Byzantinists are continually having to remind themselves that Leo was described as a *sophos* during his own lifetime; only a few years ago Magdalino felt it necessary to reassert that 'Leo was already celebrated in his own day, and not just in posthumous legend, as a ruler of outstanding *sophia*', a fact that Ostrogorsky had already noted.¹ No doubt this tendency is due to the fact that the two studies by Mango and Irmischer devoted to Leo the Wise focus attention on the subsequent legendary figure, the miraculous prophet referred to from the twelfth century onwards, rather than on the historical Leo VI²; no wonder Magdalino had to restate the emperor's claim to *sophia* given that the objective of Mango's study was 'to trace the stages by which the rather colourless emperor of the Macedonian dynasty became a seer of such enduring fame' and that the conclusion of this study was that the character of Leo the Wise owed more to the person of Leo the Mathematician (also known as the Philosopher) than to the emperor.³ Thus in this chapter I intend to concentrate on the reality of Leo VI the wise, showing that the emperor did indeed have the reputation as a *sophos* whilst he lived, and aiming to understand why this was so.

That Leo VI was renowned for his wisdom during his reign is quite clear from those sources that were produced in or shortly after his lifetime. Philotheos attests that Leo was most wise⁴; Arethas's court orations are full of references to Leo's wisdom⁵; Choïrosphaktes in his works indicates that the emperor was a *sophos*⁶; a correspondent of Choïrosphaktes, Prokopios the *spatharios*, labels Leo VI as a wise emperor⁷; in the west at Teano, a residence of the monks of Monte Cassino, the poet Eugenius Vulgarius of Naples alludes to the wisdom of Leo in a

¹Magdalino, 'Revisited', 110; Ostrogorsky, *State*, 242.

²Mango, 'Legend'; J. Irmischer, 'Die Gestalt Leons VI. des Weisen in Volkssage und Historiographie', *Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte im 9.-11. Jahrhundert*, ed. V. Vavrinek (Prague, 1978), 205-224.

³Mango, 'Legend', 59, 90-92. For Leo the Mathematician see below.

⁴Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 81. 3; 83. 21; 85. 8; 187. 17; 189. 3; 217. 29.

⁵See *ASM*, II, 1-48, esp. 4. 32; 4. 34; 9. 19; 24. 1; 24. 23-24; 24. 27 - 25. 9; 25. 31 - 26. 1; 37. 6; 37. 25; 41. 18; 46. 15-16; 46. 21. See also Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations', 1-40.

⁶See Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 21, 104-105; Magdalino, 'Revisited', 117.

⁷Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 19, 96-97.

commentary on one of the poems he addressed to the emperor⁸; the patriarch Nikolaos observes that God had 'glorified' the emperor 'with wisdom especially'⁹; the *Life of Theophano* refers several times to Leo's *sophia* calling him both *sophos* and *pansophos*, and reveals that his wise rule was divinely ordained¹⁰; the *Life of Euthymios* records that Euthymios addressed Leo as 'your most wise majesty'¹¹; the chronicler known as the Continuator of George the Monk notes that Joseph the hymnographer lived until the reign of Leo the wise¹²; another chronicler, Eutychios of Alexandria, describes the emperor as a wise man and a philosopher¹³; and naturally enough the *sophia* of Leo VI was fully acknowledged by his son Constantine VII (913-949) and those authors commissioned by him.¹⁴ *Sophia* was certainly a quality that could be possessed by emperors, and had been in recent history. When the Chrysotriklinos was redecorated during the reign of Michael III (842-867) an epigram was produced describing and explaining the new mosaics, and it said that the emperor's deeds are 'filled with wisdom'.¹⁵ Both Michael III and the caesar Bardas are described as possessors of wisdom by Photios in his homily on the inauguration of the palatine church of the Theotokos of the Pharos.¹⁶ Hymns of Photios celebrate the *sophia* of Basil I also¹⁷, and Leo VI in his *Epitaphios* on his parents portrays his father as having *sophia* and being a *sophos*.¹⁸ Yet these instances cannot compete with the sheer quantity of references to the wisdom of Leo himself. However it is not the bulk of these instances alone that make Leo's reputation as a *sophos* remarkable, but also the quality of *sophia* itself. Although *sophia* could be ascribed to an emperor, when it came to praising the intelligence of a ruler it is clear that the more usual term was *phronesis*, which was laid down in the handbook of Menander as one of the four virtues by which the acts of an emperor were to be categorised.¹⁹ This is strikingly exemplified by the letters of the patriarch

⁸See H. Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, I (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), 7-9.

⁹*Nicholas. Letters*, 218, 75-76.

¹⁰*VT*, 5, 4-5, 16, 14 (for Leo as *sophos*); 7, 5 (for Leo as *pansophos*); 10, 29-30 (for St Demetrios's prediction of Leo's wise rule).

¹¹*VE*, 31, 10.

¹²*GMC*, 808.

¹³Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, 25.

¹⁴*DAI*, I, 98, 80; 230, 72; 254, 2; *De Cer.*, 1; 115, 3; 123, 24-25; 455; 456, 19-20; *De Them.*, I; 31, 2; 35, 5; 59, 21 (*Porfirogenito*, 73; 76; 96, 35); *TC*, 313, 16; 320, 8; 335, 13; 349, 4-5; 352, 19. *Iosephi Genesii Regum Libri Quattuor*, edd. A. Lesmueller-Werner and H. Thurn, *CFHB* 14 (Berlin, 1978), 3.

¹⁵See W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, I (London, 1916), 44-47, esp. 46, 18. See also Z. A. Gavrilovic, 'The Humiliation of Leo VI the Wise (the Mosaic of the Narthex at Saint Sophia, Istanbul)', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 28 (1979), 87-94, esp. 89.

¹⁶*PG* 102, 565; 573; *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople, Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, C. Mango, *DOS* 3 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), homily 10, 189.

¹⁷*PG* 102, 577-584.

¹⁸See Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 46, 20-21; 56, 26-28.

¹⁹See D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), 84-85.

Nikolaos that mention the intellect of his addressees, for he uses the term *sophia* extremely rarely, employing instead *phronesis*, or even *synesis*; in only one letter does he call the Bulgarian Tsar Symeon (who was indeed famed for his wisdom) a *sophos*, and this was because it was appropriate to a Biblical quote that he was including.²⁰ This thus raises the question of why *sophia* was so heavily connected with Leo VI; perhaps when we consider the meaning of the term the answer will become clear.

It is usual to identify two distinct types of *sophia* in Byzantine thought, those of inner and outer wisdom. The outer variety is taken to refer to secular knowledge, whilst the inner to Christian knowledge.²¹ This can be seen in the application of the term to people and events of the ninth century. *Sophia*, evidently of the inner type, was frequently the possession of those who were religiously enlightened, such as famed iconophiles like the Graptoi brothers and the empress Eirene.²² Another example comes from the reign of Leo VI itself when the emperor banned the annual procession to the church of St Mokios on Mid-Pentecost after he was nearly killed there in 903; the *oikonomos* of the church, named as Mark the most wise (ὁ σοφώτατος) monk, protested about the emperor's ruling, but when Leo remained unmoved Mark predicted that the emperor would die ten years to the day on the anniversary of the attempted regicide, a prediction that was fulfilled.²³ It seems certain the Mark was most wise in the inner sense, for he had the divine gift of foresight, a trait often found in Byzantine monks.²⁴ Turning to outer wisdom we find many examples of its proponents, the most famous being Leo the Mathematician and Photios.²⁵ Leo the Mathematician was renowned for his learning, both literary and scientific, and the latter particularly made him appear wondrous to his contemporaries.²⁶ He was placed by Bardas at the head of the school that was established in the palace building of the Magnaura, a school that specialised in the teaching of outer wisdom, its subjects being named as philosophy,

²⁰Nicholas. *Letters*, 70. 11; 72. 60-61

²¹See J. Meyendorff, 'Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting Approaches to a Complex Theme', *DOP*, 41 (1987), 391-401, esp. 391, who observes that Christian authors use the term *sophia* in at least two ways, one to refer to 'the natural wisdom of the universe, which preoccupied the Greek philosophers', the other for 'the personalized and "true" Wisdom revealed in Christ'. See also Treadgold, 'Macedonian Renaissance', 76.

²²For the wisdom of the Graptoi see the *Life of Michael the Synkellos. Text, Translation and Commentary*, M. B. Cunningham (Belfast, 1991), 52-55, esp. 52. 29 - 54. 5 where it is stated that the patriarch of Jerusalem 'often summoned them [the Graptoi] so that he might benefit from their conversation and discussion about the divine scriptures. Listening to the torrent of their all-wise (πανσοφου) teaching...he was delighted and rejoiced greatly in spirit, praising God the merciful for having revealed such luminaries in his days'. For the wisdom of Eirene see *Theophanis Chronographia*, I, ed. C. de Boor (New York, 1980), 477. 32.

²³*GMC*, 862.

²⁴See P. Charanis, 'The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society', *DOP*, 25 (1971), 61-84, esp. 75.

²⁵For these two intellectuals see Lemerle, *Humanism*, 171-235.

²⁶See *TC*, 185-192.

geometry, grammar and astronomy.²⁷ Photios was also well known, even infamous, for his learning. Niketas David fully acknowledges his outer wisdom, observing that 'he was so steeped in grammar and poetry, rhetoric and philosophy, and even medicine, and very nearly all secular learning, that he was thought not only to surpass all men in his own day but also able to rival the ancients'.²⁸ Such was Photios's reputation for wisdom that Basil I made him tutor to his children.²⁹ It seems that the Graptoi can also be described as men of outer wisdom, since their tutor Michael 'taught them grammar, philosophy, and a number of works of poetry so that in a short time the all-holy brothers were proclaimed supremely wise (*πανσόφους*)'.³⁰ Thus it was evidently possible for Byzantines to be wise in more ways than one, but is it really the case that they could only be wise in two ways, as possessors of secular and Christian knowledge? Is the simple dichotomy of inner and outer wisdom really sufficient to convey what Byzantines meant by *sophia*? Certainly as regards Leo VI most Byzantinists have been content to ascribe his reputation as a *sophos* to the fact that he was a prolific author and orator, and thus an exponent of outer wisdom. Mango asserts that Leo earned his epithet 'on account of his erudition and literary works', a view commonly found amongst Byzantinists.³¹ Karlin-Hayter certainly supported this view, but she was also willing to incorporate other explanations.³² She was able to countenance what Mango could not, that Leo VI had indeed acquired the status of a prophet in or shortly after his lifetime, but this still keeps us within the bounds of the inner and outer categories; Leo the Mathematician seemed to have the gift of foreknowledge simply by virtue of his grounding in science, just as Mark the monk did through divine inspiration. But Karlin-Hayter does take us beyond this basic division by her observation that Leo was wise due to his practical talents as a ruler, 'in particular law-giving and organising and co-ordinating the war-effort'. This comment prompts the notion that wisdom could be an especial quality found in rulers, and indeed the concept of the wise king has been examined by Kalugila, who traced the idea from the kings of Egypt through to Old Testament figures.³³ He concluded that royal wisdom did incorporate many aspects, including the knowledge of God, the fear of God, the ability to interpret dreams, literary wisdom, judicial wisdom, and practical wisdom

²⁷See *TC*, 185; 192; *Iosephi Genesis*, 69-70.

²⁸See *PG* 105, 509. The translation quoted comes from Lemerle, *Humanism*, 234. Niketas however also notes that Photios did not possess true wisdom, that which comes from Christianity.

²⁹*TC*, 276-277.

³⁰*Michael the Synkellos*, 52. 25-27.

³¹Mango, 'Legend', 68. See also Irmscher, 'Gestalt', 210; Ostrogorsky, *State*, 242; Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 198; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 404; Lemerle, *Humanism*, 239.

³²For her analysis of the wisdom of Leo see *VE, Commentary*, 155

³³L. Kalugila, *The Wise King. Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and its Environment* (Uppsala, 1980).

such as building and ruling well.³⁴ It may however be wondered if such ideas were still current in the Byzantine empire, but given that its ideology was based on Christian and Roman concepts which themselves had their origin in the thought worlds that Kalugila describes one must strongly suspect that such factors would not have been alien to ninth-century Byzantium.³⁵ Thus when Byzantines refer to the *sophia* of the emperor Leo VI they may be indicating more than his secular or Christian learning, and could in fact be alluding to a whole range of traditional imperial roles. It seems, then, a good idea at this point to examine what the Byzantines did have to say about the emperor's *sophia*.

Yet there is a problem. Although there is ample testimony that Leo VI was called a *sophos* the majority of our sources do not explain what they mean by describing him so; why should they when they knew perfectly well themselves what they meant? Yet a few do elaborate upon the theme and it is clear that they have the learning of the emperor in mind. Philotheos comments that Leo happens to be an emperor that is neither ignorant (*ἀμαθεῖ*) nor lacking in wisdom (*ἀσόφω*) but in fact most wise (*σοφωτάτῳ*) and favoured by the grace of heaven in his thoughts (*λόγῳ*).³⁶ Several of Arethas's court orations make it quite clear that the emperor was a man of literary tastes and talents. At the start of one oration Arethas expresses reluctance to speak before Leo as he will appear boorish contrasted to the emperor's enormous wisdom (*μεγάλῃ τῆς σοφίας ἀβύσσῳ*).³⁷ In another Arethas states that the emperor is so informative that it is no longer necessary to buy books.³⁸ Such comments do indicate that Leo's learning was connected with his reputation as a *sophos*, and we are well acquainted with his own literary endeavours, whether they have been preserved or not. The emperor was wont to write and deliver sermons and speeches for occasions such as regular church feasts and the dedication days of new or rebuilt churches. A collection of these homilies has been preserved, but it is quite clear that it represents only a part of his output.³⁹ Leo also composed military manuals.⁴⁰ It appears that he completed his father's revision of the Justinianic code,

³⁴Kalugila, *Wise King*, 132.

³⁵For the origins of Byzantine political thought see F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background*, 2 vols, DOS 9 (Washington DC, 1966).

³⁶Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 85. 6-8.

³⁷ASM, II, 24. 1.

³⁸ASM, II, 46. 23-25.

³⁹See Akakios, *Λόγοι*; PG 107, 1-298; Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 181-207; Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison'; Frolow, 'Deux églises'; Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 202-205; P. Devos, 'La translation de s. Jean Chrysostome BHG 877 h : une oeuvre de l'empereur Léon VI', AB, 107 (1989), 5-29; D. Serruys, 'Les homélies de Léon le sage', BZ, 12 (1903), 167-170. It is clear that Leo did write other speeches that have not been preserved: see GMC, 862; 866; 870; ASM, II, 15. 1-5. Perhaps the collection of homilies that has been preserved has its origin in the gift of his own writings that Leo gave to Euthymios in 900: see VE, 51. 14-18.

⁴⁰See Chapter Six.

the *Basilika*, and he produced his own volume of new laws, the Novels. It seems likely that the *Book of the Eparch* was also drawn up by this emperor.⁴¹ Leo was a keen hymnographer too, and some of these hymns have survived, some we know of only from other sources.⁴² In addition he composed poems, though those works that are securely connected with him do not seem to have been preserved.⁴³ A book of spiritual advice to a monastic community, probably that of Leo's spiritual father Euthymios at Psamathia, appears to have been a work of the emperor.⁴⁴ Like Leo the Mathematician Leo VI was known for his interest and skill in the field of astronomy.⁴⁵ Several of our sources refer to the emperor's love of and activity in the field of learning in a more general way. In the *Life of Blasios* it is related that when this saint returned to Constantinople after a long absence in Rome he was taken to the palace to meet the emperor, whom he accidentally found, busy at his customary activity of writing (καλλιγραφῶν).⁴⁶ In his letters from exile Choïrosphaktēs asserts that Leo both loves learning and loves to listen (φιλολόγων καὶ φιλακροαμόνων), and he clearly hoped that the emperor would be so delighted with his Atticisms that he would be restored to freedom.⁴⁷ One of the poems written in 913 about the death of Leo states that the emperor was 'of eloquence the shining light' (ἐν λόγοις φέγγος ἄδυτον), that his 'sermon's (τῶν λόγων) copious flow is like the vastness of the ocean', and that 'the hymns that issue from [his] lyre are drops of sweetest honey'.⁴⁸ Leo's interest in Niketas David was as much to do with this man's literary talents as his political opposition to the emperor, and it seems that he wished to exploit his skills by appointing him as a teacher of philosophy, or failing that as a

⁴¹See J. Koder, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, CFHB 33 (Vienna, 1991).

⁴²See H.J. W. Tillyard, 'ΕΘΘΙΝΑ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΜΑ. The Morning Hymns of the Emperor Leo', *ABSA*, 30 (1932), 86-108; 31 (1933), 115-147; E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, second edition (Oxford, 1961), esp. 237; 244. Philotheos tells us that Leo wrote a hymn for the feast of Epiphany: see Oikonomidēs, *Listes*, 186-189. Arethas records that Leo had composed a hymn for the procession of the relics of Lazaros through Constantinople to Hagia Sophia, and also that after the deposition of the relics in the church the emperor judged a hymn-singing contest there: see *ASM*, II, 14, 6-7; 15, 29 - 16, 6. Constantine VII notes that Leo wrote a hymn for the feast of St Elijah and also one for that of St Demetrios: see *De Cer.*, 114, 22 - 115, 3; 123, 22-25.

⁴³The emperor wrote verses on the fall of Thessalonica, the rebel Andronikos Doukas and his brother Alexander: see P. Maas, 'Literarisches zu der Vita Euthymii', *BZ*, 21 (1912), 436-440, esp. 436-437. *VE*, 81, 30-32, reveals that Leo also wrote a poem about his son Constantine. A mass of other verses do exist bearing the name of Leo the Wise, but it is uncertain whether this indicates Leo VI: see Irmscher, 'Gestalt', 210.

⁴⁴A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia Graeca Sacra Subsidia Byzantina Lucis Ope Iterata*, VI (Leipzig, 1975), 213-253. On the work see Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 206-228.

⁴⁵Symeon of Bulgaria acknowledges the emperor's renown as an astronomer in his correspondence with the diplomat Choïrosphaktēs: see Koliās, *Choerosphactēs*, letters 1 and 3. Choïrosphaktēs himself also indicates that Leo VI had knowledge of the stars in his poem on the emperor's bath: see Magdalino, 'Bath', 239. In the light of these testimonies Leo's own comments on astronomy in his *Taktika* take on greater significance: see *PG* 107, 1092, Epilogue, 67.

⁴⁶See *AASS*, Nov IV, 666; Grégoire, 'Acta Sanctorum', 806-807.

⁴⁷See Koliās, *Choerosphactēs*, letter 21, 107, 117-118; letter 22, 109, 3-4.

⁴⁸See Sevčenko, 'Poems', 201-204.

teacher of rhetoric.⁴⁹ Thus certainly the overwhelming impression to be gained from the Byzantines themselves is that Leo was a *sophos* because of his writings and love of learning. Yet it would be wrong simply to leave the analysis here; not only do a few authors indicate other types of wisdom applicable to Leo, but the examples of his erudition themselves can be broken down into different categories.

It is Arethas who indicates that Leo can be viewed as wise in the inner sense or, if one prefers, in that he showed knowledge and fear of God. Several times in his orations Arethas calls the emperor *theosophos*, wise in the things of God or God-wise. The God-wise Leo is urged to encourage the new patriarch Nikolaos in his task⁵⁰; the emperor's action of bringing the relics of Lazaros to Constantinople is characterised as *theosophos*⁵¹; Leo's wisdom is connected with his Christian way of life when Arethas comments that his dinner guests are intoxicated through the bowl of wisdom and the lessons of piety of the emperor⁵²; Leo is described as being full of the wisdom and grace of God.⁵³ Certainly both Leo's religious writings and religious role do give him the aspect of a man of God endowed with divine wisdom. He set himself up as a church orator, augmented feasts with his own hymns, and took it upon himself to advise a monastic community on spiritual life. His dominant role in church affairs is infamous; he deposed Photios and Nikolaos, appointed his young brother to the patriarchate, legislated in matters that were the proper sphere of the synod, banned the procession to the church of St Mokios on the feast of Mid-Pentecost, married four times, canonised one wife and buried another at Easter.⁵⁴ He also presided over a church union, and ended a drought through direct intercession with God.⁵⁵ And although we may accuse the author of the presumed *Life of Niketas David* of being virulently anti-Leo he was surely not distorting reality greatly when he portrayed the emperor as considering himself as the intercessor for his people with God.⁵⁶

But not only must we ascribe such Christian wisdom to the emperor but also, as Karlin-Hayter realised, practical wisdom. However we do not have to turn to later

⁴⁹See *VE*, 105, 17-21; Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 125, 38-40; Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian', 358. The offer of these teaching posts indicates that the school established by Bardas at the Magnaura was still functioning in the reign of Leo VI.

⁵⁰*ASM*, II, 4, 32.

⁵¹*ASM*, II, 9, 19.

⁵²*ASM*, II, 25, 31 - 26, 1.

⁵³*ASM*, II, 46, 15-16.

⁵⁴On Leo's strong-arm attitude in religious affairs see Magdalino, 'Revisited', 114; Schminck, 'Rota'.

⁵⁵For the union see Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 184-188; Dvornik, *Photian Schism*, 265-271; Grumel, 'Chronologie', 6-8; 13-17; H. Grégoire, 'Études sur le neuvième siècle', *Byz*, 8 (1933), 515-550, esp. 540-550. For his part in ending the drought see *ASM*, II, 28, 13 - 29, 7; Jenkins, Laourdas, Mango, 'Nine Orations', 12; 14.

⁵⁶Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 125, 43-45. It is related that the emperor asked Niketas 'Do you wish to find salvation without my majesty, my prayer or mediation?'

authors such as Niketas *magistros* for testimony of this fact, for Philotheos himself points to this conclusion when he states that the emperor was most wise in deed (ἔργῳ) as well as in thought (λόγῳ).⁵⁷ Choirosphaktes also indicates the emperor's practical involvement in state affairs, asserting that during his career as an ambassador he had always benefited from Leo's personal advice.⁵⁸ The internal organisation that Jenkins noted as such a feature of Leo's reign would certainly earn him the right to be seen as a ruler of practical wisdom⁵⁹, and it can hardly escape our attention that a great deal of the emperor's writings do fall into this sphere, such as his military manuals, his juridical works, and other guide books. Whether Leo's building activities⁶⁰ were seen as an expression of his *sophia* is harder to say, since so little detailed testimony touching upon this subject has remained, but we can certainly observe that Choirosphaktes's poem on the opening of the emperor's bath-house makes Leo's wisdom a major theme.⁶¹

Thus far we have seen that many of the categories identified by Kalugila as elements of royal wisdom are applicable to Leo VI, and we can add that he certainly possessed judicial wisdom by virtue of his prescriptive works. This only leaves the talent of being able to interpret dreams remaining, but Leo seems to be disqualified here since there is no evidence of him doing this. However perhaps Kalugila has been too rigid in his definition here and we should rather understand the category to be that of miraculous ability, including the gift of prophecy. Such a talent is certainly found in the character of Leo the Wise, but as we know Mango disassociated our emperor from this figure, concluding emphatically that 'Leo VI was neither a prophet nor a magician'.⁶² However Karlin-Hayter was more open to the possibility, citing the *Life of Antony Kauleas* which states frankly that Leo could estimate what would happen in the future, but unfortunately this text may date to a much later period when the legend of Leo the Wise had developed. Yet Magdalino also seems to consider the possibility that there was more to the wisdom of Leo VI than meets the eye of most Byzantinists; he comments that Choirosphaktes's poem on the bath-house 'suggests that his [Leo VI's] later reputation as "Leo the Wise", a

⁵⁷Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 85. 8.

⁵⁸Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 25, 127. 93-94.

⁵⁹Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 201; 207-208.

⁶⁰Leo seems mainly to have been a builder of churches and monasteries: see *GMC*, 850; 860; 870; *VE*, chaps. 4-6; Akakios, *Λόγοι*, 137-139; *VB*, 335; *TC*, 146; *AASS*, Nov III, 884. See Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 205-206; G. Downey, 'The Church of All Saints (Church of St Theophano) near the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople', *DOP*, 9-10 (1955-56), 301-305. For St Lazaros see Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 298-300. One does wonder if the churches for which Leo wrote the dedication speech were in fact commissioned by him also: see *GMC*, 862; 866; Akakios, *Λόγοι*, 243-248; 274-280. See also Frolow, 'Deux églises'; T. Macridy with A. H. S. Megaw, C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, 'The Monastery of Lips (Fenari Isa Camii) at Istanbul', *DOP*, 18 (1964), 249-316; Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 202-205.

⁶¹See Magdalino, 'Revisited', 104.

⁶²Mango, 'Legend', 70.

wizard of extraordinary powers, was based on something more than his unremarkable literary achievements, and an ignorant confusion between him and Leo the Mathematician'.⁶³ I thus wish at this point to investigate whether prophetic ability can be counted as an element in the wisdom of Leo VI.

Mango is certainly correct when he observes that the official pronouncements of Leo VI upon the subject of magic and divination are severe, citing Novel 65 and the *Taktika*.⁶⁴ Yet he did not point out that in the *Taktika* Leo also advises his generals to cynically exploit signs, symbols and scientific skill to encourage their troops. Signs prefiguring victory are to be invented⁶⁵; signs and symbols that scare the soldiers are to be reinterpreted favourably⁶⁶; scientific expertise, like the knowledge of when stars are to appear, is to be exploited to make predictions to convince the army of divine favour⁶⁷; make up dreams that promise help from God⁶⁸; symbols, augury and dreams can be used in pretence to encourage the troops⁶⁹; astronomy is an essential skill for a general, and can be used to convince troops that you can tell the future.⁷⁰ It is also interesting to note that Leo makes it clear that it was the business of a general (and presumably even more so of an emperor) in a very real sense to be able to predict the future; he needed the ability to foresee what was going to happen.⁷¹ Thus although Leo took up the stance of frowning upon magical and prophetic practices it is quite clear that he would not have been above pretending to have such talents. Furthermore, as Mango rightly points out, there is no need to believe that 'Leo himself adhered too strictly to the letter of his pronouncements', citing the case recorded in the chronicles where he consults the metropolitan Pantaleon of Synada about the portent of the lunar eclipse of 908.⁷² Further to this the chronicles do in fact contain two episodes where the emperor is seen to have the power of prediction. The first occurs in relation to Constantine Doukas, when he had just returned from his defection to the Arabs. Leo received Constantine and his colleagues warmly and gladly in the Chrysotriklinos, but just before Constantine departed from the throne room the emperor uttered a grave warning, swearing it upon an icon of Christ; he advised Constantine not to try to seize imperial power, for if he did his severed head would be brought through the

⁶³Magdalino, 'Bath', 239.

⁶⁴Mango, 'Legend', 68.

⁶⁵*PG* 107, 885, 14. 116.

⁶⁶*PG* 107, 1033, 20. 78.

⁶⁷*PG* 107, 1049, 20. 141.

⁶⁸*PG* 107, 1053, 20. 149; 1061, 20. 179.

⁶⁹*PG* 107, 1072, 20. 213.

⁷⁰*PG* 107, 1088, Epilogue. 53; 1090, Epilogue. 61.

⁷¹*PG* 107, 1044, 20. 117; 1084, Epilogue. 36.

⁷²Mango, 'Legend', 68.

doors of the Chrysotriklinos.⁷³ This prophecy came true in 913 at the time of Constantine's attempted coup after the death of Alexander. The emperor's other prediction concerned his brother; as Leo lay dying he saw Alexander approaching and commented 'Behold the evil time of thirteen months', which transpired to be a prophecy, for Alexander did indeed only reign for thirteen months before his death in 913.⁷⁴ For Mango neither of these instances was sufficient to prove that Leo VI was a known prophet, but he only explains this deduction with respect to the case of Alexander, asserting that 'Leo was in fact not prophesying' but 'merely quoting a proverb' which is applicable 'to persons of a perverse or evil character'.⁷⁵ Yet by indicating that Leo could indeed have passed such a comment upon his brother in 912 Mango in fact strengthens the argument that Leo VI could have been believed to have had prophetic powers, for the casual proverb proved to be stunningly true. As for Constantine Doukas it seems quite likely that Leo would have issued a warning about his future behaviour after his return from Bagdad, which came to have greater significance later. But what is most striking about both prophecies is that they must have been in circulation in 913, the year after that of Leo's death; it was in 913 that Alexander died after his thirteen month reign, and that Constantine Doukas was decapitated whilst attempting to take power.

As far as Mango was concerned the above two cases are the only known instances of Leo's gift of prophecy, yet there are other episodes that appear to be relevant. One instance is the case of the monastery that the emperor wished to build for his spiritual father Euthymios. As a location for the monastery Leo picked a site on the property of the exiled Leo Katakalon where a church dedicated to Kosmas and Damian already stood. The emperor took Euthymios to view this location, and when the monk entered the pre-existing church he saw in the apse an inscription saying 'The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts'. At this Euthymios was delighted and went out to Leo and exclaimed "'It is right, sire, to obey your orders and receive your decisions as emanating from the will and providence of God. For the king's heart is in the hand of God'".⁷⁶ From this episode it is clear that Leo could appear as miraculous, in that his action was divinely foretold. Another instance not noted by Mango concerns St Blasios, the monk who returned to Constantinople in the reign of Leo, having been absent in Rome for eighteen years. Soon after his arrival in the city he was granted an audience with the emperor, who apparently confessed to him that "'Christ showed

⁷³GMC, 869-870.

⁷⁴GMC, 871.

⁷⁵Mango, 'Legend', 69.

⁷⁶For this episode see *VE*, 24-29, esp. 29, 3-5.

me your angelic form three years ago”⁷⁷. Despite the evidence of these two episodes and the other two above they hardly constitute proof that during his own lifetime Leo was known as an exceptional prophet. Firstly as far as we know these four instances were only in circulation after Leo VI had died, and secondly, as a glance through Byzantine chronicles and lives of saints reveals, the gift of prophecy was not an unusual one in Byzantium, and thus these episodes hardly qualify Leo as an especially skilled seer. Yet there remain two contemporaries of the emperor who do reveal that he did predict the future during his reign, and that he could be portrayed as having supernatural powers.

These contemporaries are Symeon of Bulgaria and Leo Choerosphaktes. The evidence comes from the letters that the two men wrote to each other during Choerosphaktes's diplomatic mission of 896.⁷⁸ In one letter Symeon reveals that in the recent past the emperor had amazed the Bulgarians by accurately predicting to them the exact time when a solar eclipse would occur, but furthermore he then proceeds to challenge the emperor to predict the fate of the Byzantine prisoners that the Bulgarians were holding captive.⁷⁹ Certainly Mango was aware of this fact, but he did not draw out its full import, merely commenting that Symeon 'was either being jocular or betraying his native superstition'.⁸⁰ What Mango did not reveal or did not realise was that the emperor did respond to the challenge through his diplomat, prophesying that the prisoners would be released, which did indeed come to pass.⁸¹ Further, Choerosphaktes strongly asserts that Leo VI did have divinatory power, and even calls the emperor a prophet.⁸² Choerosphaktes adds to this impression that Leo had special powers in his poem concerning the emperor's bath-house; the details of the bath he describes indicate that it was 'a monument to the wisdom of an emperor with supernatural powers over the created world', and his own comments reveal that the emperor was 'a *sophos* who "surpassed the imagination of Daedalus"...could read the stars...and invited comparison with other eminent masters of the "outer" wisdom'.⁸³ Thus not only can it be argued that the emperor's contemporary reputation for *sophia* could reflect an element of prophetic ability, but also that the subsequent legend of Leo the Wise does owe as much to Leo VI as it does to either Leo the Mathematician or Leo Choerosphaktes.⁸⁴

⁷⁷AASS, Nov IV, 666.

⁷⁸For these letters see Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, letters 1-4.

⁷⁹Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 76-77.

⁸⁰Mango, 'Legend', 69.

⁸¹Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 76-77.

⁸²Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 80-81.

⁸³See Magdalino, 'Revisited', 116; 'Bath', 239.

⁸⁴See Magdalino, 'Bath', 239 and n. 47; Mango, 'Legend', 92-93; Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 65.

However our study of Leo's reputation as a *sophos* does not end here for it seems that there are further evocations of *sophia* beyond those already identified. One of these was the Platonic concept of the ideal philosopher king, which indeed Arethas did hail the emperor as in one of his court orations.⁸⁵ Another connotation is possible, and in fact it seems to me to be the most fundamental element of Leo's epithet, for it enables us to understand the origin of his reputation and why it was so intense; quite simply Leo was deliberately cast as a *sophos* as he was meant to be a new Solomon.

Solomon, the son and successor of David the God-chosen king, was the archetypal wise king of the Old Testament.⁸⁶ His wisdom was a gift from God⁸⁷, and found expression in his talents as a judge, a temple builder, a writer of songs and proverbs, a king who had encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural world. His wisdom was also revealed by his role as prophet and priest, for he spoke directly with God, not through a mediator as David and Saul had done, and he officiated at the dedication of his temple. Such was his fame for wisdom that foreigners flocked to his court to behold him. His reign was also distinguished by fabulous wealth and peace. Solomon thus presided over the Golden Age of the Jewish kingdom. As Dvornik has shown, it is clear that from the moment Constantine the Great (306-337) favoured Christianity Old Testament characters, including Solomon, became suitable fodder as comparisons and models for Byzantine emperors.⁸⁸ A famous example is that of the emperor Heraclius (610-641), who seems to have been intent on establishing himself as a new David.⁸⁹ As for Solomon, he most often appears in comparison to Byzantine emperors in the sphere of church building. It is well known that when Justinian I (527-565) entered the completed church of Hagia Sophia he is alleged to have crowed 'Solomon, I have outdone thee'.⁹⁰ But even if this is an apocryphal tale it is evident from sources that are contemporary with Justinian's reign that the notion of surpassing Solomon's building achievement was current.⁹¹ Justinian's desire to triumph over the wise king may even have been

⁸⁵ASM, II, oration 5, 24, 27 - 25. 9; Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations', 3; 12. See Dvornik, *Byzantine Political Philosophy*, II, 357.

⁸⁶For an analysis of Solomon's wisdom see Kalugila, *Wise King*, 106-122.

⁸⁷Third Kings, 4, 29; 5, 12.

⁸⁸See Dvornik, *Byzantine Political Philosophy*, II, 644-645.

⁸⁹For Heraclius's interest in David see S. S. Alexander, 'Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology, and the David Plates', *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 217-237.

⁹⁰G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris, 1984), chaps. 5 and 6.

⁹¹See for instance Romanos's *On Earthquakes and Fires* in M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, II (Columbia, 1973), 237-248; the Constantinopolitan kontakion translated in A. Palmer and L. Rodley, 'The Inauguration Anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: A New Edition and Translation with Historical and Architectural Notes and a Comparison with a Contemporary Constantinopolitan Kontakion', *BMGS*, 12 (1988), 117-167. See also A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse* (California, 1991), 204.

inspired by the recent completion of another church, that of St Polyeuktos. This had been commissioned by Anicia Juliana, a woman of imperial blood and a potential rival to Justinian, and an epigram put up in the church said of her that 'she surpassed the wisdom of renowned Solomon by raising a habitation for God'.⁹² A recent study even suggested that the very dimensions of Anicia Juliana's church were taken from those of Solomon's temple.⁹³ This type of synkresis can also be found in use not long before Leo VI came to power, in the reign of Michael III. Photios commented during his dedication speech at the inauguration of Michael's palace church of the Theotokos of the Pharos that this building surpassed the temple of Solomon.⁹⁴ It seems that in addition to his building skills Solomon's connection with law and judgement could also make him a useful model for Byzantine emperors, as can be seen in the prooimion of the *Ecloga* of Leo III (717-741).⁹⁵ But not only was Solomon an abstract element in political philosophy he was also a tangible presence in Byzantium. During the reign of Justinian I objects reputedly from the temple of Solomon passed through Constantinople via Carthage after Belisarius's victory over the Vandals in 534⁹⁶, and although Procopius states that these items were sent back to Jerusalem it seems that some of them must have remained in the imperial city or returned there at a later date, for a ninth-century source records that there was a chalice of Solomon kept in Hagia Sophia, whilst a tenth-century source asserts that in the same church there was a golden table of Solomon.⁹⁷ One of the most intriguing Solomonic objects kept at Constantinople is the throne of Solomon, which is named only by Constantine VII's *Book of Ceremonies*.⁹⁸ This throne was located in the great triklinos of the Magnaura, where the emperor received foreign envoys, and seems to have incorporated mechanical objects such as a tree, singing

⁹²See R. M. Harrison, 'The Church of St. Polyeuktos in Istanbul and the Temple of Solomon', *Okeanos - Essays for Ihor Sevcenko*, edd. C. Mango, O. Pritsak, with U. M. Pasicznyk, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983), 276-279; C. Mango and I. Sevcenko, 'Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople', *DOP*, 15 (1961), 243-247; *Greek Anthology*, I, 7-11.

⁹³See R. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium* (London, 1989). However see C. Milner, 'The Image of the Rightful Ruler: Anicia Juliana's Constantinian Mosaic in the Church of Hagios Polyeuktos', *New Constantines*, ed. P. Magdalino, forthcoming, 73-81.

⁹⁴See Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, 188; R. J. H. Jenkins and C. A. Mango, 'The Date and Significance of the Tenth Homily of Photius', *DOP*, 9-10 (1955-56), 125-140, repr. Jenkins, *Studies on*, II.

⁹⁵See *Ecloga. Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos' V.*, ed. L. Burgmann (Frankfurt, 1983), 164. 66; 164. 80. S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain, 1973), 57, comments that 'The author of this law code saw himself... as a second Solomon in his judgement seat'.

⁹⁶H. B. Dewing, *Procopius*, II (London, 1916), 280. 5-9. The objects had come to be in Carthage after the Vandal assault on Rome, where the items had been kept since Titus's sack of Jerusalem.

⁹⁷For the chalice see I. Sevcenko, 'The Greek Source of the Inscription on Solomon's Chalice in the *Vita Constantini*', *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, III (Paris, 1967), 1806-1817. For the table see A. A. Vasiliev, 'Harun-Ibn-Yahya and his Description of Constantinople', *SK*, 5 (1932), 149-163, esp. 157. Three other tables are mentioned, those of David, Korah and Constantine the Great.

⁹⁸*De Cer.*, 566-567; 570.

birds, roaring lions and moving beasts.⁹⁹ Whether the throne was believed to be the throne of Solomon that is described in the Old Testament, or was just inspired by it, is unclear.¹⁰⁰ How long this throne had been located in the Magnaura and which emperor had put it there also seem to be unanswerable questions¹⁰¹, but what is obvious is that the emperor who sat on this throne and received his guests was deliberately taking the role of Solomon.

One emperor who was particularly interested in and connected with Old Testament figures was Leo VI's own father Basil I, as Magdalino has observed.¹⁰² Under Basil the prophet Elijah was established as the heavenly patron of the Macedonian dynasty, whilst a letter sent to Photios during his first period of exile requested commentary on three passages from the *Book of Kings* concerning Saul, the anointing of David, and the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon's judicial fame was certainly acknowledged during the reign, for he appears in the prooimion of the *Procheiron*, and the scene of the judgement of Solomon was included in the illuminated manuscript of the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, where the king is depicted 'as a model of wisdom and justice'.¹⁰³ Further, Basil is said to have placed a customised statue of Solomon in the foundations of his New Church.¹⁰⁴ Thus Basil certainly had an interest in Solomon as imperial judge, builder and wise man, but it is the figure of David that was the key factor in the ideology of his reign; like

⁹⁹For the throne see G. Brett, 'The Automata in the Byzantine "Throne of Solomon"', *Speculum*, 29 (1954), 477-487. This throne appears to be the one that Liudprand of Cremona saw Constantine VII upon when he visited Constantinople in 949: see *Werke*, 154. 5 - 155. 15.

¹⁰⁰For the Biblical throne see First Kings, 10-20. It was inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold; it had six steps; its back had a rounded top; on both sides of the seat were arm-rests, with a lion standing beside each of them; twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step.

¹⁰¹Brett, 'Automata', 487. It is well known that the emperor Theophilus (829-842) had various mechanical objects in use at his court such as a plane tree, lions and gryphons, but these were reputedly melted down by Michael III. Thus it could be construed that the throne of Solomon must have been rebuilt after Michael's death and before Liudprand's visit of 949. However P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Michael III and Money', *BSI*, 50 (1989), 1-8, doubts that the objects were melted down, but more fundamentally than this, as Brett, 'Automata', 482, points out, 'there is no question in any reference to the earlier set of a "Throne of Solomon," or of these automata having formed part of it as the *De Ceremoniis* describes them'. See also E. Ville-Patlagean, 'Une image de Salomon en basileus byzantin', *Revue des Études Juives*, fourth series, 181 (1962), 9-33, esp. 14-17; A. Alföldi, 'Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels', *La Nouvelle Clio*, 1-2 (1949-50), 537-566, esp. 539, who strongly connects the throne with Heraclius, and Heraclius is linked with the Magnaura by M. Mundell Mango, 'Imperial Art in the Seventh Century', *New Constantines*, 109-138, esp. 112.

¹⁰²Magdalino, 'Nea'.

¹⁰³For the *Procheiron* see I. and P. Zepos, *Jus Graeco-Romanum*, II (Athens, 1962); for the prooimion see Schminck, *Rechtsbüchern*, 56-61. This law book is traditionally dated to 870-879 for it names Constantine and Leo as Basil's co-emperors, yet Schminck, *Rechtsbüchern*, 55-107, has dated it to 907, arguing that it was a revision of the *Eisagoge* ordered by Leo VI. For the illuminated manuscript see der Nersessian, 'Illustrations', 208.

¹⁰⁴*GMC*, 844. G. P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, DOS 19 (Washington DC, 1984), 249, states that Basil took this action 'as a symbol of his devotion to the work of building the church'.

Heraclius before him Basil was set on establishing himself as a new David.¹⁰⁵ This Old Testament model appears to have suggested itself due to the striking parallels between the lives of Basil and David, and also because Basil wished to claim divine support and legitimacy for his reign which had been initiated by the bloody eradication of both Bardas and Michael III. Basil, like David had risen from obscurity and become king through the death of his one time patron, who had fallen from divine favour. David's rise to royalty and success were all due to the fact that he had been selected by God, and by linking himself with this king Basil was effectively asserting that his own rule was divinely-ordained. The image of Basil as new David finds testimony in several works produced during the reign. Photios wrote two hymns linking Basil with David, and it seems likely that he was also the author of a panegyric poem on the emperor which casts Basil as a new David.¹⁰⁶ This theme is also found in a mosaic that was put up on the ceiling of the palace apartment called the Kainourgion, which depicted the imperial family surrounding a cross; inscriptions were incorporated in the mosaic, one being a prayer of the children which begins 'We thank Thee, O Word of God, that thou hast raised our father from Davidic poverty and hast anointed him with the unction of the Holy Ghost'.¹⁰⁷ In addition to these indicators the *Book of Ceremonies* does record instances where the emperor is hailed as a new David, and Vogt believed that these acclamations dated to the reign of Basil I.¹⁰⁸

That Basil was keen to present himself as a new David is quite evident, but it seems that he wished to take the model further than this by ensuring that his children would be wise, just as David's son Solomon had been wise. We noted above that Basil appointed the wise Photios to be tutor to his offspring, but in addition to this we can cite again the decoration of the Kainourgion and the comments that Basil's biographer makes about it. In another mosaic in the apartment Basil and Eudokia were shown enthroned, whilst their children were represented round the building wearing imperial dress. The boys were depicted 'holding codices that contain the

¹⁰⁵See Markopoulos, 'Laudatory Poem'; I. Kalavrezou, 'A New Type of Icon: Ivories and Steatites', *Κωνσταντίνος Ζ΄*, 377-396, esp. 392-395; H. Maguire, 'The Art of Comparing in Byzantium', *The Art Bulletin*, 70 (1988), 88-103, esp. 89-93; Magdalino, 'Nea'; der Nersessian, 'Illustrations', 222. The interest in Old Testament figures seems to have been shared by at least one other member of the Macedonian dynasty, for it is well known that Constantine VII also had a marked preoccupation with David and Solomon, which is reflected in several works from his reign such as the *Book of Ceremonies*, the *De Administrando Imperio*, the *Life of Basil*, and the Paris psalter: see E. Anagnostakes, 'Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο τῆς Δανιηλίδας: Πληροφορίες καθημερινού βίου ἢ μυθολογικά στοιχεία'; *Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ ΖΩΗ ΣΤΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟ*, ed. C. G. Angelidi (Athens, 1989), 375-390, esp. 389-390; G. Huxley, 'The Scholarship of Constantine Porphyrogenitus', *PRIA*, 80 (1980), 29-40; H. Buchthal, 'The Exaltation of David', *JWarb*, 37 (1974), 330-333.

¹⁰⁶For the hymns see *PG* 102, 581; 584; Markopoulos, 'Laudatory Poem', 226; Magdalino, 'Nea', 58. For the poem and its supposed Photian authorship see Markopoulos, 'Laudatory Poem', 226.

¹⁰⁷For the decoration of the Kainourgion see *VB*, 331-335, which has been translated by Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 196-198.

¹⁰⁸See *De Cer.*, 322; 368; Vogt, *Commentaire*, II, 140.

divine commandments' whilst the girls carried 'books of the divine laws', and the biographer notes that 'in this way the artist wished to show that not only the male, but also the female progeniture had been initiated into holy writ and shared in divine wisdom (τῆς θείας σοφίας) even if their father had not at first been familiar with letters on account of the circumstances of his life, and yet caused all his children to partake of learning (σοφίας).¹⁰⁹ Thus it appears that Basil was deliberately ensuring that his heir would be a *sophos*, and this scenario finds confirmation in the two parainetic texts that were written for Leo. In the final chapter of the *First Parainesis* we find Leo being urged to read other works that would help him to be a good emperor; those works recommended include the 'resolutions and lessons' of Jesus of Sirach (an apocryphal wisdom book) and above all the maxims of Solomon.¹¹⁰ The *Second Parainesis* makes Basil's desire that Leo should be a *sophos* much more explicit. In this text the importance of *sophia* is stressed by the concept of wisdom being given a higher profile; the work opens with *sophia* as its theme. It is stated that wisdom was granted as a gift by the All Holy Triad to man, through which he would recognise God and glorify Him in everything. Basil then addresses Leo saying 'So you, my God-guarded child, being reared with wisdom become a φιλόσοφος for us from this - fearing God; for the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord'.¹¹¹ Leo is then exhorted to occupy himself with the study of the wisdom taught by God. Thus it appears that Leo in fact owes his wise epithet to his father, who intentionally cultivated the image of his heir as a *sophos* since he wanted to recall the glorious duo of David and Solomon¹¹², just as under Heraclius, a former new David, the imperial son and heir Heraclius Constantine was likened unto Solomon.¹¹³ Leo may certainly have earned the epithet of 'wise' in his own right, but the frequency with which it was used to describe him indicates that he had been intentionally forced into that mould in the first place by the pressure of Basil's ideological objectives.

However there seems to be one problem with this theory; certainly we can spot the parallels between Leo and Solomon, as did later Byzantine authors, but none of our extant sources contemporary with Leo's reign explicitly recognise the emperor as a second Solomon.¹¹⁴ Yet there are indications that they were aware of

¹⁰⁹VB, 333-334; Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 198.

¹¹⁰PG 107, lvi; J.-M. Sansterre, 'A propos des titres d'empereur et de roi dans le haut moyen âge', *Byz.*, 61 (1991), 15-43, esp. 24. For Jesus of Sirach see Dvornik, *Byzantine Political Philosophy*, I, 362-364; *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, ed. B. M. Metzger (Oxford, 1965), 128-197.

¹¹¹PG 107, lvii.

¹¹²It is interesting to note that it was in the ninth century that the duo of David and Solomon became an integral element in images of the resurrection: see A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), 186-203.

¹¹³See Alexander, 'Heraclius', 223; 231.

¹¹⁴Schminck, 'Datierung', 86-87, spotted the links between Leo and Solomon. As early as 927 we find a Byzantine author likening Leo VI unto Solomon due to the qualities that he possessed and the

this factor. When the patriarch Nikolaos wrote to the pope in 912 relating his version of the tetragamy affair he recalled that he had acknowledged to the emperor's face the fact that he had been 'glorified by Him [God] with wisdom especially', thus recognising that Leo VI had received his *sophia* as a gift from God just as Solomon had done.¹¹⁵ Indeed as Gavrilovic argues it may be this very concept that the narthex mosaic in Hagia Sophia is illustrating.¹¹⁶ Another pointer to the identification of Leo with Solomon is a letter of the diplomat Leo Choïrosphaktes. Writing to the emperor following his exile toward the end of Leo's reign Choïrosphaktes states that the emperor ranks among the wise kings, thus indicating that Leo and Solomon could have been connected in Byzantine minds.¹¹⁷ The exiled diplomat offers us further proof of this when he goes on to ponder who was responsible for his fall from grace. He wonders if his slaves had played a part, and asks Leo 'Have you not heard the things about Jeroboam the lord-slayer? I know you have heard; are you not familiar with Hermogenes who says: 'For the slave is by nature enemy to the masters'? I know that in reading these words you have understood them very well. How? You see clearly and daily conspiracies formed against your majesty by your slaves, who have been heaped with your favours. I know it, you see it and understand it'.¹¹⁸ As the insistent Choïrosphaktes asserts, he is referring to actual events, perhaps the fall of Samonas in 908, for this eunuch was indeed the most honoured of the emperor's servants.¹¹⁹ But what most

fact that his reign had been a golden age: see Jenkins, 'Peace', 293; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Homily on the Peace with Bulgaria of 927 and the "Coronation" of 913', *JÖB*, 17 (1968), 29-39, repr. *Studies in*, XVII. Nikephoros the philosopher in his *Life of Antony Kauleas* refers to the emperor Leo speaking honeyed phrases equal to those of David and Solomon: see *Monumenta Graeca et Latina*, I, 15, 15-16. Byzantinists such as Grégoire, 'Blaise', 399, and Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 155, viewed this text as a tenth-century work, but the general consensus seems to be that it is from the fourteenth century as its author is identified with Nikephoros Gregoras: see the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan (New York, 1991), 125. A Russian text written at the earliest at the end of the fifteenth century certainly records that the figure of Leo the Wise was like a second Solomon: see Majeska, *Travelers*, 144, n. 55.

¹¹⁵*Nicholas. Letters*, 218, 75-76. For Solomon receiving wisdom from God see Third Kings, 4, 29.

¹¹⁶See Gavrilovic, 'Humiliation'. The Russian text cited in n. 114 above records that there was a mosaic of Solomon over the main doors in Hagia Sophia, but there is doubt about this testimony: see Majeska, *Travelers*, 236. It must be said that the interpretation of this image is notoriously varied anyway; N. Oikonomidès, 'Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia', *DOP*, 30 (1976), 151-172, sees it as a monument of the triumph of Nikolaos over Leo, whilst Schminck, 'Rota', believed it showed Photios's supremacy over Basil I. See also R. Cormack, 'Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul', *Art History*, 4 (1981), 131-149; J. Featherstone, 'A Note on the Dream of Bardas Caesar in the Life of Ignatios and the Archangel in the Mosaic over the Imperial Doors of St. Sophia', *BZ*, 74 (1981), 42-43; E. J. W. Hawkins, 'Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul', *DOP*, 22 (1968), 151-166; C. Osieczkowska, 'La mosaïque de la porte royale à sainte-sophie de Constantinople et la litanie de tous les saints', *Byz.* 9 (1934), 517-523; I. D. Stefanescu, 'Sur la mosaïque de la porte impériale à sainte-sophie de Constantinople', *Byz.* 9 (1934), 41-83.

¹¹⁷Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 105, 76-77.

¹¹⁸Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 105, 92 - 107, 97.

¹¹⁹Another possibility is the disgrace of the eunuch Constantine. For Samonas and Constantine and their histories see Chapter Seven.

concerns us here is the allusion to Jeroboam, who was in fact a rebellious slave of king Solomon.¹²⁰ It seems that a servant of the emperor had been cast as Jeroboam to Leo's Solomon, a comparison that may have been prompted by the fact that the emperor was recognised as a Byzantine Solomon. It appears that the Solomonic model may also be detected in the account of the relationship between the first two Macedonian emperors and their Peloponnesian patroness, the rich widow Danelis.¹²¹ The depiction of this woman and her fabulous wealth has puzzled Byzantinists, and Runciman has even referred to the fairy-tale quality of the story of Danelis.¹²² The puzzle is perhaps explicable if we accept that the image of Danelis has been affected by the Biblical model of the queen of Sheba.¹²³ Just as the Biblical queen visited the court of Solomon, so Danelis visited the court of both Basil I and Leo VI.¹²⁴ Both women came with vast trains and presented the rulers with splendid gifts. When Danelis visited Basil she was received in the Magnaura, where he may have been seated upon the throne of Solomon. She even appears in the guise of the queen of the Peloponnese.¹²⁵ Danelis's second visit to Constantinople is recorded in less detail, but significantly on this occasion she came to see the most wise Leo, just as the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon was inspired by her desire to see this wise king.

Further to these examples above I believe we can turn to other factors to show that the imperial ideology of Leo VI, just like that of his father and his son, had as an integral part the influence of Old Testament models, particularly that of Solomon. For not only was Leo famed for being wise, but also for being mild (*praos*) and peaceful (*eirenikos*), qualities that again lead us back to David and Solomon. Leo's mildness is attested by several sources from his reign. Basil I in the *First Parainesis* seems particularly keen that Leo should be a mild emperor¹²⁶; the *Life of Theophano* notes that Leo was mild, and indicates that his mild rule was divinely-ordained¹²⁷; one of the poems marking the death of Leo acknowledges this

¹²⁰ Third Kings, 11. 26-27.

¹²¹For Danelis and her relationship with Basil and Leo see *VB*, 226-228; 316-321.

¹²²S. Runciman, 'The Widow Danelis', *Études Dédiées à la Mémoire d'André M. Andréadès*, ed. K. Varvaressos (Athens, 1940), 425-431, esp. 427.

¹²³This thesis has also been proposed by Anagnostakes, 'Ἐπεισόδιο', who identified the influence of the Alexander romance too. However Sevckenko, 'Re-reading', 192-193, accounted for the seemingly odd details about Danelis by suggesting that she was 'an *archontissa* of a Peloponnesian *Sklavinia* in the process of peaceful and diplomatic absorption into the empire', and poured cold water on Anagnostakes's interpretation, though he admitted that the comparison between the number of slaves given by Danelis and by Candaules does stand up to scrutiny.

¹²⁴For the queen of Sheba see Third Kings, 10.1-10; 13.

¹²⁵It is interesting to note, as Huxley, 'Scholarship', 38, points out, that the *Russian Primary Chronicle* portrayed Olga as the queen of Sheba to Constantine VII's Solomon.

¹²⁶*PG* 107, xxxvi; xxxv.

¹²⁷*VT*, 7. 26-27; 8. 12; 9. 31.

quality as being a particular trait of the emperor¹²⁸; the *Life of Euthymios* hails Leo as the mildest of rulers¹²⁹; the author of the biography of Basil I refers almost as often to Leo's mildness as to his wisdom.¹³⁰ Most important of all is the testimony of the *Life of Constantine the Jew*, as it is believed to date from Leo's own reign, and it also points to the model for this mildness. Commenting upon the character of Leo the author asserts 'I know not of a soul more mild (πραοτέρας) save that man David of olden times'.¹³¹ Thus Leo's mildness seems to have been inspired by an Old Testament model, and the same can be said for his peaceful quality. Again the *First Parainesis* recommends this virtue¹³²; the *Life of Theophano* attests it as characteristic of Leo¹³³; a document referring to the selling of land in 897 has many adjectives to describe Leo and Alexander, one being that of 'peacemakers'¹³⁴; the acrostic device of Leo's own *Taktika* identifies the emperor as 'peaceful'¹³⁵; the *Life of Euthymios* calls Leo 'the most peaceful emperor'.¹³⁶ In the case of this particular virtue we are left to seek the Old Testament model ourselves, but it seems clear enough that this is Solomon. Peacefulness seems to have been particularly connected with this king; not only was his reign characterised by peace, but his very name means 'peaceful', a fact the Byzantines were well aware of.¹³⁷ Dagron notes that Eusebius in his ekphrasis of the church of Tyre inaugurated in 318 calls Constantine the Great 'our most peaceful (εἰρηνικώτατος) Solomon'.¹³⁸ The speech that marked the peace with the Bulgarians in 927 cryptically identified Leo VI as 'the peaceful and wise Solomon'.¹³⁹ Thus it seems quite clear that by having ascribed to him or laying claim to such qualities as wisdom, mildness and peacefulness Leo, just like his father and his son, emerges as an emperor whose image was moulded in the form of the two famous Old Testament kings David and Solomon, but particularly that of Solomon.

But is this the whole story? It should not be forgotten that David and Solomon were ancestors of Christ, and also precursors of Christ.¹⁴⁰ In reality the Macedonian emperors were perhaps not so much concerned with the Old Testament

¹²⁸Sevcenko, 'Poems', 202. 22; 202. 32; 202. 36.

¹²⁹VE, 11. 11-12.

¹³⁰VB, 313; 320; 352.

¹³¹AASS, Nov IV, 648.

¹³²PG 107, xxxv.

¹³³VT, 7. 27.

¹³⁴*Actes de Lavra, I, Des origines à 1204*, edd. P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos, with D. Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1970), 89.

¹³⁵Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 232.

¹³⁶VE, 73. 3.

¹³⁷See Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 192.

¹³⁸Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 303.

¹³⁹Jenkins, 'Peace', 290; 293.

¹⁴⁰Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 195.

kings as with their New Testament descendant, Jesus Christ. Further it is striking that Leo was in fact not only called wise, but most wise. Could it be that the Byzantine emperor was attempting to outdo the Old Testament king, endeavouring to surpass the reputation of Solomon, perhaps hoping to create a greater resonance by the epithet of 'most wise'; who could be more wise than Solomon than God himself, from whom wisdom came?¹⁴¹ Certainly the epithets of mildness and peacefulness evoke a further model, as revealed in the *First Parainesis*. There Basil states that Leo is his son by flesh, but that he will also be called son of the heavenly emperor through spirit by being 'a student of the mild and peaceful Christ', citing Matthew 5. 9, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God'.¹⁴² We also saw that Leo was called 'most peaceful', which takes on further significance in the light of Kartsonis's observation that it was 'commonly acknowledged from the days of Pseudo-Athanasius to those of Psellus' that 'Solomon means peaceful and Christ is the most peaceful'.¹⁴³ The *Taktika* calls Leo not only peaceful, but peaceful in Christ.¹⁴⁴ Thus perhaps we should not be surprised that no contemporary source explicitly names Leo VI as a new Solomon: the emperor was hoping to evoke a higher plane.

In conclusion we can make several observations about the wisdom of Leo VI. He certainly did possess this quality during his own lifetime, and the origins of his reputation as a *sophos* lie with the political ideology and aspirations of his father. Leo was to be the new Solomon to the new David. The epithet seems to have been particularly appropriate to a wide range of skills and talents that Leo gives evidence of as emperor, skills and talents that qualified a ruler to be wise as far back as the days of ancient Egypt and which were transmitted and transmuted down the centuries, shaping the concepts of political philosophy of other cultures. Leo was indeed perceived to be learned, but this was not the sole factor that made him a *sophos*. It can certainly be stated that amongst the other skills that he was known to possess was the ability to predict the future. Above all else Leo's extensive and exceptional reputation for *sophia* evokes and reflects the fact that he was an emperor with a highly inflated perception of his religious role and authority. Thus is the reality of Leo the wise.

¹⁴¹ Adding to the impression that Leo saw himself as a superior ruler is the fact that he did not revere past emperors, a fact noted by Magdalino, 'Non-Judicial'.

¹⁴² *PG* 107. xxxv.

¹⁴³ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 198.

¹⁴⁴ Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 232.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE FOUR WIVES OF LEO VI

Leo VI is renowned as the Byzantine emperor who dared to broach canon and civil law by proceeding to a fourth marriage, and Byzantinists have devoted much time and energy to the study of this element of his reign.¹ The fourth marriage certainly was one of the major incidents of the reign, leading to a rift within the church that was not healed until the mid-tenth century. However it should not be ignored that as far as Leo was concerned he had secured for himself an apparent victory, for in 907 an ecumenical synod decided to tolerate his union. Also worthy of greater acknowledgement is that the tetragamy crisis reveals much about the nature of this emperor, such as his desires and ambitions, and the methods by which he resolved the problems facing him; indeed the tetragamy crisis is the most obvious facet of his reign (though not the sole one by any means) that demonstrates his attitude towards ecclesiastical authorities and his perception of his role in religious affairs. Another area of concern regarding the tetragamy is that whilst the fourth marriage itself has received much attention the first three marriages have not been scrutinised to the same degree. Thus in this chapter I wish to look at the marriages as a whole and in their own right, and also highlight what can be deduced about the fundamental issue of Leo himself, and by so doing develop an accurate image of this forceful emperor.

The basic issue at the heart of the tetragamy crisis was Leo's desire to have a son of his own blood who would succeed him on the throne, and it is quite clear that the emperor would go to any lengths to achieve this aim. However at the time of Leo's first marriage no one can have foreseen how crucial this issue would become, though no doubt a large part of the motivation behind the marriage was the creation of a male child who would be the future heir of the Macedonian dynasty. Yet this very marriage would be a vital factor in the whole affair; it was presumed that Byzantines would usually only marry once, a second marriage being not entirely free from disapproval.² This first wife was thus expected to be Leo's partner for life,

¹See for instance Diehl, *Portraits*; R. J. H. Jenkins, 'Three Documents Concerning the "Tetragamy"', *DOP*, 16 (1962), 231-241, repr. *Studies on*, VIII; 'Note on Nicetas'; *Imperial Centuries*; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters'; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La "préhistoire" de la dernière volonté de Léon VI', *Byz.*, 33 (1963), 483-486, repr. *Studies in*, XII; 'Synode'; N. Oikonomidès, 'La dernière volonté de Léon VI au sujet de la tétragamie (mai 912)', *BZ*, 56 (1963), 46-52, repr. *Documents et études sur les institutions de Byzance (VIIe-XVe s.)* (London, 1976), IV; 'La "préhistoire" de la dernière volonté de Léon VI au sujet de la tétragamie', *BZ*, 56 (1963), 265-270, repr. *Documents et études*, V; 'Narthex Mosaic'; R. Guiland, 'Les noces plurales à Byzance', *BSI*, 9 (1947), 9-20, repr. *Études byzantines* (Paris, 1959), XI, 233-261.

²Guiland, *Études*, 233-235.

yet the details of the union that have survived indicate that the young emperor was not content with his bride.

As has been seen the first marriage was arranged by Leo's father and mother shortly after he had stepped into the position of heir-apparent following the death of his elder brother Constantine in 879. It is crystal clear that Leo had no choice in the question of who was to be his wife. The *Life of Theophano* reports that although a bride-show was held from which Leo's intended was to be selected it was in fact his mother the empress Eudokia who chose the successful candidate, without seeking her son's opinion, and that her decision was ratified by Basil³; the *Life of Euthymios* reveals that Leo was forced to marry his first bride on the insistence of his father.⁴ Yet there was method in the apparent brutal enforcement of the choice of the parents; they had chosen the bride very carefully. Despite the story of the bride-show it is evident that the first wife Theophano Martinakia was not miraculously chosen to be Leo's augusta⁵ simply by virtue of her beauty⁶; this was undeniably a union based on deeper considerations. It was Mango who first highlighted the importance of Theophano's family for her selection as Leo's bride.⁷ She belonged to the Martinakios family, which was closely related to the Amorian house. Under the emperor Theophilos one of its members, Martinakes, was forced to become a monk and turn his house into a monastery after the emperor had received a prophecy that the Martinakioi would take the throne after his son and wife (Michael and Theodora).⁸ The *Life of Theophano* actually admits that Theophano was of imperial blood and that this was one of the factors that induced Eudokia to select her out of the line up of young virgins.⁹ The *Menologion of Basil II* also highlights the imperial connection of the family by stating that Theophano's father Constantine, when *illustris*, was related to three emperors, meaning probably Michael II, Theophilos and Michael III.¹⁰ The connection with the Amorians is significant

³VT, 6. 6-24.

⁴VE, 41. 16-19.

⁵The question of bride-shows is debated. Treadgold, 'Bride-Shows', has argued that they were a historical reality, whilst L. Rydén, 'The Bride-shows at the Byzantine Court - History or Fiction?', *Eranos*, 83 (1985), 175-191, has presented the case that they are in fact purely literary creations. I am more convinced by the latter view. However see also L.-M. Hans, 'Der Kaiser als Märchenprinz. Brautschau und Heiratspolitik in Konstantinopel 395-882', *JÖB*, 38 (1988), 33-52.

⁶Schreiner, 'Réflexions', 189, argues that beauty was the decisive factor in the selection of Theophano as Leo's bride, playing down the political factor that has been detected.

⁷Mango, 'Eudocia'.

⁸TC, 121.

⁹VT, 6. 6-24.

¹⁰See Kurtz, *Zwei Griechische Texte*, 48. 7-8; PG 117, 209. It is Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 120, who says that the three emperors alluded to are the Amorian emperors. Mango, 'Eudocia', 20, had conjectured that the emperors were Theophilos, Michael III, and Basil I, but this is unsatisfactory as it does not make sense; if Constantine was related to these emperors he would have been related to more than three. Herlong's theory is more convincing, for it is only the Amorians to whom Constantine was related at the time when he was an *illustris*.

enough, given Basil's own links with the Amorian house, but it is made even more startling by the indication that Eudokia Ingerina herself was related to the Martinakioi, a fact revealed by Skylitzes.¹¹ The comment of Leo VI himself in his *Epitaphios* that his mother was 'born of a race that scarcely ceded to that which had the supreme rank' can be seen as evidence corroborating the statement of Skylitzes.¹² Mango also observed that the prophecy given to Theophilos concerning the coming to power of the Martinakioi must have been recorded because it came true, and this could only have happened if indeed Eudokia Ingerina was a member of this family.¹³ Again Leo's *Epitaphios* is of interest here for in it he alludes to certain prophecies that did indicate the coming to power of his mother; the prediction made to Theophilos may have been one of these.¹⁴ Thus the story of the bride-show and the miraculous choice of Theophano looks increasingly unconvincing given the wealth of connections between the Martinakioi and the Macedonian dynasty; Eudokia would have known perfectly well who Theophano was. But the question remains, why did Basil and Eudokia want to marry her to their son? Is the existence of the family connection sufficient to explain it? Certainly a factor may have been the desire to further cement the Amorian and the Macedonian families by increasing the ties between them, adding to the impression of a hybrid dynasty. However another reason for the union may have been the lack of threat that Theophano presented; she seems to have carried no excess baggage of power-hungry relatives, a fact that would have pleased Basil, who was wary of the danger that family members could pose.¹⁵ Theophano was an only child whose mother, Anna, died whilst the saint was still a baby.¹⁶ There is no indication that any of her relatives gained high political office after she became empress. Her *Life* does allude to her uncle Martinos Martinakios who held the post of *atriklines*, meaning that he was in charge of organising guests at imperial banquets like his more famous contemporary Philotheos; as such this was hardly a position that enabled him to present any political threat to the imperial family.¹⁷ Thus Leo was married to Theophano not only because she was a relation of the mixed dynasty, but perhaps more importantly because she was safe.

With hindsight these were not the only considerations Basil and Eudokia should have made; it was a fatal mistake to neglect, or over-rule, Leo's own wishes.

¹¹ *Scylitzae*, 127. 19 - 128. 21. See Mango, 'Eudocia', 20.

¹² Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 52. 18-19.

¹³ Mango, 'Eudocia', 20.

¹⁴ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison', 52. 28-29.

¹⁵ *PG* 107, xxviii. For the attitude of Basil to family see Chapter Eight below.

¹⁶ *VT*, 3. 6-7.

¹⁷ *VT*, 21. 31. It is interesting to note that the father of the author of the *Life* also had a job that involved the organising of state ceremony, *VT*, 17. 18-28, and one is tempted to conjecture that the author's family owed their relationship with the family of the saint through contact in the job sphere.

The simple fact of the matter is that Leo did not want to marry Theophano, and it is this that should alert us to one of the key characteristics of this emperor, his desire to have his own way and get what he wanted. As has already been observed it seems likely that Leo, prior to his marriage with Theophano, had formed a friendship with Zoe Zaoutzaina, and may have hoped that he could take her as his wife.¹⁸ Thus it appears that the first marriage was indeed a bitter blow for Leo, since he was forced to abandon his personal desires and conform to the wishes of his parents, which were strictly enforced by Basil. Thus in 882 Leo was married to Theophano Martinakia with full imperial ceremony, during which the bride was also crowned.¹⁹ Not long after the union it seems that the empress Eudokia died, and so Theophano became the chief *augusta* at the imperial court.²⁰ No doubt it was in remembrance of the mother of the imperial family that the name Eudokia was chosen for Leo and Theophano's first and only child.²¹ It was not apparent at the time, but the birth of this baby girl marked the beginning of Leo's struggle to acquire a son to whom he could pass on imperial power.

The *Life of Theophano* presents the marriage of Leo and his first wife in an idealised light, but it is known from elsewhere that all was not so perfect as it alleges. Prior to Leo's imprisonment in 883, and thus very shortly after his wedding with Theophano, the young emperor was accused of having an affair with Zoe Zaoutzaina.²² It was Theophano herself who had formed this suspicion and who informed her father-in-law of her fears. Basil acted swiftly and harshly; Leo was beaten by his father and Zoe Zaoutzaina was forced to marry a certain Theodore Gouzouniates. This incident is extremely interesting as we are forced to recognise that although Leo had been married against his will to Theophano he was still determined to remain attached to his former friend. Leo himself asserted the innocence of his relationship with Zoe at that time, but it seems that Theophano knew perfectly well where the liaison was heading, and anyway it was bad enough that Leo was seen to be devoting time to another woman. Despite Theophano's alleged lack of jealousy²³ it is clear that in the first years of her marriage she had not yet resigned herself to the fact that her husband was not content to have her as his

¹⁸See Chapter One above.

¹⁹*VT*, 6. 25-34; *GMC*, 846. The date of 882, 'and quite probably in September', is proposed by Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 101. Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 167, is however more cautious and says of the wedding that 'We only know for certain that it took place before Leo's imprisonment'. I would add that Leo must have been married for at least nine months by the time of his imprisonment in the summer of 883, for by this time he and Theophano had already had a child as *VT*, 8. 5, indicates. If Leo was imprisoned in July 883 the marriage must have occurred at the latest in October 882.

²⁰*VT*, 7. 2-10. The chronicles do not record Eudokia's passing.

²¹*VT*, 8. 5; 8. 16; *De Cer.*, 643.

²²For this episode see *VE*, 41. 1-3.

²³*VT*, 23. 30; *GMC*, 856.

partner. For the moment however Leo was sharply recalled to the wishes and expectations of his father, but the further development of the marriage following this incident was abruptly curtailed in the summer of 883 when the heir-apparent was accused of intending to assassinate his father, and was disinherited and confined in the palace apartment of the Pearl.²⁴ It is the *Life of Theophano* that adds the unique and perhaps peculiar detail that Theophano and the child Eudokia were also imprisoned with Leo.²⁵ One does wonder about the veracity of this detail. Would Basil really have taken such a harsh measure against the wife and daughter of his disgraced son? Could Theophano and Leo have undergone a three year imprisonment together without the conception of another child? Could it be that the hagiographer has simply invented this slant to the story in his desire to show Theophano as a tower of strength and support for Leo in his hour of need, to portray her as a new Sarah and a second Rebecca? The allegation that Theophano was also imprisoned with Leo is perhaps then not very convincing. If we do discount this assertion the question then arises of what happened to Theophano when her husband was isolated for three years. It is often supposed that she became a saintly figure, devoting herself to charity and good causes, simply because she found herself in a troubled marriage, as in the comparable case of princess Diana; yet perhaps it is tempting rather to connect her development as a saint to the period of Leo's imprisonment. She could have devoted herself to prayer, piety and charity in the hope of somehow aiding Leo, of achieving his liberation as a reward for her good acts. It may however have been more selfish than that; for her own security she became a pious nonentity, retiring from court to monastic seclusion. Thus by the time that Leo was liberated she had carved out for herself a completely new life-style in which it was difficult to relocate her husband. Indeed after the ending of the imprisonment and the start of Leo's own reign it does appear as if he and Theophano had no common life. The *Life* is not much help here for it only speaks in generalities about the *politeia* of the saintly empress: she spent her time in chanting, she hated wealth and luxury, she performed works of charity, endowing orphans, widows, the poor and monks, she was totally free from jealousy or ill-will, and she devoted herself to a programme of *askesis*. It is in the *Life of Euthymios* that we find concrete details on Theophano's life during Leo's reign. She is seen to spend time at religious sites, such as the church of the Theotokos at Blachernai and Pege.²⁶ This text makes it clear that upon the death of the child Eudokia both Leo and Theophano

²⁴GMC, 846-847.

²⁵VT, 8. 5.

²⁶VE, 21, 12-15. She was also responsible for building a church dedicated to a St Constantine: see Majeska, 'Body'.

viewed their union as finished.²⁷ Thus it does seem possible that it was not Leo's infidelity with Zoe Zaoutzaina that effectively terminated the relationship of the emperor and his wife, but it was the vacuum that Leo found himself in on his release from prison in July 886 that made him revive his old friendship with Zoe.

The circumstances of this revived affair are not altogether clear; when did it begin again? Naturally enough the *Life of Theophano* is not of much help since it tries to conceal the problems that did exist between Leo and Theophano, and only gives a veiled reference to Leo's relationship with Zoe through the fact that Theophano was renowned for her lack of jealousy. The *Life of Euthymios* is not as helpful as one might expect, and only points to Leo's association with Zoe when the question of the emperor's divorce from Theophano following the death of their daughter Eudokia is raised.²⁸ It is the chronicles that contain the most explicit record of the liaison, since they state that at the time of Stylianos's appointment to the position of basileiopatōr (891-893) Leo and Zoe had already become lovers.²⁹ An important figure to consider in the history of the liaison is the husband that was foisted onto Zoe by Basil, Theodore Gouzouniates. Did he die before the affair began, as the chronicles say, or only after the death of Theophano herself, as the *Life of Euthymios* alleges? Grumel took up the case for the chroniclers³⁰, whilst Karlin-Hayter has maintained the integrity of the hagiographer.³¹ It is certainly not enough to say that the *Life* is a more reliable source; it is quite capable of creating its own distortions, and it is also capable of making errors. My feeling is to favour the chronicle version of Theodore dying before or early in the history of the affair; certainly Jenkins has shown that the Logothete's chronology is worthy of trust. Further the *Life of Euthymios* shows that Leo and Theophano were going to divorce after the death of their daughter, at a time when Stephen was still patriarch, so perhaps this indicates that Theodore was already out of the picture and Zoe was free to remarry.

Regarding the nature of the affair itself the chronicles give the impression that it was openly acknowledged. On the occasion of the assassination plot at the monastery of Damianos it is stated that Zoe accompanied Leo to the site whilst Theophano remained at the shrine of the holy soros at Blachernai, and indeed it was the fact that Zoe was sleeping with the emperor and heard the plotters that saved Leo.³² Theophano seems to have resigned herself to this state of affairs, and the *Life*

²⁷VE, 37, 27-35.

²⁸VE, 37, 33-34.

²⁹GMC, 852.

³⁰Grumel, 'Chronologie', 22-25.

³¹Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 17-18.

³²GMC, 855-856.

of *Euthymios* shows that following the death of her daughter she often resided away from the palace, at the shrine at Blachernai, and in fact it was the wish of the empress to be divorced also; it was only the influence of Euthymios, who seems also to have been a confidant of Theophano, that prevented her from agreeing to the annulment of the marriage.³³ It is surely significant that this proposed divorce was on the agenda prior to the death of the patriarch Stephen; not only does this give us a date by which the marriage was unofficially dead (May 893), but it also indicates that Leo's brother could have used his position as head of the church to sanction the divorce. The contemplated divorce reveals that Leo was intending to get married for the second time, and this further marriage was presumably expected to be his last. Thus Zoe Zaoutzaina was to be Leo's preferred wife for life, and it was by her that he intended to have his son and heir.

This thought brings into play Ohnsorge's contestation that Leo and Zoe had their daughter Anna whilst Theophano was still alive.³⁴ He points out that if Anna was of a marriageable age for the union with Lewis of 900 she must have been born before Zoe became Leo's wife and augusta in 898. Ohnsorge then conjectures that Anna died in 906 when giving birth to her son Constantine. Such theories however are open to doubt, given the fact that it is not certain that Anna did go to Italy to marry Lewis, despite what Previt -Orton says.³⁵ This matter will be returned to below, but suffice it to say for the moment that it can be argued that Anna's birth occurred when Zoe was empress; not only does this child seem to have been viewed as legitimate, but also it seems an unlikely scenario that if Leo and Zoe did conceive one child prior to Theophano's death that there would have been no others born, as appears to be the case.

Thus after the death of Leo's daughter Eudokia marital and extra-marital affairs seem to have reached a stalemate and a *status quo*. Theophano would not agree to the divorce, but she did stay out of the way of her husband, letting him conduct his liaison with Zoe Zaoutzaina. Thus it was the death of Theophano in 895 or 896³⁶ that should have ended this situation. Theophano's ascetic regime had eventually endangered her life, making her ill, as her *Life* explicitly reveals.³⁷ It also relates that the empress was even aware of her impending death and thus took the opportunity of bidding farewell to Leo, whom she kissed and entreated on behalf of her relatives, friends and slaves.³⁸ The *Life of Euthymios* also informs us of the final stages of Theophano's life; it seems that she also took care to see the monk

³³VE, 37, 33 - 39, 13.

³⁴W. Ohnsorge, 'Zur Frage der T chter Kaiser Leons VI', *BZ*, 51 (1958), 78-81, esp. 81.

³⁵C. W. Previt -Orton, 'Charles Constantine of Vienne', *EHR*, 29 (1914), 703-706.

³⁶Karlin-Hayter, 'Th ophano'.

³⁷VT, 15, 13-18.

³⁸VT, 16, 12-16.

before she died, for in November he made his final visit to the woe-laden empress whilst she was 'being nursed' at the church of the Theotokos at Blachernai, thus giving the detail of the site of her death which her own *Life* did not reveal.³⁹ The dying empress even gave gifts to Euthymios; these were sacred vessels of jasper with cloths to cover them which had Euthymios's name woven on them in gold, and also Theophano's own scarf (*maphorion*) which she wore in church.⁴⁰ The empress is then said to have died on 10 November.⁴¹ According to her *Life* Theophano was given the full imperial ceremony for her funeral, which was the occasion of a miraculous event, which incidentally does place her death in winter.⁴² When the coffin was led out of the palace through the Chalke accompanied by the emperor and the senate the weather, which had been bad and snowing, was transformed and became mild and pleasant. When however her body was entombed at the church of Holy Apostles the weather reverted to normal again.

If Leo was hoping that the death of Theophano signalled the end of his illicit affair with Zoe and the legitimization of their union he was sadly mistaken; matters were not that simple. Theoretically indeed the emperor should have been able to proceed to a second marriage, which was legitimate in Byzantium. However he hit a snag: the very character of the woman that he wished to marry, and the fact that he had conducted an immoral liaison with her. For although in Byzantium a second marriage was permissible, there were certain conditions attached; a second marriage was not allowed for the legalisation of a former concubinage.⁴³ Thus Leo was entitled to get married a second time, but not to Zoe. This situation is explicitly stated in the *Life of Euthymios*, when Leo seeks the approval of his spiritual father for the projected marriage.⁴⁴ Euthymios was perfectly prepared to accept that Leo had the right to marry a second time; his point of disagreement with the emperor was over the choice of his bride. The simple truth was that Zoe Zaoutzaina had a bad reputation. Euthymios asserted that Zoe's 'evil conduct is notorious' and that if Leo did marry her then everyone would believe that the rumours about Zoe were true. The *Life* itself already made clear what these rumours were; it was believed that Zoe had in fact been responsible for the deaths of both Theophano and Theodore Gouzouniates, presumably in order that she should become Leo's second

³⁹VE, 45. 14-17.

⁴⁰VT, 17. 26-27. also makes mention of the relic of Theophano's *maphorion*, which it says was kept at the church of Holy Apostles, and was instrumental in curing the author's father of his painful feet. One wonders if this was the same *maphorion* that the empress had given to Euthymios; presumably she could have had more than one.

⁴¹However the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* commemorates her feast on 16 December: see AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 314-316.

⁴²VT, 16. 25 - 17. 4.

⁴³Guilland, *Études*, 234.

⁴⁴VE, 47. 4-30.

wife.⁴⁵ The chronicles also knew of the accusation that Zoe had poisoned her own husband to become the mistress of the emperor.⁴⁶ Leo was so enraged by Euthymios's objection to Zoe Zaoutzaina that he compelled his spiritual father to reside at the monastery of St Diomedes for a period of two years. Thus this event reveals to us again the emperor's desire to get his own way, but also his desire to have his intentions approved. However he could brook no opposition, and dealt ruthlessly with those who did obstruct him. Grumel has in fact suggested that the abbot Anatolios of the Studite monastery also suffered a like fate to that of Euthymios for opposing Leo's union with Zoe, for there is an odd break in his tenure of his position as the head of the monastery.⁴⁷ It seems that Leo himself, naturally, did not share the popular perception of Zoe's nature, and he upheld her reputation loyally whilst she was alive, and also after she was dead.

It is perhaps in the reaction against the person of Zoe that there is found the explanation for the delay of the second marriage. It has been noted that Euthymios was exiled for two years, and the chronicles tell us that Zoe was empress for one year and eight months; thus from the fact that Zoe was still alive when Euthymios was released from his monastic confinement it can be deduced that Leo did not immediately marry Zoe on the death of Theophano. We seem to have here a rare case of Leo restraining his desires; perhaps he had the hope that the fuss over the choice of his second wife would die down given a little time. But Byzantine society was evidently not quick to forget the scandalous pre-history of the emperor's intended bride. Not only was there the question of whether she was a murderess, but the fact that she had been the emperor's mistress undermined the case for her suitability to be empress. A further problem may have been that although a second marriage for Leo was not out of the question it was a different matter when it came to Zoe, for this was also to be her second marriage, and the attitude of Byzantine law towards women getting married again was not the same for men.⁴⁸ It seems that it was not until July 898 at the earliest that Leo dared to proceed to regularise their relationship by marriage.⁴⁹ One wonders if the emperor deliberately cultivated Theophano's reputation as a saint, which began to grow shortly after her death⁵⁰, so

⁴⁵VE, 45. 33-35.

⁴⁶GMC, 852.

⁴⁷Grumel, 'Chronologie', 29-32.

⁴⁸See G. Buckler, 'Women in Byzantine Law around 1100 A. D.', *Byz*, 11 (1936), 391-416. esp. 406-408; Guiland, *Études*, 233; J. Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4^e-7^e siècle)*, I, *Le droit impérial* (Paris, 1990), 226-238. However Beaucamp, *Statut*, II, *Les pratiques sociales* (Paris, 1992), 70, notes that certainly in the case of Byzantine Egypt society ignored the normative dispositions of imperial legislation.

⁴⁹For the date of the second wedding see Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 13.

⁵⁰This is clear from the fact that Leo built a church in her memory not long after her death, and that the edition of her *Life* that survives preserves a pro-Stylian flavour.

as in some way to lessen the insult that had been caused to the empress by Zoe's relationship with the emperor; if Theophano had in fact borne the scandal with ease why should it bother anyone else now that Leo wished to marry Zoe? There is perhaps also the hint that it was all part of God's plan anyway, and thus really it was He who had willed the emperor's relationship with Stylianos's daughter. Yet the scandalous taint did not vanish, and when Leo and Zoe finally did get married it was not with the ceremony that would still have been appropriate for a second union. The patriarch, Antony Kauleas, apparently refused to condone the marriage by his participation, and after Leo had crowned Zoe it was a palace cleric called Sinapes who blessed the couple, and he was then deposed for his pains.⁵¹ It seems that Leo had finally decided that he was going to do what he wanted after all, and was prepared to ride out the storm.

Yet there are certain indications that the emperor did try and convince society that the marriage and Zoe were both perfectly presentable. One instance of this could be two poems by Leo Choiosphaktes that were written on a certain wedding of Leo VI.⁵² In one of these poems Choiosphaktes is insistent on the legality of the union, and this has recently been connected with the fourth marriage by Magdalino, following Kolias's line.⁵³ Yet there is clearly a problem with this dating of the poems; at the time when Leo VI married his fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina soon after Easter 906⁵⁴ Leo Choiosphaktes was not present in Constantinople but was in fact engaged on an embassy to the east which had begun in late 904 or early 905 and lasted until early 907, Choiosphaktes returning to the imperial city in February of that year.⁵⁵ Perhaps one should not rule out the possibility that Leo Choiosphaktes sent these poems to Constantinople by letter. Yet the fact that he does allude to the legality of the union does make it seem unlikely that the context was that of the fourth marriage, since its legitimacy was a major point of dispute; it does seem doubtful that anyone could have argued that it was legal. The context of the second marriage however seems much more appropriate, for here was a wedding that was indeed theoretically legitimate, since the emperor was entitled to take another wife. In 898 Choiosphaktes would have been a renowned figure at the imperial court, since he had performed such sterling work for the empire through his diplomatic activity with the Bulgarian prince Symeon.⁵⁶ It seems that through his poems Choiosphaktes showed his support for the emperor and perhaps hoped to influence opinion at Byzantium regarding the

⁵¹*GMC*, 856-857.

⁵²*Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, III, 356-358.

⁵³Magdalino, 'Revisited', 99.

⁵⁴See Karlin-Hayter, *VE. Commentary*, 193, for this date.

⁵⁵Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 47-52.

⁵⁶Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 28-42.

second marriage. Another tactic of Leo's to improve the acceptability of Zoe can be seen in the record of a miracle that happened during this emperor's reign. The miracle occurred on 31 August at the church of the Theotokos at Chalkoprateia, and was a result of the laying of the relic of the girdle of the Virgin upon the empress Zoe⁵⁷, and thus must have taken place in 898 or 899, the years when she would have been *augusta* in August. The miracle took place on the anniversary of the dedication of this church, where Mary's girdle was kept in the so-called holy casket (*ἀγία σορός*). We are told that Zoe, who was suffering from an 'impure spirit', was the recipient of a dream wherein she was told that she would be cured if the girdle of the Virgin was laid upon her. Leo duly arranged on the *encaenia* day of the church that the casket was opened and that the patriarch spread the belt over the afflicted empress, who was subsequently cured.⁵⁸ One suspects that this was a public relations exercise, an open declaration that Zoe could no longer be accused of being an evil woman since she had been cured by divine powers.⁵⁹ The very fact that this event could occur also suggests that opposition to Zoe as empress had lapsed somewhat, for the patriarch who would not bless the union was able to unfold the relic over her, whilst Euthymios who was exiled for his refusal to countenance Zoe as Leo's second bride seems to have been present at this ceremonial miracle.⁶⁰ Perhaps they could no longer resist Leo's insistence. Philotheos certainly records without any reservation the fact that Zoe was empress and was involved in court ceremonial, but perhaps this is only to be expected of a state document.⁶¹

⁵⁷AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 935-936; *Menologion of Basil II*, PG 117, 613. See also Jugie, 'Homélie mariales', I, 485; Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 172-173; 'Théophano', 13-14. It is interesting to note that the cure took place at the shrine of the church which rivalled the Blachernai's own holy *Soros* which contained the Virgin's robe; this latter church had strong connections with Zoe's old rival Theophano.

⁵⁸The accounts indicate that this was the first time the casket had been opened since the relic had been installed in Constantinople. We are told the the girdle was found as good as new, and also that within the casket there was an imperial document relating when and how the relic had first been brought to the city by the emperor Arcadius (395-408). However the accounts also say that it was 410 years from this event until Leo VI opened up the casket for the performing of the miracle, which is in fact a chronological impossibility, for Arcadius died in 408, and 410 years from then does not take us into the reign of Leo VI. Jugie, 'Homélie mariales', I, 485, has tried to account for this discrepancy saying 'Le seul moyen de rendre acceptable un pareil calcul serait de faire partir les 410 ans de l'année 477 ou 478, époque à laquelle l'église de Chalcopratia a pu être bâtie par l'impératrice Véline'. He thus concludes that Zoe must have been cured in either 887 or 888. Yet this hypothesis is clearly incorrect, since Zoe did not become empress until 898. For the moment I would conclude that the figure of 410 years is simply an error. Further evidence for this event is supplied by a surviving homily that Leo VI's spiritual father Euthymios delivered on the feast of the girdle of the Virgin and the dedication day of the church of the Theotokos at Chalkoprateia, the text of which is found in Jugie, 'Homélie mariales', I, 505-514, esp. 511. In this homily Euthymios does refer to the opening of the casket, though he does not explain that this was for the benefit of the empress Zoe.

⁵⁹This is not to dismiss the idea that Zoe was indeed ailing, for she died not much later from 'a fearful illness': *VE*, 49, 24-25.

⁶⁰Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 172-173, and 'Théophano', 13-14, opines that Euthymios was present on this occasion.

⁶¹Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 225, 1-2.

Yet it is clear that Zoe never did escape from the scandal that attached to her person, even after her death. When she was buried after succumbing to a fearful illness which was accompanied by 'the loss of her wits'⁶² in late 899 or early 900⁶³ there was found on her coffin the following inscription, 'The miserable daughter of Babylon'.⁶⁴ It seems unclear from this story whether the inscription was put on deliberately, or just happened to be already inscribed on the coffin that they found to bury her in, but the implication is less hazy; it is a reference to Zoe's scandalous life for she is apparently being connected with the whore of Babylon of the *Book of Revelation*.⁶⁵ It could be that Zoe had caused so much scandal that someone felt strongly enough to graffiti her tomb with such an insult. Yet Leo himself remained loyal to his dead wife. In a vividly described episode in the *Life of Euthymios* there is related a surprise night visit of the emperor to Euthymios's monastery at Psamathia, shortly after the death of Zoe Zaoutzaina.⁶⁶ Leo barged in on the monks waiving all ceremony, and proceeded to join them in their customary post-prandial measure of wine, which was diluted with warm water. However the beverage was not to the emperor's liking, and on the spot he endowed the monastery with a gift of vine-growing land, saying to Euthymios "'I will consecrate to this new-built monastery the property in the Pyliatic which belonged to that poor wife of mine [Zoe] whom you had in aversion; so you may be continually reminded of her and of me"'.⁶⁷ One suspects that the last thing Euthymios wanted was to be continually reminded of Zoe, and one also suspects that Leo chose the gift of property quite deliberately to vaunt his attachment to Zoe in the face of his spiritual father.

Further evidence of Leo's concern for the memory of his deceased wife is found in the chronicles. They report that after the emperor had been made aware of the plot of Zoe's surviving relatives in 899/900 he managed to remove the ring-leader, Basil the *epeiktes*, from Constantinople by despatching him to Macedonia, giving him 24,000 *miliaresia*, a sum that is described as being the *psychika* of his

⁶²VE, 49, 24-25.

⁶³Grumel, 'Chronologie', 19-21, dates her death to the winter of 899-900. This was followed by Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 104, who places her death in December 899/January 900. However Karlin-Hayter, 'Théophano', 13, reached the conclusion that she died in March 900 at the earliest by deducing that since the office of basileiopatōr was included in Philotheos's treatise of September 899 Stylianos Zaoutzes must still have been alive at this date, and as Zoe is recorded as dying six months after her father the earliest her death can have been was March 900. But it seems that she has backed down from this dating. In VE, *Commentary*, 172, she is less adamant, merely saying that 'Zoe was alive in sept. 899, but dead very soon after, to be out of the way for Leo's marriage with Eudocia'. It does seem possible that the office of basileiopatōr could have been included in Philotheos's work even after the death of Stylianos.

⁶⁴GMC, 857.

⁶⁵However Runciman, *Romanus*, 41, has in fact viewed the inscription as one that Zoe herself had carved on her future tomb as a sign of her repentance.

⁶⁶VE, 51, 24 - 55, 19.

⁶⁷VE, 55, 15-18.

aunt Zoe.⁶⁸ It seems that such money was to be distributed as charity and thus benefit Zoe's soul in the after-life.⁶⁹ The chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon even asserts that in the month of May after Zoe's death Leo, having built a church for her called Hagia Zoe, buried her there.⁷⁰ However this chronicler may simply have been confused, or carried away, by the example of the church that Leo did build for his first wife Theophano, which he records immediately after the details on the church of Hagia Zoe.⁷¹

Yet when the empress Zoe had been alive Leo's concern was surely not solely with the reaction of society to her; the hope for the birth of a son and heir must have occupied his mind also. A second marriage was usually the last that a Byzantine would proceed to, given the shame that would attach to a third by virtue of canon and civil law; St. Basil excluded trigamists from communion for three years, and Leo VI himself had cracked down on third marriages in Novel 90.⁷² Thus Leo's union with Zoe was theoretically his last chance to secure a legitimate male child of his own blood. It was the fact that this failed to happen that precipitated the major internal crisis of his reign; it seems that only one child of Leo and Zoe survived the marriage, and this was a girl named Anna.⁷³ What was Leo to do now? It is surely extremely indicative of the emperor's character that he did not simply accept the situation that fate had allotted him; he did not concede the point that God obviously did not wish him to have any male children (a point that the opponents of his following marriages did not fail to pick up on) but turned his mind to the securing of a third marriage. The question of why Leo was so determined to produce a male child of his own blood does not seem to have been addressed in the various writings on the tetragamy affair. The impression one gets though was that it was all down to the impulse of human pride: he could not bear the thought that a son of his would not survive him and maintain the Macedonian dynasty in the future. Indeed perhaps the very existence of this dynasty was at stake; the only other surviving son of Basil was the co-emperor Alexander and he too had not yet produced any

⁶⁸GMC, 858-859.

⁶⁹For another example of money being distributed for the repose of the soul see Leo's Novel 40: Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 156-165.

⁷⁰*Ps. Sym.*, 703. Whether Hagia Zoe means St Zoe or Holy Life is open to interpretation, but perhaps it shouldn't worry us greatly since this story is probably mistaken.

⁷¹On the church that was built for Theophano see Downey, 'Church of All Saints'.

⁷²Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 296-299; Guiland, *Études*, 237.

⁷³GMC, 860. *De Cer.*, 643, indicates that two daughters of Leo and Zoe were buried in the mausoleum of Constantine the great, but it gives them both the same name of Anna. A further complication is that it is not specified which Zoe is meant. Ohnsorge, 'Töchter', 79-80, believes that the Zoe is in fact Leo's fourth wife, and the entry should call the daughters Anna and Helena. For the moment it is sufficient to state that only one child of the second marriage survived after Zoe Zaoutzaina's death.

children. We may however doubt that Leo would have been content to see a son of Alexander destined for the throne, given our knowledge of further events.

It seems that it was almost immediately after Zoe's death that Leo did begin to turn his mind to the methods by which he might take another wife, and these methods reveal the extent of his determination and ruthlessness. Firstly Leo was aware that he had to make the position of *augusta* vacant, and this necessitated ridding himself of the two females who could be expected to fill this role. The first of these was the wife of Alexander, whose name is not known. Eliminating her claim to be chief *augusta* does not seem to have been too taxing; Leo simply accused Alexander of plotting against him and as punishment separated him from his wife, thus terminating her chance of being *augusta*.⁷⁴ Perhaps this is too cynical an interpretation of events; Alexander may indeed have been plotting against Leo, for it was certainly a moment that was favourable for the co-emperor. His brother had had his allotted limit of two wives and had not managed to produce a son, and thus it now surely devolved upon Alexander to provide the heir of the Macedonian dynasty, so why not just help matters along their natural course a little by making himself emperor; Leo had clearly had his chance so he should be moved aside. If Alexander was indeed plotting it was extremely opportune for his brother; by discrediting himself Alexander had brought Leo one step closer to justifying the taking of a third wife. The other candidate for the position of *augusta* was Leo's own daughter Anna, who may still only have been a very young child in 900 if she was born after Zoe had become empress. The fact that it is recorded that Leo had to make an excuse justifying appointing his daughter *augusta* may actually indicate the truth of her extreme infancy; the chronicles go out of their way when commenting on the creation of Anna as *augusta* that this step had to be taken for without her the *kletoria* would not be able to be performed according to the blue-print of court ceremony.⁷⁵ This excuse was in fact Leo's secret weapon; a precedent had now been set by which it was deemed that it was essential to have an *augusta* for the sake of imperial ceremony, even if this meant the appointment of a female who was not quite suited for the job. Now all Leo had to do was make an excuse to get rid of Anna, and then he would be able to justify his progression to a third marriage as a state necessity. Indeed Leo did put his plan into action, as revealed by the famous letter of the patriarch Nikolaos written in 912 to the pope Anastasios III.⁷⁶ Nikolaos records for the pope a conversation he had with the emperor shortly after the advent of the fourth marriage; the patriarch reports that he said to Leo "Even the third [marriage] was perhaps unworthy of your Majesty. But that perhaps found excuse in

⁷⁴*VE*, 55. 21-24.

⁷⁵*GMC*, 860.

⁷⁶*Nicholas. Letters*, 218-221.

the treaty made with the Frank, because it was agreed by you that your only daughter should be sent to him as his bride...and since it was agreed that your daughter should go to Francia, and since there must be a Lady in the Palace to manage ceremonies affecting the wives of your nobles, there is condonation of the third marriage, because your daughter was to be given away". Thus Nikolaos presents a very neat précis of the justification for the third marriage. To make the position of *augusta* vacant once more Leo had hit upon the plan of arranging a marriage between Anna and the Frank Lewis of Provence, on the pattern that often occurred between Byzantium and the west, the last projected union being between Basil I's son Constantine and the Frankish princess Ermengarde. As has already been noted Previt -Orton and Ohnsorge have directed their attention to this union, and both assume that it did occur, though this can be disputed.⁷⁷ But whatever one concludes about the projected union the main point to recognise is that Leo made an excuse to remove his daughter from the position of *augusta* so that he could justify his third marriage, exploiting the pretext that a woman was essential in the palace for the sake of imperial ceremony. Indeed Grumel has already appreciated the workings of Leo's mind, seeing the separation of Alexander from his wife and the promotion of Anna as a move against his brother, though he did not extend his analysis to the subsequent engagement of Anna.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Previt -Orton, 'Charles Constantine'; Ohnsorge, 'T chter'. Previt -Orton was of the opinion that the union did occur, and argued that this would explain why the son of Lewis III, Charles Constantine, has aspersions cast on his birth, for his mother had been the product of a scandalous marriage and his grandfather's (Leo VI's) own parentage had been dubious, and also why he had such a Byzantine name. Previt -Orton did however point out the difficulty in this theory: the question of Anna's age. Ohnsorge believed he had found the answer to this problem by conjecturing that Anna was born to Leo and Zoe before they were married, therefore it was perfectly feasible that Anna could have married in 900 and given birth to Charles Constantine in 906, dying in the process (thus explaining why Lewis is found in 915 with another wife called Adelaide). Ohnsorge's explanation has the added bonus of furthering Charles's shameful origins, since his own mother was illegitimate. But can it be taken for granted that Anna actually married Lewis? Forgetting the problem of her age for the moment it seems that there is no concrete evidence that she did marry this Frank. It is interesting to note that Nikolaos only talks of the marriage as something that was meant to happen, he never says that it did come to pass. It was surely sufficient for Leo's purposes just to make the excuse of an impending union; all the emperor was interested in was the creating the climate in which he could marry again. J. Gay, *L'Italie m ridionale et l'empire byzantin depuis l'av nement de Basile I^{er} jusqu'   la prise de Bari par les Normands (867-1071)*, I (New York, 1960), 153-155, certainly believed that the marriage between Anna and Lewis remained a project, but then he is mistaken in placing the marriage negotiations prior to Anna's *augustaship*; Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 178, states that it was either Anna's marriage or death that made the position of *augusta* vacant. It must also be acknowledged that the vast majority of marriages proposed between the Franks and the Byzantines never came to fruition. If we accept this then the age of Anna no longer becomes an issue; it was perfectly possible for the emperor to engage his daughter to be married at some point in the future when she had reached the correct maturity. As with the example of Leo's brother Constantine this would have been a case of child betrothal. As for Anna's true fate it seems likely that she died at an early age, and was buried in the family mausoleum at the church of Holy Apostles, as the *De Cer.* records.

⁷⁸Grumel, 'Chronologie', 32-34, I would however disagree with his conjecture that Samonas aided Leo in the slandering of Alexander and the achievement of the separation. The steps against Alexander must have occurred very shortly after Zoe's death, whilst Samonas only came to Leo's

A further point made clear in Nikolaos's letter regarding the third marriage is of course the attitude of canon law to such an event. Despite the ruling of St Basil Nikolaos was able to assert that "the sacred canons do not wholly reject the third marriage, but condone it, even though averting their eyes - as it were - from a 'smear on the Church.'" ⁷⁹ Thus a third marriage was not beyond the realms of possibility, and certainly within Byzantium there is a precedent for such a union, though perhaps it is not quite salubrious itself; the iconoclastic emperor Constantine V (741-775) took a third wife with little trouble.⁸⁰ Thus Leo was not yet entering completely uncharted waters. Despite this fact it does seem rather surprising that there appears to have been little fuss made about this third union, as shall be seen. However a certain group within Byzantium was highly alarmed at the thought that Leo was aiming to take another wife. This group was the surviving relatives of the defunct empress Zoe, who to some extent had acquired and maintained their positions within society by virtue of whom they were related to. They realised that a new wife would probably mean new favourites, and thus their positions were endangered. The chroniclers certainly take the view that the plot was inspired by the fear of these relatives that they had had their day. The ring-leader of the group was Basil the *epeiktes*, who was the nephew of Zoe Zaoutzaina, and apparently very keen to become emperor.⁸¹ It is related that he enlisted Samonas, a eunuch servant in the house of Stylianos, to aid in the plot, giving as its justification the threat of impending obscurity.⁸² Thus it is clear that Leo's wilful ambition to take another wife gave rise to a plot that could have proved fatal for him, if Samonas had not turned informer. So at the same time as the advent of the third marriage the notorious prestige of the Zaoutzes family came to an end; a new broom was sweeping through Byzantium.

Yet one of the most intriguing points about the third marriage is that we do not know much about the powers behind this new broom; the figure of the third wife, Eudokia Baiane, is shrouded in mystery. All the chroniclers tell us is that 'The emperor fetched a maiden from the Opsikion theme, who was most beautiful indeed; her name was Eudokia, and he crowned, entitled, and married her'.⁸³ Given the language of this brief account of the choice of Eudokia and her marriage with Leo it

attention and service in 900 after the thwarting of the plot of the relatives of the deceased empress. Thus it seems chronologically impossible that Samonas could have helped the emperor in his actions against his brother.

⁷⁹Nicholas. *Letters*, 220. 84-86.

⁸⁰See Guillard, *Études*, 239.

⁸¹For the episode see *GMC*, 858-859.

⁸²*GMC*, 858. It would be interesting to know what the attitude of the plotters was to Zoe's daughter Anna: was she a consideration in their plans? However perhaps she was already dead.

⁸³*GMC*, 860. However none of the tenth-century chroniclers reveal her family name. We learn it from *VE*, 63. 13, and also from *De Cer.*, 643.

has been conjectured that this was indeed another case of a bride-show, but this can be doubted even if one does believe in them.⁸⁴ So how did Eudokia come to be chosen as Leo's bride? Schreiner takes the view that the emperor selected Eudokia simply because she was beautiful, but this is hardly satisfying, for whilst stringently maintaining that family was not a consideration in the choice of brides he fails to mention the fact that Eudokia was of the Baianos family.⁸⁵ Surely there must have been some mechanism whereby Leo already knew of the existence of this Eudokia, and the most likely explanation is that he was acquainted with other members of the Baianos family, but here we hit a stumbling block: no other members of this family are recorded in the reign of Leo VI, although we do know of others from earlier and later periods.⁸⁶ No obvious promotions appear to be made whilst she is empress that could aid us in determining her network; her premature death seems to obscure such details. Thus to some extent we are still in the dark as to why Leo chose Eudokia. Perhaps like Theophano she was chosen since she was safe, that is she did not have extensive connections which might all desire to benefit from her new status. Could her choice in fact reflect that Leo had learnt his lesson from the example of the family of Zaoutzes?

Another odd facet about the third marriage is, as Karlin-Hayter phrases it, 'the scarcely documented reaction' of society to it⁸⁷; there seems to be no evidence that it caused a fuss. Jenkins asserts that 'the complaisant Patriarch Antony Cauleas...without very much ado, issued a 'dispensation' which freed the emperor from the canonical penalties entailed by third unions'⁸⁸, whilst Karlin-Hayter comments that 'The third marriage took place in the patriarchate of Kauleas and was probably celebrated by him'.⁸⁹ Yet such deductions are all a matter of inference. It is however known that the marriage must have occurred around Easter 900, for Eudokia died the following year on 12 April, having been empress for only one

⁸⁴For this conjecture see Treadgold, 'Bride-Shows', 408-409. Treadgold (who believed that these events were a real facet of Byzantine history) disagrees with this conjecture saying 'the words of Theophanes Continuatus prove nothing, since an emperor does not need a bride-show to find a beautiful woman to marry, or to bring her from a province not far from his capital'.

⁸⁵Schreiner, 'Réflexions', 190.

⁸⁶See Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 81. He notes that 'Eudocia's family is not well documented', but that we can refer to some members of it. A seal dating to 650-870 names a Baianos who was a *patrikos* and a *strategos*. Also around 870 the *strategos* of Longobardia had a protostator named Baianos, and another Baianos, who is described as a wealthy and noble inhabitant of Asia Minor, had his property confiscated in 1034 by Michael IV. Herlong also notes that the name may be of Bulgarian origin, since the brother of khan Toktu, who was killed in 772, was called Baianos.

⁸⁷Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 183.

⁸⁸Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 214-215.

⁸⁹Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 183. A. Cutler and N. Oikonomidès, 'An Imperial Casket and Its Fate at a Humanist's Hands', *The Art Bulletin*, 70 (1988), 77-87, esp. 85, tie in the production of the Palazzo Venezia casket with the occasion of Leo's third marriage, and point to an inscription on the casket that suggests that the wedding was blessed by the patriarch. However Kalavrezou, 'New Type', denies that the casket was produced on the occasion of a wedding, and agrees with Maguire, 'Comparing', in linking the casket rather with Basil I.

year.⁹⁰ So why was there apparently no opposition excited? It seems that there may have been several factors. There was the careful groundwork of Leo VI himself; the precedent of Constantine V; there may have been a certain sympathy with Leo's plight; also the choice of Eudokia was probably more pleasing than that of Zoe; and the example of the patriarch's toleration of the marriage may have had its imitators.⁹¹ Yet, could the projected trial of Arethas in 900 have had anything to do with the third marriage?⁹² From letters of Arethas it is known that he was put on trial on 19 April 900 on a charge of atheism, a common accusation that concealed the true reasons. The trial took the form of an ecclesiastical tribunal and sat in the *metatorion* (imperial robing room) of Hagia Sophia. The prosecutor was Nikolaos Xylomachairios (although Jenkins and Laourdas assert that it was the emperor who was the real instigator of the action) and the judges included the *synkellos* Euthymios, Christopher the bishop of Cyzicus and also Nikolaos the *mystikos*. Apparently the prosecution broke down thanks to the intervention of John Rhabdouchos. Jenkins and Laourdas saw in the trial an indication that Arethas had actually been involved in a plot against the emperor, either that of the Zaoutzes family or that of Alexander. Yet given that Arethas was initially the prime mover in the opposition against the fourth marriage, and the closeness in date between the third marriage and his trial it could be that in 900 he was already objecting to the emperor's behaviour. But if he was he seems to have been effectively silenced, and in the period 901-902 he delivered orations at Leo's court.⁹³ In addition to this possible manifestation of resistance Karlin-Hayter does allude to the opposition of 'some circles'⁹⁴, but this is no more than an inference drawn from the problems surrounding Eudokia's burial, which shall be dealt with below.

Thus the third marriage was safely secured, and things looked even better for Leo when it emerged that Eudokia had become pregnant. During Easter 901 she gave birth to a baby boy, who was called Basil.⁹⁵ But any joy that Leo may have felt was marred, first by the death of Eudokia during the birth, and then by the fact that the child died too. One can only imagine the depth of anguish and despair that Leo was hurled into. His mood is reflected in his insistence on a public imperial funeral

⁹⁰Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 183.

⁹¹One wonders if Antony Kauleas could have had a vested interest in recognising Eudokia as empress and a legitimate wife.

⁹²For this trial see Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 349-351.

⁹³See Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations', 1-2.

⁹⁴Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 183.

⁹⁵*VE*, 63, 13-14; *GMC*, 860; *De Cer.*, 643, where he is referred to as the brother of Constantine Porphyrogennetos; Grierson, 'Tombs', 22; 28. The choice of name seems significant: Leo was not intent on connecting himself with Michael III or with creating a 'new Constantine'. All he wanted to do was stress the continuity of the Macedonian dynasty.

for Eudokia.⁹⁶ At first he had planned to bury her in his recently built monastery of St Lazaros, which was linked to the Macedonian palace complex.⁹⁷ However the abbot of this establishment, Hierotheos, refused to let the body be brought in past the gate and sent it back to the palace. Then the funeral was rescheduled for the following day, Easter day itself; the plan was to bury Eudokia with the customary imperial ceremony in the mausoleum of Constantine the great at the church of Holy Apostles, where Leo's first two wives had been buried already. The fact that the body was originally intended for St Lazaros's seems to reveal that Leo had been willing to make concessions due to public opinion and the fact that it was Easter, but the insulting interruption of the original plan seems to have pushed him in the other direction. It is interesting to ponder on which factor had been more decisive in Hierotheos's decision to send the body back; was it the fact that it was Easter or that the third marriage did have a certain shame attached to it? The *Life of Euthymios* perhaps indicates that the former was the major factor, for Euthymios when requested to attend the funeral by the emperor implored Leo in a letter not to bury Eudokia on Easter day, saying "do not, on the glorious and august day of the Resurrection, bring a cloud over your royal city, making the brightness and joy of our common salvation and resurrection give way before lamentation and the wailing of mourners".⁹⁸ Leo's recorded reply is equally worth reporting, speaking volumes on his mood and character; the emperor retorted "where has your Holiness read that the dead should not be buried on Easter day?...tomorrow it is my will she should be borne, as empress, followed by the Senate, in royal state, to the grave, and I will show this populous city that Eudocia, empress of the Romans, is dead, that among them at least I may find fellow-mourners and sharers of my grief".⁹⁹ Thus Leo pursued his own will despite any religious qualms that may have existed, asserting his imperial authority and moved by the tragedy of his own circumstances; his attitude throughout the scandals surrounding his four marriages was certainly consistent.

With the death of his third wife and his first son the emperor could surely have been expected to resign himself finally to his fate. He had had the maximum number of wives that was precedented in Byzantine history; to go beyond this would be unheard of. Realising this Leo did act with due caution, but it is clear that he was still determined to have a son. By 903 he had taken a concubine, Zoe Karbonopsina, a fact we know since some of the chroniclers report that when Leo was nearly

⁹⁶For this episode see *VE*, 63. 18 - 65. 23.

⁹⁷Magdalino, 'Revisited', 99.

⁹⁸*VE*, 63. 34 - 65. 2.

⁹⁹*VE*, 65. 14-22.

assassinated at the church of St Mokios on 11 May 903¹⁰⁰ his trusted saviour Samonas was not present, but was in fact escorting this Zoe to the palace so that she would be with the emperor.¹⁰¹ Leo was thus immersing himself in even more scandal¹⁰², but at least he was still holding off from the novelty of a fourth marriage. Indeed he was deliberately doing so, making sure he had secured a son before taking that unprecedented step. Further in the chronicles it is stated that Zoe lived with the emperor as wife, but she was not crowned.¹⁰³ She only became Leo's fourth wife when she married him in 906, after the birth and baptism of their child Constantine.

Unlike the case of the third wife of Leo VI information on Zoe's background does exist. She was descended from the family of the chronicler Theophanes¹⁰⁴, and was great-granddaughter of Photeinos the *protospatharios* and *strategos* of the Anatolikon theme under Michael II (820-829), who also became *strategos* of both Crete and Sicily.¹⁰⁵ Certain of her relatives who lived under Leo VI are also known. Most famously there is Himerios who had risen to the post of *protasekretis* by 904, when he was also put in charge of the Byzantine navy¹⁰⁶; this man was in fact married to Zoe's sister.¹⁰⁷ It seems that Himerios became Zoe's brother-in-law at the latest just after the settling of the tetragamy crisis for he is identified as her relative then by the *Life of Euthymios*.¹⁰⁸ It could be possible that he was related to Zoe prior to the scandal of the fourth marriage, which gives rise to the questions, did Himerios only come to prominence through Zoe, or was it through Himerios that Leo met Zoe? A further relation of Zoe was a *patrikios* named Nikolaos.¹⁰⁹ It also seems that Leo Choirosphaktes had a family connection with Zoe.¹¹⁰

Thus with his concubine installed in the palace Leo hoped to secure a male heir. And at last in September 905¹¹¹ a boy was born¹¹², and he was called

¹⁰⁰Grumel, 'Chronologie', 40-41.

¹⁰¹GMC, 861.

¹⁰²Leo himself had advocated the outlawing of concubinage: see his Novel 91, Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 298-301.

¹⁰³GMC, 862.

¹⁰⁴DAI, I, 98. 77-80.

¹⁰⁵TC, 76. Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 104, conjectures that he was a brother or nephew of Theophanes.

¹⁰⁶GMC, 863; VE, 109. 25. Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 106, wondered if Himerios was of a naval family, given his connections with Photeinos and Isaakios.

¹⁰⁷Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 129. 98-99.

¹⁰⁸VE, 109. 25-26.

¹⁰⁹VE, 109. 25-26.

¹¹⁰Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 23, 115. 29-30.

¹¹¹See Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 108-109. D. Pingree, 'The Horoscope of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus', *DOP*, 27 (1973), 217-231, esp. 229, has identified a horoscope as being that of the child Constantine, which reveals his birth to have occurred on 3 September 905.

¹¹²Ohnsorge, 'Töchter', argues that prior to the birth of Constantine Zoe and Leo had produced two daughters, Anna and Helena, basing his conclusion on the entry in the *De Cer.* about the tomb of two

Constantine. This child was eventually to succeed to the throne as the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Given that the child was the product of such a scandalous union it seems surprising that so many pious figures became linked with his birth; the line up includes the patriarch Nikolaos, the sainted nun Euphrosyne, certain holy men, the abbot of the monastery of St Athenogenes, and an icon of the Mother of God at Pege. However it is likely that some of these incidences were inventions of a later time, when Constantine VII had become emperor, inventions that were intended to reveal that his birth was divinely approved. The involvement of St Euphrosyne the Younger in the securing of a male child for Leo is known from the *Life* that was written in the fourteenth century by Nikephoros Kallistos.¹¹³ Attached to this work was an account of various miracles that had occurred throughout Byzantine history at the holy site of Pege, and one of these miracles, involving an icon of the Theotokos, also touches on the birth of Constantine.¹¹⁴ The case of the monastery of St Athenogenes was exploited by Constantine VII himself¹¹⁵, though it may have been the same incident that Leo VI himself is made to refer to by the chroniclers when he warns Constantine Doukas against trying to seize power.¹¹⁶ Such stories cannot be argued with certainty to be a true reflection of the events and sentiments of Leo's reign; for this one can however turn to the last and significant case of the patriarch Nikolaos.

Nikolaos, the spiritual brother of Leo and his one time fellow student, had become patriarch on 1 March 901 after the death of Antony Kauleas in the same year on 12 February.¹¹⁷ His attitude to the pregnant Zoe is well documented in the *Life of Euthymios*. Nikolaos is alleged to have said to Euthymios on the occasion of the baptism of the boy "in this child Constantine you see the fruit of prayer. For even now, in our generation, there are men who truly are servants of God. Seven

daughters of Leo and a Zoe, and also an inscription found in Constantinople referring to the porphyrogennetoi Leo, Alexander, Constantine, Anna, Helena and Maria. However it could be that the Anna and Helena of the inscription were sisters of Leo VI, like Maria.

¹¹³AASS, Nov III, 858-877, esp. 870. Chapters 17-33 concern Leo VI and his relationship with Euphrosyne. Euphrosyne had come to settle at the church of the Theotokos at Pege at the start of the tenth century, and she took up residence in a subterranean cave there. Leo, on hearing of her reputation visited her, and eventually asked her to intercede with God on his behalf, to secure for him a son. Subsequently Euphrosyne did have a vision and was informed that God would allow Leo to have a son who would become emperor.

¹¹⁴*De sacris aedibus deque miraculis Deiparae ad Fontem*, AASS, Nov III, 878-889, esp. 885. It is related that in her quest for a child Zoe fabricated a plait which had the same measurements of the icon of the Theometor which hung on the right of an icon of the Saviour at the Refuge (a building at Pege which Leo VI himself had much restored), and by virtue of wearing this plait she gave birth to Constantine.

¹¹⁵TC, 464. It was said that Leo VI had gone to Mt Olympos in Bithynia to make the request to be given a son who would succeed him, and Peter the abbot of the monastery predicted to him that this would indeed come to pass.

¹¹⁶TC, 373. There was a prediction circulating that a Constantine would become emperor, and Doukas is told that this is not referring to him but to Leo's son, a fact the emperor says he has been assured of 'by many holy men'.

¹¹⁷Grumel, 'Chronologie', 10.

priests we instructed to remain for as many days in this great and holy temple of the Wisdom of God, their faces turned to the altar, daily by their prayers propitiating God the holy One, and thus we caused the emperor to obtain that he desired. And behold we rejoice with him that he has a beloved son".¹¹⁸ In connection with these prayers it seems that Nikolaos also blessed Zoe's womb, saying "The Church shall be yet further enlarged and made brilliant under the prince sprung from you"; it is also related that he predicted that the child would be a boy, and that at this time whenever he sat down to dine with Zoe he addressed her as a bride.¹¹⁹ As a friend of the emperor it appears that Nikolaos had been prepared to help Leo in his ambitions, even to pander to them.

Public reaction to the birth of Constantine is not recorded, but when Leo aimed to have Constantine baptised with full ceremonial in Hagia Sophia ripples of disapproval are attested. Nikolaos himself asserts that archpriests and priests did not want him to baptise the child unless he secured from the emperor in advance a guarantee that he would separate from Zoe, and he alleges that the emperor agreed to these terms on oath.¹²⁰ Despite this arrangement it is evident that there was still some concern, for it is reported elsewhere that the patriarch-endorsed baptism went ahead on 6 January (the feast of Epiphany) 906¹²¹ 'in spite of strong opposition on the part of Epiphanius of Laodicea who, with some of the metropolitans, stood out against it'.¹²² However the emperor himself had taken steps to blunt this protest by making sure that the real focus of the opposition, Arethas (who was now bishop of Caesarea, an appointment that perhaps in itself was a means by which Leo had hoped to keep him sweet¹²³), was out of Constantinople at the time.¹²⁴ The baptism was thus a coup for Leo, for it secured legitimacy for Constantine.¹²⁵ And not only had the emperor persuaded the patriarch to participate but also the *synkellos* Euthymios, who so often opposed his wishes; the monk even consented to be one of Constantine's godfathers.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸VE, 71. 19-26.

¹¹⁹For these details see VE, 81. 11-17.

¹²⁰Nicholas. *Letters*, 218. 45-51. Of course we may be inclined to distrust Nikolaos's account, given that it was his aim to show the pope that he had always opposed the fourth marriage.

¹²¹For this date see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 105.

¹²²VE, 71. 12-14.

¹²³Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations', 2-3, argue that Arethas acquired this post at the end of 902.

¹²⁴ASM, II, 110. 17-20; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 335-336. Arethas had been sent off to Hellas on a mission to purify churches there after the Arab assaults of recent years.

¹²⁵Leo may also have tried to stress Constantine's legitimacy by calling him porphyrogenetos: see Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 129. 95.

¹²⁶VE, 71. 14-16. GMC, 865, reveals that the other sponsors included the co-emperor Alexander and the ubiquitous Samonas, as well as 'all the leading men'. The *Life of Euphrosyne the Younger*, AASS, Nov III, 870, alleges that Euphrosyne became Constantine's godmother.

So far so good. Leo had achieved his aim of having a son of his own blood, and had had him recognised as legitimate through patriarchal baptism. If the emperor had stopped here all would have been well. Yet Leo did not stop; he refused to give up the mother of Constantine, despite his alleged agreement with Nikolaos. Three days after the baptism of the boy Zoe was back in the palace.¹²⁷ Regarding public reaction to this development it seems that Leo was well aware of the scandal that his personal life was creating, and in order to assert that he in no way approved of licentiousness, he performed a public act demonstrating his moral fibre: he converted Kuphe from a den of prostitutes into a charitable institution for the elderly.¹²⁸ Whether this tactic had any effect is unknown, such information lost amidst the breaking of the full storm; for after Easter 906, probably in the month of June, Leo took the fateful step of marrying for a fourth time.¹²⁹ The couple were blessed by the presbyter Thomas, who was subsequently deposed.¹³⁰

This time there was no immediate dispensation; canon law was quite clear that to go beyond three marriages was an abhorrent act, and indeed before Leo no one had ever ventured this far.¹³¹ The price that Leo faced for this fourth marriage was a ban from church, that is excommunication. So why did Leo act thus if the price was so high? surely he was undermining his imperial authority by bringing such shame upon himself? Through the baptism of Constantine the emperor had apparently already secured the objective of legitimising his son and heir, so why was the marriage to Zoe necessary? Magdalino has indeed addressed this very issue, asserting that 'Leo's reasons for marrying have not satisfactorily been explained'.¹³² He discounts that the marriage was needed to legitimise Constantine, for this had already been secured. Was it then Leo's love for Zoe? Magdalino admits that this was a part of the emperor's decision, but locates the main reason in the personality of the emperor, saying 'he [Leo] believed himself more canonical than

¹²⁷Nicholas, *Letters*, 218. 52-54.

¹²⁸GMC, 865. See D. J. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1968), 233. Leo's action recalls a similar tactic used by the empress Theodora in the sixth century, when she wished to demonstrate her renunciation of her past life as a prostitute; prostitution was cracked down on in the city, and a house of reform was established for these women: see Dewing, *Procopius*, VI (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935), 198-199; VII (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940), 74-77.

¹²⁹For this date see Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 193.

¹³⁰GMC, 865. See also H. Grégoire, 'Thomas Dephourkinos du monastère de Kyminas et le quatrième mariage de Léon VI le sage', *Byz*, 32 (1962), 381-386. But when was Thomas deposed? According to *VE*, 109. 32 - 111. 1, it was Euthymios who removed this priest from his post, whereas the natural implication of the chronicles is that he was deposed immediately after performing the ceremony. Perhaps Euthymios simply ratified the ban when he became patriarch in 907, or he may be referring to the decisions of the synod.

¹³¹Guilland, *Études*, 235-236. Most of the classic studies on the fourth marriage refer to the law against fourth marriages in Basil I's *Procheiron*, but this has been shown to be an interpolation by Leo VI in 907: see N. Oikonomidès, 'Leo VI's Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages. An Interpolation in the *Procheiros Nomos* (IV, 25-27)', *DOP*, 30 (1976), 173-193.

¹³²Magdalino, 'Revisited', 114.

the canons'. This assessment of Leo is undoubtedly true, but has Magdalino been too hasty in underplaying the legitimisation and love factors? Yes, technically Constantine had been legitimised by the patriarchal baptism, but was this enough for a future emperor? Surely it was vital that his mother was not a figure of disgrace, and thus Leo was keen to legitimise Zoe's position too.¹³³ Indeed Macrides has remarked that 'The best way to secure an illegitimate child's future was to legitimise him by marrying his mother'.¹³⁴ Also the love motive may indeed be stronger than is realised, for it could even move Leo to corruption.¹³⁵ Ultimately all these motives boil down to the one factor, not so much that Leo saw himself as above the canons, but that he was determined to get what he wanted; he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. He did not want to pay the price for securing Constantine's baptism; Zoe was to remain in the palace and become his wife and empress.

It was this desire that was at the root of the tetragamy crisis; if only Leo would give up Zoe the crisis would be ended.¹³⁶ But the emperor would not contemplate such a move, and set about winning dispensation for himself. Leo's main tactic¹³⁷ was to summon to Constantinople a synod of the whole church, which would then grant him economy. To this end agents were despatched to the other sees of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem to inform their bishops of Leo's situation and get them to agree to consent to economy. With the promise of agreeing to economy secured the bishops were to bring word of this to the forthcoming synod, through writs and representatives. This undertaking was entrusted to two men, Symeon *asekretis* in the west, and Leo Choirosphaktes in the east.¹³⁸ It is apparent that this plan was one that was devised by the emperor and

¹³³After economy was granted to Leo in 907 he was still anxious that Zoe should be recognised by the church as *augusta*: see *VE*, 109, 24-113, 27.

¹³⁴R. Macrides, 'Artificial and Illegitimate Ties of Kinship', unpublished paper.

¹³⁵See *DAI*, I, 244, 235-256. Here it is related that an old cleric Ktenas attempted to bribe Leo through the intermediary of the *parakoimomenos* Samonas (thus dating the story to 907-908) with forty pounds of gold to make him a *protospatharios*. At first the emperor turned this offer down, but when Ktenas threw in a pair of ear-rings and a silver table Leo was won over. The addition of the ear-rings that helped to clinch the deal suggests the factor of a woman; Leo must have wanted to give them to Zoe.

¹³⁶Not only does Nikolaos's letter make this point clear, but so too does a letter of Arethas written in the period May-December 906: *ASM*, II, 67, 7-68, 8; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 356.

¹³⁷As in other disputes over religious issues the exploitation of apparently favourable texts was made. For instance the patriarch Nikolaos came up with a letter of Athanasius that could be used to justify the recognition of the union, 'after a certain punishment': see *VE*, 73, 10-15. Arethas indicates that Leo sought support from Dionysius (archbishop of Alexandria from 200-265) who interpreted St Paul's ruling on marriages liberally: see *ASM*, II, 105-107; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 367-368, who wonder if the ruling of Dionysius is the text that the *VE* ascribes to Athanasius. It is also clear that the bishop of Pharsalus interpreted I Corinthians, 7, 1-2, in favour of the emperor: see Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian', 360.

¹³⁸See *VE*, 79, 21-27; 87, 5-13; 101, 7-29.

the patriarch together; Nikolaos was actually working for Leo's cause.¹³⁹ Nikolaos devised letters and responses to the opposing metropolitans¹⁴⁰, telling the emperor that he could win the metropolitans over, and he even offered to receive Leo in church on 1 May (the day of the encaenia of Basil I's Nea) and then again on 6 August (the feast of the Transfiguration).¹⁴¹ On the evening of Christmas day 906 Nikolaos was still working towards the goal of economy, trying to win over those who opposed the emperor's marriage.¹⁴²

But how extensive was the opposition to Leo's fourth marriage? As we have seen the leader of the protesters was Arethas, and other figures were Epiphanius, Niketas the Paphlagonian (an ex-pupil of Arethas), and various unnamed metropolitans. Interestingly Arethas himself indicates that only a small group formed this opposition¹⁴³, though Nikolaos was able to maintain that the fourth marriage caused uproar in the whole city.¹⁴⁴ The emperor knew that Arethas was the focus of the trouble, and it seems that he tried to neutralise him, both through his own supporters¹⁴⁵, and by the threat of reviving the charge of atheism.¹⁴⁶ Yet the problem of Arethas and his allies paled into insignificance with the emergence of the main stumbling block to Leo's planned economy-granting synod, the patriarch Nikolaos himself.

The reason for Nikolaos's change of side is hard to fathom. The *Life of Euthymios* alleges that the patriarch had only been a supporter of Leo in the first place since he was trying to appease him for having been implicated in a plot with Andronikos Doukas to take the throne, and it was when Nikolaos got wind of the fact that Leo was going to depose him anyway after the tetragamy issue had been settled by the synod that he turned to the opposition.¹⁴⁷ Nikolaos himself maintains that he had always had deep reservations about the issue¹⁴⁸, and the *Life of Euthymios* reports that he said he changed his mind when he saw the obstinacy of

¹³⁹*Nicholas. Letters*, 222. 114-123. However Nikolaos says he went along with the plan in the expectation that the synod would not grant the emperor economy, and that he would then be forced to give up Zoe.

¹⁴⁰*VE*, 81. 18-24.

¹⁴¹*VE*, 71. 27 - 73. 7. Leo however refused these offers and decided to await the decision of the council. Arethas confirms that Nikolaos offered to receive Leo in church and that the emperor declined: see *ASM*, II, 128. 19-22.

¹⁴²See *ASM*, II, 168-174; Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian', 359.

¹⁴³*ASM*, II, 60. 27 - 61. 19; 90. 2-9; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 353; 360.

¹⁴⁴*Nicholas. Letters*, 218. 62-64. Nikolaos's testimony is more open to doubt than Arethas's, for Nikolaos was trying to convince the pope that a dispensation should never have been granted. Also, why would Arethas lie about the extent of the opposition?

¹⁴⁵The purpose of Nikolaos's meeting with Niketas on Christmas day was to influence Arethas through his pupil, but the meeting itself was a recognition of the importance of Niketas's role in the opposition: see Westerink, 'Nicetas the Paphlagonian', 359; Jenkins, 'Three Documents', 232.

¹⁴⁶*ASM*, II, 97. 26 - 98. 10; 103. 32 - 104. 12; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 366; 369-370.

¹⁴⁷*VE*, 73. 23 - 75. 13.

¹⁴⁸*Nicholas. Letters*, 218. 65 - 222. 123.

the opposition that faced Leo.¹⁴⁹ Whatever the truth it is clear that Leo now had a serious problem on his hands; it had seemed as if things were going to turn out as he wished, with the patriarchs of all the sees granting him economy, but now his key ally had turned against him. By Christmas 906 it is apparent that favourable word was coming from both east and west regarding the granting of economy, and this may explain why Leo is found attempting to be admitted into Hagia Sophia on Christmas day, for he did process here in the customary manner, only to be turned away at the imperial doors by the patriarch, who forced him to divert to the *metatorion*; the same thing happened on the feast of Epiphany, although Nikolaos had promised to receive him on that day.¹⁵⁰ It appears that the patriarch was going out of his way to publicly humiliate the emperor. Nikolaos's example was forced on or followed by the other metropolitans, and it is said that he made them agree in writing to oppose the emperor.¹⁵¹ This situation was jeopardising the plan that Leo had so carefully worked for; without the agreement of the patriarch at the forthcoming synod it would fail. Leo now had to act to prevent this situation.¹⁵²

The emperor resorted to a personal appeal to the patriarch and the metropolitans. He summoned them all to the palace on the evening of Epiphany, and only Arethas and Epiphanius refused to attend. With this captive audience the emperor made his case in a beautifully stage-managed affair.¹⁵³ He asked why Nikolaos has refused to admit him to church, given that he had received the concession of the other sees, and that Nikolaos had once been his ally. Then Leo invited the bishops into his private apartments, relating to them the tragic misfortunes of his married life, and showing them the child Constantine, whom he gave to each of them to bless and pray over, which they all did. After the bishops had held the child Leo himself took his son in his arms, and weeping he uttered a poem that moved his audience to weep also with pity. Having thus got the bishops where he wanted them Leo declared that all he wished for was to be admitted to the church as far as the altar railings. It is alleged that some of the metropolitans were inclined to concede his wish, and Nikolaos said that he would too if all were unanimous, but as soon as the patriarch got the metropolitans on their own he made them reaffirm in writing their opposition to the emperor. Leo made one last effort on 1 February 907 (the feast of Tryphon), summoning again the metropolitans and the

¹⁴⁹VE, 81, 7-10.

¹⁵⁰For these events see VE, 75, 15 - 79, 6.

¹⁵¹VE, 83, 4-19.

¹⁵²The chronicles indicate that Leo's main ally was now Samonas: GMC, 865. A letter of Arethas also points to the influence of this eunuch, but to that of Leo's secretary Stephen too: ASM, II, 94 - 104, esp. 94, 1 - 95, 2; 104, 13-19; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 363-366.

¹⁵³For this see VE, 79, 7 - 83, 4.

patriarch, and giving Nikolaos an ultimatum.¹⁵⁴ Leo asserted that the representatives from the other sees were now on their way with writs granting economy¹⁵⁵, so given this would Nikolaos receive him tomorrow in the church of the Theotokos at Blachernai for the feast of Hypapante? With the refusal of Nikolaos, and the subsequent assent of most of the metropolitans to the patriarch's decision Leo was left with no choice. He could not have the synod being sabotaged by the opposition of the patriarch of Constantinople, so he exiled Nikolaos and the metropolitans. Nikolaos was despatched to his monastery at Galakrenai¹⁵⁶, whilst the metropolitans were despatched on ships from the Phiale to 'outside the town'. Four days later Leo recalled the metropolitans who had not rejected his penance, and on the following day he began his campaign to undermine Nikolaos by alleging that he had been in league with the plotter and deserter Andronikos Doukas. Letters of Nikolaos were produced which fugitives from Doukas swore on the cross were indeed sent by the patriarch to Andronikos. Having disgraced the patriarch Leo then extracted a resignation from him by agreeing to drop the matter of his treachery.¹⁵⁷ Leo thus ruthlessly pursued his goal, ridding himself of his opponents, but he was not yet out of the woods; the synod was still to take place and he needed a new patriarch who would support him.

Regarding the new patriarch Leo actually struck lucky, despite initial fears. At last Euthymios was put forward as successor to the patriarch, perhaps by virtue of being the *synkellos*, though his *Life* reports that it was because he was nominated by the metropolitans as the best choice since he was "above reproach, and marked with the seal of sanctity, and conspicuous for his great achievements".¹⁵⁸ It does indeed seem likely that the metropolitans had influence in nominating him, for as the *Life* itself admits Leo was wary of their choice since Euthymios had so often opposed his will in the past, and the emperor had in fact studiously avoided giving him the post the last two times it had become vacant, even though Euthymios had been *synkellos* on both occasions. Yet the monk's eventual reply to the proposal turned out to be a blessing; he said he would only agree to be patriarch if the synod would consent to the granting of the dispensation.¹⁵⁹ As has been seen this

¹⁵⁴VE, 83. 22 - 89. 2.

¹⁵⁵So runs the version of the VE, but Nikolaos asserts that the representatives from Rome arrived before he was exiled, and that it was alleged that he refused to meet or talk with them; *Nicholas. Letters*, 222. 129 - 224. 158. Thus the eastern representatives may indeed have arrived after Nikolaos's fall, but it does seem that those from the west came to Constantinople before this.

¹⁵⁶See also GMC, 865; *Nicholas. Letters*, 224. 167-172. Concerning Nikolaos's monastery see I. Sevckenko, 'An Early Tenth-Century Inscription from Galakrenai with Echoes from Nonnos and the *Palatine Anthology*', *DOP*, 41 (1987), 461-468.

¹⁵⁷VE, 91. 17-29. For the question of Andronikos's plot and Nikolaos's role in it see Chapter Seven.

¹⁵⁸VE, 95. 4-5.

¹⁵⁹VE, 99. 31-36.

condition seems to have been well assured; things were going Leo's way at last. Now he did not have to worry about the role of the patriarch of Constantinople at the synod since it seemed that there was not going to be one in post. Things thus appear to have transpired as Leo had wished and planned. The representatives from Rome¹⁶⁰, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem arrived with the Byzantine ambassadors and presented their writs granting economy. Apparently most of the metropolitans in Byzantium recognised this economy¹⁶¹, agreeing that the emperor should be admitted into church again, but also that he had to fulfill the terms of his penance, which Leo himself had already stated that he was content to observe. Euthymios was thus forced to fulfill his promise and became patriarch.

But what were the terms of Leo's penance? All that seems to be known is that the emperor was no longer allowed into the sanctuary; he had to stand at the altar railings as a penitent.¹⁶² Basil of Caesarea's 80th canon seems to expect that those who progressed to polygamy, that is beyond a third marriage, were to suffer a canonical penalty of eight years.¹⁶³ Was Leo to remain a penitent for eight years then? Under normal circumstances it also seems that such a marriage should have been dissolved, but since Leo had secured economy the fourth marriage was not annulled; Zoe remained in the palace as the emperor's wife and Constantine's mother.¹⁶⁴ Leo did not separate from her. But one may wonder if he ever slept with her again¹⁶⁵; there seem to have been no further children, certainly no more sons. Was this abstinence from sex a condition of the penance or was it a personal observance of the emperor himself? Leo certainly did make the concession of changing the law afterwards to ensure that no one ever again could marry a fourth time.¹⁶⁶ This decree may have been another of Euthymios's conditions for becoming patriarch, as the chronicles indicate he accepted the post to forestall Leo from introducing a law that allowed third and fourth marriages to occur.¹⁶⁷ Leo VI thus has the dubious distinction of being the first and last person in the history of Byzantium to have been allowed to marry for a fourth time.

¹⁶⁰But see n. 155 above.

¹⁶¹It is clear that those who did not were exiled, if they were not in exile already; Arethas found himself exiled in Thrace: *VE*, 103. 22-24.

¹⁶²*VE*, 109. 21-23.

¹⁶³Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 217.

¹⁶⁴However she was not recognised by the church as *augusta* within Leo's life-time, though the senatorial body did acclaim her as such: *VE*, 109. 24 - 113. 27. Ironically it was Nikolaos who both restored the presbyter who had married her to Leo and who recognised her as *augusta* in church, measures which Euthymios had refused to undertake: see *VE*, 125. 1-4; 137. 8-16.

¹⁶⁵Zoe's alleged affair with the eunuch Constantine may be a symptom of her frustration: *GMC*, 869.

¹⁶⁶Oikonomidès, 'Interpolation'.

¹⁶⁷*GMC*, 866.

The crowning of Leo's success was a literal reality; on Sunday 15 May 908¹⁶⁸, on the feast of Pentecost, the patriarch Euthymios officiated at the coronation of Leo's son and heir, Constantine VII.¹⁶⁹ At last Leo's dream was realised, but at what cost? The emperor of Byzantium had brought scandal on himself, breaking canon and civil law, refusing to accept the fate that God had apparently allotted him, and now he lived the life of a penitent. Yet God had also finally granted Leo to have a son, and by common consent the synod of 907 had agreed to grant the emperor economy. Leo's reign was not fatally undermined, and Constantine VII's right to rule was never doubted. If the matter turned out a success it was only because of Leo's determination to get his own way, the force of his will to see matters through to the end, the effective strategy of his plans. It is surprising that these lessons of the most famous feature of Leo's reign have not been fully appreciated; such qualities as Leo displayed in his efforts to secure a male heir of his own blood should surely not be restricted to this isolated strand of his reign.

¹⁶⁸For this date see P. Grierson and R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Date of Constantine VII's Coronation', *Byz.* 32 (1962), 133-138, repr. *Studies on*, XIII.

¹⁶⁹*GMC*, 868-869.

CHAPTER SIX
MILITARY MATTERS

In the sphere of foreign affairs Leo VI has received much harsh criticism from Byzantinists. Runciman characterised the emperor as an 'apathetic, indolent statesman' who 'would never go out of his way to intervene abroad', Ostrogorsky asserted that 'Unlike Basil I, Leo VI had no clear programme of foreign policy', and Vasiliev accused Leo of being 'indolent et inhabile' with regard to the military concerns of his reign.¹ Such impressions are understandable given the catalogue of military failures that the chronicles record; this catalogue is long but worth repeating. The inhabitants of Hypsele, a fortress north of Sebasteia, were carried off by the Arabs²; in southern Italy the rebel Agion of Longobardia defeated the Byzantine forces that were sent out to bring him into line³; Samos was besieged by the Arabs and its *strategos* was taken prisoner⁴; provoked by the obstinacy of the emperor Symeon of Bulgaria was led to declare war on the Byzantines, defeating them in battle twice, and he also managed to avoid being compelled to make peace on Byzantine terms when the emperor made the dreadful mistake of recalling his forces⁵; the city of Demetrias in Greece was taken by the Arabs⁶; in Sicily the town of Tauromenion fell to the Arabs whilst the Byzantine fleet was occupied in Constantinople helping build churches for Leo⁷; Lemnos was seized by the Arabs and its inhabitants were taken prisoner⁸; an Arab fleet sailed towards Constantinople but diverted to Thessalonica and sacked it, whilst the Byzantine fleet was seemingly powerless to take any defensive action⁹; the Byzantine navy was worsted by the Arab fleet in an engagement of the last years of the reign.¹⁰ Yet despite this record the emperor has found his apologists. Jenkins commented that 'It is customary to represent the foreign and military policy of Leo the Wise as uniformly unsuccessful and even disastrous, and true it is that his reign was marked by some terrible reverses, against both the Bulgarians and the Saracens. But the results of these were...temporary; whereas the results of the Byzantine counter-measures, in

¹S. Runciman, *A History of the First Bulgarian Empire* (London, 1930), 126; Ostrogorsky, *State*, 255; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 219.

²*GMC*, 849-850.

³*GMC*, 852.

⁴*GMC*, 852.

⁵*GMC*, 853-855.

⁶*GMC*, 860.

⁷*GMC*, 860.

⁸*GMC*, 861.

⁹*GMC*, 862-863.

¹⁰*GMC*, 870.

organisation and diplomacy, were both permanent and salutary'.¹¹ The emperor's major advocate, Karlin-Hayter in a study devoted to the very topic of foreign affairs during Leo's reign, showed that the accepted impression of the emperor in this field was in need of considerable adjustment.¹² She stressed that we need to get beyond the overwhelmingly gloomy impression of failure that the chronicles are so keen to present and take on board evidence from other sources that reveal more positive aspects of the emperor and his deeds. It emerges that Leo can be seen as 'his own Minister for War'¹³; that he oversaw a 'considerable step forward' in the organization of the themes¹⁴; that he was not disinterested in military matters¹⁵; that Agion's victory was short-lived¹⁶; that the loss of Tauromenion was more a symbolic blow than a real one for Sicily was basically already lost¹⁷; that peace was secured with the Bulgarians from 896 until the end of Leo's reign, leaving the emperor free to concentrate on the eastern part of the empire, using the tools of war and diplomacy.¹⁸ From observations such as these it transpires that the reign, in respect to military affairs, is not the disaster it is so often portrayed as being; Karlin-Hayter concludes that 'The overall balance is that some territory was added to the Empire, a number of small states were induced to enter more closely the Byzantine sphere of influence, conquests of the preceding reign were consolidated and the frontiers strengthened'.¹⁹ Leo VI is let off with only 'three major blunders' to his name, the 'failure to defend Thessalonica, the provocation that sparked off the Bulgarian war and the premature withdrawal of Byzantine forces from Bulgaria'.²⁰ However it seems that Karlin-Hayter's vital reassessment has been ignored, for eight years after her article appeared we still find the old myths being pedalled when Browning asserts that Leo 'had no taste for military matters, and worse still no foreign policy'.²¹ Thus given the continuation of poor perceptions of Leo VI and his reign it seems necessary to return to the issue of military matters. However given the existence of Karlin-Hayter's analysis of the emperor's record in foreign affairs

¹¹Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 201.

¹²Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs'.

¹³Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 17.

¹⁴Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 19-20, n. 5. For Leo's work on the themes on the eastern frontier see N. Oikonomidès, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe- XIe siècles et le taktikon de l'Escorial', *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines*, I (Bucarest, 1974), 285-302, repr. *Documents et études*, XXIV.

¹⁵Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 20.

¹⁶Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 22-23. On Byzantine relations with southern Italy during Leo's reign see Gay, *Italie méridionale*, I; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 152-157.

¹⁷Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 24.

¹⁸Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 29.

¹⁹Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 16.

²⁰Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 39.

²¹Browning, *Bulgaria*, 57.

it would be redundant to tread the comprehensive path that she has already taken; I need to take a different approach. Thus it is my intention to examine fewer phenomena in greater detail. First I will consider what we can gauge of Leo's attitude to military matters, for if we misapprehend this crucial factor our whole perception of the events of his reign is affected. Then I will examine the two major military threats that faced the empire during his reign, Bulgaria and the Arab navy, thus touching on the three blunders Karlin-Hayter identified. I hope to show that Leo was concerned with the physical condition of his empire, and that in a sense he was unlucky since he was faced with exceptional problems simultaneously. My aim will be ultimately to prove that it is a gross misrepresentation to assert that Leo had no taste for military matters and no foreign policy.

In the history of ninth-century Byzantium Leo VI is an exceptional emperor, for he was one that never went on campaign, and indeed the furthest he seems to have got beyond Constantinople was to Nikomedeia, Olympos and Pythia.²² It is my belief that it is this fact, that Leo was not a soldier, that has contributed to the popular perception that he was indifferent to military affairs. It has even given rise to the rather anachronistic suggestion that Leo was a pacifist.²³ However it is quite obvious that such deductions are illogical; it is entirely possible that an emperor can be interested in military matters even if he is not a soldier himself. One only has to consider the case of Justinian I (527-565), who launched the campaign in the sixth century to retake the west but never campaigned in person, to realise the truth of this. Indeed military affairs were the responsibility of every emperor. Yet it is certainly intriguing that Leo was not a soldier; why was this the case when Byzantine emperors had been taking the field with their armies ever since Heraclius had put a definitive end in the seventh century to the apparent trend of the non-campaigning emperor? The obvious answer seems to be that Leo simply never received the necessary training. Vogt asserted that Leo must have received military training, conjecturing that it was the sponsors of his tonsure who were his instructors in the art of war, but he has to admit that we know nothing about this aspect of his education.²⁴ It is clear that such an unsubstantiated theory is untenable, especially when Leo VI himself reveals in his *Taktika* that he only knew of war second-hand, learning from his generals, from accounts of previous emperors, and

²²DAI, I, 246, 36 - 248, 38. For Leo on Olympos see also TC, 464. It seems that Leo went to Olympos for the monks, and to Pythia for the hot springs (a letter of Theodore of Cyzicus to Constantine VII indicates that Leo improved the bathing facilities at Pythia: see J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle* (Paris, 1960), 326, 17-20). As to Nikomedeia, perhaps he went here to address the army, which in itself reveals that he was not as disinterested in military affairs as some have believed him to be.

²³Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 127, 219; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 411; Grégoire, 'Blaise', 395.

²⁴Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 407-408.

from listening to his father.²⁵ To explain this lack of practical instruction we only have to remember that Basil had expected his eldest son Constantine to succeed him, and significantly had in fact attended personally to his military training, taking him on campaign to the east shortly before his death in 879.²⁶ Constantine even celebrated a triumph with his father in Constantinople after this campaign.²⁷ Thus it looks as if Leo's military education was neglected since it was deemed that he would not be Basil's main heir. And when Constantine did die in 879 the priority seems to have been to get Leo married and producing children to secure the future of the dynasty. Basil may even have become over protective of his surviving sons, fearing to expose them to the dangers of war. Leo's imprisonment in 883-886 also precluded any military experience. But is it enough to explain Leo's non-participation in warfare as an omission of his education? Surely we can find other emperors who had had no training but still ventured out into the field; the example of the emperor Julian (361-363) seems apt since he too was a book-loving youth with no evident military training who suddenly came to fill an imperial role, and who achieved great military successes in Gaul. Thus we are forced to ask, did Leo simply not want to go out to war?²⁸ Before we leap to this conclusion it would perhaps be wise to consider reasons that would have prevented Leo from taking the field. The most obvious factor would be his health. The children of Basil I do not seem to have inherited their father's famed strength; it is the general impression that Leo, Stephen and Alexander were not possessed of very good health²⁹, but can this be substantiated? They did die relatively young, but that does not necessarily indicate that they were sickly by nature. Perhaps we should look for other explanations as to why Leo was not a campaigner. A possibility is that Leo deliberately stayed in Constantinople so as to consolidate his position as emperor. He had acceded to power at a young age, and only a short time after his release from imprisonment. Given the purge that marked the beginning of his reign it was perhaps the case that Leo felt his position as emperor was insecure, and that he needed to be in the city to establish his rule. He may also have felt that the best contribution he could make to the empire was to stay at mission control as the director, whilst he let the experts get on with the necessary action. It is intriguing to note that his example seems to have become practice, for those who succeeded Leo also remained in the city, even Romanos Lekapenos who had been an army man

²⁵PG 107, 976. 18. 123.

²⁶VB, 278.

²⁷For the triumph and its date see Haldon, *Three Treatises*, 140-147; 268-269.

²⁸Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 354, assert that Leo had 'peu d'inclination pour la vie des camps et des opérations'.

²⁹Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 229, was certainly of the opinion that it was Leo's poor health that condemned him to be an armchair general. See also Diehl, *Portraits*, 173.

before he became emperor. The trend seems to have been broken again by Nikephoros Phokas.³⁰ Thus the question is begged, was there some facet of Byzantine history at the end of the ninth century and the start of the tenth century that made it advisable for the emperors not to go on campaign? At the moment this is beyond my ability to answer, and it seems sufficient for my purposes simply to note that just because Leo did not go on campaign does not mean that he was uninterested in military matters.

That the emperor has been arraigned on such a charge is quite incredible, and the allegation is made doubly incomprehensible when one bears in mind that one of Leo's most famous achievements was the production of the *Taktika*, a manual on warfare addressed to an unspecified general, thus indicating that the text was for all the emperor's generals to hear or read. It is my belief that it is through this work that we can gauge Leo's concern for the military condition of his empire. But before looking more closely at this text we must realise that this was not the emperor's first foray into the world of military literature; previously he had produced the work known as the *Problemata*.³¹ This is believed to have been a work of his youth, and it consists of a series of extracts from the *Strategikon* of Maurice, a sixth-century work; in the *Problemata* Leo quotes from Maurice's text to answer questions that he has posed.³² That Leo produced another book on the subject of warfare can be deduced from the *Taktika* itself; the emperor indicates that he compiled a book of excerpts relating to the topic, calling to mind the compilations that Constantine VII is famed for creating.³³ We should not forget that Leo also instructed the *magistros* Leo Katakalon (when he was a monk at Sigriane) to compose a work on imperial military expeditions.³⁴ Thus it is surely indicative of a genuine interest in things military that Leo produced and commissioned various works on the subject.

Turning now to the *Taktika* we need to consider its origin and nature. As should be clear from the existence of the *Problemata* it was a work that evolved, not one that was written in a fell swoop. Vogt was of the opinion that it originated from his student days, that he was instructed to compose it by his masters, and that he continued to update it until his death.³⁵ However the general opinion of Byzantinists is that it dates to the early 900s.³⁶ Vogt, though mistaken in the details, was right about it being a composition that evolved, a fact that can be deduced from the

³⁰See Cheynet, *Contestations*, 192.

³¹A. Dain, *Leonis VI sapientis problemata* (Paris, 1935).

³²See Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 354.

³³See Magdalino, 'Non-Juridical'.

³⁴See Haldon, *Three Treatises*, 94-97.

³⁵Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 408.

³⁶See Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 193-194.

existence of two distinct recensions of the work, called the Laurentian (dated to the mid-tenth century) and the Ambrosian (dating to the first half of the eleventh century).³⁷ The work is better known in the Ambrosian form, which is the later version. It is this form that is reproduced in the *Patrologia Graeca*, and it is instructive to outline the structure of this work. As has been recognised Leo conceived his *Taktika* as a legislative work, a fact that is reflected in the language he uses throughout the text.³⁸ Thus we find that each chapter of the work is known as a *diataxis*, which can be translated as 'constitution'. In the Ambrosian edition the constitutions, preceded by a prooimion and followed by an epilogue, are arranged as follows:

1. About tactics and the general.
2. About what kind of man the general must be.
3. About how it is necessary to take decisions.
4. About the division of the army and the appointment of leaders.
5. About weapons.
6. About the armour of the cavalry and the infantry.
7. About the exercise of the cavalry and the infantry.
8. About military punishments.
9. About marching.
10. About the baggage of the army.
11. About encampments.
12. About preparation for war.
13. About the day before battle.
14. About the day of battle.
15. About besieging cities.
16. About things after the battle.
17. About unexpected incursions.
18. About the methods of arranging armies of the Romans and the differing nations.
19. About naval warfare.
20. About different maxims.

As stated this arrangement of the constitutions was not the earliest known; that is found in the Laurentian edition where constitutions 15, 17 and 19, as they are known in the Ambrosian text, follow the epilogue. Thus it appears that Leo wrote these three sections after he had composed the other constitutions, to which he

³⁷For these two versions see Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 355-356; A. Dain, 'Inventaire raisonné des cents manuscrits des «constitutions tactiques» de Leon VI le sage', *Scripta*, 1 (1946-47), 33-49, esp. 34; 40.

³⁸See Magdalino, 'Non-Juridical'; Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 229.

appended them. At a later date they were then integrated into the main body of the text, thus forming the Ambrosian recension.

So much for the structure of the work; what of its merits as a military handbook for generals at the start of the tenth century? Regarding this issue we may expect Leo to be criticised, since firstly he had no first hand experience of military action, and secondly because much of the *Taktika* is based on the work of previous authors, especially the *Strategikon* of Maurice. Vogt thus described Leo's work as a study of the army as it existed in the past and as it ought to be at the end of the ninth century, but not as it was in reality; any contemporary allusions in the work are to be ascribed to the fact that Leo did continue to add to the text.³⁹ Dagon, who characterises Leo as a poor general and a mediocre strategist, suggests that the advice and analysis that the emperor offers is not so much mistaken as naive, and he also criticises him for underestimating the danger that the christianised Bulgarians presented.⁴⁰ Haldon detected that there was an air of uncertainty about what Leo was writing, that the emperor 'tended to confuse facts with ideals', yet he ascribes this not to ineptitude on the emperor's part but to the fact that he was writing at 'the beginning of a period when new policies were being shaped and when the armies of the Empire were undergoing reform and reorganization'.⁴¹ Comments more definitely positive than this have been made by other Byzantinists. In the sphere of literature it has been appreciated that Leo revived the genre of the military handbook, for a whole spate of such works followed on the heels of his production.⁴² And although Leo used the works of earlier authors as the basis for his book it does not follow that it has no original or relevant content. For instance Magdalino has noted that although Leo bases himself on Maurice 'the differences between the prooimia are as striking and significant as their common core'.⁴³ Further evidence of the contemporary relevance of the work is clear from the fact that it contains the first analysis by a Byzantine author in a *Taktika* of the main enemies of the empire since the seventh century, the Arabs.⁴⁴ Indeed Leo himself indicates that he was moved to write the *Taktika* because of the threat that was presented to the Byzantine empire by the Arabs; the work was intended to address

³⁹Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 408.

⁴⁰G. Dagon and H. Mihaescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas 963-969* (Paris, 1986), 9; 145; 152.

⁴¹J. F. Haldon, 'Some Aspects of Byzantine Military Technology from the Sixth to the Tenth Centuries', *BMGs*, 1 (1975), 11-47, esp. 45.

⁴²Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégestes', 354.

⁴³Magdalino, 'Non-Juridical'. Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégestes', 356, also point out that Leo's information is not always traceable to a source.

⁴⁴*PG* 107, 972-989, 18. 109-154. G. Dagon, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au X^e siècle. A propos des *constitutions tactiques* de l'empereur Léon VI', *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, (1983), 219-243.

contemporary concerns, not to be a purely academic exercise.⁴⁵ Dagron has suggested that the emperor was keen for the Byzantine army to copy certain traits of the Arabic system in order to also achieve the success that the enemy so evidently did; these traits were the concept of holy war, the fact that war was an integral part of Arab social life by virtue of territorial organisation, the fact that the army consisted of volunteers, and that it was amply supplied and funded by those Arabs who did not participate in the fighting.⁴⁶ Such was the value of the emperor's examination of the Arab army and the threat it presented to Byzantium that part of this section of the work had an autonomous manuscript tradition.⁴⁷ That Leo was concerned with the efficacy of the Byzantine forces is undeniable, and he pin-points various areas for improvement. A particular worry was the insufficiency of bowmen in the army. He reflects several times on this issue, asserting that harm had been suffered because of the lack of this weapon which was so vital when fighting the Saracens and the Turk, and he prescribes that each man under the general should have his own bow.⁴⁸ The emperor also identifies three further problems with the army, the lack of practice of manoeuvres, simple carelessness and the shortage of soldiers.⁴⁹

Thus it is evident that Leo was addressing the issues of his own day, revealing that he was concerned about such matters. This assertion is further confirmed by other elements of the work, perhaps most obviously the constitution on naval warfare, the *Naumachika*.⁵⁰ Leo tells us that he could find no written sources to serve as a base for this *diataxis* so he had to resort to gathering information from his own naval officers.⁵¹ It seems unlikely that an emperor who was apathetic about military affairs would bother to go to such trouble, and this indicates strongly that Leo was concerned about the military condition of the empire and had in fact identified one of the key areas affecting the security of the empire in the ninth and tenth centuries, when the Arab navy was at the peak of its power. The chapter on the navy was one of those that the emperor seems to have written posterior to the main bulk of the *Taktika*. The other two constitutions that seem to have been an after-thought were those on unexpected incursions and siege warfare.

⁴⁵PG 107, 981, 18. 142; 1093, Epilogue, chap. 71.

⁴⁶Dagron, 'Modèle islamique', 221

⁴⁷Dagron, 'Modèle islamique', 220, n. 9.

⁴⁸PG 107, 805, 11. 49; 952, 18. 22-23; 1036, 20. 81. Haldon, 'Military Technology', 39, picked up on Leo's identification of archery as a cause for concern, and notes that it was only in the later tenth century that an advance in this area was made.

⁴⁹PG 107, 989, 18. 153. The manpower problem is also commented upon at 977, 18. 129 and 1069, 20. 205.

⁵⁰The Ambrosian version of this constitution has been edited by A. Dain, *Naumachica* (Paris, 1943), 15-33.

⁵¹PG 107, 989, 19. 1.

As we have seen these *diataxeis* were later integrated into the main body of the text and are found respectively as *diataxis* 15, 17 and 19 of the Ambrosian edition. However it seems that no one has yet drawn the obvious conclusion from these details, that these three topics were ones that Leo realised were of particular relevance to military affairs within his own reign, which was marked by sudden assaults on Byzantine territory by the Bulgars and by a seemingly unbeatable Arab navy that assaulted several coastal towns and fortresses of the Byzantine empire. From such considerations I would have no hesitation in agreeing with Karlin-Hayter's verdict on the *Taktika*, which she describes as 'a highly practical composition'.⁵² I would also assert that the work is a vital indication that Leo VI was not indifferent to military affairs, but was in fact deeply concerned with the physical assaults the empire found itself subjected to during his reign.

Having thus reflected on the evidence for Leo's theoretical concern for the condition of the empire I wish now to turn to physical realities, and concentrate on the two main military problems facing him, the aggressive Bulgarian kingdom and the predatory Arab navy whose shadow loomed especially large over the Aegean sea. Indeed it seems to me that the seriousness of the threat that this pair of enemies presented has not been sufficiently appreciated and taken into consideration in the evaluations of Leo's record in military affairs. Put simply it appears that Leo was unlucky in his opponents, and thus one must wonder if it is fair to reprimand him for his failures against them. First I will consider the danger posed by the Bulgarians, and examine how Leo reacted to this problem, then I shall pursue the same course for the Arab navy.

When Leo acceded to power in 886 the Byzantine empire was at peace with the Bulgarian kingdom which was ruled by its khan Boris, and indeed had been at peace ever since the Bulgarians had converted to orthodoxy in 864/5; the emperor Michael III had in fact used the threat of military action to enforce this conversion, and when Boris was baptised he took the name of the Byzantine emperor as his own.⁵³ It seemed that the days of the vicious Bulgarian assaults on Byzantium which had ceased with the sudden death of the infamous khan Krum in 814 were truly a thing of the past.⁵⁴ Our knowledge of Leo's relations with Bulgaria during the first seven years of his reign is nil, though it is clear that it was a time of change and crisis in this neighbouring kingdom. Boris resigned from power in 889, handing the throne on to his eldest son Vladimir.⁵⁵ However this son was set on reversing the policies of his father, and in 893 Boris had to come out of the monastery to

⁵²Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 21

⁵³Browning, *Bulgaria*, 55.

⁵⁴Browning, *Bulgaria*, 50.

⁵⁵Browning, *Bulgaria*, 56.

which he had retired and restore order to the kingdom. Vladimir was removed from power and in his place Boris installed another son, Symeon, who had also been living as a monk. We can only conjecture as to what Leo made of these events, but it seems likely that he would have been pleased, for Vladimir had threatened the entente between Byzantium and Bulgaria that Boris and the emperors Michael III and Basil I had worked so hard to achieve. Indeed the Byzantines may have been particularly satisfied with the rise to power of Symeon, for he had already come closer within their orbit of influence than any previous Bulgarian ruler, as he had received some education at Constantinople itself when he was a boy, and was thus known as the half-Greek.⁵⁶ If Byzantium had indeed expected that having a Bulgarian ruler with such a history would be beneficial and ensure good relations between the two states they were totally mistaken; within a year of Symeon's accession Byzantium and Bulgaria were at war.

How did this war begin? As has been seen Karlin-Hayter still reckoned it as one of Leo's three major military blunders, and by doing so perhaps she herself has fallen into the trap that the chronicles set, a trap she has been instrumental in pointing out to others. Once again we return to their story of the transfer of the Bulgarian markets to Thessalonica from Constantinople. The chronicles alleged that it was Stylianos who had brought about this change as a favour for friends of a beloved servant, and that Leo refused to reverse the decision even though Symeon sent a delegation to Constantinople complaining about it, and the heavy exactions that the Bulgarian merchants were being forced to pay.⁵⁷ Thus the emperor was implicated in a deed of blind favouritism that was to have dire consequences for the empire. For this tale Magdalino has supplied an interpretation that reveals the decision in a more worthy light, but the end result is the same; Leo's obstinacy resulted in the rousing of a significant enemy. Is this then a true blunder as Karlin-Hayter saw it? Yet it seems that she has not appreciated one vital factor in the outbreak of the conflict, and that is that Symeon wanted a war.⁵⁸ Of this there can surely be no doubt, given his evident ambition and ruthlessness as revealed by his subsequent record. The chronicles themselves even explicitly state that the complaints about the transferral of the market simply served as an excuse for the assault on Byzantium.⁵⁹ The fact that the war broke out so soon after Symeon became khan also indicates that he was keen to take the field against Byzantium.

⁵⁶Browning, *Bulgaria*, 57.

⁵⁷Concerning this issue of the transferral of the Bulgarian markets to Thessalonica see also N. Oikonomidès, 'Le kommerkion d'Abydos, Thessalonique et le commerce Bulgare au IX^e siècle', *Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantin*, II, VIII^e-XV^e siècle, edd. V. Kravari, J. Lefort and C. Morrison (Paris, 1991), 241-248, esp. 246-247.

⁵⁸Browning, *Bulgaria*, 57.

⁵⁹*GMC*, 853; *TC*, 357.

Indeed if Magdalino is right to see in the transferral of the market to Thessalonica a measure of the emperor to reward St Demetrios and his city, this act must surely be dated to the early stages of his reign, and so it appears that Symeon is simply using the policy as an excuse for war; it only became an issue upon his accession. Thus can Leo really be blamed for the start of the war if Symeon was set on his course anyway? Perhaps the emperor may not be completely exonerated; a more open minded hearing of the Bulgarian grievances could have been advantageous, but it seems that Symeon would have found another excuse, so war would only have been postponed. We should also not forget that the emperor may have trusted to the extant peace treaty between the two powers.⁶⁰ But the question remains, why was Symeon intent on coming to blows with Byzantium? For Browning the answer was to be found in Symeon's resentment of Byzantium, and his desire to assert the independence of Bulgaria.⁶¹ Certainly his actions against Byzantium bespeak hatred and contempt, and one wonders what exactly his youthful experiences in Constantinople were; perhaps he had been more hostage than student, and had come to bear a grudge. Symeon's aim of Bulgarian independence was not just expressed through military force, but through culture also; ironically it was the Byzantines themselves who had armed him with this weapon. With the demise of the Byzantine missionary Methodios in 885 and the ending of his work (spreading orthodoxy by translating christian works into the Slav language) in Moravia his disciples, such as Clement, Naum and Constantine, found themselves without a base of operations, and ended up as refugees in Bulgaria where Boris put their talents to good use.⁶² Located at Ohrid and Pliska, they were entrusted with the creation of a Slavic clergy and a national liturgy, and thus the displacement of Byzantine clergy and the Greek language, which had been the official tongue of church and court. Symeon continued this policy of his father, taking it to further heights. He was at the centre of a literary circle at Preslav (which in 893 had replaced Pliska as the Bulgarian royal city), where he was involved in the translation of Byzantine texts into Slavic; he himself translated extracts from the homilies of John Chrysostom, and ordered others to produce similar works. A collection of sayings and writings of Greek and Latin fathers was produced, as well as a short chronicle, written by Constantine in 893-894. In 906 Constantine, now bishop of Preslav, made a translation of the sermons of Athanasius of Alexandria, which was copied in 907 by Tudor Doksov, a

⁶⁰PG 107, 956, 18. 42.

⁶¹Browning, *Bulgaria*, 57-58.

⁶²See F. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs. SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius* (New Jersey, 1970), esp. 244-253; *Kiril and Methodius. Founders of Slavonic Writing. A Collection of Sources and Critical Studies*, ed. I. Duichev, tr. S. Nikolov (New York, 1985). For Clement see D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (Oxford, 1988), 8-33.

cousin of Symeon and a member of the circle.⁶³ A priest Gregory made a translation of the sixth-century Byzantine chronicle of Malalas, and also a version of the Trojan war. Symeon's literary tastes were renowned; the author of an anonymous panegyric likens the Bulgarian khan to a new Ptolemy as he amassed books in the palace, whilst the letters of the patriarch Nikolaos to Symeon give ample references to his love of literature, especially books of history.⁶⁴ Thus not only was Symeon a military threat to the Byzantine empire but he was also set on establishing Bulgaria as a cultural rival to Byzantium.

It is true that initially the war, deliberately started by Symeon, went badly for Byzantium; those forces that Leo sent out to meet the Bulgarian incursion were defeated in Macedonia and the commander, the *stratelates* Prokopios Krenites, was killed.⁶⁵ To add to the humiliation Symeon seized the Khazars who formed Leo's *hetaireia*, cut off their noses and sent them back to Constantinople. But how serious was this defeat? Was it not rather more an issue of Byzantine loss of face? Symeon had certainly exposed his ruthless and uncompromising nature, but it appears that the force that was despatched against him was rather second best as far as the Byzantine army went; when Symeon launched his assault in the second year of his rule the main Byzantine force was already occupied on campaign, so Leo had had to make do with what he could drum up at short notice.⁶⁶ Thus it was rather the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack of Symeon that was the major factor in the defeat of 894; for the next round Leo was to be in a much better state of preparation. In fact he resorted to one of the classic principles of Byzantine foreign policy; make other people fight your battles. The people he chose were the Magyars, a Turkic people living north of the Danube. Niketas Skleros was despatched by Leo to secure their help; he sailed up the Danube to meet with them, bringing incentives in the form of gifts from Constantinople.⁶⁷ The Magyars agreed to wage war on Symeon, and Niketas took hostages (presumably as a guarantee of their promised co-operation) and returned to Byzantium. But this aid acquired through diplomacy was only part of Leo's response to the war begun by Symeon; it was combined with a major military and naval campaign, which was put into action in 895.⁶⁸ The land forces were commanded by the domestic of the schools Nikephoros Phokas, whilst the *drungarios* of the fleet Eustathios commanded the navy. The army marched out

⁶³See E. Georguiev, 'Konstantin Preslavski', *Kiril and Methodius*, 161-180.

⁶⁴I. Duichev, 'Panegyric to Tsar Simeon', *Kiril and Methodius*, 151-152; *Nicholas. Letters*, 184, 64-66; 210, 66-88.

⁶⁵*GMC*, 853. It is Skylitzes, *Scylitzae*, 176. 89, who provides Krenites's christian name.

⁶⁶*PG* 107. 956, 18. 42; Runciman, *Bulgarian Empire*, 145; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 126.

⁶⁷*GMC*, 853-854.

⁶⁸For the campaign of 895 see *GMC*, 854-855; *TC*, 358-359.

to Bulgaria, and the navy sailed up the Danube where it met up with the Magyars, and readied to transport them over the river into Bulgarian territory. But Leo did not want to start a war; indeed Byzantine foreign policy can be generally characterised as pacific in that it was built around how to avoid full scale conflict. The emperor was hoping to intimidate Symeon into making peace by this show of force, and to this end he despatched an ambassador, the *quaestor* Konstantinakis, to the Bulgarian leader to reconclude a peace treaty. But once again Symeon proved himself an unpredictable and headstrong enemy. The Byzantine ambassador was imprisoned (never to be heard of again) and Symeon marched out to confront Nikephoros's forces. Whether they actually engaged is a moot point, but even if they did Symeon was soon distracted, for the Magyars made their move; ferried across the Danube by Eustathios they hacked their way through the wicker screens that the Bulgars had placed along the river, and over-ran Bulgaria, reaching as far as Preslav.⁶⁹ Symeon had to turn away from the Byzantine forces to deal with this threat from the rear, and with his life in danger he had to take refuge in the fortress of Moundraga.⁷⁰ The victorious Magyars exchanged their Bulgarian prisoners of war with the Byzantines. Thus Symeon was soundly beaten and Leo had placed him in such a situation that he would now be forced to make peace on Byzantine terms. The Bulgarian leader did indeed approach the nearby *drungarios* Eustathios about peace terms, and to this end another Byzantine ambassador was despatched to Symeon at Moundraga; this ambassador was the most famous diplomat of the reign, Leo Choirosphaktes. However it was at this point that another of Leo's major blunders, as Karlin-Hayter has categorised them, occurred; the Byzantine land and water forces withdrew, taking the military pressure off Symeon, who was then able to act in his more usual manner. He slung Choirosphaktes into prison without even speaking with him (Symeon's foul treatment of diplomats became infamous⁷¹) and took his revenge on the Magyars who had been so instrumental in aiding the Byzantines achieve the humiliation of their Bulgarian opponent. In this task he was aided by another tribe, the Pechenegs.⁷² Without Byzantine support the Magyars were decimated.⁷³ Symeon then issued Byzantium with an ultimatum through its mediator Choirosphaktes, who was being kept at Moundraga⁷⁴; before agreeing to peace terms he required the return of all the Bulgarian prisoners who had been taken in the war. This condition was fulfilled; Choirosphaktes returned to Constantinople with

⁶⁹DAI, I, 51. 38-40; PG 107, 956, 18. 42.

⁷⁰DAI, I, 176. 11. GMC, 855, calls it Moudagra.

⁷¹See Nicholas. *Letters*, 192. 32 - 194. 41. The patriarch refused to send envoys of the pope on to Symeon because of his 'practice of detaining diplomatic agents'.

⁷²DAI, I, 176. 13-19.

⁷³In the next few years they migrated further westward, forming the kingdom of Hungary.

⁷⁴GMC, 855.

the Bulgar Theodore⁷⁵ who received the prisoners and then took them home. How and why did this dramatic reversal occur? One moment Leo has Symeon where he wants him, and the next the tables are turned and the Byzantine advantage is lost. The key issue is the withdrawal of Nikephoros and Eustathios, for this gave Symeon the freedom to act again. This mistake seems to have been the responsibility of the emperor. Theophanes Continuatus explicitly states that the two men were commanded to return home.⁷⁶ However is it so straightforward as has been believed? Other versions of the chronicle are not identical; they indicate that Nikephoros and Eustathios agreed to return.⁷⁷ Should some blame thus attach to those generals who were in charge of the campaign? It is certainly a distinct possibility, since Nikephoros Phokas seems to have fallen into disgrace on his return to the city. We have already seen that Theophanes Continuatus tried to pin the fall of one of his military heroes on the evil machinations of Stylianos Zaoutzes, and there seems sufficient reason to doubt this story. This chronicler may further have wished to protect Nikephoros by asserting that he was ordered to return from Bulgaria, thus that he had had no part in the decision. However perhaps Leo even used Nikephoros as a scapegoat to take the blame for the failure of the campaign of 895. Whatever the explanation for the withdrawal it is undeniable that it was a mistake; Symeon was liberated to fight another day, the Bulgarian headache remained. However I think it is necessary to question the belief that the withdrawal and its results count as a major mistake. Yes, if the troops had remained on the Bulgarian borders Symeon would have been forced to accept Byzantine terms, but it seems highly unlikely that he would have kept to the treaty given his proven treacherous nature. The Byzantine troops could not remain permanently on the Bulgarian frontiers, so Symeon was not going to be restrained indefinitely. I believe that if a peace had been forced on him in 895 it would have been worthless. What was unfortunate about the withdrawal was that Symeon was able to retaliate immediately, and the advantage that Leo had acquired in the form of the prisoners of war had to be given up to secure a treaty. As to the terms of the peace that were agreed after the return of the prisoners we are in the dark. Ultimately it seems that Byzantium did pay Bulgaria subsidies, but 896 seems a much more likely date for the initiation of this policy than 895. Given that Symeon was so keen to get the prisoners back we may wonder if this is an indication that the peace terms were not yet too obviously in favour of Bulgaria; it must have been worthwhile for

⁷⁵This Theodore is identified as a relative of Symeon, and thus I presume he is the Tudor Doksov that we have already encountered.

⁷⁶*TC*, 359.

⁷⁷*GMC*, 854; *LG*, 268. They also assert that it was Eustathios who approached Symeon about peace, not vice-versa.

Byzantium to fulfil Symeon's terms, for why else would the captives have been restored to their freedom? It should also be noted that in 895 few, if any, Byzantine casualties were sustained; it was the Magyar allies who had met with Symeon's wrath. Perhaps the next stage of the war will give us some clue as to how things stood after the campaign of 895.

The restart of the war in 896 has it seems been as uncritically studied as the Byzantine withdrawal in 895, and significantly enough the two events are both connected with the figure of Nikephoros Phokas. For most chroniclers the war is sparked off again by the death of Nikephoros, perhaps hinting that the fear of Phokas's military skill had kept Symeon in check.⁷⁸ Symeon's reported objective was to get more prisoners, presumably Byzantine ones.⁷⁹ If his aim was to acquire Byzantine prisoners to use as a bargaining tool with Byzantium he certainly achieved this, for as in 894 the Byzantines were soundly defeated at the battle of Bulgarophygon in Thrace, about 100 miles west of Constantinople. However unlike the battle of 894 the inferiority of the Byzantine forces was not an excuse; all the thematic and tagamtic forces of the east were sent against the Bulgars, under the command of the new domestic of the schools Leo Katakalon. The ceasing of hostilities with the Arabs in 895-896 and an exchange of prisoners was also presumably meant to have improved the chances of success against the Bulgars.⁸⁰ Yet the Byzantines were defeated and the chroniclers report that 'all perished', though we know that Leo Katakalon himself survived, as did a certain Melias.⁸¹ The seriousness of the military failure should not be in any doubt though, for it seems that the Bulgarians overran Thrace and were even able to approach the walls of Constantinople, for they are recorded as having damaged the narthex of the great church at Pege during Leo's reign.⁸² It would then be at this date that the emperor

⁷⁸*GMC*, 855. However *TC*, 360, contradicts this for it alleges that Nikephoros's career continued after his deposition from the post of domestic of the schools, asserting that he became *strategos* of the Thrakesion theme and achieved victories against the Arabs and the other nations. Notably this chronicle gives no explanation for the restarting of the fighting.

⁷⁹Skylitzes, *Scylitzae*, 178. 46-50, has a rather different version of events; he asserts that it was Leo who broke the peace since he did not want to fulfill the terms of the treaties agreed with Bulgaria. How are we to explain this version? First of all it seems an unlikely account; Byzantine emperors were not wont to initiate conflict. Secondly when battle was joined it was in Byzantine territory, which may indicate that it was Bulgaria who once again was the aggressor, which does seem much more likely. Skylitzes seems to have been confused and misled by the account of Theophanes Continuatus who evidently served as his source. As stated in the note above Theophanes Continuatus provided no explanation for the war of 896, so Skylitzes had to supply one of his own. From the account that Theophanes Continuatus gives it does appear that Leo is the aggressor for it is he who sends out his forces against Symeon; in his tale about the career of Nikephoros this chronicler seems to have lost a key element of the main narrative, and thus Skylitzes was misled.

⁸⁰See Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 126.

⁸¹For Katakalon see *DAI*, I, 206. 51-52. For Melias see *De Thematis*, 35. For Melias see also H. Grégoire, 'Notes épigraphiques', *Byz.* 8 (1933), 49-88, esp. 79-88.

⁸²*AASS*, Nov III, 884; Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 205. One wonders if the Pechenegs played any role in this severe incursion.

resorted to using Arab prisoners to repulse the Bulgarians.⁸³ After they had fulfilled their function Leo had the Arabs rounded up, disarmed, and then dispersed. But the repulse or departure of Symeon was not the end of the matter; the Bulgarian leader now held captive a large number of Byzantine prisoners that the state was anxious to retrieve, especially since manpower was a problem. Once again a Byzantine diplomat was sent out to negotiate with Symeon, and for this task Leo chose Choïrosphaktes, who already had experience of the volatile Bulgarian. Letters of Symeon and Choïrosphaktes survive from this period of negotiation, that the diplomat was to term the first of his three embassies to the Bulgarians, perhaps because the embassy of 895 never really occurred due to Symeon's reversal of fortune.⁸⁴ Although Choïrosphaktes was later to claim the credit for the success of this first embassy, namely the freeing of 25,000 Byzantine prisoners and the securing of a peace treaty⁸⁵, it is quite clear that the real negotiating went on directly between Symeon and Leo VI; whilst Symeon and Choïrosphaktes played literary tricks and games with each other it was the emperor who was informed that Symeon would return the captives.⁸⁶ The price for the return of the captives and the settlement of a peace, which ostensibly lasted until Leo's demise, is not known exactly, but it seems likely that Byzantines had had to agree to the paying of a subsidy to Bulgaria, for it was Alexander's refusal to continue this payment after his brother's death that led to the restarting of the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict.⁸⁷ Certainly we know that in 904 Symeon the *asekretis* was on his way to the Bulgars with a gift, which may have formed part of a subsidy.⁸⁸ Vasiliev also asserts that Symeon was just as keen for peace as the Byzantines, for his country, although victorious, was exhausted by the war, and he also wanted to consolidate his achievements.⁸⁹ Thus ostensibly from 896 until the end of Leo's reign the Bulgarians and Byzantines were at peace, as is reflected in Philotheos's *Kletorologion*, where much is made of the presence of Bulgarian friends at the Byzantine court.⁹⁰ But Symeon was evidently still a problem for the empire, for Choïrosphaktes found himself having to undertake two more missions to the

⁸³Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 129-130; Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 27.

⁸⁴For the letters see Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 76-91.

⁸⁵See Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 113. 6-8.

⁸⁶Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 13, 89. 4-5.

⁸⁷*GMC*, 873. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 127, believes that the treaty was settled in 897 and that it involved the Byzantines paying annual tribute. However he erroneously states that in return Symeon had to give up 30 fortresses in Dyrrachion; this concession was not won by Choïrosphaktes on his first embassy, but on his second.

⁸⁸*VE*, 101.17-19.

⁸⁹Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 132.

⁹⁰Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 163. 18; 167. 11-12; 169. 8-9; 177. 26; 181. 14-15; 203. 10; 207. 33 - 209. 1; 211. 10-11.

Bulgarian court in order to insist that Symeon curb his expansionist tendencies.⁹¹ The first of these further missions seems to have occurred in 901-902 and involved requesting that the Bulgarians give up possession of thirty fortresses in Dyrrachion which had been taken over with their goods and inhabitants.⁹² The second embassy took place in 904, and entailed Choirosphaktes persuading the Bulgarians not to take advantage of the Arab siege and sack of Thessalonica by moving on the city themselves. Thus Leo VI was hardly unaware of the threat that the Bulgarians could still pose, and this brings us back to Dagron's verdict on the emperor's attitude to the Bulgarians as expressed in his *Taktika*; he accused Leo of underestimating the danger they presented to the Byzantine empire, asserting that he 'le mesure encore mal, croit définitive ou durable une accalmie passagère, et compte sur la christianisation pour conduire ce peuple au même processus d'assimilation que les Slaves'.⁹³ Karlin-Hayter has also latched on to Leo's reflections on the Bulgarians, asserting that 'The Bulgarian war did not appeal to him ideologically'.⁹⁴ Runciman shares this view, asserting that Leo's 'tender Christian conscience made him dislike to fight fellow-believers'.⁹⁵ But are these assertions fair or accurate? Let us look closely at what the emperor says in his *Taktika*. In the section on how other nations fight and how the Romans should fight them Leo does mention the nation of the Bulgars, but he asserts that since Byzantium is now at peace with this nation and the Bulgars are a christian people he will not bother to describe their tactics and how the Byzantines should counter them.⁹⁶ Such an attitude certainly appears very foolish given that Leo was aware how great a headache the Bulgars could be, and how much injury they had so recently inflicted on Byzantine forces. But should we take him at his word? Although he does not describe the Bulgars at war he does go into considerable length about the Turks (Magyars), who were neighbours of the Bulgarians. What is suggestive is that Leo does draw attention to the fact that the military practices of the Bulgars and the Turks are similar, and various facets of Turkish behaviour he describes seem rather more fitting with regard to the Bulgarians. For instance when he describes the Scythian method of arrangement in battle he comments that only the Turks and the Bulgars follow the same method.⁹⁷ When he reports that the Turks are insatiable for money and despise oaths and break agreements it is hard to resist the sensation that what he is saying is really directed toward the subject of the Bulgarians, or at least equally applicable to it, and this

⁹¹For these other missions see Koliai, *Choerosphactès*, 113, 8-13.

⁹²For the date see Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations', 10-11.

⁹³Dagron and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 152.

⁹⁴Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 40.

⁹⁵Runciman, *Bulgarian Empire*, 146.

⁹⁶PG 107, 957, 18, 44.

⁹⁷PG 107, 956, 18, 43; 957, 18, 45.

sensation holds true for the rest of the information that the emperor presents, especially since it appears that the Byzantines had more experience of dealing and fighting with the Bulgarians than with the Turks.⁹⁸ He seems to force this notion himself too, when he comments that the Bulgars differ only from the Turks in that they are no longer pagan, and no longer nomadic pastoralists.⁹⁹ The emperor also has to excuse himself for writing so much about the Turks and how they fight and how the Byzantines should fight them for he admits that at the time of composition they are not enemies of the empire, but are actually eager to be received as its subjects, an assertion that seems to fit with what the chronicles tell us of relations between the Magyars and Byzantium.¹⁰⁰ So why does he talk about the Turks in so much detail? It seems to me that an explanation can be found if we admit that Leo is really talking about the Bulgars, whom he constantly compares to the Turks¹⁰¹, whilst still maintaining the notion that all is peace and harmony between Byzantium and Bulgaria, a notion he knew to have a fragile reality. Perhaps it would have been impolitic to explicitly describe in a state document how to wage war on an enemy who had just been pacified and who had representatives attending court occasions in Constantinople as 'friends' of the empire. It should not be overlooked either that Leo does in fact narrate certain measures that had been taken against the Bulgarians and could no doubt be used again. These measures were the use of the Magyars¹⁰², and the device of the planted spike that Nikephoros Phokas had implemented against the cavalry.¹⁰³ It seems that Dagron, Karlin-Hayter and Runciman were too easily fooled by Leo's tongue; perhaps the Bulgarians were too. Thus although peace had been secured after the war of 896 the emperor had no delusions as to the danger that the neighbouring kingdom could present to Byzantium. However, ostensibly the peace did hold, and despite its terms this was surely one of the successes of Leo's reign, for Byzantium was no longer distracted by the destructive and unexpected conflict with so close a christian neighbour; she could now turn to the accepted problem of the Arab threat.

By the ninth century the land war with the Arabs on the eastern frontier seems to have fallen into a rhythmical pattern of tit for tat seasonal raids¹⁰⁴; the real

⁹⁸PG 107, 957, 18. 47.

⁹⁹PG 107, 960, 18. 61.

¹⁰⁰PG 107, 964, 18. 76.

¹⁰¹Another example is PG 107, 964, 18. 75.

¹⁰²PG 107, 956, 18. 42.

¹⁰³PG 107, 800, 11. 26. See E. McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos', *DOP*, 45 (1991), 129-140, esp. 134-135.

¹⁰⁴See J. F. Haldon and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands', *ZRVI*, 19 (1980), 79-116.

threat to the security of the Byzantine empire came from Arab sea power.¹⁰⁵ With the previous eastern enemy of Persia it seems that the Byzantine empire had had little to worry about as regards naval warfare, and this fact no doubt explains why the navy of the empire had been a neglected and negligible force. With the advent of the Arab empire in the seventh century the Byzantine empire received a serious shock, for here was an enemy that fought both on land and sea. The development of the Arabs into a significant sea power was facilitated by the occupation of Alexandria (642) and the coast of Syria. Byzantine control of the Mediterranean was quickly threatened; Cyprus was taken in 649, Rhodes in 654, Kos fell too, and Crete was assaulted. By 674 an Arab fleet was able to approach and threaten Constantinople itself, and this was the first of several such instances. In 678 an assault on the imperial city was repelled by the first recorded use of Greek fire, an inflammable liquid that ignited on impact, but this did not deter further assaults.¹⁰⁶ By the ninth and tenth centuries the sea-based war had attained its zenith. The Islamic occupation of Crete in c. 824 was of particular significance, given the strategic importance of the island in the Mediterranean; Christides observes that Crete 'separates or rather connects on the one hand the Aegean Sea and the Greek peninsula, and on the other Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt', whilst Miles describes the island as 'that all-important strategic key to the evanescent but sporadically long-protracted Arab successes not only in the Aegean as well as in the Ionian and Adriatic seas'.¹⁰⁷ This situation does seem to have met with a response from the Byzantines, for they directed their attention to the condition and status of their navy; by the end of the ninth century, as the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos reveals, the *officium* of the *drungarios* of the fleet had been organised, and two new maritime themes, those of the Aegean sea and Samos, had been created to take their place along side that of the extant Cibyrrheot theme.¹⁰⁸ These innovations occurred at some point between the early reign of Michael III (a *Taktikon* from 843 does not contain these details) and 899 when Philotheos wrote his work. A likely point for the innovations would be the reign of Basil I (867-886), which did see a marked increase in the use and prominence of the Byzantine navy. Turning now to the specific events of naval war during Leo's reign it is clear that the period was

¹⁰⁵See V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (CA. 824). A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984); G. C. Miles, 'Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area', *DOP*, 18 (1964), 1-32; K. M. Setton, 'On the Raids of the Moslems in the Aegean in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries and Their Alleged Occupation of Athens', *AJA*, 58 (1954), 311-319.

¹⁰⁶Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 64, asserts that Byzantine writers 'exaggerate the destructive power' of Greek fire.

¹⁰⁷Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 38; Miles, 'Crete and the Aegean', 10.

¹⁰⁸See H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer. La marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VII^e-XV^e siècles* (Paris, 1966), 99.

particularly bad for Byzantium. Vasiliev stressed that during this period the empire suffered its most important defeats at sea; Christides comments that in the time of Leo VI 'the Byzantine naval strength was at its lowest ebb'.¹⁰⁹ An alleged Arab occupation of Athens, disproved by Setton, was even dated to the period 896-902 because Leo VI's 'military and naval ventures against the Arabs were notoriously unsuccessful'.¹¹⁰ It is certainly undeniable that those who commanded the Arab navy and worked in tandem with the land offensives of the Abbasids in Asia Minor achieved infamous successes, as we have already noted. Like the case of Symeon of Bulgaria the emperor seems to have been very unlucky in the quality and character of the commanding enemies whom he had to contend with. The most famous admirals of the day were Leo the Tripolite and Damianos, and as with Symeon they had had experience of Byzantium from within; in fact they were both Byzantines who had been captured in war and subsequently converted to Islam, ending up working for the other side. Leo originally hailed from Cilician Attaleia¹¹¹ whilst Damianos was known to be a Greek.¹¹² Ironically it was these men of Byzantine origin who 'launched the most savage raids against the Byzantines in the Aegean' and formed an integral part of 'a shocking blitz which can be compared with the land successes of the Arabs in the seventh century'.¹¹³ Let us now examine this blitz more closely, and see what Leo's response to it was.

For the history of naval conflict during the reign we do not have to rely solely on the incidents enumerated by the Byzantine chroniclers; we are also amply informed by their Arab counterparts, most notably Tabari. It is he who supplies us with the first known naval assault of the reign, when in 888 the eunuch Yazaman, governor of Tarsus, undertook a sea raid and captured four Byzantine vessels.¹¹⁴ Vasiliev conjectures that he probably also played a naval role in the assault on Salandu, a coastal town of western Cilicia, which was attacked in 891.¹¹⁵ The first detail of naval warfare that the Byzantine chroniclers record in the reign is the siege and capture of Samos and its *strategos* Paspalas, which has been dated to the period of August 891 - May 893.¹¹⁶ The chroniclers often refer to places being 'taken' when they report Arab attacks on islands and coastal sites, yet it is clear that the

¹⁰⁹Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 219; Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 219.

¹¹⁰Setton, 'Occupation of Athens', 314.

¹¹¹TC, 366.

¹¹²See Tabari, vol. 38, 34, n. 180; Nicholas, *Letters*, 9, 31-33; Eutychios of Alexandria, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, 26.

¹¹³Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 161; 157.

¹¹⁴Tabari, vol. 37, 157. Yazaman, a dreaded enemy of the Byzantines who was reputedly depicted in Byzantine churches, died on 23 October 891 during a land raid, and was buried in Tarsus: see Tabari, vol. 37, 175.

¹¹⁵Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 122.

¹¹⁶Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

Arab objective was not to conquer Byzantine locations, but merely ruin them by sacking and removing the population; as with the land war the mentality seems to have been raiding rather than conquering. The next incident we know of was a successful sea raid by the eunuch Raghīb in 898; he took 3000 Byzantine sailors prisoner, decapitated them, and burned their ships. He is also reported to have captured several Byzantine fortresses, but unfortunately we do not know where these were.¹¹⁷ Vasiliev attached great significance to this defeat for the Byzantines, asserting that it caused the enfeeblement of their fleet which protected the coasts of the empire, and thus led to the subsequent famed successes of the Arab navy, especially from 902-904.¹¹⁸ Yet Raghīb himself soon got his come-uppance, but not from the Byzantines; it seems he had earned the disfavour of the caliph Mutatid and was imprisoned in 899 and quickly died.¹¹⁹ This event had repercussions for the naval force of Tarsus, for in 900 the caliph ordered the raiding ships to be burned, and in fact it was Damianos himself who was behind this measure for he held a grudge against the people of Tarsus for having supported Raghīb against him.¹²⁰ Among the ships burnt were about fifty old ones of an outmoded design, on which a lot of money had been spent. The Byzantines were no doubt glad that the Arabs were thus effectively shooting themselves in the foot, though as Vasiliev notes the Muslims were not just dependent on the fleet of Tarsus. Any benefit from the self-inflicted loss was certainly short-lived, for it was not much later, probably in 901, that Damianos himself led an expedition that resulted in the capture of Demetrias in Thessaly.¹²¹ However this year also saw a successful land and sea attack against the Arabs by the Byzantines.¹²² News of this assault reached Bagdad from Muslim merchants at al-Raqqah, who reported that the Byzantines had arrived in many ships, and also Byzantine cavalry had come to Kaysum, mid-way between Samosata and Maras. More than 15,000 Muslims were driven off into captivity. The Arab response soon came, for in late 902 or early 903 the island of Lemnos was occupied and its inhabitants were taken prisoner.¹²³ One is struck by the fact that the Arab navy was coming ever closer to the centre of Byzantine power, and only two years later it approached Constantinople itself.

This incident formed part of the most infamous of all Arab naval assaults on the Byzantine empire during the reign of Leo VI, the sacking of Thessalonica in the

¹¹⁷*Tabari*, vol. 38, 73.

¹¹⁸Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 133.

¹¹⁹*Tabari*, vol. 38, 79; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 140.

¹²⁰*Tabari*, vol. 38, 91; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 141.

¹²¹*GMC*, 860. For the date see Grumel, 'Chronologie', 34-36.

¹²²*Tabari*, vol. 38, 97; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II. 1, 141.

¹²³*GMC*, 861. For the date see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 107.

summer of 904.¹²⁴ As news reached the emperor that the Arab navy (which was being commanded by Leo the Tripolite) was approaching the Hellespont he despatched the *drungarios* of the fleet Eustathios to repel the enemy. However Eustathios was forced to turn tail and the Arabs pursued him up the Hellespont as far as Parion. Then for some reason the Arabs turned back the way they had come, and were followed by the Byzantine fleet, which was now headed by Himerios the *protasekretis*.¹²⁵ Sailing via Abydos, Strobilos¹²⁶, Imbros and Samothrace, the Byzantines eventually encountered the Arab fleet anchored at Thasos, but dared not attack. The Arabs then homed in on Thessalonica as a target, which duly fell to them at the end of July 904; its *strategos* Leo Katzilakios was taken prisoner and Byzantine blood was shed. What the Byzantine fleet was up to whilst Thessalonica was assaulted and taken is unrecorded. An Arab report on the sack adds to our knowledge of its details.¹²⁷ Leo apparently killed 500 men and captured a like number, whilst rescuing 400 Muslim captives. Further, 60 Byzantine ships were seized and loaded with booty. As to the ultimate deliverance of the city, the chronicles relate that this came about through accident rather than design. The story goes that a *koubikoularios* called Rhodophyles had been on his way to Sicily on some matter that involved him taking along 100 pounds of gold when he had fallen ill on his journey and taken refuge in Thessalonica. Whilst he was recovering there the city was captured by the Arabs. The Tripolite took Rhodophyles prisoner, and learning that he had in his possession such wealth tortured him to discover its whereabouts, but the eunuch died without divulging the information. The gold was in fact found in the street by another imperial official the *asekretis* Symeon, who was himself on a mission, taking a gift to the Bulgars.¹²⁸ With both these material

¹²⁴See GMC, 862-863.

¹²⁵Why the emperor's chief secretary should be appointed to command the navy is unclear, and it could be felt to bespeak desperation, but Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 106, has indicated that there was a history of naval experience in Himerios's family. As to why the Arabs turned back from Constantinople, the chronicles assert that it was God's will, but such an explanation does not satisfy modern historians; Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 56 and 161, has reckoned that the approach on Constantinople was 'just a distracting gimmick', a method of 'psychological warfare'.

¹²⁶Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 166, identifies this with the Strobilos near Kos. If this is correct it will have taken Himerios a considerable amount of time to track down the enemy fleet, and thus the assault on Thessalonica occurred a good distance in time from the initial approach on Constantinople. However E. Malamut, *Les îles de l'empire byzantin VIII^e-XII^e siècles*, II (Paris, 1988), 503-504 and 657, whilst recognising a Strobilos as the coastal city of Asia Minor facing Kos, appears to think that Himerios's Strobilos is in a different locality, between Abydos and Imbros, judging from the map she gives of the movements of Leo of Tripoli and Himerios in 904. However she gives no explanation for her assumption.

¹²⁷See Grégoire, 'Le communiqué'; *Tabari*, vol. 38, 148. VE, 101, 10-19, also touches on the sack of Thessalonica.

¹²⁸The reason for Symeon's presence in Thessalonica is supplied by the VE. Perhaps Leo Choirosphaktes was sent out to Bulgaria on his third embassy as a replacement for Symeon who had become embroiled in the situation at Thessalonica, using the gift destined for the Bulgars to assist in buying off the Arabs.

assets Symeon was able to enter into a deal with Leo and they struck a bargain: if Symeon handed over the goods Leo and the Arabs would depart without destroying Thessalonica. This bargain was carried out, and the *Life of Euthymios* notes that in addition to sparing the city Leo even forewent most of the Byzantine captives. The Arabs sailed home safely via Crete without suffering any retaliation from Himerios. From such a story the defence and subsequent rescue of Thessalonica does appear rather ineffective and shambolic; it is the fact that Symeon used his own initiative that saved the city from further harm. Nikolaos was certainly critical of the governmental response to the attack, relating that 'The Thessalonians begged for help day by day, but those here [Constantinople] delayed sending the fleet thither, and so the situation was lost'.¹²⁹ Nikolaos may over state his case, but it does appear that the Byzantine naval forces hardly covered themselves in glory, for they were unable to do anything to halt the Arabs; surely this was indeed one of Leo's major blunders as Karlin-Hayter asserted. Yet perhaps we can make some pleading on behalf of the emperor. The fact is, as Christides has asserted, that this was not the average Arab naval force; it was unusual in the large number of ships it consisted of.¹³⁰ Even if we are wary of using Kaminiates's evidence it seems likely that this is true, given the extreme reluctance of the Byzantine navy to tangle with the enemy; they were not being cowards, they had good reason to be reluctant to engage in combat. Leo seems to have combined forces with Damianos and Egyptians for the assault of 904.¹³¹ If the Arab fleet was of such a constitution it was no wonder that the Byzantines could only look on in helplessness, there was nothing they could do to stop such a force. It was better to stand off and minimise the destruction and loss. We should also not forget that this was Himerios's first recorded naval experience, and this may explain some of the evident hesitation. With regard to the buying off of Leo this may have been less spontaneous as it appears, for the presented story seems unrealistic. Why was Rhodophyles taking such a large amount of gold to Sicily? Why was it left in the street, and how did Symeon manage to come across it so adroitly? It seems unlikely to me that Leo VI would have simply resigned Thessalonica to its fate; could it be possible that the buying off of the Tripolite was in fact more well-organised than the sources allege? The story seems to want to present the salvation of the city in a miraculous light, as the result of a series of happy (or not so happy, if you were Rhodophyles) coincidences. Yet are diplomacy and military inaction the whole story?¹³² Perhaps too much attention has been

¹²⁹Nicholas. *Letters*, 326. 64-66.

¹³⁰Christides. *Conquest of Crete*, 61.

¹³¹Christides. *Conquest of Crete*, 161, 168.

¹³²Certainly Thessalonica was not simply abandoned to its fate; an inscription on the walls of the city indicates that they were repaired under Leo prior to the capture of the city in July 904: see J.-M.

focused on the city of Thessalonica itself; the emperor's *Taktika* reveals that it was Byzantine practice to respond to a naval assault by launching a land attack¹³³, and this does seem to have happened in 904. It is well known that in late November of this year Andronikos Doukas won a victory at Maras, and Vasiliev wondered if this was a revenge-inspired action for the assault on Thessalonica.¹³⁴ Yet Tabari also records a massive Byzantine land attack earlier in the same year (the report of the campaign reached the Muslims between 18 June - 16 July), prior to the fall of Thessalonica.¹³⁵ Leo 'had sent ten crosses with one hundred thousand men against the border towns and...a number of them had moved on al-Hadath. They had raided and burned, and they had captured every Muslim they had been able to'. Given the religious and aggressive character of this raid it seems obvious that it should be viewed as Leo's angry military response to the Arab encroachment on regions of the empire so close to Constantinople itself. I believe Vasiliev was mistaken to divorce the two incidents, for although the Byzantine land assault was effective before the fall of Thessalonica we must remember that the authorities knew of the presence of the Arab navy well before it took this city. Thus it seems that Leo has been unfairly accused of doing nothing in response to the Arab assault of 904; he did in fact take the accepted response of his day, and quite effectively too. It can also be argued to some degree that the fate of Thessalonica in 904 was of more significance in the psychological sphere than the physical sphere. Not only was Thessalonica the second city of the empire, it was believed to benefit from the heavenly protection of St. Demetrios, who had always rescued her from siege situations in the past. The fall of the city in 904 thus struck the Byzantine psyche a terrible blow, which is reflected by the writings relating to the event. Not only do we have the extended account of the chronicles, but in Constantinople the patriarch Nikolaos delivered a sermon on the capture of Thessalonica, whilst the emperor Leo VI composed a lament on the fall of the city.¹³⁶ The real cause for concern seems to have been the thought that if Demetrios could abandon Thessalonica, was there any guarantee that the Virgin would continue to protect Constantinople itself?

Whatever the true import of the taking of Thessalonica by the Arabs in 904 Byzantinists are in no doubt that it did prompt the Byzantines into action against the

Speiser, 'Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance. I. Les inscriptions de Thessalonique', *TM*, 5 (1973), 145-180, esp. 162-163, and note that Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 180, wrongly dated the repairs to after the fall of 904.

¹³³*PG* 107, 980, 18, 139.

¹³⁴Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 181.

¹³⁵*Tabari*, vol. 38, 147. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 163, noted this incident, but dated the report to 19 May-17 June, and did not connect it with events closer to Constantinople.

¹³⁶For Nikolaos's sermon see *Nicholas. Miscellaneous Writings*, 8-17. For evidence of Leo's poem see Maas, 'Literarisches'.

Arab navy.¹³⁷ This is certainly the impression that the sources create, and one is tempted to conclude that the difference after 904 was really made by the new commander of the fleet Himerios, who was also holding down the job of logothete of the drome. However the emperor's own concern for the subject of naval warfare should not be doubted; we have already noted that he was prompted to produce an extra chapter for his *Taktika* devoted to this subject, even though it meant writing it from scratch. But is it fair to deduce that this concern was only prompted by the events of 904? To start with we cannot be sure when exactly Leo did add his *Naumachika* to the *Taktika*; it could predate 904. What may be indicative of Leo's perception of the danger of the naval threat and the importance of the Byzantine navy prior to 904 is that he already addresses these issues in constitutions 18 and 20, before the production of the separate constitution on naval warfare. Thus the emperor notes that the Cilician Saracens fight on the sea as well as on land, and assault the coast of the empire.¹³⁸ He recommends that if the Arabs launch a naval attack the *strategos* should retaliate with a land assault; if however the situation is reversed the *strategos* of the Cibyrrheot theme is to attack the shores near Tarsus and Adana.¹³⁹ Leo also favours a tactic that was used by his father, that of a joint land and sea attack upon the Arabs.¹⁴⁰ He highlights the danger posed to coastal lands and islands, and advises land attack to deter the enemy.¹⁴¹ In the case of a projected combined fleet from Egypt, Cilicia and Syria, Leo asserts that Cyprus should be used as a base from which to attack the diverse fleets before they unite, or one can even set fire to them before they have set out as they lie in harbour.¹⁴² Also, as we have seen, there are indications that the Byzantine fleet was active before 904, even if it was not always successful. The Bulgarian war of 895 and the Sicilian situation that led to the fall of Tauromenion in 902 may have distracted the Byzantine fleet from their usual sphere of operations, thus making the task of the Arab navy easier. Theophanes Continuatus specifically note that the Arabs did take advantage of the fact that the Byzantines were preoccupied with the Bulgarian problem¹⁴³, calling to mind one of Karlin-Hayter's basic observations, that the Byzantine empire had to contend with war on several fronts, thus stretching its resources.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps the Arab assault on Samos in 891-893 was more crippling

¹³⁷Ostrogorsky, *State*, 58; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 181; Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 204; Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 35.

¹³⁸*PG* 107, 980, 18. 138.

¹³⁹*PG* 107, 980, 18. 139.

¹⁴⁰*PG* 107, 980-981, 18. 140.

¹⁴¹*PG* 107, 1049, 20. 139.

¹⁴²*PG* 107, 1072, 20. 212.

¹⁴³*TC*, 366.

¹⁴⁴Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 17.

than we realise; it was after all the base of one of the three naval themes of the empire. However it is clear that after 904 we do possess more information concerning Byzantine naval movements, which I wish to consider now.

As observed above it is the figure of Himerios who dominates naval events after 904, but he only gradually builds up to the role of aggressor against the Arabs; his first recorded victory, on St Thomas's day (6 October) 906 was won whilst he was in the role of defender of the empire.¹⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the chronicles only tell us of the victory because it was an integral part of their main plot, the desertion of Andronikos Doukas to the Arabs. This is a salutary reminder of the other possible victories that they have not bothered to tell us about, and perhaps our perception that the Byzantines were spurred into action post 904 is mistaken, for what have we not been told of the period 886-903? Indeed the only other information presented by the chroniclers about Himerios's naval activity is negative; this was his defeat at the end of Leo's reign. It is to other sources we must look to to learn of Himerios's further actions. Thus it must be stressed again that the situation after 904 may only *appear* to be better than what went before; if we were dependent on the chronicles alone for the study of Byzantine naval warfare from 904-912 we would undoubtedly conclude that the situation did not improve in the latter part of Leo's reign. This should be ample warning against dismissing the former part of the reign as inferior. It is also striking that the chronicles reflect less Arab naval activity in the period 905-912. Turning to the other sources now we find striking evidence of the character of Himerios and his successes. One favourable witness is the author of a hagiographical work, Niketas the *magistros*, a prominent in-law of the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos and an exile-victim too; he warmly praises the achievements of the emperor Leo VI and his 'archon' of the drome and the fleet Himerios, under whom he had served.¹⁴⁶ Niketas had found the material for his story of St Theoktista when he stopped off on the island of Paros whilst on a mission to Crete for the emperor, and the most likely explanation for this incident of diplomacy seems to be the retrieving of those Byzantines taken captive in Thessalonica by Leo the Tripolite, whom he had sold on Crete during his voyage home.¹⁴⁷ Evidence of Himerios's more aggressive activities comes not from Tabari, but from another Arab historian, Masudi. He relates that in the period from 20 September 909 to 8 September 910 the commander of the Byzantine fleet, whom he calls Faris, fell on the coast of Syria and seized the fortress of al-Qubba after a long

¹⁴⁵GMC, 866-867. For the dating of Himerios's victory to 906 see Chapter Seven below.

¹⁴⁶See the *Life of St Theoktista*, AASS, Nov IV, 221-233.

¹⁴⁷Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 167. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 208-210, and Miles, 'Crete and the Aegean', 8, n. 28, suggest that the object of the mission was to neutralise Crete during the coming Byzantine naval campaign against Cyprus and Laodicea, but I find this not a very convincing theory.

struggle, and also took the town of Laodicea where he captured a large number of prisoners.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps this assault was in response to the Arab land assault in September 909 led from Tarsus by Munis al-Khadim or to the summer raid of 910 led by al-Qasim b. Sima, which had both resulted in the taking of a great number of Byzantine prisoners.¹⁴⁹ Connected with the raid on the Syrian coast may be Himerios's activities on Cyprus¹⁵⁰; we do not know of these directly, only from their controversial aftermath, when Damianos wreaked revenge. It seems that at some point Himerios had been on Cyprus and broken the agreed precepts governing the island by capturing and killing some Muslims, for Cyprus was strictly a neutral zone, shared by Byzantium and the Arabs.¹⁵¹ Damianos had soon reacted sharply, assaulting the island for four months in 911 or 912, taking prisoners and causing destruction. It seems that Himerios's actions on Cyprus were still very much in the mould of attack as a form of defence; however in his last campaign, and the last of the reign of Leo VI, we find that Byzantium has become the aggressor. In 911 a huge campaign was mounted against the island of Crete, the details of which we owe to an entry in Constantine VII's *Book of Ceremonies*.¹⁵² Vasiliev reckons that the empire-wide force comprised 177 ships, 34200 rowers, 7140 soldiers, 700 Russians¹⁵³, and 5089 Mardaites, and concludes that 'Byzance s'était sérieusement préparée à la lutte contre les Arabes d'Orient'.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately we know nothing of the details of the campaign itself, except for the fact that it was evidently a failure; the chronicles record that towards the end of Leo's reign, in October (presumably 911)¹⁵⁵, Himerios was defeated at sea by both Leo the Tripolite and

¹⁴⁸See Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, 43. Among these captives it seems that we must identify the famed Harun-Ibn-Yahya who found himself as a prisoner of war in Constantinople towards the end of the reign of Leo VI, having been captured by the Byzantines and brought by ship from the city of Ascalon on the Palestinian shore to Attaleia, and thence to Byzantium; see Vasiliev, 'Harun-Ibn-Yahya'; H. Grégoire, 'Un captif arabe à la cour de l'empereur Alexandre', *Byz.* 7 (1932), 666-673.

¹⁴⁹*Tabari*, vol. 38, 193. The results of these two summer campaigns are provided by another Arab historian, Arib: see Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, 59.

¹⁵⁰Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 211. He dates Himerios's actions on Cyprus to summer 910, asserting that they were part of his policy to keep the various Arab fleets apart.

¹⁵¹For the incident see *Nicholas. Letters*, 8, 108 - 11, 157; Grégoire, 'Saint Démétrianos'; Masudi, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, 43. For the position of Cyprus under the Arabs and Byzantines see R. J. H. Jenkins, 'Cyprus between Byzantium and Islam, A. D. 688-965', *Studies presented to D. M. Robinson*, II, edd. G. Mylonas and D. Raymond (St Louis, Missouri, 1953), 1006-1014, repr. *Studies on*, XXII.

¹⁵²*De Cer.*, 651. See Vasiliev's analysis of the information in *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 201-207.

¹⁵³This detail appears to confirm the reality of Leo's relationship with the Russians in the latter stages of his reign as related in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*. See Vasiliev, 'Second Russian Attack'; *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 196-198; R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Supposed Russian Attack on Constantinople in 907: Evidence of Pseudo-Symeon', *Speculum*, 24 (1949), 403-406, repr. *Studies on*, XII; G. Ostrogorsky, 'L'expédition du prince Oleg contre Constantinople en 907', *SK*, 11 (1940), 47-62.

¹⁵⁴Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, 201-207.

Damianos. However the lack of success of the campaign should not blind us to the obvious significant point, that in the last stages of his reign Leo VI had embarked on an offensive strategy against the Arab sea threat, hoping to wrest the strategic site of Crete from their control and thus ultimately secure the shores and seas of the Byzantine empire. Although this was not a new scheme of foreign policy, and indeed continued to be until Nikephoros Phokas finally achieved it in 961, it shows clearly that Leo VI should not be accused of having no foreign policy.¹⁵⁵

I set out to challenge the view that Leo VI was not concerned about the military side of his responsibilities and that he had no foreign policy, concentrating my study both on what we can gauge of Leo's attitude to military matters, and on the two most serious military threats to the empire during his reign, the Bulgars and the Arab navy. It should be clear by now that although this emperor was not a soldier he did take the trouble to ponder the military crises facing the empire, and attempted to respond to them. The military situation under Leo was particularly aggravated by the sudden outburst of conflict with the Bulgarian kingdom, a problem that Basil I had been spared. This preoccupied the Byzantines for over three years of conflict, and no doubt after 896 the emperor continually had to be wary of this dangerous neighbour. He did however ostensibly bring this problem to heel. The problem of the Arab navy is a slightly different matter, for this was an expected threat, and formed part of the regular conflict between the two empires. It seems dangerous to me to make sweeping generalisations about the Byzantine response to this threat given the fact that our knowledge can be so subject to what the sources choose to record; the conflict with the Arabs was an everyday problem unlike the Bulgarian war, which is recorded in much more detail by the Byzantines because it was unusual. It can however be asserted that Leo VI did show particular concern about the naval threat to the empire, and towards the end of his reign he hoped to lessen it by recapturing the strategic island of Crete. It should also be noted that in both areas the calibre of Leo's opponents was exceptional. Symeon, Damianos and Leo of Tripoli all had inside knowledge of Byzantium, which may have given them a particular advantage compared to other enemies of the Byzantine empire. Symeon was particularly ruthless and ambitious, clearly being totally unconstrained by the normal expectations of behaviour in warfare, and certainly we can suspect that Leo and Damianos shared similar characteristics; thus to some

¹⁵⁵Pseudo-Symeon however places the battle not in October, but in the eighth month of the campaign, which would make it easier to comprehend why Himerios only returned to Constantinople after the death of Leo VI on 11 May 912; the final battle did not occur in October 911 but only after the death of Leo VI in 912; see R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Date of Leo VI's Cretan Expedition', *Hell*, 4 (1953), 277-281, repr. *Studies*, XIV. However he rejects this theory in 'Chronological Accuracy', 105.

¹⁵⁶For the Byzantine attempts to reconquer Crete see Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 172.

degree the emperor suffered from bad luck. As stated at the outset of this chapter it is Karlin-Hayter who has rescued Leo's military reputation, revealing how mistaken it is to reduce the military record of the reign to a string of military failures by turning to the evidence beyond the chronicles. However perhaps even she fell victim to the trap of the chronicles when she limited Leo's three major blunders to the start of the Bulgarian war, the military withdrawal from Bulgaria in 895, and the failure to defend Thessalonica in 904, for in each of these events we have seen that a case can be made in defence of the emperor. Thus it is certainly hard to escape the prejudices that have been handed down through the centuries by Byzantium itself, but it should never again be doubted that Leo was indeed an emperor to whom things military mattered.

CHAPTER SEVEN
EUNUCHS AND ARISTOCRATS

For the functioning of his empire the Byzantine emperor was dependent upon those officials that he appointed to serve him, and it was these men who formed the senatorial order of the empire. Of course by the time of Leo VI the senatorial order as a body no longer had the power and functions it had once possessed during the Roman republic and the early empire; indeed the moment Augustus established his principate the position of the senate was compromised, and ultimately became redundant. It is well known that amongst his collection of new laws Leo included two that officially revoked the ancient rights of the senate¹, but essentially these were meaningless for they 'merely ratify a situation long since recognised'.² Yet the concept of the senate still had significance for Byzantium, for it denoted the ruling class of the empire, those men who were titled administrators or just titled, and whose prominence in society was reflected by the degree of their association with the emperor. As such it is still valid to talk of the emperor's relationship with the senatorial order, and despite the initial impression that his legislation creates there are indications that Leo VI was an emperor who had good relations with his senators. Karlin-Hayter noted this in her reading of the *Life of Euthymios*, citing the following two instances.³ When the patriarch Nikolaos had refused the emperor admittance through the imperial doors to the nave of Hagia Sophia on Christmas day 906, and Leo had to content himself with entry to the *metatorion*, he wept when the gospel was read out 'moving his hearers to lament and weep with him, not only the Senate, but some of the very metropolitans'⁴; and when Leo was barred again on the feast of Epiphany 'the members of the Senate protested', urging the emperor to enter the main body of the church with them "'as one of us'".⁵ However within this source other examples of the closeness between the senate and emperor can be found. When Leo relates to Euthymios the story of his marriage to Theophano he casts the senate as a sympathetic witness of his plight⁶; the senate is presented again as sensitive to the emperor's feelings when he mourns the loss of his third wife in 901⁷; the senate had no qualms about

¹Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, Novel 47, 184-187; Novel 78, 270-271.

²Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 595.

³Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 595.

⁴VE, 77, 3-7.

⁵VE, 77, 31 - 79. 2.

⁶VE, 41, 16-19.

⁷VE, 63, 16 - 65. 22.

recognising Leo's fourth wife as *augusta*.⁸ It is also notable that after Leo's death when Nikolaos was restored to the patriarchate and summoned Euthymios to a tribunal senators stayed away in droves although they had been requested to attend.⁹ One may be excused for suspecting that what we are finding here is not so much a reflection of historical reality but the exploitation of the senate as a literary device to evoke support or opposition, yet this *Life* is not isolated in its testimony. We have already seen that the senate had a part to play in the protection of Leo from his father's wrath in 883 and his release from prison in 886. We have also seen that as far as Pseudo-Symeon was concerned the senate achieved Leo's desire by condemning Photios at his trial in 887. Further to these cases Skylitzes informs us that as Leo realised death was coming upon him he summoned the senate to him, and recalled the good relationship that had existed between them during his reign and thus in return he urged it to look after the interests of his wife and child after his death.¹⁰ Far more compelling than these examples are the words of Leo VI himself and those of his son Constantine VII. It has been noted previously that when Leo forced through the installation of his brother Stephen as patriarch at Christmas 886 he revealed total confidence in the support of the senate for his action. When Constantine VII records that his father was responsible for the construction of an imperial galley specifically for the purpose of ceremonial jaunts by sea he asserts that Leo 'was rather more hospitably inclined towards magisters and patricians and familiar friends of senatorial rank [than Basil I], and...always wished them to share his pleasure'.¹¹ Thus we do have a strong indication that Leo's good relationship with those of the senatorial order was very much a matter of reality, and in this chapter I wish to consider the emperor's relations with two distinct groups within this class, the eunuchs and those of the so-called military aristocracy who originated from the eastern frontier and whose names later came to much greater prominence, the Phokades, Doukai and Argyroi, for it seems to me that these two groups and Leo VI's relations with them comprise a significant feature of his reign.

⁸*VE*, 111. 20-21.

⁹*VE*, 119. 6-11.

¹⁰*Scylitzae*, 191. 12 - 192. 24. This scenario however must be viewed as dubious since the earlier chroniclers have no record of it, and Skylitzes seems to have appended it to the demises of other emperors, such as Theophilos.

¹¹*DAI*, I, 246. 22-24. Prior to the creation of an imperial barge by Leo VI the emperors had made use of a scarlet barge. When Basil I had gone on long distance jaunts he had used two galleys from the imperial navy. The barge had only been able to transport a limited number of men of senatorial rank, and only those that held specified posts. These were the *drungarios* of the watch, the *drungarios* of the fleet, the logothete of the drome, the hetaireiarch, the *mystikos*, the secretary of pleas, the *domestikos* of the schools if he was present in Constantinople, the *parakoimomenos*, the *protovestiaros*, and those of the bed-chamber that the emperor wanted. Leo later had another galley built for these imperial journeys.

That eunuchs had a large role to play in the administration of the empire and the imperial palace is well known.¹² They seem to have come to prominence and become increasingly important from the end of the third century onwards, and Hopkins wonders if it was 'the capture of the Persian king's harem by Galerius in AD 298' that 'led to a proliferation of eunuchs in the Roman court'.¹³ The emperor Julian (361-363) made a concerted effort to rid the palace of eunuchs, but after his brief reign they never looked back. The majority of eunuchs seem to have been of lowly or foreign origin.¹⁴ Their heavy use in the Byzantine empire has often been ascribed to the fact that they were trustworthy in two respects; they could never aspire to be emperor themselves, and they could attend upon women without any danger of impropriety occurring.¹⁵ Whilst the former is certainly valid, the latter has perhaps been over-rated as we shall see. Hopkins however certainly provided a much more satisfying explanation as to why this group was so valued. They could soak up criticisms that might have fallen on the emperor¹⁶; they 'acted as a lubricant preventing too much friction between the emperor and the other forces of the state which threatened his superiority'¹⁷; they met 'the need of a divine emperor for human information and contact'¹⁸. Our knowledge about their jobs, titles and position within Byzantine society is particularly good for the era of the late ninth century due to the existence of Philotheos's *Kletorologion*, a fact which is striking, for it has been appreciated that Leo VI was an emperor with a marked connection with eunuchs, notably one in particular, the Arab Samonas. The career of this eunuch has been the subject of several individual studies, and I will give a brief account of it here.¹⁹ Leo's relationship with Samonas dates to the period shortly after Zoe Zaoutzaina's death when her surviving relatives headed by her nephew Basil plotted against the emperor in order to maintain their power. It seems that Samonas was a youthful servant in the house of Stylianos Zaoutzes, charged with

¹²See K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978), 172-196; R. Guiland, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, I (Amsterdam, 1967), 165-380, which collects his articles on eunuch jobs and titles, and contains his general overview 'Les eunuques dans l'empire byzantin. Etude de titulaire et de prosopographie byzantines', *REB*, I (1943), 197-238; Runciman, *Romanus*, 29-30, makes a stirring claim for the importance of eunuchs in the Byzantine empire, asserting that their 'significance has never...been properly realized' and that a lot of Gibbonese has been talked about their negative influence upon Byzantine society.

¹³Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 192-193.

¹⁴Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 181; 188-189.

¹⁵Guiland, 'Les eunuques', 200; 215; Runciman, *Romanus*, 19.

¹⁶Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 174.

¹⁷Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 180.

¹⁸Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 187.

¹⁹See Rydén, 'Portrait'; Jenkins, 'Flight'; R. Janin, 'Un arabe ministre à Byzance: Samonas (IX^e-X^e)', *EO*, 34 (1935), 307-318.

the domestic duty of filling the cups of dinner guests with water.²⁰ He was taken into Basil's confidence about the plot, but promptly ran to tell the emperor of the threat to his life. Thus the conspiracy was crushed and Samonas was rewarded; not only did he receive a third of the property of the plotters but he entered into Leo's service and received the title of *koubikoularios*, beginning his rise to the highest eunuch rank and post. The *Life of Euthymios* relates that he was soon promoted *nipsistiarios*²¹, whilst the chronicles say that he was rewarded with the title of *protospatharios* in 900 for having saved Leo's life.²² The overwhelming impression is that from 900 onwards Samonas became Leo's right hand man, helping him in all his desires; he is credited with taking Zoe Karbonopsina to the palace in 903 at the time of the St Mokios attack.²³ Much has been made of his role as a policeman or intelligence officer, based on the *Life of Basil the Younger*, for in this Samonas is responsible for the inquisition of the saint who was taken for a spy.²⁴ Leo's evident attachment to this eunuch has been detected in the fact that he punished him mildly for his attempt to flee to his own country in 904.²⁵ He simply confined him to the house of caesar Bardas for four months, and on releasing him began the process of promotion again, creating him *patrikios*, the highest title a eunuch could aspire to.²⁶ Samonas even became the godfather of Leo's son Constantine in 906.²⁷ In the emperor's subsequent struggles with the church and the patriarch Nikolaos Samonas was firmly aiding and abetting Leo.²⁸ The *Life of Euthymios* reports that it was the *protovestiarios* Samonas who was despatched in February 907 with the metropolitans to the exiled Nikolaos to extract his resignation.²⁹ It was surely in gratitude for his help during the tetragamy crisis that Samonas was promoted to the

²⁰The chronicles allege that Samonas was already a *koubikoularios* in the service of the emperor when the plot was exposed, but the version of the *Life of Euthymios* is apparently more accurate here. Rydén, 'Portrait', 104, argues that the author of the *Life of Euthymios* is better informed since after Samonas fell in 908 he was confined for a time in Euthymios's monastery at Psamatia, where the author of the *Life* is supposed to have lived also. As to how an Arab eunuch slave came to be in the household of Stylianos the most common suggestion is that he had been captured by the Byzantines in a campaign against the Arabs, and perhaps even emasculated by the Byzantines too.

²¹*VE*, 51, 6-7. However from the information that Philotheos supplies on eunuch titles it would seem that this was in fact a demotion: see Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 125, 22 - 127, 5. It is possible that between 899 and 900 the order of these titles was reversed.

²²*GMC*, 859.

²³*GMC*, 861.

²⁴*PG* 109, 656. Jenkins, 'Flight', 221, was particularly responsible for stressing this notion. See also Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 177, who describes Samonas as 'Leo's valuable and trusted head of Security'.

²⁵*GMC*, 863-864. For the usual date of 904 see Jenkins, 'Flight', 227. However Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 107-108, also recognises that the year of the flight could equally be 905.

²⁶*GMC*, 864, links Samonas's liberation with Leo's *autokratoria* (the anniversary of his accession), but *Ps. Sym.*, 708, connects it with the birth of Constantine VII.

²⁷*GMC*, 865.

²⁸See *GMC*, 865; *ASM*, II, 94-104. Arethas's letter shows that Samonas was still *patrikios* at the end of 906: see *ASM*, II, 94, 4; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 366.

²⁹*VE*, 91, 17 - 93, 12.

top exclusively-eunuch post of *parakoimomenos*, a job last held at the end of the reign of Michael III. Samonas continued to prove himself concerned for the emperor's wishes, and endeavoured to persuade the patriarch Euthymios to recognise Leo's fourth wife Zoe as augusta.³⁰ However not much later, in the early summer of 908, Samonas fell from grace, having been exposed as the brain behind a scheme to implicate another court eunuch, Constantine the Paphlagonian, whom Leo and the empress favoured, and whom Samonas had become jealous of; he was tonsured and confined to the monastery of Martinakios.³¹ It is obvious then that this eunuch did have a central part to play in the reign, but only from the years 900-908, and indeed Byzantinists seem to have been slow to realise that his relationship with the emperor was not unique among eunuchs; it is clear that there is a wider picture to examine, not the limited one of 'Leo and Samonas'. One Byzantinist who did appreciate this fact was Guiland, who observed that Basil I did not seem to have 'une affection particulière pour les eunuques' but that 'Sous Léon VI, les eunuques retrouvèrent toute leur influence', stating that it was from among the eunuchs that this emperor chose his favourites.³² Unfortunately Guiland then devoted most of his study on the eunuchs of the reign to the famous duo, Samonas and Constantine the Paphlagonian; thus I shall now outline what we know of the other eunuchs who did serve Leo, including the said Constantine.

Even before Leo became emperor in his own right in 886 he seems to have had a trusted eunuch at his side; when he was had up for plotting to kill his father in 883 amongst his co-conspirators who suffered punishment was his *protovestiaros* Niketas Helladikos.³³ It was Leo who restored Niketas Xylinites (the master of the augusta's table who had been suspected of a liaison with Eudokia Ingerina), appointing him to the position of *oikonomos* of Hagia Sophia. When Agion rebelled in southern Italy it was Constantine the master of the table whom Leo despatched to head the campaign against him.³⁴ During the Bulgarian war the *patrikios* and *protovestiaros* Theodosios was sent out with the army in 896, and died during the battle of Bulgarophygon; the loss of this eunuch is recorded as having caused the emperor particular grief.³⁵ The eunuch Christopher features in several episodes of the reign. When in 899 Leo rumbled the corruption that was co-ordinated by two of Stylianos's familiars, the businessman Staurakios and the eunuch Mousikos,

³⁰VE, 111. 3-5.

³¹GMC, 869-870. For the date see Jenkins, 'Flight', 234.

³²Guiland, 'Les eunuques', 221.

³³GMC, 846. Niketas was to become *papias* during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos.

³⁴GMC, 852. This job was one of those specifically intended for eunuchs, though it is possible that 'bearded men' could hold eunuch jobs; the most famous example is of Basil becoming Michael III's *parakoimomenos*.

³⁵GMC, 855; *De Them.*, 33.

Christopher the *koitonites* was charged with assisting in the punishment of the latter by installing him in the Studite monastery.³⁶ Perhaps Christopher received promotion from the emperor for his part in this episode, for by 900 he had become *protovestiaris*; when Samonas came to report the nascent plot of Stylianos's relatives to the emperor Leo at first did not believe him, and so it happened that Christopher, now *protovestiaris*, and the *koitonites* Kalokyris were despatched to Samonas's room to eavesdrop on Basil's conversation with the eunuch, and were ordered to bring a written account of what they had heard to the emperor.³⁷ With the vindication of his accusations Samonas entered the emperor's service and began his rise, but Christopher does not immediately disappear from the scene; when news first reached Leo of the approach of the Arab fleet towards Constantinople in 904 the emperor was actually on his way to the dedication of the monastery of his *protovestiaris* Christopher in the emporion of Boutios.³⁸ It seems that Leo also made use of eunuchs as diplomats. Constantine VII informs us of the eunuch Sinoutis, the *chartoularios* of the drome, who was entrusted with missions to Taron and Iberia.³⁹ We have already seen that the *koubikoularios* Rhodophyles was on a mission to Sicily when he found himself enmeshed in the siege and capture of Thessalonica by the Arabs in 904.⁴⁰ Tabari reveals that eunuchs went on missions to the Arabs also. Shortly after al-Muktafi's accession to the caliphate in 902 Leo despatched two diplomats to him at Bagdad, one a eunuch and the other not, bringing the new caliph gifts and captives and requesting an exchange of prisoners; and again a few years later a pair of diplomats was sent to the Arabs, one the maternal uncle of the emperor's son and the other the eunuch Basil, with the object of arranging an exchange of prisoners.⁴¹ The former of these two diplomats has been equated with Leo Choirosphaktes, who in his letters from exile to the emperor does refer to a eunuch with whom he had shared a mission, and who subsequently slandered him in Constantinople and thus played a part in his disgrace and exile.⁴² We return finally to the familiar figures of Samonas and Constantine the Paphlagonian. After the settling of the tetragamy crisis in 907 Samonas endeavoured to win favour with the fourth wife Zoe by presenting her with the gift of his eunuch

³⁶*GMC*, 857. A *koitonites* was one of the staff of the imperial chamber subordinate to the *parakoimomenos*: see Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 305. For the date of this episode see Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 106.

³⁷*GMC*, 858.

³⁸*GMC*, 862.

³⁹*DAI*, I, 190. 35-40. It has been conjectured that Sinoutis was probably 'a native of Siounia, in eastern Armenia': see *DAI*, II, 162.

⁴⁰*GMC*, 863.

⁴¹*Tabari*, vol. 38. 133; 181.

⁴²Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, letter 25, 121-127. However Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, 56, identifies the slanderous eunuch as Sinoutis.

servant, Constantine, who had previously belonged to the *magistros* Basil.⁴³ However Samonas's plan began to backfire when he realised that Leo and Zoe were both becoming very attached to the new eunuch in their lives. Samonas had to resort to slander, asserting that the empress and the eunuch were having an affair.⁴⁴ Believing this to be true Leo entrusted Samonas with carrying out the punishment of Constantine; he was tonsured and placed in the monastery of St Tarasios. However the emperor soon began to miss Constantine, and so contrived his restoration. Firstly the *parakoimomenos* was instructed to transfer Constantine to Samonas's own monastery at Speira, where Leo then came to visit. On bumping into Constantine by 'accident' Leo called for him to be restored to his secular life, and the emperor and the eunuch returned to the palace together. Subsequently Samonas continued to work for Constantine's disgrace, and apparently hit upon the idea of writing a pamphlet reviling the emperor which was presumably meant to be eventually ascribed to Constantine. Samonas's secretary Constantine the Rhodian wrote the document⁴⁵, and it was thrown into the *metatorion* of Hagia Sophia for the emperor to find, which he did. However the eunuch Constantine did not fall victim to the plot for one of Samonas's conspirators, the *megistos koitonites* Michael Tzirethon, confessed what had happened to Leo, and the *parakoimomenos* finally fell from imperial favour in 908. The result of this plot transpired to be positive for Constantine, for he was promoted quickly to the post of *parakoimomenos*, thus attaining it in a far shorter a time than Samonas himself. Leo also had a monastery constructed for him at Nosiai.⁴⁶

From these details above it is quite clear that Leo VI was well served by several eunuchs during his reign, and had close relations with more than just Samonas. But we can detect the emperor's close connection with eunuchs not only by citing the cases of individual officials; certain facts point to his wider concern. Leo is not famed for being a great builder, but undoubtedly the major construction of his reign was the church of St Lazaros and its connected monastery, sited on the north-eastern fringes of the palace complex inaugurated by Basil I that included the

⁴³For the details of this episode see *GMC*, 869-870. For the origins of Constantine the Paphlagonian see the chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon and the *Synaxarion of Constantinople: Ps. Sym.*, 713-715; *AASS*, Propylaeum Novembris, 721-724.

⁴⁴On the possibility of sexual relations between women and eunuchs see Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 194. Another example we have already encountered is the alleged affair between Eudokia Ingerina and the master of the augusta's table Niketas Xylinites.

⁴⁵For this Constantine see Downey, 'Constantine the Rhodian'.

⁴⁶*Ps. Sym.*, 713-715, possesses more information than the other chronicles about Constantine, concerning his father, the building of the monastery and his rise to prominence. Constantine's career was stalled after the death of Leo when Alexander came to power, but he returned in 913 when Zoe Karbonopsina asserted her right to be regent for her son, and until Romanos Lekapenos seized power for himself in 919 Constantine was one of the most powerful ministers of the government.

Nea, the Tzykanisterion, the Oikonomion, and Leo's bath-house.⁴⁷ The church seems to have been built around the middle of the reign; it was certainly in existence when the plot of the relatives of Zaoutzes was thwarted in 900⁴⁸, and the *Life of Euthymios* can refer to it as 'new-built' in 901.⁴⁹ Leo even managed to find the very relics both of Lazaros (on Cyprus) and his sister Mary Magdalene (at Ephesus), and had them transported to Constantinople to be housed in this church.⁵⁰ What is interesting to note is that the monastery which was linked with the church was specifically set aside for eunuchs. Such an institution appears rare enough, and when taken in conjunction of what we know of Leo's close links with his eunuch officials it seems to have deeper significance. Leo also issued legislation that directly concerned eunuchs. In Novel 26 in the most sympathetic tones he decreed that eunuchs should be able to adopt children.⁵¹ Justinian had refused eunuchs this right on the grounds that if nature has not granted the faculty to have children then the law cannot communicate this ability, but Leo asserts that it is not nature that has taken this faculty away but the injustice of men, and states that it is not philanthropic to deprive eunuchs of their only chance to become fathers simply because they do not have the physical ability to do so. Thus from the weight of this evidence it is evident that Leo showed marked favour towards eunuchs not only as individuals but also as a group. The obvious question to pose now is why this should be the case.

In the answering of this inquiry we are assisted again by Hopkins's vital study on the role of eunuchs at the Byzantine court, which as we have seen has done much to explain the abundance of them working for the emperor. Most importantly for our study of Leo VI is his definite assertion that 'We should be wary of evaluations of emperors as 'weak', which are based exclusively or mainly on whether eunuchs held power in their reign. For eunuchs flourished under powerful emperors like Valentinian I, even under Theodosius the Great, just as under an idle fop like Theodosius II'. Certainly Leo VI's heavy use of eunuchs does seem to have had some contribution to the verdicts that have been passed upon him; Karlin-Hayter noted the tendency to dismiss Leo 'as a supine and feeble sovereign who left government to a series of deplorable favorites, devoting himself exclusively to wife-trouble and impractical theorizing'.⁵² Runciman's judgement of Leo as an apathetic

⁴⁷See *GMC*, 860, for the construction of the church and the monastery, and see also Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 309. For the Macedonian palace complex see Magdalino, 'Nea'.

⁴⁸*GMC*, 859.

⁴⁹*VE*, 63, 18-20.

⁵⁰See Dolley, 'Translation', but note that his chronology is completely wrong, for he was unaware of the evidence of Arethas's orations, which dates the translation of Lazaros to the early 900s.

⁵¹Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, Novel 26, 100-105.

⁵²Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 20.

statesman springs to mind. It is certainly worth noting that although Leo VI has a much broader interest in eunuchs and a wider selection of them working for him when compared to his father Basil I it can perhaps be argued that the one eunuch that Basil did favour, Baanes, had far greater official authority than Samonas ever did.⁵³ This eunuch attained the dignity of *patrikios*, and held the posts of *praipositos* and *sakellarios*. He represented Basil at the council of 869-870, and also in Constantinople itself when the emperor was on campaign against Tephrike and Germanikia in 878. How should we then explain this apparent discrepancy between Basil and Leo? Perhaps we can start with their differing origins; Basil came of an obscure family in Thrace, and only rose to imperial power through his connection with Michael III, whereas Leo was born into the life of the palace and grew up in the society of eunuchs. Leo's attachment to this group of men may have been heightened due to the fact that he was not the imminent heir to the throne; his brother Constantine may have received more attention from Basil whilst the other sons were thrown on the company of eunuchs. Perhaps the imprisonment of 883-886 was also a formative experience in this respect, for Leo may have had more contact with palace eunuchs during this period than with anyone else. We may certainly suspect that the more Leo was frustrated in his desire for a son and heir the more he sympathised with the plight of eunuchs. Another factor in the difference may be that Basil was more of a military emperor than his successor. Indeed Leo never went on campaign; as observed in the previous chapter the furthest that he got away from Constantinople seems to have been Olympos, Pythia and Nikomedia. Thus Leo's sedentary court-based life-style probably lent itself to the development of an emperor who did rely on his eunuchs more than emperors who were away from the city on campaign; Leo simply had the time and opportunity to develop a special relationship with his eunuchs. It is certainly not an accident that the reigns of those emperors and empresses who did not go on campaign are particularly famed for the role that eunuchs played within them; obvious examples are Arcadius, Theodosius II and Eirene.⁵⁴

Having thus pondered why Leo should have a particular penchant for eunuchs I wish now to return to the analysis of Hopkins concerning the prevalence of eunuchs in the service of the Byzantine emperor; for him one of the key functions of these eunuchs, whether perceived or not, was to curtail the force of the aristocrats.⁵⁵ He comments that 'any exercise of power by non-aristocrats limited

⁵³On Baanes see R. Guillard, 'Contribution à la prosopographie de l'empire byzantin. Les patrices sous les règnes de Basile I^{er} (867-886) et de Léon VI (886-912)', *BZ.* 63 (1970), 300-317, esp. 301, repr. *Titres et fonctions de l'empire byzantin* (London, 1976), XI: 'Les eunuques', 221.

⁵⁴See Guillard, 'Les eunuques'.

⁵⁵Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 188-189.

the power of aristocrats' and that this 'exercise of power by eunuchs limited the power of centrifugal forces in the state'.⁵⁶ His conclusions, though based mainly on a consideration of eunuchs in the early Byzantine empire, have equal relevance for Byzantium of the ninth and tenth centuries, for at this time eunuchs still maintained their significant role in the imperial government, and it is generally agreed that the tenth century was a time when the military aristocrats of Asia Minor did present a particularly dangerous centrifugal threat to the empire, for they were encroaching on the village communities which were so vital for the survival of the empire, and they also began to set their sights on the throne.⁵⁷ The key families that constituted this economic and political threat were based on the eastern fringes of the empire, and are namely the Phokades, Maleinoi, Skleroi, Argyroi, Kourkouas, Tzimiskai and Doukai.⁵⁸ Amongst these families we can note that several were already prominent by the reign of Leo VI, and indeed as Angold has noted this emperor was the first who had to deal with these families that were to cause such problems for the empire after his reign.⁵⁹ Thus I intend now to examine how Leo did interact with these rising families. Are there indications that they were already showing signs of their future threat? And is Leo's apparently excessive use of eunuchs in any way connected with the keeping of these families in check?

Several of these family names will by now be familiar. We have seen that in March 886 John Kourkouas headed a plot to overthrow Basil I, and that in 894-5 Niketas Skleros was despatched on a mission to win the military assistance of the Magyars. In 912 the funeral of Leo VI would be witnessed by Michael Maleinos.⁶⁰ However my study will be devoted to three families who do figure largely in the surviving records for Leo's reign; these are the Phokades, Doukai and Argyroi, and I shall take them in that order. The origins of the Phokades are obscure but it seems that they came to be based in Cappadocia.⁶¹ The key figure of the family in Leo's reign is the first we know of, Nikephoros Phokas, grandfather of the emperor of the same name who reigned from 963 to 969. Nikephoros began his military career under Basil I, and by the end of the reign of this emperor he was on campaign in southern Italy. Leo's *Taktika* does in fact refer to Nikephoros's activities there; when the emperor notes that it is preferable to use incentives when dealing with a

⁵⁶Hopkins, *Conquerors*, 188; 196.

⁵⁷See Cheynet, *Contestations*; R. Morris, 'The Powerful and the Poor in Tenth-Century Byzantium: Law and Reality', *Past and Present*, 73 (1976), 3-27; Toynbee, *Constantine*, 145-176.

⁵⁸Cheyne, *Contestations*, 213; Morris, 'Powerful and Poor', 23.

⁵⁹M. Angold, 'Introduction', *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (Oxford, 1984), 2.

⁶⁰L. Petit, 'Vie de saint Michel Maléinos', *ROC*, series I, 7 (1902), 543-568, esp. 552. 12-17. Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 160, conjectures that the admiral Eustathios, who served under Leo in 895, 902 and 904, was in fact of the Maleinos family, being the grandfather of Michael Maleinos.

⁶¹For this family see Dagron and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, appendix, J.-C. Cheynet, *Les Phocas* (Paris, 1986), 289-315; Cheynet, *Contestations*, 213-214.

besieged people he cites the case of 'our *strategos* Nikephoros' when he was sent against the Lombards by 'our imperialness'.⁶² Dagrón conjectures that this campaign occurred in 885 when 'Basile I règne encore, avec Léon comme empereur associé'.⁶³ Yet surely this is wrong on two counts; not only was Leo VI in fact languishing in prison in 885, but he does explicitly take the credit for sending Nikephoros against the Lombards. Thus the incident should be located at a point after the release of Leo in July 886 and before the rebellion of Agion in 888, for it is clear that Nikephoros was no longer present in Italy then. It seems possible that what accounts for Nikephoros's return from the west was his appointment to the post of domestic of the schools, which he filled after the death of Andrew⁶⁴, who is last heard of at the trial of Photios in 887. When domestic of the schools Nikephoros was active on the eastern frontier, for both Leo's *Taktika* and Nikephoros Phokas's *De Velitatione* refer to a campaign of Nikephoros against the Arabs, apparently when he was holding this post.⁶⁵ When the Arabs launched an assault over the frontier into the Anatolikon theme Nikephoros responded with a counter-offensive against Arab territory. He attacked the areas around Adana and Tarsus and managed to return home unscathed, bearing with him booty and prisoners of war. The advent of the Bulgarian war called for Nikephoros's services closer to Constantinople, and in 895 he led the land forces in the major campaign against Symeon. It may even be that Nikephoros did engage in battle in Bulgaria, for Leo's *Taktika* records a weapon that he devised for use against the Bulgarian cavalry; this was the spike that could be planted in the ground.⁶⁶ After the withdrawal from Bulgaria in 895 Nikephoros's career came to a stop; some chronicles record that he died, asserting that it was this fact that encouraged Symeon to attack the empire again in 896, when a new domestic of schools, Leo Katakalon, was sent out to face the Bulgars.⁶⁷ However the chronicler Theophanes Continuatus has a different story to tell; Nikephoros's removal from office occurred under other circumstances.⁶⁸ It is related that Leo VI and Nikephoros Phokas were on very friendly terms, and Stylianos hoped to benefit from this situation by marrying his daughter to the popular Phokas. However Nikephoros rejected the projected alliance, and in revenge

⁶²PG 107, 896, 15. 38.

⁶³Dagrón and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 166.

⁶⁴GMC, 854.

⁶⁵PG 107, 800, 11. 25; 933, 17. 83; Dagrón and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 112-115. For analysis and dating of the campaign recorded by Leo VI and Nikephoros II Phokas see Dagrón and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 166-169, and Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, 293-295. Cheynet dates the campaign to 886-895, but I would modify this to 887-895, for Andrew seems still to have been alive in 887.

⁶⁶PG 107, 800, 11. 26.

⁶⁷GMC, 855.

⁶⁸TC, 359.

Zaoutzes had charges contrived against him that resulted in his dismissal from office.⁶⁹ Thus it is possible that Nikephoros was disgraced in 895-6 and then died, but the chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus also reports that Nikephoros resumed his career again after his fall, becoming *strategos* of the Thrakesion theme, accomplishing brave and notable deeds in war and setting up many trophies over the Agarenes and other nations, and dying at a good old age.⁷⁰ For Cheynet these added details do not ring true.⁷¹ Whilst he concedes that the story of Phokas's demotion is not unlikely he finds the account of his subsequent career unbelievable; for Nikephoros to become a plain *strategos* after having been domestic of the schools 'serait contraire à toute la tradition administrative byzantine', and surely Leo VI 'qui avait pour lui [Phokas] tant d'estime' would have reappointed him as chief of the army after the defeat at Bulgarophygon in 896. Dagron however rejected the theory originally proposed by Grégoire that Nikephoros died between 894-896 in disgrace, but perhaps he was encouraged in this by the thought that the famed eastern campaign (which Cheynet has dated so persuasively to the time when Phokas was domestic of schools) may have occurred after the Bulgarian war.⁷² One wonders if Theophanes Continuatus was simply confused and is in fact alluding to an earlier stage of Nikephoros's career. But although the final stages of Phokas's life are shrouded in confusion and controversy one fact is undeniable; the emperor's relationship with this soldier was by and large excellent, a point that Cheynet has already highlighted, observing that 'La vraie force de Nicéphore fut l'amitié indéfectible de Léon VI qui le considérait comme «son général»'.⁷³ Friendship between the emperor and his general is certainly the overwhelming impression created by the testimony of our sources. We have seen that Theophanes Continuatus records their good relationship, and the fact that Leo VI himself in his *Taktika* praises the achievements of Nikephoros in all the theatres of war where he was active appears to corroborate this assertion. That Leo very rarely refers to historical incidents in his military manual makes these instances all the more striking; indeed they give the *Taktika* the air of being a panegyric on Nikephoros Phokas. Given this evident amity between the two men Cheynet was even led to conjecture that the relationship dated to Leo's youth, and that Phokas was one of his allies during the events that led to his imprisonment in 883.⁷⁴ Further evidence of the friendship is conveyed by what we know of Leo's relationship with the sons of Nikephoros;

⁶⁹I have wondered elsewhere if the real reason for Phokas's fall was in fact the withdrawal from Bulgaria.

⁷⁰TC, 359-360.

⁷¹Cheynt, *Les Phocas*, 295.

⁷²Dagron and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 168-169. For Grégoire's view see his 'Carrière'.

⁷³Cheynt, *Les Phocas*, 296.

⁷⁴Cheynt, *Les Phocas*, 296.

Bardas Phokas is recorded as being a particularly devoted friend of Leo VI, whilst it seems that Leo Phokas attained the post of *strategos* of the Anatolikon theme under the emperor.⁷⁵ Indeed it is apparent that both Leo VI and Constantine VII relied on the military talents of the Phokades 'sans crainte'⁷⁶, and in general the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty who did not command their armies in person had 'une prédilection évidente pour les Phocas', and the Phokades themselves showed a 'remarquable fidélité' to the dynasty.⁷⁷ As Dagron observed it was Leo VI who was the initiator of this special relationship with the family; quite simply he was the 'grand protecteur' of the Phokades.⁷⁸ Thus as far as this family of the military aristocracy goes Leo VI had close personal ties of friendship with them, which were not affected by the supposed fall of Nikephoros in 895-6. However when we turn to the other two families, the Doukai and the Argyroi, there certainly appears to be evidence of tension between them and the emperor, and the issue of the role of eunuchs in limiting the power of the aristocrats comes to the fore.

Before considering the case for the conflict between these two families and Leo VI I will sketch in what we know of the origins of the Doukai and the Argyroi, and the careers of the family members under Leo.⁷⁹ The family name of Doukas derived from the military rank of *dux*, and appeared for the first time in c. 855.⁸⁰ It was suspected that the family was of Armenian extraction but Polemis has insisted that they are Greek.⁸¹ It is also important to note that the famed Doukas family that appeared under Basil II and acquired an imperial role in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is not to be identified with that which was prominent at the beginning of the tenth century, though the later Doukai did connect themselves with the earlier family.⁸² The family in Leo's reign were active in the military sphere on the eastern frontier, but it is unclear if they were based on property in this region⁸³ or indeed if they had any extensive estates at all.⁸⁴ Like the earliest known Doukas the first Argyros appears in the mid-ninth century during the reign of Michael III, the name meaning 'celui qui brille, sous-entendu comme l'argent, par sa beauté, sa noblesse ou quelque autre trait de race ou de valeur personnelle'; however which nuance

⁷⁵For Nikephoros's sons and Bardas's friendship with Leo VI see *TC*, 360; for the conjecture that Leo Phokas was *strategos* of the Anatolikon theme in c. 900 see Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, 297; 313.

⁷⁶Cheyne, *Contestations*, 264.

⁷⁷Cheyne, *Contestations*, 321.

⁷⁸Dagron and Mihaescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, 9; 175.

⁷⁹For the Doukai see D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai. A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968); Cheynet, *Contestations*, 216-217. For the Argyroi see J.-F. Vannier, *Familles byzantines: les Argyroi (IX^e-XII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1975); Cheynet, *Contestations*, 215-216.

⁸⁰Polemis, *Doukai*, 4.

⁸¹Polemis, *Doukai*, 5-6.

⁸²Polemis, *Doukai*, 6; Cheynet, *Contestations*, 216-217.

⁸³Cheyne, *Contestations*, 216

⁸⁴Polemis, *Doukai*, 6-7.

made it applicable to the family is unknown.⁸⁵ Unlike the Doukai the Argyroi can be definitely traced to their place of origin, the region of Cappadocia.⁸⁶ Once again it cannot be proved that they possessed great estates, though the fact that the first known member of the family, Leo⁸⁷, built a monastery in Charsianon dedicated to St Elizabeth perhaps indicates that they did have significant property in this area.⁸⁸

The two major members of these families who served Leo VI were Andronikos Doukas and Eustathios Argyros, both coming to prominence in the first decade of the tenth century. Eustathios receives a particularly glowing press on his debut in the chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus, whose pronounced favouritism for Nikephoros Phokas has already been witnessed.⁸⁹ The chronicler reports that the emperor had as *hypostrategos* of the Anatolikon theme Eustathios the *patrikios*, who was of the excellent and good family of the Argyroi, and that he campaigned against the Ishmaelites, who were terrified even at the mention of his name. Eustathios is even credited with several specific virtues, those of strength, might, intelligence, courage, sensibility, temperance and justice, the last four being those that the actions of an emperor were categorised by. Andronikos Doukas is mentioned in conjunction with Eustathios but receives no such fulsome description, though it is evident that this chronicler is equally sympathetic to this general. Of the actual military endeavours of Andronikos we know little; it is from Tabari that we learn of his successful assault on Maras in November 904.⁹⁰ The Byzantine sources do not even indicate what post Andronikos held; again it is the Arabs who suggest that he was in fact domestic of the schools by 906.⁹¹ Thus ironically Andronikos was famous amongst the Byzantines not for the details of his military career but because he defected to Bagdad. The chronicles tell us that Samonas nursed a grudge against Andronikos⁹², apparently ever since the eunuch had been stalled in his attempt to flee the Byzantine empire and return to his country of origin.⁹³ Apparently in 904 Samonas made an excuse to go out to visit his monastery of Speira in Damatry, but taking money and horses he began his attempt to return to his native land. In the course of his journey he nobbled the horses of the public post by ham-stringing them in order to delay any pursuit. Leo VI did despatch Basil Kamateros the *hetaireiarch* and George Krenites after Samonas, but it was the *drungarios*

⁸⁵Vannier, *Argyroi*, 15.

⁸⁶Vannier, *Argyroi*, 16.

⁸⁷For this Leo Argyros see Vannier, *Argyroi*, 19-20.

⁸⁸Vannier, *Argyroi*, 16.

⁸⁹*TC*, 368-369.

⁹⁰Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 181.

⁹¹Polemis, *Doukai*, 20-21; Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, 312.

⁹²*GMC*, 866.

⁹³For this episode see *GMC*, 863-864.

Nikephoros Kaminas who was responsible for stopping the eunuch from crossing over the Halys.⁹⁴ Having failed to win the collusion of Nikephoros with bribes Samonas sought refuge at a nearby holy site, that of the cross at Siricha, which he maintained had been the object of his journey all along.⁹⁵ It was the son of Andronikos, Constantine Doukas, who actually apprehended Samonas at Siricha and brought him back to Constantinople, where the flight was to be the subject of an inquiry before the senate. However the emperor, due to his attachment to the eunuch, prevailed upon Constantine Doukas to maintain before the inquiry that Samonas had not been fleeing to Syria, but had indeed had Siricha as his goal. However when Constantine was asked to give his response on the oath 'by God and the emperor's head' he could not lie, thus dismaying both Samonas and Leo. Samonas was duly confined to the house of Bardas for fourth months, before returning to the society and favour of the emperor. Thus Samonas's grudge was born, and in 906⁹⁶ his plans to undermine Andronikos and his family began to take effect. The chronicles relate that a joint land and sea force was prepared against an Arab attack, to be headed by Himerios and Andronikos Doukas.⁹⁷ When the fleet was gathered Andronikos received orders to board ship, but due to the machinations of Samonas he was very reluctant to do so; the eunuch had prevailed upon a friend of Andronikos to write to him with the warning that Himerios had been ordered by the emperor on the advice of Samonas to seize and blind Andronikos when he went aboard. When Himerios continually urged Andronikos to come onto his ship he feared the worst and refused to comply, leaving the *drugarios* of the fleet to face the enemy alone. Yet Himerios did manage to secure a victory on 6 October, and when Andronikos heard this in despair he fled to the fortress of Kabala with his relatives and slaves, and occupied it. It seems that the Doukas entourage remained here for six months⁹⁸, during which time Leo sent out Gregory Iberitzes the domestic of schools (and an in-law of the Doukai) to win Andronikos over.⁹⁹ However Andronikos, hearing that the patriarch Nikolaos had been dethroned and exiled, sought safe passage from the Arabs who came to his aid and then escorted

⁹⁴The chronicles disagree over the name of the *drugarios*; he is called Kallonas by *TC*, 369, and Kamitzes by *Ps. Sym.*, 708.

⁹⁵On the shrine of the cross at Siricha see H. Ahrweiler, 'Sur la localisation du couvent du Timios Stauros de Syricha', *Geographica byzantina*, ed. H. Ahrweiler (Paris, 1981), 9-15.

⁹⁶The question of the date of Andronikos's flight and Himerios's naval victory have been much debated, but I agree with Polemis, *Doukai*, 17-18, who follows the chronology indicated by the Byzantine and Arab chronicles, not that of the *Life of Euthymios*. See also Grumel, 'Notes chronologiques'; M. Canard, 'Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques arabo-byzantines au X^e siècle', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 13 (1949-50), 51-69, esp. 60-61, n. 4.

⁹⁷For the chronicle's account of Andronikos's desertion and Constantine's return see *GMC*, 866-868; *TC*, 371-374.

⁹⁸*VE*, 69, 5-7.

⁹⁹Polemis, *Doukai*, 24, states that Gregory Iberitzes was the father-in-law of Constantine Doukas.

him over the border, first to Tarsus and then on to Bagdad.¹⁰⁰ But Samonas did not rest yet, for the emperor wanted to get Andronikos back, and hit upon the idea of sending him a chrysobull concealed in a candle which guaranteed him a safe return to Byzantine society; the eunuch scuppered this plan by making sure that the document fell into the wrong hands, those of the vizier. Andronikos found himself imprisoned in Bagdad, and was forced to convert to Islam. It seems that he died not much later.¹⁰¹ Turning now to Constantine Doukas it is apparent that we have already touched upon much of his career. He first appears as the escort of Samonas from Siricha to Constantinople, and thus it has been conjectured that he must have had a post in a region that encompassed Siricha in 904.¹⁰² For telling the truth before the senatorial inquiry about Samonas's flight Constantine earned the anger of the emperor, and we next find him involved in his father's occupation of Kabala and desertion to the Arabs. However unlike Andronikos Constantine managed to escape from Bagdad and return to Constantinople in c. 908 where he was enthusiastically received by Leo VI in the Chrysotriklinos, though he also received a dire warning against trying to become emperor himself.¹⁰³ That the emperor did favour Constantine is confirmed by the restart of his military career, for he became *strategos* of Charsianon in c. 909¹⁰⁴, and by 913 he was domestic of the schools.¹⁰⁵ It was in 913 that Constantine did endeavour to take imperial power on the death of Alexander I but the regency council thwarted his attempt, and Constantine and his allies were brutally crushed, leading to the extinguishing of the fortunes and very existence of the Doukas family.¹⁰⁶

Turning now to the Argyroi the main member of the family who played a role in the reign of Leo VI, as we have seen, was Eustathios Argyros. Before we look more closely at his career it is vital to assert that the Eustathios whom we have encountered as *drugarios* of the fleet should not be confused with Eustathios Argyros.¹⁰⁷ The latter first figures under Leo in the first decade of the tenth century, though his career may date back to 866, for he might have been the protostrator of the caesar Bardas in that year.¹⁰⁸ Under Leo VI it is clear that the *patrikios* Eustathios Argyros had a military role in the east, winning victories over the Arabs.

¹⁰⁰For Andronikos and the Arabs see Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 187-191.

¹⁰¹Polemis, *Doukai*, 19. It seems that Constantine Doukas only returned to Constantinople after his father's death, and Constantine was back in the city c. 908.

¹⁰²Ahrweiler, 'Timios Stauros', 11, n. 1. Polemis deduced nothing about Constantine's career from his involvement in the apprehension of Samonas.

¹⁰³For the date of Constantine's return see Polemis, *Doukai*, 22.

¹⁰⁴*DAI*, I, 240. 152-153. For the dating see *DAI*, II, 191.

¹⁰⁵*GMC*, 874. See Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, 312.

¹⁰⁶For the events of 913 see Polemis, *Doukai*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁷See Vannier, *Argyroi*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁸Vannier, *Argyroi*, 21.

Theophanes Continuatus identified his post as that of *hypostrategos* of the Anatolics, which Vannier interpreted as meaning that he was probably the *strategos* of the Anatolikon theme.¹⁰⁹ It seems that whilst in this post Eustathios fell into disgrace and was exiled, for Constantine VII relates that he was recalled and made *strategos* of Charsianon¹¹⁰; his fall has thus been linked with the episode of the rebellion and flight of Andronikos Doukas, and his restoration has been dated to 907-908.¹¹¹ Whilst he was *strategos* of Charsianon Eustathios had dealings with certain Armenian refugees at Melitene, namely Melias, the trio of brothers Baasakios, Krikorikios and Pazounes, and also a certain Ismael.¹¹² These refugees appealed through the intermediary of Eustathios and also directly to the emperor to be allowed safe-passage into the Byzantine empire, where they would serve the emperor along the eastern frontier. Eustathios's stint as the *strategos* of Charsianon does not seem to have been of long duration, for he was soon replaced in c. 909 by the returned Constantine Doukas, whilst he took a post in Constantinople, that of *drungarios* of the watch, which involved ensuring the security of the emperor.¹¹³ However in c. 910¹¹⁴ Eustathios came under suspicion and the emperor ordered him to return to his home in Charsianon; on the road to Aran he took poison from 'his man' and died; he was buried at Spynin on the summit of Aran.¹¹⁵ Like Nikephoros Phokas and Andronikos Doukas Eustathios Argyros had sons who also served Leo VI. These were Leo and Pothos who were *manlabites* (bodyguards) of the emperor; they were responsible for exhuming their father and burying him in their ancestral monastery of St Elizabeth.¹¹⁶ In 911 it seems that Leo Argyros became *strategos* of the theme of Sebasteia, acquiring the dignity of *protospatharios*.¹¹⁷ His career continued under Zoe Karbonopsina and also Romanos Lekapenos, and it seems that he became domestic of the schools in 922 for a brief period.¹¹⁸ Pothos's career also continued; he was domestic of the schools in 921 and in 958 he seems to have fought the Hungarians whilst holding the office of domestic of the excubitors.¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁹Vannier, *Argyroi*, 22. See also Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, 313. However Ahrweiler, 'Timios Stauros', 11, n. 1, seems to suggest that Eustathios was *strategos* of Charsianon from at least 904.

¹¹⁰*DAI*, I, 238. 136-138.

¹¹¹Vannier, *Argyroi*, 22; *DAI*, II, 191.

¹¹²See *DAI*, I, 238. 136-146.

¹¹³Vannier, *Argyroi*, 23. Vannier asserts that Eustathios also became *magistros*, but this detail is only recorded by the later chronicler Skylitzes: see *Scylitzae*, 188. 24.

¹¹⁴This date was proposed by Vannier, *Argyroi*, 25.

¹¹⁵Of the tenth-century chroniclers only *TC*, 374, has these details. Vannier, *Argyroi*, 23, n. 9, notes that Aran and Spynin are on the route which goes from Melitene to Charsianon via Sebasteia.

¹¹⁶*TC*, 374.

¹¹⁷Vannier, *Argyroi*, 25.

¹¹⁸Vannier, *Argyroi*, 25-26.

¹¹⁹Vannier, *Argyroi*, 27-28.

Having thus set out what we know of the careers of the Doukai and Argyroi under Leo VI it is time now to turn to the interpretation of these many complex details by Jenkins, who argues that these two families formed a plot to remove Leo VI from power, and were only thwarted by the skills of the emperor's chief intelligence agent, the eunuch Samonas.¹²⁰ I will outline here the details of the plot as visualised by Jenkins. His starting point was a consideration of the flight of Samonas in 904, for which there seemed to be no good reason; he also found the consequent lenient attitude of Leo towards the recaptured Samonas 'inexplicable'.¹²¹ Jenkins provided an explanation in devising the theory of the plot centred on Andronikos and Eustathios. He baldly asserts that 'Andronicus was to have the crown. Saracen naval support, indispensable for the capture of Constantinople, was to be purchased by maritime concessions abandoned to the Arabs by the treachery of the lord admiral Eustace'.¹²² Also involved in this conspiracy was the patriarch Nikolaos. Jenkins begins to trace the plot from 902, when Eustathios was accused of treachery for letting Tauromenion fall to the African Arabs; it was the influence of Nikolaos over Leo that ensured that Eustathios was not executed, but only forced to take up a monastic life in the Studite monastery.¹²³ The next step in the plot was the attempted assassination of the emperor in the church of St Mokios on the feast of Mid-Pentecost 903, which the *Life of Euthymios* asserts that Leo came to suspect Nikolaos of.¹²⁴ In addition, the Arab navy was allowed to make further inroads, taking Lemnos in the same year. This takes us up to the moment of Samonas's flight in the spring of 904. Jenkins is of the opinion that this eunuch's functions were 'closely connected with the work of the secret police'¹²⁵, and that his attempt to escape to the Arab empire was a sham, a cover for his real purpose to acquire information about the details of the collusion between the Arabs and the military aristocracy.¹²⁶ However Samonas's mission failed, thanks to the intervention of the *drugarios* Nikephoros who stopped him crossing the Halys. And due to Constantine Doukas's testimony that Samonas had indeed been fleeing the country the emperor, who was fully in the know of the eunuch's real intentions, had to punish him. However the mildness and short duration of the penalty reveal Leo's awareness of the truth. It was after the failure of the mission that the conspirators made their major move. The Arab allies advanced on Constantinople, and the admiral Eustathios offered no resistance. He was

¹²⁰Jenkins, 'Flight'.

¹²¹Jenkins, 'Flight', 218.

¹²²Jenkins, 'Flight', 224.

¹²³See *GMC*, 860-861.

¹²⁴*VE*, 75, 2-6.

¹²⁵Jenkins, 'Flight', 222.

¹²⁶Jenkins, 'Flight', 226-227.

removed from his command and demoted to the post of *drungarios* of the watch. Then Himerios was sent out against the enemy, and Andronikos Doukas was meant to join forces with him, but was in a dilemma; how could he make his move on Constantinople when there now existed a Byzantine admiral of 'unquestioned loyalty to the crown'?¹²⁷ Andronikos's course of action was decided upon when he received the letter that Samonas was responsible for. He dashed away and took refuge in Kabala, and then defected over the border in 905. Thus the immediate threat of the conspiracy was overcome, but its members still remained to be dealt with. Thus a secret letter of conciliation was sent to Andronikos, and was deliberately allowed to fall into the wrong hands, and thus discredited Doukas at Bagdad; Eustathios was allowed to return from exile and become *strategos* of Charsianon, but when he made a break for Melitene he was poisoned by agents of Samonas; and finally the patriarch Nikolaos was deposed.¹²⁸ Thus it was that Samonas 'pitted his wits against the most powerful forces in the empire...and...beat them all'.¹²⁹

Thus here we have a blatant case of a eunuch limiting the power of aristocrats, but I doubt if Hopkins ever visualised such a direct practice of his theory. However it should be clear even from the above summary of Jenkins's analysis of events between the emperor and certain military officials that his argument is flawed, and indeed Polemis, Karlin-Hayter and Rydén have already rejected his interpretation; we shall return to Polemis's objections below, and it is sufficient for the moment to note that Karlin-Hayter remarks that Jenkins's theory is 'too bold' for her and does not seem to be 'sufficiently guaranteed by the sources', whilst Rydén states that it 'rests on too many assumptions to be convincing'.¹³⁰ Ignoring the fact that it does seem to owe more to imagination than to the sources we can note several points of contention. Firstly Jenkins has identified the admiral Eustathios with Eustathios Argyros. Then he has equated Himerios's pursuit of the Arabs in 904 with his victory of 906, thus also placing Andronikos's flight to Kabala in 904. This means that Jenkins has firmly ignored the statement in the *Life of Euthymios* that Andronikos remained for six months at Kabala, even when he is so ready to accept its evidence concerning Nikolaos's involvement in the conspiracy. Indeed Nikolaos's role in both the trial of the admiral Eustathios and the flight of Andronikos can be understood in much simpler terms; he was not a co-conspirator of these men but a source of appeal for them since he was the head of the Byzantine church, a church that 'had a different philosophy of punishment' than

¹²⁷Jenkins, 'Flight', 229.

¹²⁸For the fates of the conspirators see Jenkins, 'Flight', 232-233.

¹²⁹Jenkins, 'Flight', 233.

¹³⁰Polemis, *Doukai*, 6-7; Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 177; Rydén, 'Portrait', 102, n. 12.

the secular authorities, that is it took a more lenient line.¹³¹ When Nikolaos persuaded the emperor not to execute Eustathios in 902 he was merely fulfilling his ecclesiastical duty, and no doubt in 906-907 Nikolaos was in correspondence with Andronikos, but not as a conspirator, but rather as a saviour guaranteeing him protection if he was brought to trial before the emperor.¹³² Regarding the St Mokios day attack on Leo it seems that there is no good reason to link it to the major conspiracy as visualised by Jenkins. Not only was Alexander the more likely instigator of the attack, but the attempted assassin was indeed apprehended, and revealed nothing of any other conspirators.¹³³ What we have in 903 seems to be a case of an individual with a grievance against the emperor, but as to the explanation of his grievance we can never know. A further point against Jenkins is that Leo's attitude to Samonas after he had attempted to return to his own country is not 'inexplicable' at all, but in fact parallels the emperor's attitude in similar cases; we are always encountering figures whom Leo has punished but then quickly restored to favour, figures such as Photios, Theodore Santabarenos, Leo Katakalon, Nikephoros Phokas, Euthymios, Stylianos Zaoutzes, the admiral Eustathios, Eustathios Argyros and the eunuch Constantine. It is even indicated that the emperor would have been glad to have had Andronikos Doukas return to the fold. Thus the instance of Samonas is not unique, or even peculiar; judging by Leo's record a house arrest of four months did constitute punishment. As for the perception that Samonas was a key figure in Leo's secret police this to my mind has been too readily swallowed, based mainly as it is on an episode in a fictional saint's life of the mid-tenth century which is hardly concerned with the Samonas of historical reality, but just wanted a villain to oppose to its hero. Yet whilst I would strongly reject Jenkins's conspiracy theory his interpretation of events does raise several serious questions that do need to be addressed; I will now consider these issues.

Firstly there is the question of why Samonas fled; why would this eunuch who had sprung to prominence, wealth and the favour of the emperor want to abandon such a life? Certainly it can appear to be a puzzle; Karlin-Hayter calls it a 'strange business' and Jenkins noted that 'there is no suggestion of motive to induce the *cubicularius* to desert'.¹³⁴ Yet the alleged motive is quite clear; Samonas simply wanted to return to his own people, and I believe that this is the truth of the matter. We must never forget that Samonas was an Arab, and that he still had family in his native country. His father seems to have lived in Melitene, and was obviously a man

¹³¹See R. J. Macrides, 'Killing, Asylum and the Law in Byzantium', *Speculum*, 63 (1988), 509-538, esp. 509.

¹³²Polemis, *Doukai*, 20, conjectures that 'Andronikos was relying upon the mediation of the patriarch to obtain a pardon'.

¹³³For the attack see *GMC*, 861; *VE*, 67, 3-14.

¹³⁴Karlin-Hayter, *VE, Commentary*, 177; Jenkins, 'Flight', 218.

of some significance, for he came on embassy to Leo VI in 908, when Samonas is alleged to have told him that he would come home to him.¹³⁵ It should also not be forgotten that it was only in 900 that Samonas began his association with the emperor, for before that he had worked as a simple servant in the house of Stylianos Zaoutzes. It was his new life that first gave him the opportunity to escape. One also wonders if the fact that the flight probably occurred in the same year as the advance of Leo on Constantinople and subsequent sacking of Thessalonica has any significance; Samonas may have thought it meet to desert either because he feared that he might be had up by the Arabs as a collaborator, or because there was anti-Arab sentiment at court.

Turning now to matters more directly connected with the military aristocrats we need to consider the evidence for their conflict with the emperor more deeply. How significant are the indications of their opposition? Having denied any connection between an aristocratic plot and the fall of Tauromenion in 902, the attack in the church of St Mokios in 903, and the naval campaign of Leo the Tripolite in 904 (and the other naval incursions of the Arabs) we thus come to the case of the non-co-operation and flight of Andronikos Doukas in 906. Most Byzantinists who have written about the incident have considered that it pointed to a significant plot against the emperor.¹³⁶ Yet what is the evidence for reaching this conclusion? We can easily discount the indications in the *Life of Euthymios* that Andronikos had imperial ambitions, for that text would do anything to blacken the patriarch Nikolaos. In reality, as only Polemis has pointed out, the actions of Andronikos tell a different story.¹³⁷ Polemis states that 'the purely defensive character of his [Andronikos] moves was obvious and there appears to be no trace of any attempt aiming at the throne', and he believes that the machinations of Samonas do lie at the root of the flight to Kabala.¹³⁸ Kabala itself was hardly a base from which to launch a bid on the throne, and Andronikos does not seem to have had a significant number of allies. Polemis notes that 'an ambitious rebel with a defined objective...would undoubtedly have turned elsewhere instead of wasting time by remaining inactive in a remote fortress in Anatolia'.¹³⁹ As for the defection over the border, that 'must be seen simply as the desperate move of a betrayed general with no carefully laid plans or wide support'.¹⁴⁰ Thus the events of 906-907 have been

¹³⁵*GMC*, 868.

¹³⁶For instance Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1, 189; Canard, 'Deux épisodes', 56-57; Jenkins, 'Flight'; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Revolt of Andronicus Ducas', *BSI*, 27 (1966), 23-25. esp. 25. repr. *Studies in*, VI.

¹³⁷See Polemis, *Doukai*, 18-20.

¹³⁸Polemis, *Doukai*, 19.

¹³⁹Polemis, *Doukai*, 19-20.

¹⁴⁰Polemis, *Doukai*, 20.

interpreted to have a meaning that the evidence does not bear out. It was indeed the revenge of Samonas that was the crucial factor, not that Andronikos was plotting against the emperor.¹⁴¹ (Could it be that a Doukas had been responsible for the capture and castration of Samonas in the first place?). Indeed as late as winter 904 Andronikos had still been campaigning on the eastern frontier and winning victories against the Arabs, a fact that totally destroys Jenkins's belief that Andronikos fled in 904. Yet perhaps Polemis does not address sufficiently the fact that Andronikos was indeed scared to go on board ship with Himerios; why should this be so? Was there some pre-existing tension between the general and the emperor that would make such a scenario likely? Again we come to the figure of Samonas. It was known that the emperor had been angry with Constantine Doukas for stating the truth about the eunuch's flight, and perhaps Andronikos did indeed think it likely that Samonas could have used his influence with the emperor to wreak his vengeance on the head of the Doukas family. Ultimately Andronikos's flight is a symptom of the fact that there was tension between the various officials of the emperor, and not an act that bespeaks rebellion. Indeed Andronikos may not have feared the influence of Samonas alone, but also that of Himerios. The factor of rivalry for the friendship of the emperor does not seem to have been fully appreciated.¹⁴² Indeed we should remember that what caused Andronikos to take refuge at Kabala was the news that Himerios had won a victory after all. Doukas was dismayed at having let another individual reap the rewards of military success, as well as fearing the repercussions of having disobeyed the orders of the emperor. He was to seek the aid of the patriarch as his defender before the emperor, but Nikolaos fell and Andronikos took to flight over the border. Yet we should not only bear in mind the actions of Andronikos, but those of the emperor too. His attitude towards Doukas does not indicate that he believed him to be a traitor. Leo's desire to be reconciled with Andronikos is well attested, and presumably the fact that an in-law, Gregory Iberitzes, was sent out to Kabala suggests that this was a measure designed to facilitate Andronikos's return to the fold; however the factor of the Arabs made matters turn out differently. Andronikos's defection complicated the problem, for now he could present a real threat to the Byzantine empire, just as Leo the Tripolite and Damianos did. One does wonder if the secret message to Doukas really was meant to undermine his position with the Arabs as Jenkins argued; certainly in his *Taktika* Leo reveals how one can discredit deserters by sending letters to them urging them to some treachery, for they will make themselves suspect, either by

¹⁴¹A comparable case is that of Tatzaios who deserted to the Arabs in 782 because of the poor relationship between him and the eunuch Staurakios, a favourite of the empress Eirene: see *Theophanis*, I, 456

¹⁴²Cheynet, *Contestations*, 322, within the context of the problems of the tenth century particularly stresses the factor of rivalry between different families.

concealing the letters from those to whom they have deserted or by showing them to them.¹⁴³ As for the case of Constantine Doukas's play for power in 913, although this lies beyond Leo's reign, it is worth noting that it too does not bespeak any great longing among the Doukai for the throne, for it too arose out of a very particular set of circumstances; essentially it was initiated not by Doukas himself but by the patriarch Nikolaos, who called for Constantine but then rejected him when he discovered he had been left as one of the regents by Alexander. As for Leo's prophetic warning to Constantine in 908, this does not indicate that the Doukai did want to take the throne during this emperor's reign, but merely shows that the chroniclers were aware of Constantine's ultimate fate in 913. Thus I believe that the examination of the incidents of tension between the Doukai and the throne has only been properly made by Polemis, and he is quite correct to sever the connection of the events of 906-907 and 913 with 'those frequent tenth-century challenges to imperial authority which culminated in the far more serious revolts of Skleros and Phokas during the first years of Basileios II'.¹⁴⁴ Indeed as Cheynet has pointed out it was the key event of the assassination of Nikephoros II Phokas in 969 that inaugurated the severe struggles for imperial power.¹⁴⁵ Instead of highlighting the problems that existed between the Doukai and Leo VI we should be concentrating on their evident friendship, as on the model of the emperor's relationship with Nikephoros Phokas. Both Andronikos and his son Constantine, as well as their in-law Gregory, rose to high office under Leo, all perhaps holding the post of domestic of the schools. It was these men who played a key part in the struggle to extend and maintain the eastern frontier. That Leo came into conflict with Andronikos was essentially an historical accident. The emperor's evident attachment to Andronikos should be clear from his attempts to secure his general's return; Leo even wrote a poem on Andronikos's desertion, just as he had done on that lamentable occasion of the fall of Thessalonica.¹⁴⁶ And although Andronikos did not return from Bagdad his son Constantine did, much to the delight of the emperor, who set him back on the path of his career. Having thus stressed that relations between Leo VI and the Doukai were essentially good can the same be argued for the Argyroi? Certainly Eustathios Argyros did hold high office, but there are indications again of tension. It seems that Eustathios suffered two disgraces, for he was removed from his office of *hypostrategos* of the Anatolikon theme, and later from that of *drungarios* of the watch. The first fall has been linked with Andronikos's desertion of 906-907, but there is no evidence to support such an interpretation. The reason for his second

¹⁴³PG 107, 1021, 20. 29.

¹⁴⁴Polemis, *Doukai*, 6.

¹⁴⁵Cheyne, *Contestations*, 328.

¹⁴⁶Maas, 'Literarisches'.

disgrace is also open to conjecture, and Vannier has tentatively connected it with the fall of Baasakios the *kleisouriarach* of Larissa, who was accused of treachery and exiled.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps we should bear in mind the office that Eustathios was holding at the time of his second fall, for it was specifically concerned with the security of the emperor; maybe he fell because he had not been sufficiently efficient at his job, as in the case of John in c. 896. As for the poisoning of Eustathios there is no strong indication that it was carried out at the will of the emperor or Samonas; indeed the impression created is rather that Eustathios committed suicide. Despite these indications of a turbulent career there are again factors that point to good relations between Leo VI and the Argyroi. Eustathios did hold several high offices, and notably his sons Leo and Pothos continued their careers under the emperor, in evident favour. They were even allowed to rebury their father in their family monastery. Thus a case can be made that all three families, the Phokades, Doukai and Argyroi, had intimate and friendly relations with Leo VI.

So what can we conclude from this consideration of Leo's relationship with his eunuchs and certain generals? It is certainly clear that friendship with both groups at the same time was not impossible, it was not mutually exclusive; Samonas may have held a grudge against the Doukai, but that was for personal reasons. Also it is evident that as far as these two elements in the senatorial order are concerned the emperor did indeed have a special relationship with them, and both groups are a prominent feature of the reign. Leo depended on his eunuchs as he spent most of his life within Constantinople, and thus the generals were also crucial, for he relied on them to fight his battles. Indeed such a dichotomy as established by Leo VI remained good until the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas, and Cheynet notes that the decision of Basil II to return to the practice of the emperor commanding in person prompted certain aristocrats of Asia Minor to rebel.¹⁴⁸ Thus Leo VI was responsible for the attaining of a *status quo*; the emperor remained at the centre of power in Constantinople where he inevitably came to develop closer relations with his palace staff, whilst he also maintained good relations with his generals. Thus essentially the marked friendship that Leo possessed with both groups was symptomatic of his style of emperorship, a style that was to last until the advent of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas.

¹⁴⁷Vannier, *Argyroi*, 23

¹⁴⁸Cheyne, *Contestations*, 331.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ALEXANDER

Amongst Byzantine emperors the figure of Alexander I (the brother of Leo VI) is notorious, and he has been reviled by Byzantines and Byzantinists alike. In fact the account of his reign as supplied by the chroniclers has been taken on board by historians¹, and Jenkins observed that 'Alexander has indeed a strong claim to being regarded as the worst man and the worst emperor ever to sit on the Byzantine throne'.² However Karlin-Hayter was not content to let such a negative image remain without investigation, and produced a study on Alexander's short reign and reputation, accounting for some of the vociferous hatred against him.³ Yet in her study Karlin-Hayter deliberately omitted any investigation of the life of Alexander before he became emperor in his own right in May 912.⁴ Thus it is my intention in this chapter to fill this very void, concentrating particularly on the relationship between Alexander and Leo, and the role that Alexander played during his brother's rule.

Alexander was the youngest son of Basil I and Eudokia Ingerina.⁵ He was born on 23 November, and Adontz has argued that the year was 870, but since he was basing this conclusion on the notoriously suspect dating of Pseudo-Symeon we should be wary of accepting it.⁶ However following Jenkins's theory that the chronicles for the reigns of Basil I to Alexander I are chronologically accurate we can follow his deduction that Alexander was born in either 869 or 870.⁷ The date of Alexander's coronation is not recorded, but it seems likely that he acquired an imperial role on the death of his eldest brother Constantine in 879.⁸ His name appears with that of Basil and Leo in the heading

¹See Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 586.

²Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 209.

³Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name'.

⁴Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 586.

⁵This was finally proved beyond doubt by Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 100.

⁶Adontz, 'Portée', 504-506.

⁷Jenkins, 'Chronological Accuracy', 98.

⁸This is certainly the assumption of Byzantinists such as Vogt, *Basile*, 61, and Ostrogorsky, *State*, 233. However W. Fischer, 'Zu "Leo und Alexander als Mitkaiser von Byzanz"', *BZ*, 5 (1896), 137-139, esp. 138, wondered if all three sons Constantine, Leo and Alexander could have been co-emperors together with their father, inspired to this conjecture by a papal letter of summer 879 that only refers to Constantine and Alexander as co-emperors. Further D. M. Metcalf, 'Basil, Constantine, and Alexander. An Enigmatic Byzantine Follis of the Ninth Century', *Situla: Razprave Narodnega Muzeja Ljubljani*, 14-15 (1974), 269-273, notes the existence of a coin where Basil is indicated as having Alexander as co-emperor with Constantine, and thus muses that Alexander was crowned before the death of Constantine, perhaps in a period when Leo was in disgrace. However both the letter and the coin are problematic, so it

of the *Eisagoge*, and he and Leo are depicted and described as *despotes* in the illustrated manuscript of the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, which dates to the beginning of the 880s.⁹ He also appears with his father and Leo on coins.¹⁰ Certainly when Basil died in 886 he left Leo and Alexander as co-emperors.¹¹ However during the period 886-912 it is evident that Leo and Alexander were not equal partners in power; we find the elder Leo governing the empire, whilst Alexander appears merely as an ineffective (albeit imperial) figure.¹² Thus the question arises, did this situation occur because that was the way things worked in Byzantium, or had in fact Leo denied Alexander his right to share in the running of the empire? Both Vogt and Karlin-Hayter indicate that Leo was blocking Alexander on purpose. Vogt appealed to the evidence of Basil's *First Parainesis*; he found it odd that this text was only addressed to Leo as heir, although Basil left the empire to both Leo and Alexander, and thus concluded that Leo had written the *Parainesis* himself to claim sole imperial authority.¹³ Karlin-Hayter simply put it down to the fact that Leo was 'extremely autocratic'.¹⁴ The chroniclers themselves relate that Leo kept his brother well away from the tasks of an emperor because he was suspicious of him¹⁵, and it is certainly well known that there was a history of tension between the two brothers (which will be examined below). Yet even if the brothers had not had personal difficulties it can be assumed that Alexander would not have had governmental responsibilities. We have already seen how Basil had devoted most of his attention to preparing Constantine for rule, and if Constantine had survived his father it can be assumed that Leo would have been as shadowy a figure as Alexander under Leo. Thus it seems that it would have been the fate of any younger co-emperor to remain very much in the background¹⁶; we may note that although Basil I did confer imperial status on his sons by making them co-emperors it was never in doubt that he was the sole ruler of the empire. Vogt's theory about the *First Parainesis* does not stand up, and in fact it confirms that although two co-emperors were to succeed Basil only the eldest partner was to be ruler of the empire. Other sources also

seems best to observe simply that we only definitely know of Alexander being co-emperor with Basil and Leo after Constantine's death.

⁹For the law book see Schminck, *Rechtsbüchern*, 4. 4. For the illustrated manuscript see Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'Portraits', 21.

¹⁰See Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 175.

¹¹*GMC*, 848; *VE*, 5. 19-20; *VT*, 14. 4-10.

¹²See Runciman, *Romanus*, 17.

¹³Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 408-410.

¹⁴Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 586.

¹⁵*GMC*, 872.

¹⁶Certainly the later case of the rule of the brothers Basil II and Constantine VIII is comparable to that of Leo VI and Alexander I.

indicate that the situation of there being a senior emperor was not one that Leo had forced upon Alexander; the *Life of Theophano* asserts that although both Leo and Alexander were emperors Leo was to be the superior partner, whilst Tabari records that only one of the three sons of Basil had taken the throne on their father's death.¹⁷ However although in 886 Leo effectively became sole ruling emperor he never denied Alexander his imperial role.¹⁸ Several sources make it quite clear that in the period 886-912 Alexander was emperor with his elder brother. These include various saints' *Lives*¹⁹, the *Synaxarion*²⁰, Choerosphaktes's poem on the death of Stephen²¹, the *Russian Primary Chronicle*²² (and the treaties between Byzantium and the Russians drawn up in 907 and 911 that are indicated in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*²³), legal documents such as that relating to the selling of a piece of land in 897²⁴, inscriptions²⁵, and perhaps most interesting and illuminating of all, the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos.²⁶ This final text deserves special attention, since its testimony is contemporary with the reign of Leo and Alexander; it was composed in 899. Here it is plain that the two brothers were presented as being co-emperors.²⁷ However Philotheos makes the realities of power equally clear. Any changes made in ceremonies, offices or the order of precedence are all ascribed to Leo alone²⁸; in the text there are almost twice as many references to the 'emperor' than to the 'emperors'; it is noted that the 'Christ-loving despot' Leo distributes twenty pounds of gold on his brumalia, and that Alexander the 'fortunate augustus' distributes only ten pounds of gold²⁹; there is even a distinction

¹⁷VT, 14, 4-10; *Tabari*, vol. 37, 153.

¹⁸S. P. Lambros, 'Leo und Alexander als Mitkaiser von Byzanz', *BZ*, 4 (1895), 92-98. conjectured that Leo did remove Alexander from his imperial position after 904, but this view has not been accepted ever since it was denied by G. Ostrogorsky, 'Zum Reisebericht des Harun-ibn-Jahja', *SK*, 5 (1932), 251-257, esp. 253, n. 10.

¹⁹VE, 5, 19-20; VT, 14, 4-10; E. Kurtz, 'Des Klerikers Gregorios Bericht über Leben, Wunderthaten und Translation der Hl. Theodora von Thessalonich nebst der Metaphrase des Johannes Staurakios', *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. -Pétersbourg*, eighth series, *Classe Historico-Philologique*, VI/1 (1904), I-112, esp. 26, 26-30; *Life of Maria the Younger*, AASS, Nov IV, 688-705, esp. 693-694; *Life of Basil the Younger*, PG 109, 656.

²⁰AASS, Propylaeum Novembris, 878, 14-16.

²¹Kolias, *Choerosphactès*, Appendice, 2, 13.

²²*Russian Primary Chronicle*, 62.

²³*Russian Primary Chronicle*, 65-66.

²⁴See *Actes de Lavra*, I, 85-91.

²⁵See Speiser, 'Les inscriptions de Thessalonique', 162-163; Grégoire, 'Blaise', 400-401.

²⁶Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 81-235.

²⁷For example, Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 83, 31; 221, 21; 223, 18.

²⁸Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 101, 1-2; 103, 25-26; 147, 15-17; 187, 17-24; 217, 33-34.

²⁹Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 223, 26 - 225, 1. It is interesting to note that the empress Zoe Zaoutzaina distributed even less than her brother-in-law, only eight pounds of gold.

drawn between the autokrator and the 'little' emperor, who takes second place.³⁰ All these factors re-enforce the notion that one of the co-emperors was naturally dominant; it was Leo who took all the decisions, who governed the empire. Yet the point remains that Alexander did have an imperial role during his brother's rule, and Grosdidier de Matons has demonstrated that Leo himself had recognised this in the acrostic device of *diataxis* 20 of his *Taktika*³¹; it appears that Alexander's name was only obscured from the text after his death in 913, when he was subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*.³²

One may however wonder what Alexander did in his capacity as co-emperor. Runciman suggested that 'co-emperors probably had little work to do except on ceremonial occasions, accompanying the Senior Emperor or deputizing for him'.³³ This certainly appears to be borne out by what we know of Alexander's activities during his brother's reign. In 886 Alexander had to participate in the ceremonial reburial of Michael III³⁴; as we have seen Philotheos also highlights Alexander's participation in ceremonies, such as the brumalia; sometime between 901 and 912 Alexander and Leo are reputed to have borne the relics of Mary Magdalene on their shoulders and to have deposited them in a silver-covered casket in the left-hand side of the sanctuary of the church of St Lazaros³⁵; in 903 Alexander took part in the ceremonial procession on the feast of Mid-Pentecost to the church of St Mokios³⁶; in 906 Alexander attended the baptism of his nephew Constantine, acting as one of his sponsors³⁷; in 907 Alexander had a part to play in the reception of Russian envoys to Constantinople, taking the oath with Leo regarding the treaty and tribute agreed between the two peoples.³⁸ As regards Alexander deputizing for Leo, it seems likely that during the tetragamy crisis when Leo was banned from entering church his co-emperor would have attained a higher profile in ceremony. It has also been conjectured that when Leo began to ail in 912 Alexander

³⁰Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 99, 12.

³¹See Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 229-242.

³²See Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 241-242; C. A. Bourdara, 'Quelques cas de *damnatio memoriae* à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne', *JÖB*, 32/2 (1982), 337-346, esp. 338. Sevchenko, 'Poems', 209-210, noted evidence of another text that provided a favourable mention of Alexander which was tampered with after his death. The portrait that survives of Alexander in the north gallery of Hagia Sophia probably dates from the time of his reign of 912-913, and is a salutary reminder that whilst this emperor lived his public image was positive: see P. A. Underwood and E. J. W. Hawkins, 'The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul. The Portrait of the Emperor Alexander. A Report on Work Done by the Byzantine Institute in 1959 and 1960', *DOP*, 15 (1961), 187-217.

³³Runciman, *Romanus*, 17.

³⁴*GMC*, 849.

³⁵Jenkins, Laourdas and Mango, 'Nine Orations'. The original source is Nikephoros Kallistos, *Sermon on St Mary Magdalene*, PG 147, 539-576, esp. 573. Nikephoros lived in the fourteenth century.

³⁶*GMC*, 861; *VE*, 67, 23-25.

³⁷*GMC*, 865.

³⁸*Russian Primary Chronicle*, 65.

again had a more significant role on state occasions, for it seems that the emperor that Harun-ibn-Yahya saw participating in the Ash-Wednesday ceremony in Constantinople was Alexander, as he is described as wearing one black boot and one red boot.³⁹ What Alexander got up to in the rest of his time is starkly outlined by the Byzantines; after his accession he continued with his education⁴⁰, devoted himself to leisure pursuits such as 'delicate living' and hunting⁴¹, and plotted against his brother. It is this last facet of Alexander's life that I wish to turn to now.

As mentioned above, the relationship between the two brothers seems to have been notoriously tense. The *Life of Euthymios* observes that Basil I left Leo and Alexander as co-emperors despite the fact that the younger was 'unbrotherly disposed' towards the elder⁴², and we have already noted that the chronicles state that Leo had kept Alexander out of governmental affairs because he was suspicious of him. Certainly there are instances during Leo's reign when Alexander was believed to be scheming against his brother. At some point in late 899 or early 900, between the death of Zoe Zaoutzaina and Leo's marriage with Eudokia Baiane, Leo suspected Alexander of plotting to take the throne, and as punishment he separated him from his wife⁴³; and when Leo was attacked in the church of St Mokios on 11 May 903 Alexander came under suspicion of having been the mastermind behind the assassination attempt.⁴⁴ A fragmentary source (perhaps surviving episodes from a *Life of Niketas David*) that has received recent attention even asserts that towards the end of his life Leo VI wished to do away with Alexander so as to secure the rule of his son Constantine VII.⁴⁵ Yet what lay behind these outward expressions of distrust and hate? As the *Life of Euthymios* indicates the unbrotherly sentiment pre-dated the accession of 886, and was felt mainly by Alexander. Thus we must seek out a reason why Alexander would have come to bear a grudge against Leo prior to Basil's death. For Jenkins the explanation for the hatred was to be found in 'dynastic reasons', though he fails to elaborate what he means by this.⁴⁶ However since he credits Basil with the same emotion for Leo for the same reasons I presume he has in mind the infamous dubious birth of Leo; Basil and

³⁹See R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Emperor Alexander and the Saracen Prisoners', *SBN*, 7 (1953), 389-393, esp. 393, repr. *Studies on*, XV. However Karlin-Hayter, *VE*, *Commentary*, 157, has indicated that she disagrees with Jenkins's identification of the emperor as Alexander. For Harun's visit to Byzantium see Vasiliev, 'Harun-Ibn-Yahya'; Ostrogorsky, 'Zum Reisebericht'; Grégoire, 'Captif arabe'.

⁴⁰*VT*, 14, 16.

⁴¹*GMC*, 872.

⁴²*VE*, 5, 20-21 ; 67, 24-25.

⁴³*VE*, 55, 21-24.

⁴⁴*GMC*, 861.

⁴⁵See Flusin, 'Fragment', I and II.

⁴⁶Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 199.

Alexander detested Leo because he was the son of the Amorian Michael III. Certainly the chronicles stress that Alexander was a 'genuine' son of Basil⁴⁷, having been conceived at a time when Michael III could not possibly have been his father, and it could be that such a consideration did affect Alexander's attitude towards Leo, no matter what the truth about his brother's parentage. Certainly I do myself believe that Alexander's hatred for Leo did spring from the fact that he felt he had been cheated of imperial power, but for a more concrete reason than that intimated by Jenkins; Alexander was not concerned about any question of birthright but the realities of imperial power, for I would contest that in the period 883-886 he had become heir-apparent to Basil. It seems obvious that when Leo was accused of intent to kill his father in 883 and was punished by loss of imperial status and imprisonment that Basil would have turned his attentions towards the next in line, just as he had turned to Leo on the death of Constantine in 879. The next in line in 883 was Alexander. This scenario has in fact already been envisaged by Vogt⁴⁸, though it does not seem to have been taken on board by other Byzantinists, despite its unerring logic, both in political practicalities and the subsequent feelings of Alexander for Leo. Perhaps the reason that Vogt's theory did not catch on was that he had no evidence; it was just a conjecture, though an extremely convincing one. Yet we should hardly be surprised that there is no Byzantine testimony to this state of affairs, for Alexander found himself shoved into the shadows again when Leo was liberated and restored to the position of heir-apparent in 886. However there does seem to be an echo of the situation in an Arab source, that of Masudi.⁴⁹ He relates that after the death of Basil I Alexander had taken the throne, but the people of Byzantium had become discontent and replaced him with his brother Leo. Thus it seems quite clear that after Leo's removal from power in 883 on the suspicion that he meant to murder his father Basil turned to Alexander as his heir. We may wonder if the emperor arranged the marriage of his youngest son at this time, as he had done for Leo shortly after the death of Constantine. Alexander would have attained the ages of 13-15 (or 14-16 if he was born November 869) in the period 883-July 886, and would thus have been of marriageable age within the time when he was next in line. Certainly we know that Alexander did have a wife⁵⁰, though there is no record of when he married her, or even who she was. Alexander's period of prominence was short-lived for his brother Leo was restored in July 886, resuming his position as heir to the throne, which he mounted in

⁴⁷*GMC*, 841.

⁴⁸See Vogt, *Basile*, 61, 156; 'Jeunesse', 418; 421.

⁴⁹Masudi, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II. 2, 38-39.

⁵⁰See *VE*, 55, 22-23; 127, 33 - 129, 4.

the following month. Thus we can well understand why Alexander could have borne Leo some malice. However it seems pertinent to ask, was Alexander really moved to plot against his brother? When Karlin-Hayter recorded that Alexander was suspected of conspiring against his brother during Leo's reign she commented 'Whether these suspicions were justified there is no means of telling'⁵¹, yet it seems to me that we should at least consider the known instances of suspected plots in further detail.

As noted above, there were two main instances when Alexander was believed to have been behind attempts to remove Leo from power, 899-900 and 903. The first case is only recorded by the *Life of Euthymios*. It states that at some point after the death of Zoe Zaoutzaina (late 899 - early 900) and before Lent 900 Euthymios heard that Alexander had been deprived of his wife as a punishment for having been suspected by Leo of plotting to overthrow him. Euthymios urged the emperor to rescind this measure, but Leo was immovable. Certainly on the face of it there seems no reason to question the motives for the action against Alexander, especially when we consider the timing of the incident. With the death of Zoe Zaoutzaina Leo VI had had his acceptable quota of two wives, from whom no male children had been secured. Thus ostensibly Leo had had all the chances he was going to get to produce a male heir of his own blood; the task of producing the future ruler of the Macedonian dynasty could now be expected to fall to others, namely Leo's brother Alexander and his wife. It could be likely then that at this time Alexander would have realised the implications of the dynastic situation and indeed may have attempted to secure his position by forcibly ousting his brother. Yet it seems rather more likely that the reason that Alexander and his wife were split up was not because of some hypothetical plot, but because Leo himself was desperate to ensure that the throne would come to a son of his rather than of his brother. Leo fully intended to take another wife, and his excuse for doing so was that there had to be an augusta in the palace; thus he would first have to get rid of those females who themselves had the possibility of filling this position. Hence Alexander's wife was ousted, and Leo's own daughter Anna was to be married off to a western prince. The path to a third wife then lay open. Thus it seems to me that there is good enough reason to doubt the allegation that Alexander plotted against his brother in 900. Let us now move on to examine the second suspected plot, the attempted assassination of Leo in the church of St Mokios on the feast of Mid-Pentecost 903. This incident has been recorded by both the chronicles and the *Life of Euthymios*, who concur in the basic elements of the story. On the feast of Mid-Pentecost it was the custom to process to the church of St Mokios, and in 903 Leo

⁵¹Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 586.

did enter the nave of the church. However on this occasion something very irregular occurred; someone sprang down from the pulpit and swung a staff at Leo's head. The blow hit the target, though its force was reduced since the staff had collided with a hanging candelabra before its descent on the emperor's head. The sources are adamant that if the blow had not been impeded Leo would have been killed. Before the assailant could strike again he was apprehended by one of the emperor's bodyguards, Chandaris. Although the sources agree in the broad details of the story, they disagree as to who lay behind the murder attempt. For the *Life of Euthymios* the major suspect was the patriarch Nikolaos himself, whom it also connects to a plot with Andronikos Doukas.⁵² However we can easily reject these allegations, for this source would say anything to blacken the name of Euthymios's rival. The fact that Nikolaos ran away from the church after the attempted murder seems quite natural, and hardly the act of someone who knew what was about to befall the emperor. The candidate that the chronicles put forward, Alexander, seems much more likely, and the evidence of the *Life of Euthymios* even adds to this impression. The chronicles relate another unusual feature of the ceremony of 903; apparently at the last minute before entering the main body of the church of St Mokios Alexander pleaded illness, and instead of accompanying his brother into the nave he seems to have mounted to the *katechoumena*, the upper galleries of the church. It also informs us that after the attack on Leo Alexander did not run away but acted quite against character, leaping down from the *katechoumena* to attend to his brother. No doubt it was this combination of odd behaviour that made Alexander appear suspect. Certainly we can well understand why Alexander would have been keen to see the end of Leo; by 903 Leo had lost his third wife, but was still pursuing his goal of producing a son by taking a concubine, Zoe Karbonopsina. Alexander may thus have wished to curtail his brother's ambitions once and for all so as to secure the dynasty for himself and his family, though as yet he had not managed to produce any children of his own. But just because Alexander is a much more likely candidate as the instigator of the murder attempt of 903 this is no reason to accept it as true, and indeed there are good reasons to believe that in reality Alexander had nothing whatsoever to do with the events in the church of St Mokios. Firstly although the assassin (who is only given a name by the *Life of Euthymios*, that of Stylianos) was apprehended and tortured he revealed no details of any accomplices. It seems odd that this supposed tool of Alexander would have taken the trouble to protect the co-emperor. The natural conclusion is that he worked alone. Secondly the choice of weapon seems

⁵²VE, 73. 24 - 75. 7.

rather odd; surely Alexander could have furnished the assassin with something more traditional for an assassination, such as a sword or a dagger. In connection with the factor of the weapon it is perhaps instructive to consider some recent observations of Macrides.⁵³ Examining killings that arose out of quarrels 'over insulting or rude behaviour or over a property' she notes that 'the weapon or instrument employed almost without exception was a stick or a staff'.⁵⁴ Perhaps we should thus conclude that the attack upon Leo in 903 was the act of an individual with a grievance against the emperor, the details of which are totally unknown to us now.⁵⁵ Alexander's illness was perhaps then just a coincidence, and the fact that he remained in the church and showed attention towards his brother could have been inspired not out of concern for Leo, but out of self-interest; Alexander perhaps thought that Leo was dead or would die, and thus he needed to be on hand to secure the throne for himself.

From the above examination of the instances where Alexander was suspected of plotting it is clear that in both cases the co-emperor may have been unjustly accused, either deliberately or accidentally. What matters in these episodes is not the truth or falsehood of Alexander's guilt, but the fact that he was believed capable of plotting against Leo, that it was a plausible likelihood. So far I have been content to give the impression that the reason for the tension between the brothers lay entirely in the fact that Alexander had been ousted from the position of heir-apparent by the restoration of Leo. Yet there is undoubtedly another factor in the distrust that existed between the pair, a distrust that can be found in Basil's own relations with his relatives, and indeed that seems to be endemic to the middle Byzantine period. Herlong observed that in the period 717-959 'It is notable that many coups d'état and almost all the successful ones were carried out by relatives of the deposed monarch', and that consequently 'The ruler's suspicion of his close relatives as relatives is characteristic of the eighth through tenth centuries, when the emperor delegated power only to ministers whom he could replace at will'.⁵⁶ Certainly Basil's attitude to his relatives is infamous. In the *First Parainesis* to Leo the heir-to-be is warned against relatives, and is told to trust friends rather than family.⁵⁷ This wariness is something that Basil seems to have put into practice. All his daughters (Anastasia, Anna, Helena and Maria) were made nuns and

⁵³Macrides, 'Killing'.

⁵⁴Macrides, 'Killing', 520.

⁵⁵If the *Life of Euthymios*'s information that the name of the assassin was Stylianos has any truth perhaps the act was that of a surviving member of the family of Stylianos Zaoutzes, though it would then seem odd that this was not obvious at the time.

⁵⁶Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 24.

⁵⁷PG 107, xxviii.

confined to the monastery of St Euphemia of Petriion.⁵⁸ Constantine VII alleges that the motive for this action was piety, though we may suspect that Basil simply wished to avoid having a plethora of sons-in-law, who could have nursed imperial ambitions.⁵⁹ The one male in-law of Basil that we do hear about is Christopher, who won such a spectacular victory against the Paulicians in 872 when he held the position of domestic of the schools.⁶⁰ Christopher is identified as the *gambros* of Basil; this could mean that he was either the brother-in-law or son-in-law of the emperor, but given that it is attested that the emperor's daughters all became nuns it seems more likely that Christopher was married to a sister of Basil.⁶¹ However apart from his victory at Tephrike no more is heard of Christopher. Regarding Basil's own blood relatives it seems that he was quite cool towards them also. It is clear that his three brothers (Marianos, Bardas and Symbatios) and his cousin Asylaion played a significant part in the seizing of power from Bardas and Michael III, and yet they never reaped the rewards of imperial power.⁶² Basil was keen simply to pass on the throne to his eldest son, and did not desire to weaken the dynasty by spreading power too widely and too thinly within the family; no doubt Basil had learnt much from his own bloody rise to power. His closest servants certainly do seem to have been friends rather than relatives, figures such as Baanes, Theodore Santabarenos, Photios and Stylianos Zaoutzes. We may ask then if Leo's behaviour during his own reign matches this pattern also. Certainly his sisters did not make any stunning comeback whilst he was on the throne, though we are aware of the presence of three of them in the background; Anna's name came to prominence during her brother's reign because of an episode connecting her with the miraculous Constantine the Jew⁶³, and an inscription has survived on a wall near Petriion dating to the period 905-912, stating 'God help Leo *despotes*, Alexander, Constantine [VII], Anna, Helena and Maria, the porphyrogennetoi'.⁶⁴ Notably when

⁵⁸*VB*, 264. For the daughters see Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 78; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 400; *Basile*, 59.

⁵⁹Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 23, notes that Constantine VI tonsured his daughters when he divorced their mother, his first wife, so as 'to remove them from the succession'. Vogt, *Basile*, 59, wondered if the daughters of Basil were also children of his first marriage. However it should not be forgotten that Basil was happy to depict them in the mosaic of the imperial family in the Kainourgion.

⁶⁰*GMC*, 841.

⁶¹On the question of Christopher's relationship to Basil see Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 76-78; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 400.

⁶²See Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 74-78; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 399.

⁶³*AASS*, Nov IV, 648-649. The basilissa Anna sent a sealed letter to the fathers on Mt Olympos requesting their advice on some matter, but she made the condition that the letter was only to be given to the father who knew what was in the letter before he opened it; Constantine the Jew was the only one to fit the bill. For comment on the episode see Grégoire, 'Acta Sanctorum', 804; Vogt, 'Jeunesse', 400.

⁶⁴See A. M. Schneider, 'Mauern und Tore am Goldenen Horn zu Konstantinopel', *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaft in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, 5 (1950), 65-107, esp. 98-99.

Leo argued that the reason for marrying a third time was the necessity of having an augusta in the palace his sisters do not seem to have been considered as possible candidates for the position. As for those whom Leo appointed as his key officials the impression is that they were valued friends rather than relatives, men such as Andrew, the Phokades, the Doukai, Stylianos Zaoutzes, Samonas, Nikolaos, Leo Choiosphaktes, Himerios, Euthymios, and Constantine the eunuch. However it seems that in Leo's case the differentiation between friend and relative was sometimes rather more blurred than in Basil's. Stylianos Zaoutzes became Leo's father-in-law, and his relationship with the emperor may have been grounded in Leo's association with his daughter. Nikolaos was Leo's spiritual brother, and Euthymios his spiritual father. Leo Choiosphaktes was related to the imperial family on two counts; his wife had close connections with the Macedonians, and he was also related to Leo's fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina.⁶⁵ Himerios, who had a prominent position by 904 and thereafter became one of the emperor's chief aides, also had a connection with the emperor's fourth wife, being married to her sister.⁶⁶ It is possible too that the Rhabdouchoi had family ties with the Macedonians, as Flusin has suggested that the name of Rhabdouchos should be restored to a lacuna in a text, where the person in question is identified as the *exadelphos* (cousin) of the emperor Leo VI, and was sufficiently important to attend an assembly where Leo put forward the arrangements for the succession.⁶⁷ The Rhabdouchos in question could possibly be either John, who was the saviour of Arethas at his trial of 900⁶⁸, or Leo who may have been the *strategos* of Dyrrachion in 880, and was certainly in this post c. 917 with the dignity of *protospatharios*, later becoming *magistros* and logothete of the drome.⁶⁹ We also know that Leo Rhabdouchos was the brother-in-law of Leo Choiosphaktes⁷⁰, and if this was by virtue of Choiosphaktes marrying

Ohnsorge, 'Töchter', indeed identified the Maria of the inscription as the sister of Leo, but argued that the Anna and Helena were his daughters by Zoe Karbonopsina. However it seems safer and more natural to identify all the women in the inscription as the sisters of the emperor.

⁶⁵For Choiosphaktes's relations with the imperial family see Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 83; 106-107; Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 17-18; letter 23, 115. 29-31; *Tabari*, vol. 38, 181, where it is indicated that Leo Choiosphaktes was the uncle of Constantine VII.

⁶⁶Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 128-129. For Himerios's influence with Leo see *DAI*, I, 240. 173 - 242. 196.

⁶⁷Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 128-129; II, 235-236. The study of this text led Flusin, 'Fragment', II, 236, to conclude that there was 'autour de l'empereur Léon, un réseau apparemment assez dense de grands personnages qui sont liés à la famille impériale par la naissance ou par alliance'.

⁶⁸See Flusin, 'Fragment', II, 236; Jenkins and Laourdas, 'Eight Letters', 349-350; 368.

⁶⁹On the problem of Leo Rhabdouchos's career see Flusin, 'Fragment', II, 236; *DAI*, II, 135; G. Ostrogorsky, 'Leo Rhabdouchos and Leo Choiosphaktes' (in Russian with a French summary), *ZRVI*, 3 (1955), 29-36; M. Lascaris, 'La rivalité bulgare-byzantine en Serbie et la mission de Léon Rhabdouchos', *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen*, 20 (1943), 202-207.

⁷⁰Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 107; Koliass, *Choerosphactès*, 18; letter 27, 129. 12-13.

Rhabdouchos's sister⁷¹, this indicates that her close relationship with the emperor was that of cousin. If this was the case then it could indeed be that they were the children of Christopher and the sister of Basil I; this would indeed make them cousins of Leo, and would also mean that we could further identify Basil's *gambros* Christopher as a Rhabdouchos. It was also Leo who played the master stroke of creating his brother Stephen patriarch, though the move had been set up by Basil himself. However I do believe we can assert that those men who rose to prominence under Leo never did so simply because they were relatives of the emperor; they were valued on other merits, and thus the principal with regard to the selection of officials in Basil's time held good during Leo's reign. Certainly Leo does seem to have kept his immediate relatives removed from positions of power. We have already noted that the situation of sisters did not change, and although the presence of the Rhabdouchoi is detectable our lack of knowledge about their careers is surely indicative that they were not invested with great authority. Certainly Stephen became patriarch, but this was an asset for Leo, not a threat. Finally we return to Alexander, and Leo's apparent wariness of him can thus be understood as a normal feature of middle Byzantine history. As with Basil Leo's prime concern was for his son and heir; blood relatives could threaten the child's future role as emperor, and were thus passed over in favour of those whose tie with the emperor was based on friendship, though they could be in-laws of the imperial family. Such a premise is graphically demonstrated by one source, which alleges that towards the end of his life Leo was anxious to ensure the succession of his son, and at first laid down that Alexander could remain as co-emperor until Leo's death yet lose his position on Constantine's accession, but later, as death was evidently creeping up on him, Leo proposed that Alexander should be done away with and that Himerios should become the legal guardian (*epitropos*) of Constantine VII.⁷²

But if Leo was so concerned about the danger that Alexander could present to the future of Constantine VII we have a major question to tackle; why was it that at the end of his reign Leo placed the empire and his son in the hands of Alexander? Before addressing this poser it seems essential to consider the source which reveals that Leo first wanted to ensure that Alexander lost his imperial position on the accession of Constantine VII, and then wished to eradicate Alexander altogether and leave Himerios as guardian. These pieces of information survive in fragments of what seems to be a *Life* of Niketas David. This source is extremely hostile to Leo VI, which is not surprising when we bear in mind that the hero Niketas David was one of the

⁷¹As hypothesised by Herlong, *Social Mobility*, 274, n. 222.

⁷²See Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 128-129; II, 237-239.

uncompromising opponents of the fourth marriage. Given that it goes out of its way to paint Leo in the darkest of hues (vitriol that is matched in no other source on the emperor) can we really believe what it tells us about the emperor's plans for the fate of his brother? Nowhere else do we find the evidence for such plans, and what is more the plans it relates did not come to fruition; Alexander did succeed in 912, and Himerios did not become *epitropos*. One of the reasons (the other reason is death, presumably Leo's) it gives for the failure of Leo's second proposal rings untrue; we are asked to believe that the senate deterred the emperor, and Flusin was led to conclude that the senate as a body was not hostile to Alexander.⁷³ I would certainly question the notion that the senate was favourable to Alexander; it was probably the extreme act of fratricide that led them to oppose the plan, if it ever existed. Further I find it impossible to imagine that Leo would coldly propose the execution of his brother; an enforced retirement would seem much more plausible. Thus I have my doubts over the testimony of these fragments, but they should not be dismissed out of hand. Their author does seem very well informed on many points, such as the details of Niketas's life, the relationship of Himerios with Leo VI, and the existence of a cousin of the emperor. Yet even without the information that this text provides we can still pose the same question as to why Alexander did succeed given the general wariness the emperor had of blood relatives in the middle Byzantine period. We can also consider it remarkable that Alexander was never denied his position of co-emperor, and the question thus broadens out to why did Alexander remain as co-emperor under Leo, and eventually succeed his brother in 912.

In addressing the first part of the problem it is important to remember that it was Basil who had established that Leo and Alexander should succeed him as co-emperors: if we understand why Basil was keen on this concept then we might see why Leo did not wish to overturn his father's arrangement. As Constantine VII indicated the reason why Basil shared the imperial title with his sons Constantine and Leo from an early point in his reign was to secure the throne for the Macedonian dynasty; he had to enforce the notion that he and his family were here to stay. This idea was apparently still with Basil when Constantine died and Leo became heir-apparent, for then Alexander was crowned also. Certainly one son was to be the real ruling force after the death of Basil, but the presence of the other son was important too to stress the concept of dynastic dominion. It seems then that Leo was equally aware of the benefits of this system, and thus Alexander remained in his position. However the situation was slightly different; Alexander had been Basil's son, but he was Leo's brother. Thus he could pose

⁷³Flusin, 'Fragment', I, 128-129; II, 240.

a danger to Leo that he had not posed for Basil, and we should remember how Basil's own brothers had fared during his reign. Leo's prime objective was that a son of his own flesh should succeed him, and if Alexander presented a threat to this he could be expected to suffer, as he did in 899-900 when he was deprived of his wife. Alexander also probably seemed like a plausible candidate for the assassination attempt in 903 since it was clear that Leo was going to stop at nothing until he had a son and heir, with the obvious implication that Alexander was never to become the heir or provide one either. With the birth of his son Constantine in 905 Leo could at last feel some relief, for he himself was still a relatively young man of 39, and could reasonably expect to live until his son was old enough to be emperor in his own right. However by early 912 Leo had become seriously ill and death was encroaching upon him, and it is now that we come to the second half of the problem, why was it that Leo now decided to leave the minor Constantine (he had reached his sixth birthday in the early autumn of 911) in the hands of Alexander. Yet perhaps the real question is was there any alternative. Himerios was not on hand at this crucial time, since he was either still on campaign against Crete, or perhaps recovering elsewhere from its failure. It is infamous that Himerios only returned to Constantinople after Leo's death when Alexander had already attained power; he was seized and confined to a palace monastery where he was badly treated, and died six months later.⁷⁴ Alexander's treatment of Himerios can be explained by the fact that they were opponents whilst Leo was alive⁷⁵, though an added dimension is added to the story if we accept that Leo had intended to promote Himerios at Alexander's expense. If Leo had any thoughts about entrusting power to his fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina we have no record of them, and we should remember anyway that at the time of Leo's death Zoe was still a somewhat controversial figure, for the church had not yet recognised her as *augusta*.⁷⁶ If Leo considered appointing other friends and/or in-laws as guardians for Constantine VII no evidence of this has been preserved. Ultimately when it comes down to it there does seem to have been no other choice but Alexander. He was at least a member of the Macedonian dynasty; to have gifted another with imperial authority could have meant undermining the efforts Basil and Leo had made to secure power for their family. By 912 Alexander had had no children of either sex, so Leo could have felt there was still a good chance that Constantine would come to power. Yet it is clear that although Alexander was chosen to succeed Leo had his

⁷⁴*GMC*, 873.

⁷⁵See Karlin-Hayter, 'Bad Name', 592.

⁷⁶For the attempts to persuade the patriarch Euthymios to recognise Zoe as *augusta* in church see *VE*, 109. 24 - 113. 27. Ironically it was Nikolaos, who became patriarch again in 912, who finally did the honours for Zoe; see *VE*, 137. 11-13.

fears for the future of his son, and thus constantly appealed to his brother to look to the welfare of his nephew.⁷⁷ Leo no doubt hoped that the strength of feeling within Byzantium would be enough to keep Alexander from doing anything untoward to Constantine, and Skylitzes records that Leo specifically called upon the senate to keep his wife and son safe.⁷⁸ There can be no doubt that Leo knew he was taking a risk when he left Alexander to succeed him in May 912, but it was a risk he was prepared to take.

⁷⁷*GMC*, 871. It appears that Leo even wrote a poem to Alexander about Constantine VII, and we can conjecture that in this he urged his brother to take good care of the child: see Maas, 'Literarisches'. Surviving poems on the death of Leo VI, written probably in 913, record that he exhorted Alexander to consider Constantine as his own son, and Constantine to view Alexander as his father: see Sevchenko, 'Poems', esp. 196-197.

⁷⁸*Scylitzae*, 192. 17-18.

CONCLUSION

The death of Leo VI in 912 was undoubtedly premature. Born in the early autumn of 866, he was only 44 years old when he succumbed to dysentery. His untimely passing led to severe convulsions within Byzantine society and the empire, instigated by his resentful brother Alexander coming to power and seeking to undo all that Leo had achieved and all those whom he had favoured. The ex-patriarch Nikolaos found himself recalled from exile and restored to the patriarchal throne, and then set about seeking vengeance on those who had ousted him and his clergy, a vengeance that was to throw the church into turmoil once again and cause bitter divisions. Zoe found herself removed from the palace, her son now at the mercy of his uncle. Himerios, Leo's close advisor, was removed from office and confined to a monastery, where he soon died. Worst of all, Bulgarian ambassadors who had come to meet the new emperor and verify the existing treaty terms between the two powers were sharply rebuked, and a dreadful war was set in motion that lasted late into the next decade. If only Leo had lived Byzantine history of the early tenth century might have presented a rather more stable image. The troublesome and trouble-making brother Alexander would have remained in the background, unable to wreak such drastic changes. Leo and Zoe would have maintained their rule, assuredly enforcing acceptance of their marriage. Nikolaos would also have been kept at arm's length, unable to plunge the church into turmoil. The elderly but firm Euthymios would have retained respect in the office of patriarch, and when the old man died, Leo would have appointed a more amenable character in his place (Arethas would have made a distinguished candidate), someone who would finally have deigned to recognize Zoe as *augusta* in church. Surrounding the emperor and serving him would have been a characteristically friendly group of officials. The eunuch Constantine the Paphlagonian had already stepped into Samonas's shoes, and there seems no reason to think that he would have proved unreliable. Himerios would have maintained his eminent position, perhaps achieving further successes at sea. Leo Choirosphaktes may have returned from his exile, as so many of those who suffered such a fate at Leo's hands did, and once again placed his skills at the disposal of the emperor. As for Leo's generals, the descendants of those whom he had previously depended upon had already begun to come to prominence, and would have risen still further; the names of Phokas and Doukas and Argyros would still have circulated with honour at the Byzantine court. As for a certain Romanos Lekapenos, his career may have followed a more modest path. The securing and consolidating of the eastern frontier of the empire would have continued apace, whilst in the west, southern Italy would have been freed of a Moslem presence. Best

of all, the grievous and lengthy war with Bulgaria might never have arisen. As for Constantine VII, we can believe that he would have received a thorough education, and would have ascended to the throne more smoothly and directly than he did.

Such speculation on how Leo's reign might have progressed if he had not died in 912 is of course hypothetical, yet it is based solidly on what this thesis has shown as being the essential and true characteristics of Leo and his reign, not those that are perceived to be essential and true. For Leo is an emperor who has more often than not been given a tough press; for most scholars he appears as a powerless, dominated and inactive figure, even dull. It was my objective to disprove these popular perceptions of the emperor, to reveal him in a more realistic and authentic light, focusing my attention particularly on the political affairs of his reign. The most famous episode within this framework has to be the tetragamy crisis, a crisis that was itself initiated by Leo's determination to secure a son and heir of his own blood against all odds. Despite this obvious truth at the heart of the affair, it seems that it has not been felt to have any relevance to other aspects of Leo's life and reign. However his tenacity of will is indeed in evidence in other episodes of the reign. To name but a few of the many cases we have seen, he deposed Photios, he installed his under-age brother as patriarch, he made his first wife a saint and he buried his third at Easter. Thus an image of a forceful emperor begins to emerge, an image that appears inconsistent with characterisations of Leo as apathetic and dominated.

It is in the sphere of military affairs that Leo is most often cited as being an apathetic emperor. Yet such a deduction is undoubtedly false. It is true that the period of his reign did witness significant military problems, but these have to be examined closely before any hasty judgement is reached upon the emperor's ability in dealing with them. In Leo's case we have to be especially careful, as many factors tend to cast him in a negative light. Primarily he was a non-campaigning emperor, a feature of his reign that marked a sudden break with the trend of the previous centuries. Further the quality of the enemies that faced the empire was significant, most notably the agitating leader of the suddenly offensive Bulgarians, Symeon. In addition the chronicle tradition is strongly biased against Leo, and needs to be examined critically, and balanced by evidence from other diverse sources. When all the evidence is analysed and weighed carefully it in fact emerges that Leo was conscious of the military difficulties facing his empire, and conscientious in seeking ways to respond to them.

Characterisations of Leo as a weak and dominated emperor tend to be based on a consideration of domestic affairs during his reign, particularly with his regard to his secular officials. It is held that Stylianos Zaoutzes was the ruling force during the first half of the reign, whilst in the second half Leo placed himself in the hands

of another unethical favourite, the eunuch Samonas. Both these positions are inadequate and untenable. Stylianos may have risen to unprecedentedly high office under Leo, but he was never the ruling spirit, and was in fact for the most part loyal to the wishes of his imperial master. As for Samonas, his prominence was part of Leo's wider attachment to and appreciation of his eunuch officials, further examples of which can be cited; he should not be treated in isolation. Further, although Stylianos and Samonas are prominent individuals, it is clear that the emperor extended his friendship to a much wider group of his officials, including his generals who are sometimes inaccurately seen as opponents of the 'weak but wilful' emperor. Leo was an emperor who sought to place himself at the centre of a group of warm and supportive 'senators'.

What emerges from a considered study of Leo and his reign does not tally with the popular perception of Leo as a weak, dominated and ineffective ruler. What we find rather is a strong-willed individual who carved out a very distinctive style of emperorship. He centred himself firmly in the imperial city of Constantinople, hardly ever venturing beyond its bounds. He established himself as a font and focus of authority, legislating and advising in all spheres from spirituality to war. Beneath him was a network of agents and officials to obey his will and put it into practice. He may have had the task of securing the Macedonian dynasty but his persona seems to transcend this function. Further, he seems to have had no imperial heroes; Leo was not concerned with the veneration of the past, but the perfection of the present guided by him, the wisest ruler of them all.

It was my intention to reveal Leo in a more authentic light, to give a more rounded picture of the emperor and his reign, and I hope I have achieved this. However I am aware of the restrictions I placed upon myself; this could not be a comprehensive study of the reign, but an examination of distinct areas of the political arena that were fundamental to perceiving Leo realistically. With this done there will now be the facility to tackle further dimensions of the emperor and his reign, namely his work both as a legislator and a homilist. For too long these spheres have remained on the fringes of evaluations of the emperor; they need to be integrated into the wider picture. Further, whilst studying the reign of Leo I felt there was a distinct need for the era of the rule of the early Macedonians to be restudied and evaluated as a whole, and for Leo to take his rightful place within this context; he has surely been underestimated as the mere completer of the schemes of Basil and the scene-setter for the literary achievements of his son Constantine VII. Thus as yet I do not plan or wish to take my leave of this distinctive emperor who is a figure to be reckoned with, and a delight to study.

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