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Michael III: a misinterpreted emperor
Μιχαήλ Γ': ένας παρερμηνευμένος αυτοκράτορας

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To my family

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Introduction: aims and sources

The reign of Michael III (840-867), the last member of the Amorian dynasty, constitutes one of the most successful eras of Byzantine history. The regency of Theodora, Michael III's mother, marks the end of the iconoclast period and the official restoration of icon veneration, which took place on 11 March 843 and is still celebrated by the Eastern Orthodox Church as the Feast of Orthodoxy. Next, during Michael III's sole reign, the secular education in the Byzantine capital is revitalized; Bardas founds a school in Magnaura where, among others, Leo the Philosopher taught.

At the same time, the patriarchate of Constantinople, with Photios on its head, expands its spiritual and religious influence on neighboring and distant peoples; the remarkable missionary work of the brothers Konstantinos (Cyril) and Methodios takes place, Bulgaria converts to Christianity, and the first steps of the Christianization of Rhos are being made. The patriarchate of the Byzantine capital also protects its ecclesiastical independence and jurisdictional limits against the unprecedented claims of pope Nicholas, who sought to become the ultimate judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West.

Simultaneously, numerous inscriptions both in Constantinople and in the empire's provinces testify the large scale of Michael III's renovative (re)building projects. The inscriptions also highlight the military imperial power in the Byzantine periphery. The reinforcement of the fortifications across major urban centres would not only demonstrate to his subjects that the emperor sought after their well-being and safety, but would also prove to be significant for the empire's campaigns, especially against the incursions of the Abbasid Caliphate in Asia Minor. As regards the latter, after almost two centuries, the Byzantines were able to gain the offensive against their most

formidable enemy. The successful military expeditions of Petronas, Bardas' nephew and strategos of the Thracesian theme, and of Michael III, are of particular importance; not only were the Byzantines able to check the advance of the Arab raids, but they also established themselves as the supreme authority in the area.

In this respect, it becomes apparent that the reign of Michael III is a prosperous and dynamic period, with the empire showing signs of rebirth and growth in almost every area. Yet, despite these brilliant achievements, the personality of Michael III is not compatible with the general progress of the empire. In the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii, Michael III is described as a worthless and indifferent emperor towards the affairs of the empire; a sovereign so extravagant that he brought the empire on the verge of financial breakdown. He damaged the imperial dignity as his sole interests were horseracing and drinking bouts with his detestable companions. Apparently, his love for wine was so great that during his sole reign, he was almost constantly drunk. And, during his state of drunkenness he was behaving like a tyrant and ordered absurd and unjust punishments to his subjects¹.

In contrast with Michael III's vices, Basil, Michael III's murderer, successor and founder of the Macedonian dynasty is described by the same sources as generous, pious, a man of remarkable physical strength, and guided by Divine Providence to assume the Byzantine throne. Basically, the vices of Michael III are contrasted one by one with the virtues of his successor. The description and comparison of the aforementioned personalities is obviously not naive; on the

¹ ...ὅτε οὖν ὅλος τοῦ ἀκράτου καὶ τῆς μέθης ἐγένετο καὶ πάντῃ τὰς οἰκείας φρένας ἀπώλεσεν, πρὸς φόνους ἐχώρει καὶ πρὸς ἀναιτίων ἀνθρώπων ἀλοκότους ποινὰς καὶ σφαγὰς, καὶ τοῖς ὑπηρεταῖς ἐνεκελεύετο· "τὸν δεῖνα" φησί, "καὶ δεῖνα λαβόντες τῷ δημίῳ παρὰδοτε, καὶ ἐτέρου τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐξορύξατε, καὶ ἄλλου τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τοὺς πόδας ἐκκόψατε. καὶ οὗτος κεφαλικῶς τιμωρεῖσθω, κἀκεῖνος γινέσθω πυρίκαυτος...". VITA BASILII, 100, 7-14.

one hand, through the systematic depreciation of Michael III and, on the other hand, through the methodical praise of Basil, the latter is not depicted as Michael III's murderer, but as the savior of the empire. It is known –but will be demonstrated again– that the aforementioned Byzantine historiographies were written under the command and supervision of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos; Basil's grandson main concern was not to create a realistic image of Michael III, but to besmear him in any way possible.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Byzantinists attempted to critically study the image of Michael III. It is worthwhile to approach and analyze these studies and try to explain in what ways this reign was perceived. I refer to some of them. In 1812, F. Schlosser adopted, rather without hesitation, the manner of the biased Byzantine historiographers; he argued that Michael III was consumed by his love for wine, wasted his wealth in low lust and his time in absurd games and actions². H. Herzberg also maintained that Michael III's character was the "product" of an inappropriate education³. Yet, in 1876, F. Hirsch remarked that the Byzantine sources that were written by order of Basil's grandson might paint a biased picture of Michael III and briefly remarked the value of Symeon Magister's redactions in sorting out Michael III's reign⁴. C. de Boor also spoke of Michael III's good qualities maintaining the view that he was a rather energetic ruler and soldier⁵.

On the contrary, based primarily on how the last member of the Amorian dynasty is described on inscriptions of Ankara and on folklore legends, H. Grégoire argued that Michael III was a great emperor⁶. The Belgian scholar was also the first one to trace the narrative techniques used by the Byzantine

² F. SCHLOSSER, *Geschichte der bilderstürmenden Kaiser des oströmischen Reiches*. Frankfurt am Main 1812, 617.

³ H. HERZBERG, *Geschichte der Byzantiner und des Osmanischen Reiches*. Berlin 1883, 141.

⁴ HIRSCH, *Byzantinische Studien*, 55-62.

⁵ DE BOOR, *Der Angriff*, 463-464.

⁶ GRÉGOIRE, *Ancyre et les Arabes*, 437-468; GRÉGOIRE, *Études*, 515-550; GRÉGOIRE, *Épopée byzantine*, 29-69; GRÉGOIRE, *Michel III et Basile*, 327-346; GRÉGOIRE, *Recueil*, 24.

historians and condemn them for purposely ignoring his achievements⁷. However, taking into consideration only inscriptional evidence to critically review one's image is unsafe to say the least. Inscriptions that refer to the emperor can be very panegyric in tone; they can often be used as a means of propaganda in order for the emperor to display his power to his subjects⁸.

J. B. Bury remarked that although Michael III reigned for a quarter of century, he never truly governed; during his infancy his mother held the reigns, whereas when he reached adulthood, it was his uncle, Bardas, who administered the state affairs⁹. Yet on another study, he highlighted that the empire's naval power improved during Michael III's reign and that Basil's naval victories were based on his predecessor's achievements¹⁰.

Th. Uspenski, who briefly examined him, acknowledged that his reign opened entirely new perspectives in the history of the empire and that it would be more correct to date the revival of the Byzantine empire not from the reign of Basil the Macedonian, who was the executor of what was already planned, but from Michael III¹¹. N. Iorga's comments on Michael III's image were remarkable as well; taking into consideration how the Byzantine historiographers treated him, N. Iorga characterized him as a Byzantine Caligula¹².

G. Ostrogorsky's analysis was more modest; he argued that the last member of the Amorion dynasty was neither a mere drunkard nor an exemplary ruler. Although he was courageous and saw to the empire's defences, he lacked personal esteem and was easily influenced by others¹³. Next, on a study

⁷ GRÉGOIRE, *Épopée byzantine*, 29ff.

⁸ Indicatively, see: RHOBY, *Meaning*, 734, 741-742.

⁹ BURY, *ERE*, 154.

¹⁰ J. B. BURY, *The Naval Policy of the Roman Empire in relation to the Western Provinces from the 7th to the 9th Century* (*Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari*, II). Palermo 1910, 34.

¹¹ Th. USPENSKI, *History of the Byzantine Empire II*. Leningrad 1927, 345 (in Russian).

¹² IORGA, *Essai*, 143.

¹³ G. OSTROGORSKY, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates* (*Handbuch der Alterumswissenschaft* 12/1). Munich 1963, 186-187.

devoted to the date of the tenth homily of patriarch Photios, which took place in 864 and referred to the inauguration of the church of the Lady of the Pharos, R. J. H. Jenkins and C. Mango evaluated Michael III positively; these renowned scholars argued that just as the political and military exploits of Michael III have been obscured by the efforts of the Macedonian propaganda, so has his role in the care of sacred buildings. Therefore, it is fitting to restore to his reign an accomplishment, i.e. the (re)building of ecclesiastical buildings, which, in the eyes of a Byzantine panegyrist (in this case Photios' oration), ranked equal to his military successes¹⁴.

During the late nineteenth century, V. M. Istrin dealt with Slavonic apocryphal and Russian literature and identified the ideal king-savior in the interpolated versions of the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara* and the *Vision of Daniel* with Michael III¹⁵. He argued that the achievements and victorious campaigns of Michael III were popular in the Slavonic apocryphal and Russian literature as the emperor was portrayed as a messenger of God, who would deliver "Tsargrad from the enemy"¹⁶. V. Vasiliev dealt with the same matter, endorsed Istrin's conclusions regarding the popularity of Michael III's and argued that it could serve as a new element in rehabilitating his name¹⁷. Vasiliev's monograph on how the Byzantines repulsed the attack of the Rhos in 860 is also indicative of the readiness of the empire's defensive capabilities during the concerned period¹⁸.

Among others, P. Alexander, R. J. H. Jenkins and Ap. Karpozilos have dealt thoroughly with the structure of the historiographical works commissioned by Konstantinos VII (Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii) and

¹⁴ JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 140.

¹⁵ ISTRIN, *Revelations*, 5-50, 133-162.

¹⁶ ISTRIN, *Revelations*, 123-126.

¹⁷ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 242. On the matter see also the Chapter III.

¹⁸ VASILIEV, *Russian attack*, 150-163.

rightfully argued that they remark the revival of secular biography¹⁹. Before Konstantinos VII's works, history was accounted in a continuous or annalistic narrative. In Konstantinos VII's commissioned historiographies this particular form of presentation changes; historical narrative is now divided into separate "reigns", on which each sovereign is the central character of the narrative.

In Genesios' work, entitled *Βασιλείαι* (on the reigns of the emperors) and consisting of four books, each book deals with the reign of a separate emperor: the first book with Leo V's reign (813-820), the second with Michael II (820-829), the third one with Theophilos (829-842), and the last one with Michael III (842-867) and briefly with Basil (867-886).

The compilation of Theophanes Continuatus consists of six books and is conventionally divided into three parts. The first part is either called "Text I" or "Books I-IV"²⁰. Similar to Genesios' work, each book describes the reign of an individual emperor; book I the reign of Leo V, book II, the reign of Michael II, book III the reign of Theophilos and book IV the reign of Michael III.

The second part is known as "Book V", Text II, or as the *Vita Basilii*, and narrates the reign of Basil. Its full title, as written in its *prooimion* is "Ἱστορικὴ διήγησις τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν πράξεων Βασιλείου τοῦ αἰοδίμου βασιλέως, ἧν Κωνσταντῖνος βασιλεὺς ἐν θεῷ Ῥωμαίων, ὁ τούτου υἱωνός, φιλοπόνως ἀπὸ διαφόρων ἀθροίσας διηγημάτων τῷ γράφοντι προσανέθετο" (Historical narrative of the life and deeds of emperor Basil of glorious memory which his grandson Konstantinos, by the grace of God and emperor of the Romans, assiduously gathered from various accounts and submitted to the <present> writer)²¹.

¹⁹ On the matter, see: ALEXANDER, *Secular Biography*, 194-209; JENKINS, *Classical Background*, 13-17. KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 351.

²⁰ Indicatively, NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 101.

²¹ *VITA BASILII V*, 8-9.

The third part is known either as “Book VI”, or as Text III. This part appears to be a combination of two texts, one (Text IIIa) covering the years 886-948, and another (Text IIIb) covering the years 944-961²². Just like the previous parts, its writer remains anonymous, but there is a possibility²³ that he might be identified with Basil the Nothos²⁴. Unlike the two previous parts, though it narrates the reigns of multiple emperors, it is not divided into one book for each emperor²⁵. Its text is simpler and less classicizing in style²⁶. It covers the historical events from 886 till the re-conquest of Crete, in 961. Thus, it is not useful for the purposes of this study.

As it has already been mentioned, these historiographical works were composed by command and supervision of Konstantinos VII. In Genesios’ case, this is clearly expressed in his *prooimion* (ἄτε ταῦτά γε καὶ διαιτῆσαι προστεταγμένος πρὸς Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος)²⁷. Similarly, in the title of Theophanes Continuatus, the anonymous writer narrates that the work was written by order of Konstantinos VII and the compilation continues from where Theophanes the Confessor, relative of Konstantinos VII left of, i.e. from the reign of Leo V the Armenian (Χρονογραφία συγγραφεῖσα ἐκ προστάξεως Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ φιλοχρίστου καὶ προρφυρογέννητου δεσπότη ἡμῶν, υἱοῦ Λέοντος τοῦ σοφωτάτου δεσπότη καὶ ἀοιδίμου ἡμῶν βασιλέως ἀρχομένη ἔνθεν κατέληξεν ὁ κατὰ γένος προσηκῶν βασιλέως, ἀρχομένη ἔνθεν κατέληξεν ὁ κατὰ γένος προσηκῶν τῷ βασιλεῖ μακαρίτης Θεοφάνης ὁ τῆς Σιγριανῆς, ἡγουν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας Λέοντος τοῦ ἐξ Ἀρμενίας· ἥς τάς τε καθ’ ἕκαστα ὑποθέσεις ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος φιλοπόνως συνέλεξε καὶ εὐσυνόπτως

²² KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 358-364; NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 103-105 (with further bibliography).

²³ On the matter, see: THEOPH. CONT. 16 (Prolegomena).

²⁴ PmbZ #20925.

²⁵ NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 101.

²⁶ NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 104.

²⁷ GENESIOS, I, 3, 14-15.

ἐξέθετο <πρὸς εὐκρι>νῇ τοῖς μετέπειτα δῆλωσιν)²⁸. This anonymous writer also relates that Konstantinos VII is the real author (ἱστορεῖς δὲ αὐτός, χειρὰ μόνον λαβὼν ἡμᾶς διακονουμένην σοι, ὅσα τοῖς πρὸ σοῦ βεβίωται...)²⁹, as he is the one who gathered the relevant information from scattered materials (...φιλομαθοῦσί τε καὶ φιλιστοροῦσιν ζῆλον καὶ ἀρετὴν ἐγγεννῶντος, τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων σποράδην τισὶ τὰ δὲ ἐκ ἀκοῇ...)³⁰.

In the preface of the fifth book, known as *Vita Basilii*, which is written in first person, Konstantinos VII claims authorship of the whole book. Basil's grandson explains that he initially intended to write a history of all the Roman emperors, but due to lack of time, books, and concentrated effort, he undertook a more modest task –to write down the history of Basil so that his great deeds (πράξεις) can serve as an ideal for his successors (Ἦν μοι προθυμία καὶ ἔφεσις...καὶ τοῖς ἐκγόνοις ἐκείνου οἴκοθεν εἶη ἀνεστηκὼς ὁ πρὸς ἀρετὴν κανὼν τε καὶ ἀνδριὰς καὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον τῆς μιμήσεως.)³¹.

Yet, as I. Ševčenko has demonstrated, the true writer was not Konstantinos VII, but an anonymous writer, who belonged to the group of literati that worked for the emperor. On the basis of parallels in phraseology, Ševčenko identified the writer of Theophanes Continuatus with the writer of *De imagine Edessena*, but the latter is also anonymous³². Ševčenko's argument regarding the authorship of Theophanes Continuatus was subsequently endorsed by the majority of Byzantinists³³.

²⁸ THEOPH. CONT. 8, 1-8. On the title of Theophanes Continuatus see also: MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 202-203; I. ŠEVČENKO, The title of and Preface to Theophanes Continuatus, in: Ὁπώρα. Studi di onore di Mgr Paul Canart per il LXX compleanno II (*Bolletino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* N. S. 52) (eds. S. LUCÀ – L. PERRIA). Rome 1998, 77-93; SIDERI, Trends, 54-56.

²⁹ THEOPH. CONT. I, 10, 16-18.

³⁰ THEOPH. CONT. I, 12, 21-23.

³¹ VITA BASILII, 8, 1-10, 18.

³² ŠEVČENKO, Re-reading, 184-185.

³³ On the matter, see: KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 352-358 (with further bibliography); NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 101-103.

This kind of structure worked greatly for Konstantinos VII's intention, which was to create a distorted image of Michael III, defame him, and ultimately justify to posterity Basil's murder and subsequent elevation to the throne. In order to achieve this, Konstantinos VII introduced in his supposedly impartial history the methods of *ψόγος* and *ἔπαινος* (blame and praise)³⁴; in his works Michael III assumes the role of the villain, in contrast to Basil, who is depicted as the hero and savior of the empire.

Indicatively, Genesios describes that Michael III was an indifferent emperor; he neglected the serious affairs of the state and preferred to spend his time watching spectacles or chariot races at the hippodrome³⁵. Theophanes Continuatus proceeds to describe that Michael III not only loved to spectate chariot races, but he also drove for himself, and thus damaged the imperial dignity and became a spectacle and a laughing stock to his subjects (ὧ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας)³⁶. Similarly, in the chapters 20-27³⁷ of the *Vita Basilii*, the *ψόγος* of Michael III's reign is used to demonstrate how bad things were before Basil assumes the throne and how Michael III's debaucheries damaged the imperial dignity. All these accusations will be described in depth below.

In Porphyrogenetos' works, the division of history into reigns enables him to insert a medium of *synkrisis*. Because of Michael III's character and his unspeakable debaucheries (disrespect, unfitness to reign, tyranny, prodigality, and drunkenness³⁸), the empire was in dramatic decline. But when Basil assumes the throne, the situation changes for the better from the very first day (Κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἡμέραν καθ' ἣν <ἐπὶ> τὴν αὐτοκράτορα ἦλθεν ἀρχὴν ὁ Βασίλειος, ὥσπερ ἐνδεικνυμένου θεοῦ τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν

³⁴ ALEXANDER, *Secular Biography*, 196. JENKINS, *Classical Background*, 23.

³⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 70, 74-76.

³⁶ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 262, 5-8.

³⁷ VITA BASILII, 80, 1-100, 50.

³⁸ See below, Chapter II.

πραγμάτων μεταβολήν...)³⁹. In this fashion, Michael III is slandered to such an extent that Basil's murderous' act is not seen as a *coup d' état*, but as a necessity for the empire's well-being.

The remaining chapters (28-102⁴⁰) illustrate in a rhetorical and encomiastic way the *πράξεις* Basil undertook as an emperor (civil administration, campaigns, [re]building of secular and religious buildings etc)⁴¹. As P. Alexander notes, the structure of *Vita Basilii* and the way his reign is narrated is too elaborate to be accidental. Konstantinos VII must have used an already existing work, namely the funeral oration delivered by his father in memory of Basil and Eudocia Ingerina⁴², which the author describes as the first specimen of biographical encomium dealing with a wholly secular hero⁴³.

Similarly, existing classical works have been used to create Michael III's blackened image. In his groundbreaking study, R. J. H. Jenkins has shown that Plutarch's Mark Antony and Nero, as described in his *Parallel Lives*, have served as models for negative traits to be drawn from and be used to create a blackened image of Michael III⁴⁴. Plutarch also describes Mark Antony as extravagant⁴⁵, drunkard⁴⁶, and a person who enjoyed the company of detestable individuals⁴⁷. Nero is likewise described as a hippomaniac⁴⁸. A medium of *synkrisis* is also evident in Plutarch's work; after the prodigal Nero ruled the attentive Galba

³⁹ VITA BASILII, 112, 1-3.

⁴⁰ VITA BASILII, 108, 1-336, 26.

⁴¹ On the matter see: P. AGAPITOS, Η εικόνα του αυτοκράτορα Βασιλείου Α' στη φιλομακεδονική γραμματεία 867-959. *Hellenika* 40 (1989) 285-322; MORAVCSIK, Sagen und Legenden, 59-126; TOBIAS, Basil I, 1-77.

⁴² A. VOGT – I. HAUSHERR, Oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Léon VI Le Sage (*Orientalia Christiana* 16/1) Rome 1932.

⁴³ ALEXANDER, Secular biography, 204-207.

⁴⁴ JENKINS, Portrait, 71-77.

⁴⁵ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 146, 4-148, 1.

⁴⁶ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 3-5.

⁴⁷ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 158, 3-4.

⁴⁸ "Equorum studio vel praecipue ab ineunte actate flagravat plurimusque illi sermo, quanquam vetaretur, de circensibus erat (From his earliest years he had a special passion for horses and talked constantly about the games in the Circus, though he was forbidden to do so.". SUETONIUS, Lives, 118-119, 3 (chapter XXII).

(68-69)⁴⁹, similarly after the extravagant Michael III ruled the economical Basil⁵⁰. Jenkin's remarks have subsequently been endorsed by F. H. Tinnenfeld⁵¹.

Having given up the idea to write a history of all the Roman emperors, Konstantinos VII adopted the chronicle of Theophanes as a serviceable record of the period from Konstantinos the Great to Michael I (306-813) and began collecting material to compile a historiography for the emperors of the Amorion dynasty (813-867), possibly reserving the reign of his grandfather for separate treatment⁵². Remarkably, Basil's grandson gave twice the same order, i.e. the history for the years between 813 and 867 to be written. Nowadays, the majority of modern scholarship believes that firstly Konstantinos VII gave the dossier to Genesios and commissioned him to create a work that would deal with the history of the period of 813-867⁵³. As it has already been mentioned, this work is divided in four books and each book deals with a separate emperor. Yet, at the end of his fourth and last book of *Βασιλείαι*, Genesios exceeded his limits

⁴⁹ "Βουλόμενος δὲ τῆς περὶ τὰς δωρεὰς ἀμετρίας καὶ πολυτελείας τοῦ Νέρωνος ἀποδεικνύναι μεγάλην μεταβολήν, ἀστοχεῖν ἐδόκει τοῦ πρέποντος. Κάνου γὰρ αὐλήσαντος αὐτῷ παρὰ δεῖπνον (ἀκρόαμα δὲ ἦν ὁ Κάνος εὐδοκιμούμενον) ἐπαινέσας καὶ καὶ ἀποδεξάμενος ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ κομισθῆναι τὸ γλωσσόκομον καὶ λαβὼν χρυσοῦς τινὰς ἐπέδωκε τῷ Κανῷ, φήσας ἐκ τῶν ιδίων, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν δημοσίων χαρίζεσθαι...". PLUTARCH'S LIVES XI, 238, 1.

⁵⁰ "...τὴν αὐτοκράτορα ἦλθεν ἀρχὴν ὁ Βασίλειος, ὥσπερ ἐνδεικνυμένου θεοῦ τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν πραγμάτων μεταβολήν, συνέβη πολλῶν ἐπινικίων ἀγγελίαν τὴν βασιλεῦσαν ταύτην καταλαβεῖν καὶ ἀνάρρυσιν πλήθους αἰχμαλώτων ἀγγελθῆναι Χριστιανῶν. πρόοδον οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπὶ τὸν μέγαν τοῦ θεοῦ ναὸν τὸν τῆς ἐκείνου Σοφίας ἐπώνυμον ποιησάμενος καὶ τὰς περὶ πάντων ὁμοῦ εὐχαριστίας αὐτῷ ἀποδούς, ἐν τῷ ὑποστρέφειν ὑπάτευσεν καὶ χρήματα πολλά, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν δημοσίων (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν) ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων..." THEOPH. CONT., V, 112, 1-10.

⁵¹ TINNENFELD, Kategorien, 98-101.

⁵² MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 201.

⁵³ BARIŠIĆ, Génésios et le Continuateur de Théophane, 119-133; KARPOZIOLOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 319; MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 201; MARKOPOULOS, Genesios, 149-150; NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 96; TREADGOLD, Historians, 188; VLYSIDOU, Αποκλίσεις, 75-103 (esp. 101-103). Michael Featherstone and Juan Signes Codoñer, who have edited the first four books of Theophanes Continuatus in the series *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantina* also argue that Genesios' *Βασιλείαι* was written before Theophanes Continuatus. See: THEOPH. CONT. 11-13 (Prolegomena).

by briefly narrating the reign of Basil. Yet, this was not the main problem –but it proves that the author had to his disposal more information about Basil’s life.

Apparently, Genesios did not satisfy Konstantinos VII’s intentions, which were to besmear Michael III’s image as much as possible. On the contrary, at some point, Genesios mentions that Michael III and Theodora were pious emperors⁵⁴ and that the empire was well governed by them⁵⁵. On another occasion, Genesios narrates that Michael III showed great determination in checking the Arab advance in Asia Minor. Once, when Michael III heard that Amer⁵⁶ raided the Byzantine lands and took a large number of prisoners, he was greatly saddened by the reports⁵⁷ and ordered Petronas to march against the emir of Melitene⁵⁸. When Petronas returned from the campaign victorious, he was honored with the rank of *magistros*⁵⁹ (Genesios’ passage refers to the battle of Lalakaon -also known as battle of Poson or Porson- which I discuss at length below). And, although Genesios claims that Michael III was an indifferent emperor, he relates that the poor functioning of the empire was

⁵⁴ “Ταῦτα μὲν ἐν πρώτοις Μιχαήλ τε καὶ Θεοδώρας, τῶν εὐσεβῶν βασιλέων, τὰ κατορθώματα”. GENESIOS, IV, 58, 27-28.

⁵⁵ “Ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ χρόνῳ καλῶς τὰ τῆς πολιτείας ἐκεκυβέρνητο παρὰ τε βασιλέως Μιχαήλ <καὶ> Θεοδώρας τῆς τούτου μητρός, μεσιτευόντων τῶν προδηλωθέντων ἀνδρῶν”. GENESIOS, IV, 61, 89-91.

⁵⁶ PmbZ #8552.

⁵⁷ “περὶ δὲ τῆς πλείστης αἰχμαλωσίας περυσμένος ὁ βασιλεὺς δυσφορήτως εἶχεν καὶ ἡνιάτο, καὶ τοῖς ὑποχειρίοις ἐντραπεζούμενος τοιαύτά φησιν «οἶμοι, οἶμοι, οὐχ εὖρηταί τις ἀνθρώπων, ὅς πρὸς τὴν βασιλείαν ἡμῶν καὶ πρὸς Χριστιανούς ἀγάπην εἰλικρινῇ διασώσειεν, ὥς ἐνθένδε προθυμοποιηθεὶς ἀπέλθοι καὶ τῷ ἀσεβεῖ πολεμήσειεν Ἄμερ»”. GENESIOS, IV, 67, 75-80.

⁵⁸ “«λοιπόν ὦ Πετρῶνᾶ, προαιρῇ ἀπιέναι καὶ προσβαλεῖν τῷ ἐχθρῷ καὶ τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας προκινδυνεύσαι;» ὑποβαλὼν δὲ αὐτῷ φησιν, ὅτι περ «ἐν ἐτοιμότητι, βασιλεῦ, χρηματίζω τὴν ἐνοῦσάν μοι αἵματος δράκα ὑπὲρ τῆς σῆς βασιλείας καὶ τῶν ὁμοπίστων ἀποκενῶσαι» τούτοις δὴ τοῖς προθύμοις λόγοις ὁ ἄναξ ἐγγυηθεὶς προχειρίζεται τοῦτον ἡγεῖσθαι τοῦ τάγματος τῶν σχολῶν”. GENESIOS, IV, 67, 87-93.

⁵⁹ “περὶ τούτου διαγγελθέντος τῷ βασιλεῖ κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν χαρμονὴ δαψιλῆς διακέχυται, καὶ ὁ Πετρῶνᾶς τῇ τῶν μαγίστρων εὐκλείᾳ σεμνύνεται”. GENESIOS, IV, 69, 37-39.

because of Bardas' personal ambitions, who exploited Michael III's interests and impulses of youth to his own advantage⁶⁰.

In addition to that, Genesios' writing style is obscure and unclear, and fails to influence its audience. What is more important is that by occasionally judging the last member of the Amorion dynasty favorably and implicitly accounting that he was not indifferent to the state affairs, Genesios fails to besmear Michael III to the extent that would justify Basil's murderous act⁶¹. This resulted in Konstantinos VII having to commission again the rewriting of the same historical period.

The anonymous author of Theophanes Continuatus avoids Genesios' mistakes and provides a more adequate narrative for the propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty⁶². Genesios' moderate approach and the scattered positive remarks about Michael III's reign are removed and the condemnation of Michael III is even greater. In fact, in Theophanes Continuatus, the only positive remark about Michael III is recorded at the last lines of the book, where the writer relates that Michael III's offering to Hagia Sophia (i.e. the lavish plate, the chalice, and the polykandylon⁶³ that weighted sixty litrai of gold) was among the most noteworthy offerings ever made⁶⁴. Theophanes Continuatus

⁶⁰ “ἐξ ὧν ἀσχέτως ἐβασίλειά, Μιχαὴλ ἐπαυχενίζων | τοῦ βασιλέως, ὡς παρορᾶσθαι μὲν πολλάκις ἐκ [τε] τῶν συγκλητικῶν ἐξεγένετο, τάχα δὲ καὶ διὰ τὸ ἀλίσκεσθαι φιλοθεάμονι καὶ φιλιπποδρόμῳ προθέσει τὸν ἄνακτα δι’ ἀπροσεξίαν τῶν ἀμεινόνων ἢ τυχὸν καὶ ἡλικία τῇ νεαζούσῃ παραρριπίζεσθαι.”. GENESIOS, IV, 70, 73-76.

⁶¹ KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι* II, 325.

⁶² SIDERI, *Trends*, 39, 324, 359, 365.

⁶³ On the polykandyla and their sympolic value, see: L. BOURAS, *Byzantine Lighting Devices*. *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 479-491; G. GALAVARIS, *Some Aspects of Symbolic Use of Lights in the Eastern Church. Candles, Lamps and Ostrich Eggs*. *BMGS* 4 (1978) 67-78.

⁶⁴ “ἡ γὰρ ὧν ἔφερεν ἀναθημάτων ἐν τῷ περιωνύμῳ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ κατασκευὴ φιλεργῶς τελεσθεῖσα καὶ φιλοτίμως ἐπαινετὴ. οὔτε γὰρ τῷ δίσκῳ τῶν παλαιῶν τι κειμηλίων καὶ ἱερῶν, καὶ τῶν ἀφ’ οὗ γεγόνασιν ἄνθρωποι τεχνουργηθέντων ἐν ναοῖς, κατὰ τὸ μέγεθος ἐξισάζεται, οὔτε τις εὐπρέπεια καὶ ὠραιότης τινὶ τῶν γενομένων ἐπήνηθησεν, πάντων ἐκεῖ τῶν ὠραίων καὶ τιμίων συνδεδραμηκότων | καὶ τὸ ποτήριον δὲ τούτῳ λίαν κατάλληλον. Οὐ μὴν δὲ καὶ ὁ εἰς φωταγωγίαν κατασκευασθεὶς αὐτῷ κύκλος, ὅπερ φασὶ πολυκάνδηλον, τινὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἡλάττωται, ἀλλὰ καὶ οὗτος ἐκ χρυσοῦ ὅλος γενόμενος, λίτρας ἔχων ἑξήκοντα, τῶν ἄλλων διαφέρει κατὰ πολὺ καὶ τούτῳ δίδωσι τὰ πρωτεῖα καὶ τὸ σεβάσμιον”. THEOPH. CONT. IV, 298, 57-300, 12.

condemns Michael III sufficiently not only by emphasizing more on his turpitude and negative traits (drunkenness, ruling as a tyrant, love for horseracing, indifferent regarding state affairs etc), but also by providing a positive evaluation of his father, Theophilos⁶⁵.

Although a radical iconoclast, Theophilos is exalted for his pursuit of justice as he regularly visits the marketplace to inquire into the prices of the wares⁶⁶; he endures his wife accusations regarding his religious beliefs⁶⁷; he appears to care for his subject's appearance and declares that no Roman is permitted to wear his hair beyond his neck⁶⁸; and he is also praised for the wisdom he possessed⁶⁹. In this fashion the contrast between Theophilos and Michael III is greater, a fact that enables the anonymous writer to emphasize Michael III's negative traits and the denigration of the imperial dignity that took place during his reign. The political purpose of this *synkrisis* is to justify Basil's later usurpation. By praising Theophilos, defaming Michael III, and portraying him as a menace for the empire's well-being while he was in power, and then exalting Basil's rule, the ousting of Michael III from the throne is seen as a justifiable necessity.

Despite Michael III's treatment by Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii, i.e. the historiographies that were composed by order of Basil's grandson, one question is naturally raised: although their narratives are biased, how can one know that their arguments are not based on historical facts (culled from oral evidence, common sources, etc)? more specifically, how can one prove that Konstantinos VII was determined to modify, suppress, and falsify

⁶⁵ On Theophilos' positive review by Theophanes Continuatus, see: JENKINS, Classical Background, 17-18; MARKOPOULOS, Genesios, 148-149; MARKOPOULOS, The Rehabilitation of Emperor Theophilos, in: Dead or alive, 37-49. Cf. LJUBARSKIJ, Man in Byzantine Historiography, 185-186. The latter argues that Theophilos is sometimes judged positively, sometimes negatively.

⁶⁶ THEOPH. CONT. III, 126, 12-128, 16.

⁶⁷ THEOPH. CONT. III, 132, 21-38.

⁶⁸ THEOPH. CONT. III, 154, 1-7.

⁶⁹ THEOPH. CONT. III, 166, 36-168, 9.

historical facts, and invent stories or traits of existing personalities so that his “historiographical products” would suit his intentions?

As P. Magdalino rightfully remarks, Konstantinos VII’s attitude regarding historical fact and fiction is expressed in the *De Administrando Imperio*⁷⁰. In Chapter 13, the emperor advises his son, Romanos, how to deal with Northern barbarians who ask to be given valuable state assets: Konstantinos VII narrates that such importunate demands and brazenly submitted claims must be turned back and rebutted by plausible speeches and prudent and clever excuses (Διὸ δεῖ τὰς τούτων ἀκαίρους αἰτήσεις καὶ παρρησιαστικὰς αξιώσεις διὰ λόγων πιθανῶν καὶ φρονίμων καὶ συνετῶν ἀπολογιῶν ἀνατρέπειν καὶ ἀποκρούεσθαι...)⁷¹.

For example, Konstantinos VII states to his son Romanos that if the Chazars, Turks, Russians or any other nation of the Northerners or Scythians ask some of the imperial vestments or diadems or state robes to be sent to them in return for some service or office they provided, their request should be rejected. They are to be told that these items were not fashioned by men, nor were they devised by human arts; God sent them by the hand of His angel to Konstantinos, the first Christian emperor. These items are to remain in Hagia Sophia and be used by the emperor and the patriarch, only when it is a great public festival of the Lord.

It should also be pointed out that these items are cursed by Konstantinos I and if any emperor misuses them or gives them to others, he shall be anathematized, rendered foe and enemy of the God, and he shall also be excommunicated from the church. Once, one emperor, Leo by name, out of his folly and rashness took up one of these diadems when there was no festival of the Lord, and without the approval of the patriarch put it on his head. All at

⁷⁰ MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 206-208.

⁷¹ DAI, ch. XIII, 66, 19-23.

once, a carbuncle came forth upon his forehead and killed him. After this incident a rule was made, according to which the one who is about to be crowned emperor must first swear that he will neither do nor conceive anything against what has been ordained and kept from ancient times, and only then may he be crowned by the patriarch and perform and execute the rites appropriately to the established festival⁷².

Among other suggestions, Konstantinos VII advises Romanos how to deal with foreigners who inquire about liquid fire. Romanos may rebut and dismiss such demands by arguing that this too is revealed and taught by God through an angel to the great and holy Konstantinos, the first christian emperor. The angel warned Konstantinos that only the Christians may manufacture it in the city ruled by them (i.e. Constantinople) and nowhere else, nor should it be sent or taught to any other nation.

Konstantinos I, in order to insure that the future emperors would also abide by the rules, inscribed curses on the holy table of Hagia Sophia, according to which the one who would dare to give this fire to another nation should neither be called a Christian, nor should he be worthy to hold any rank or office; and if he would be the holder of any such (ranks or offices) he would be expelled and anathematized in an exemplary fashion, so that no one else, whether he is emperor, patriarch of any other man, would dare to transgress the angel's rules. Yet, it happened once that one military commander was heavily bribed by certain foreigners and handed them over some plans of how to manufacture this liquid fire. Since God could not leave such kind of transgression unpunished, when the bribed official was about to enter Hagia Sophia, fire came down out of heaven and killed the man instantly. Afterwards, everyone got terrified and not one, whether emperor, noble, military commander, or

⁷² DAI, ch. XIII, 66, 24-68, 72.

private citizen dared to attempt passing information to foreigners about how the liquid fire is manufactured⁷³.

Obviously, the aforementioned stories regarding inscribed curses are fictional and are only meant to deceive the Northern barbarians. Yet, the advice that Konstantinos VII gave to his son proves that when it was beneficial for the state's propaganda, Basil's grandson did not have the slightest hesitation to resort to fiction and invent stories so that he could refute unwanted demands. However, he was not the first one to use the medium propaganda or to invent stories for dynastic or state purposes.

In his *Taktika*, Konstantinos VII's father, Leo VI⁷⁴, advises his military officials to exploit symbols and signs to encourage their troops; astronomy (such as the appearance of a star) can be employed to convince the army of divine favor – even dreams that promise help from God can be “made up” to encourage the troops⁷⁵. Yet, as Magdalino meticulously highlights, for Konstantinos VII history writing was an exercise in imperial authority, comparable to legislation and legal codification; it was the emperor who decided what was useful and what was true, and he made little real distinction between the documentation and invention of historical facts⁷⁶.

Konstantinos VII's imperial authority regarding the (re)writing of history is also demonstrated from the fact that he gave twice the same order: the history from 813 to 867 to be written. Since Genesios' *Βασιλείαι* did not satisfy his imperial propaganda, he commissioned the anonymous writer of Theophanes Continuatus to rewrite the same historical period. Another factor that compelled Konstantinos VII to exercise his imperial authority to his historiographical projects and to praise the founder of the Macedonian dynasty

⁷³ DAI, ch. XIII, 68, 73-70, 103.

⁷⁴ PmbZ #24311.

⁷⁵ TOUGHER, Leo VI, 119.

⁷⁶ MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 208-209.

is that he himself was sidelined for twenty-four years by Romanos Lakapenos⁷⁷, who, just like Basil, was a usurper.

Zoe Karbonopsina⁷⁸, who was governing as regent to her son, Konstantinos VII, was replaced in 919 by the then *droungarios tou ploimou*⁷⁹ Romanos Lakapenos. In May of the same year, Romanos Lakapenos married his daughter Helena⁸⁰ off to Konstantinos VII and became *basileopator*⁸¹ of the latter. Yet, Romanos was too ambitious to rule as regent. He soon altered his imperial status and began ruling as an emperor, whereas the adolescent Konstantinos VII was sidelined and was crowned co-emperor.

Shortly afterwards, the situation became even worse for Konstantinos VII. On 20 May 921, Christophoros Lakapenos⁸², the oldest son of Romanos, was also crowned co-emperor and was given precedence over Basil's grandson, who at that time was about fifteen years old and was considered old enough to rule. Next, on 25 December 921 two other sons of Romanos Lakapenos, Stephanos⁸³ and Konstantinos⁸⁴ were also crowned co-emperors. Basically, three out of Romanos' four sons became co-emperors. The other one, Theophylaktos⁸⁵, Romanos' youngest son, was to pursue an ecclesiastical career – while he was still an adolescent, he was appointed *synkellos*⁸⁶ of the then patriarch Nicholas I⁸⁷. With the help of his father, Theophylaktos eventually became patriarch of Constantinople in 933; he retained this rank till 956, the

⁷⁷ PmbZ #26833.

⁷⁸ PmbZ #28506

⁷⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 342.

⁸⁰ PmbZ #22574.

⁸¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 307.

⁸² PmbZ #21275.

⁸³ PmbZ #27251.

⁸⁴ PmbZ #23831.

⁸⁵ PmbZ #28192.

⁸⁶ On the ecclesiastical rank of *synkellos*, see: DARROUZÉS, *Officia*, 16-19.

⁸⁷ PmbZ #25885.

year he died. As a patriarch, Theophylaktos consistently supported his father's policy.

From the moment Christophoros Lakapenos was given precedence over Basil's grandson, it must have been evident to Konstantinos VII that, just as Basil displaced the Amorian dynasty, so did Romanos Lakapenos threatened to displace the Macedonian dynasty with one of his own –the difference is, of course, that Romanos did not consider the assassination of Basil's grandson as a solution. Under this prism, it also becomes apparent that when Konstantinos VII assumed the throne, in 944, he must have felt that the future of the Macedonian dynasty was precarious. By denigrating the Amorian dynasty – and especially Michael III– in his historiographical projects, Konstantinos VII was able to propagate that the renewal of the Byzantine empire did not start with the ending of iconoclasm during Michael III's reign, but with Basil, his grandfather, who assumed the throne in 867 and founded the Macedonian dynasty⁸⁸. Yet, a critical study on every aspect of Michael III's rule may lead to different conclusions.

More recently, a large number of distinguished Byzantinists studied Michael III's image as portrayed in the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii, and argued that his character and reign is intentionally falsified and slandered so that Basil's murder and subsequent elevation to the throne can be justified⁸⁹. That being said, Michael III's reputation is still not rightfully

⁸⁸ MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 195.

⁸⁹ CHRISTOU, Όψη, 38-39; CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Ιστορία Β1, 210-212; DE BOOR, Der Angriff, 463-464; DVORNIK, Photian schism, 132; GRÉGOIRE, Épopée byzantine, 29ff; HIRSCH, Byzantinische Studien, 55-62; HUNGER, Literatur I, 340-343; HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 443-450; JENKINS, Classical Background, 13-30; JENKINS, Portrait, 71-77; JENKINS - MANGO, Date, 140; KARLIN-HAYTER, Deux histoires, 452-496; KARLIN-HAYTER, Charioteers, 326-335; KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1-8; KARLIN-HAYTER, Rumeur, 85-111; KARPOZIOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 367-389; KISLINGER, Image und Realität, 389-400; KUBIAK, Damietta, 45-66; LJUBARSKIJ, Man in Byzantine Historiography, 184; LJUBARSKIJ, Kaiser als Mime, 39-50; MAGDALINO, Knowledge, 192-209; MAGUIRE, Parody, 128; MANGO, Ingerina, 17-27; MARKOPOULOS, Historical Writing, 184; MARKOPOULOS, Trends, 698, 702; MARKOPOULOS, Voices, 26-29; RÉMONDON, Damiette, 249; RICKELT, Herrscherbuße, 250; TREADGOLD, Historians, 180, 191-196; NEVILLE, Historical

reviewed. In internationally known *corpora*, Michael III is presented as “Michael III, the drunkard”⁹⁰, which proves that this is how he is still known. To this day there are Byzantinists who uncritically adopt Michael III’s image, as presented in the above historiographies and describe him merely as a drunkard and unworthy emperor.

I cite the arguments of certain scholars that have truly caught my interest: V. Vlysidou argues that Michael III was a weak emperor⁹¹ and during his reign the imperial authority was severely damaged: “...ὁ βυζαντινὸς αὐτοκρατορικός θεσμός γνώρισε στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ τελευταίου ἐκπροσώπου τῆς δυναστείας τοῦ Ἀμορίου μια πρωτοφανῆ ὑποβάθμιση”⁹². From my viewpoint, Vlysidou’s remarks on the decline of the imperial authority are exaggerated, because she uncritically adopted the biased narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii.

I. Karagiannopoulos, although he remarks that the Byzantine historiography is ill-disposed towards Michael III, describes him as a “Play-boy” of his time⁹³. He concludes that Michael III refrained from the major state affairs occurred during his reign. As he was a drunkard and pleasure-seeking and, thus, unable to properly govern, he tried to limit Basil from further advancing his career by promoting his own people (the author probably refers to Basiliskinos⁹⁴)⁹⁵. I find that Karagiannopoulos’ remarks do not correspond to historical reality. As I will demonstrate on the following chapters, Michael III not only showed diligence for the empire’s well-being (by personally

Writing, 95-109; PAPAMASTORAKIS, History, 194; TINNENFELD, Kategorien, 98-100; YANNOPOULOS, Ιστορία, 180.

⁹⁰ For example, in the Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection the chapter referring to Michael III’s coins is entitled “Michael III the Drunkard”. See: DOC III/1, 542.

⁹¹ VLYSIDOU, Οικογένειες, 209.

⁹² VLYSIDOU, Θεσμός, 33.

⁹³ KARAGIANNPOULOS, Ιστορία II, 259.

⁹⁴ PmbZ #977 (this individual is also recorded as Basiliskianos).

⁹⁵ KARAGIANNPOULOS, Ιστορία II, 282.

participating in campaigns in Asia Minor, presiding over ecclesiastical synods, seeing to the empire's fortifications etc), but his role was also pivotal in Basil's career advancement.

T. Lounghis' conclusions on Michael III's reign are even more biting: "... η νέα αριστοκρατία με τα ονόματα που σε λίγο θα γίνουν ένδοξα, δε διστάζει να παραγκωνίσει ολοκληρωτικά τον αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Γ' που δεν μπορεί να ασκήσει διοίκηση και ξεσπάει την ανήμπορη λύσσα του σε ιπποδρομίες και συμποτικά όργια, όπου διασύρει τον κλήρο και τους αξιωματούχους, αφήνοντας την ανάμνηση ενός μέθυσου, ενώ η αριστοκρατία κερδίζει πολλές νίκες και πολέμους"... "Τώρα πια τίποτε απολύτως δε μπορεί να ελέγξει ο Μιχαήλ Γ'"..."Ο πορφυρογέννητος Μιχαήλ Γ' σφάχτηκε τη νύχτα της 23 προς 24 Σεπτέμβρη του 867 σε ηλικία μόλις 27 χρονών και στο θρόνο ανέβηκε μόνος ο Βασίλειος"⁹⁶. Remarkably, Michael III's own participation in the campaigns in Asia Minor is also ignored by this author and Basil's treachery and participation at the night of Michael III's murder is –surprisingly– suppressed. Quite frankly, Lounghis' biased commentary on Michael III's reign and character can be viewed as a "remake" of Theophanes Continuatus dated in the twentieth century.

Thus, it can be concluded that the image and reputation of Michael III is still a controversial issue among contemporary scholarship. More importantly, this proves that there is still a significant number of Byzantinists who uncritically adopts information derived from Byzantine historiographers without considering the underlying premises upon which these historiographers based their judgement. As R-J. Lilie's meticulous study has shown, this is partially attributable to a general tendency among scholars of the past to deem the testimony of sources to be reliable until the contrary has been proven⁹⁷. Lilie

⁹⁶ LOUNGHIS, Δοκίμιο, 210-211.

⁹⁷ LILIE, Reality and Invention, 158.

rightfully remarks that Byzantine writers did not write just for themselves; they wrote for an audience they valued.

This meant that, when needed, these writers had to make some “modifications” in their accounts to meet the expectations of their audience, which was their main objective⁹⁸. These “modifications” meant that the authors would deliberately falsify historical events, so as to portray their heroes more positively and their adversaries more negatively. And, in order for their narratives to become more convincing, they would also enhance them with anecdotes, where their hero is presented doing exemplary acts, whereas their villains are depicted doing detestable ones. Under this prism, it becomes apparent that the historical truth of these anecdotes was insignificant. It was more important to illustrate the characteristics of the person(s) concerned, even if they were not based on historical truth⁹⁹.

Taking into consideration Lillie’s remarks concerning the objectives of the Byzantine writers and the way Michael III has been treated by the historiography of the tenth century, we may conclude the following: for our topic, (i) the “audience” that the authors had to satisfy was Konstantinos VII. Genesios (ii) failed to satisfy his intentions and, as a result, Basil’s grandson, by exercising (iii) his imperial authority in his historiographical projects commissioned the anonymous writer of Theophanes Continuatus to rewrite the same historical period. This time, the anonymous author satisfies the “audience’s” intentions; Michael III’s image is sufficiently blackened. I strongly believe that Michael III’s distorted image, as portrayed by Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii*, is one of the most noteworthy examples of deliberate falsification of historical personalities and the misleading consequences in modern historiography.

⁹⁸ LILLIE, *Reality and Invention*, 165.

⁹⁹ LILLIE, *Reality and Invention*, 163-176.

Till recently, a study concerning the critical review of Michael III's reign and character was a *desideratum*. The initiative was undertaken by Patricia Varona Codeso, who, in 2009, published her monograph about Michael III entitled "Miguel III (842-867). Construcción histórica y literaria de un reinado". Codeso has dealt with how Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, Symeon Magister, and Skylitzes narrate Michael III's reign, as well as the relationship and similarities among them¹⁰⁰. Codeso also dealt with the veneration of holy icons¹⁰¹, the regency of Theodora¹⁰² and the administration of the empire under Michael III and Bardas¹⁰³. She has rightfully demonstrated how propaganda contributed in the making of a villain (Michael III) –especially in Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii's narratives¹⁰⁴.

In 2020, Nektarios Dapergolas published his book regarding Michael III entitled "Ο αυτοκράτορ Μιχαήλ Γ' και η εποχή του (842-867). Νεότερες εκτιμήσεις και συμπεράσματα". Dapergolas provides an overview of the most important historical events of Michael III's reign¹⁰⁵. The Greek scholar underlined the problem of the sources regarding Michael III, i.e. that Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii, were biased and unfavorably disposed towards Michael III. Dapergolas also remarked, just like P. Codeso¹⁰⁶, P. Karlin-Hayter¹⁰⁷, K. Amantos¹⁰⁸, I. Karagiannopoulos¹⁰⁹ and W. Treadgold¹¹⁰ previously had, that the financial situation of the empire during the late years of Michael III's reign was not as severe as the aforementioned sources would

¹⁰⁰ CODESO, Miguel III, 13-56.

¹⁰¹ CODESO, Miguel III, 57-96.

¹⁰² CODESO, Miguel III, 97-128.

¹⁰³ CODESO, Miguel III, 129-184.

¹⁰⁴ CODESO, Miguel III, 249-268.

¹⁰⁵ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 43-98, 139-198.

¹⁰⁶ CODESO, Miguel III, 117-122.

¹⁰⁷ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1-8.

¹⁰⁸ AMANTOS, Ιστορία, 25.

¹⁰⁹ KARAGIANNOPOULOS, Ιστορία II, 304.

¹¹⁰ TREADGOLD, Finances, 9-95.

have us believe¹¹¹. Dapergolas further argued that Michael III was not sidelined by Bardas; on the contrary, despite his uncle's influence, he was able to make his own decisions¹¹².

Yet, without disregarding these noteworthy studies, I believe that Michael III's reign and character has not been studied in a satisfactory manner –there are still aspects of his reign that have not been thoroughly examined. For instance, the naval and military expeditions that took place during the reign of the last member of the Amorian dynasty have not been comprehensively presented. From my point of view, the aforementioned monographs present the matter rather briefly¹¹³, whereas previous studies, published in various scientific journals, have dealt only with one specific campaign¹¹⁴. Therefore, neither the magnitude of Michael III's successful campaigns has been adequately presented, nor has the way Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii suppressed and falsified his military achievements been adequately highlighted. The same can be said regarding the financial status of the empire during his sole reign. Although a number of studies has demonstrated that the imperial treasury was not empty¹¹⁵, I believe that by thoroughly studying the concerned historiographies separately and observing their narratives and discrepancies, a more detailed analysis about the economy of his era can be extracted.

Yet, remarkably, no one has ever studied the archaeological evidence (epigraphical evidence, coins and seals) of Michael III's reign as a whole. H. Grégoire dealt only with the material coming from Asia Minor¹¹⁶. Combining

¹¹¹ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 211-216.

¹¹² DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 107-110; 153-162.

¹¹³ CODESO, Miguel III, 131-141; DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 45-49.

¹¹⁴ I cite some of them indicatively: HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 443-450; KOLIA-DERMITZAKI, Execution, 141-162; KUBIAK, Damietta, 45-66; RÉMONDON, Damiette, 245-250.

¹¹⁵ AMANTOS, Ιστορία, 25; KARAGIANNOPOULOS, Ιστορία II, 304; KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1-8; TREADGOLD, Finances, 9-95.

¹¹⁶ GRÉGOIRE, Ancyre et les Arabes, 437-468; GRÉGOIRE, Michel III et Basile, 327-346; GRÉGOIRE, Recueil, 24.

the historical narratives with the archaeological evidence can be a valuable asset in revealing not only his activities, but also traits of his character, and how he wanted to be displayed among his subjects. More specifically, inscriptional evidence may reveal Michael III's (re)building activities, which may have been deliberately suppressed by the relevant Byzantine authors. Additionally, coins and seals may provide information not only about the way the emperor wanted to be displayed among his subjects, but also reveal aspects of the policy he intended to pursue within or beyond the borders of the empire.

With this study, I plan not only to fill these gaps, but also comprehensively study anew the historiographies that deal with his reign. More specifically, the purpose of my study is to provide (i) a thorough and objective presentation of the image and work of Michael III; (ii) a critical presentation and evaluation of the sources that relate to his reign; (iii) a comprehensive analysis of all the aforementioned archaeological evidence; (iv) a critical approach and presentation of Michael III's private life and personality, based on both the written sources and the archaeological evidence; (v) the official epistolography of Michael III's sole rule (primarily Michael III and Photios' letters to pope Nicholas and Boris); (vi) Byzantium's attempt to expand, during the concerned period, its religious and political influence in Armenia; (vii) Michael III's image on the Slavonic and Russian apocryphal interpolated historiography that refers to his achievements; (viii) a detailed presentation of the campaigns that took place during the regency of Theodora and Michael III's sovereign and, lastly, a detailed analysis (ix) of the financial status of the empire during 842-867. Finally, I would like to emphasize that ultimate goal is not necessarily to restore Michael III's image, but to provide an impartial study based on scientific criteria and research.

Regarding my approach to the relevant written sources, I would also like to clarify the following: I have opted to study and examine primarily the historiographies that were composed during the tenth century, by command

and supervision of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos; namely Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii. Taking into consideration their intentions, for the sake of convenience, I refer to them using the phrase “biased Byzantine historians”. Later Byzantine writers such as Georgios Kedrenos, Ioannes Zonaras, Konstantinos Manasses, Ephraem etc. are less frequently used. The reason behind this distinction of mine lies in the fact that the later Byzantine writers have, either purposely or unintentionally reproduced the accusations of the Macedonian propaganda.

Even Skylitzes, who, although in the *prooimion* of his *Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν*, claims that he is going to write actual history, narrating the historical events as happened, and that he would omit from his narrative anecdotes of subjective or fanciful nature and leave aside personal contradictions and differences¹¹⁷, he eventually reproduces the Macedonian propaganda. For example, he describes that when Michael III would become drunk from drinking unwatered wine, he would behave like a tyrant and command irregular things to be done: one man to have his ears cut off, another his nose etc.¹¹⁸. On the contrary, in his narrative Basil is depicted as a pious man who is guided by the Divine Providence and is destined to assume the Byzantine throne¹¹⁹. The reason that the two personalities are depicted in this manner is that for the years 811-948 Skylitzes’ *Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν* is based on Genesios, and mostly on Theophanes Continuatus¹²⁰.

Thus, when it comes to critically examine Michael III’s image, emphasis should be placed on the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii¹²¹. To separate historical truth from imperial propaganda, I have

¹¹⁷ SKYLITZES, 4, 31-59.

¹¹⁸ SKYLITZES, 113, 39-43.

¹¹⁹ SKYLITZES, 118, 46-130, 81.

¹²⁰ KARPOZIOS, *Ἱστορικοί καὶ χρονολόγοι* II, 239, 241-243.

¹²¹ Yet, I have to clarify that I am not dealing exclusively with the common sources that these historiographies share, but rather with their very narratives as it is. On the matter, among the ample bibliography see: E. ANAGNOSTAKIS, *Οὐκ εἶσιν ἐμὰ τὰ γράμματα. Ἱστορία καὶ ιστορίες*

also used the medium of *synkrisis* –just like Konstantinos VII did by comparing Michael III’s traits and deeds with Basil’s ones. That is to say, regarding the concerned personalities, I am examining and comparing the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii with Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon’s accounts.

Symeon Magister’s chronicle is preserved in a large number of manuscripts, which differ depending on the chronological periods they relate, their style, their sources etc. Yet, there are enough commonalities among these manuscripts to distinguish two main versions¹²²: Redaction A and Redaction B. The narrative of the first Redaction begins with the creation of the world and ends in 948. It is favorable towards Romanos I Lakapenos¹²³. Redaction A has recently been edited and published by Staffan Wahlgren¹²⁴.

The narrative of Redaction B begins with the creation of the world and ends in 963. It relates the reconquest of Crete and describes favorably the early career of Nikephoros II Phokas¹²⁵ before he became an emperor¹²⁶. Redaction B has been published by V. M. Istrin (based on the codex *Vaticanus gr. 153*)¹²⁷ and J.

στον Πορφυρογέννητο. *Σύμμεικτα* 13 (1999) 97-137; F. BARIŠIĆ, Génésios et le Continuateur de Théophane. *BYZ* 28 (1958) 119-133; VLYSIDOU, *Αποκλίσεις*, 75-103; HIRSCH, *Byzantinische Studien*, 128-129, 131-133, 137-138, 159-161; HUNGER, *Literatur I*, 351-354; JENKINS, *Classical Background*, 11-30; KALDELLIS, Genesios, XI, XII-XIV, XXI-XXIV (introduction); KARLIN-HAYTER, *Deux histoires*, 452-496; KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 327-366, (with further bibliography); A. LESMÜLLER-WERNER, *Miscellanea zur Übersetzung des Genesios*. *JÖB* 38 (1988) 319-341; J. N. LJUBARSKIJ, Theophanes Continuatus und Genesios. Das Problem einer gemeinsamen Quelle. *BSI* 48 (1987) 12-17; MARKOPOULOS, Genesios, 137-150 (with further bibliography); Neville, *Historical Writing*, 95-109; TREADGOLD, *Historians*, 134-196; J. SIGNES-CODONER, Constantino Porfirogénito y la Fuente comun de Genesio y Theophanes Continuatus I-IV. *BZ* 86/87 (1993-1994) 319-341.

¹²² On the matter, see: KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 391-410 (with further bibliography); NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 118-123 (with further bibliography); SIDERI, *Trends*, 349-350; TREADGOLD, *Historians*, 197-217.

¹²³ KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 396-397; NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 118.

¹²⁴ Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon (*Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 44/1) (ed. St. WAHLGREN). Berlin 2006.

¹²⁵ PmbZ #25535.

¹²⁶ KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 400; NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 119.

¹²⁷ V. M. ISTRIN, *Хроника Георгия Амартола в древнем славянорусском переводе*. Vol II. Saint Petersburg (Petrograd) 1922.

M. Featherstone (based on the codex *Vaticanus gr. 163*, Featherstone published the folios 42-6, which recount the reign of Michael III)¹²⁸ –St. Wahlgren prepares a critical edition of Redaction B as well¹²⁹. In both Redactions, each ruler's reign is discussed in a separate chapter, meaning that the structure of the chronicle resembles the ones of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii.

As has modern scholarship demonstrated, the most valuable feature of Symeon Magister's account is that when he was writing his chronicle, i.e. in the second half of the tenth century, he did not have to worry about displeasing an emperor who descended from Basil, so he could afford to be critical to the founder of the Macedonian dynasty¹³⁰. Yet, the fact that he was a strong supporter of Romanos Lakapenos may give us reason to believe that he intended to besmear the Macedonian dynasty and, as such, also deliberately falsified the historical events¹³¹. Although this possibility cannot be omitted, it appears that Symeon Magister's narrative is less vague and more informative regarding important scenes during Michael III's reign. For example, Symeon Magister, as will be described, names the exact individuals that participated in Bardas and Michael III's murders –and he is the only one that mentions Basil's participation in both of them. Of course, that does not mean that he is favourable towards Michael III.

For instance, Symeon Magister relates that Petros Ptochomagistros¹³² mocked Michael III for building a lavishly decorated stable: "Ioustinianos build the Great Church, and he had it decorated with gold and silver and precious marble, and nobody remembers him nowadays. And you, emperor, who have

¹²⁸ J. M. FEATHERSTONE, *The Logothete Chronicle in Vat. Gr. 163*. *OCP* 64 (1998) 419-434.

¹²⁹ On the matter and the manuscripts that constitute Redaction B, see: WAHLGREN, *Symeon the Logothete*, 324.

¹³⁰ CODESO, *Miguel III*, 43-44; MARKOPOULOS, *History Writing*, 188-190; MARKOPOULOS, *Voices*, 29; TREADGOLD, *Historians*, 210.

¹³¹ LILIE, *Reality and Invention*, 166-167; MAGDALINO, *Knowledge*, 203.

¹³² PmbZ #6094.

made a dung-deposit and a resting place for horses, you think that you will be remembered by this?" Failing to receive the expected praise, the emperor was infuriated, and he had Ptochomagistros kicked out and beaten¹³³.

This scene is not found in the narratives of Genesios, nor of Theophanes Continuatus, but it is recorded in the *Patria*¹³⁴ and Pseudo-Symeon¹³⁵. Yet, for the scope of our study the key element is the fact that Symeon Magister did not have to suppress information about Basil's actions during Michael III's reign. His work does not give the impression that his narrative is deliberately fabricated, and he appears to be better informed of what was happening in the imperial court. I reckon that his chronicle is a very important tool in distinguishing historical truth from the imperial propaganda practiced by Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii*.

Pseudo-Symeon's narrative (otherwise known as the third Redaction of Symeon Magister) is an interesting case¹³⁶. Its text is preserved in only one manuscript, the *Parisinus Graecus* 1712. The chronicle narrates the period from the creation of the world till the reign of Romanos II (963)¹³⁷. Yet, only the portion covering the years 813-963 has been published, under the title "Symeon Magister" in the forty-fifth volume of the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*¹³⁸. For the reign of Michael III, Pseudo-Symeon depended mostly on Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and, as such, he reproduced the imperial propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty.

¹³³ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 426, §21; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 10, 3-13; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 244, 234-245, 246. English translation of the text after: WAHLGREN, *Chronicle*, 184-185.

¹³⁴ *PATRIA*, III, 152-155 (n. 29).

¹³⁵ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 666, 16-667, 6.

¹³⁶ On Pseudo-Symeon, see: KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι* II, 401-410 (with further bibliography); MARKOPOULOS, *Ψευδοσυμεών*, 1-29; NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 121, 123; SIDERI, *Trends*, 350; TREADGOLD, *Historians*, 217-224.

¹³⁷ PmbZ #26834.

¹³⁸ Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister [i.e. Pseudo-Symeon], Georgius Monachus (*Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 45) (ed. I. BEKKER). Bonn 1838, 603-760.

For example, Michael III is characterized as “ὁ ἀπαιδευτότατος ἄναξ”¹³⁹, “ἀνίερος”¹⁴⁰, “ἀφρονέστατος”¹⁴¹ etc. As Ath. Markopoulos¹⁴² and P. Karlin-Hayter have remarked, he also condemns Michael III for emptying the imperial treasury with his extravagant lifestyle: “ὅτε δὲ ὁ Βασίλειος ἦλθεν, οὐδὲν ἄλλο εὔρεν εἰ μὴ κεντηνάρια ἰγ’ καὶ μυριάσια σακιά θ’”¹⁴³. As a result, one could argue that his contribution on critically reviewing Michael III’s reign is limited. Yet, there are cases where Pseudo-Symeon adds anecdotes recorded neither in Genesis, nor in Theophanes Continuatus.

To the best of my knowledge, he is the only author claiming that Photios was Michael III’s habitual boon companion: “ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄμιλλαν μετὰ τοῦ ἀθλίου βασιλέως Μιχαήλ ὑπὲρ τοῦ τίς ἂν πλέον πῖν ἐνστησάμενος δέκα κώθωσιν αὐτὸν ὑπερέβαλλεν· τοῦ Μιχαήλ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ν’ πεπληρωμένου, οὗτος ὁ Φώτιος τοὺς ξ’ ἐκπεπωκὼς ἐνεκαυχᾶτο ὡς μὴ μεμεθυκῶς”¹⁴⁴ (once, Photios took part in a drinking contest with the emperor and beat him; whereas Michael III drunk fifty cups of wine and became drunk, Photios drunk sixty and was not overcome). As a matter of fact, this anecdote might have been culled from an anti-Photian source, which could have been written by Niketas David Paphlagon¹⁴⁵.

¹³⁹ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 663, 4.

¹⁴⁰ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 663, 9.

¹⁴¹ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 662, 12.

¹⁴² KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1; MARKOPOULOS, Ψευδοσυμμεών, 160.

¹⁴³ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 659, 22-663, 1.

¹⁴⁴ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 663, 13-17.

¹⁴⁵ On the matter see: J. GUILLARD, Le Photius du Pseudo-Syméon Magistros. *Revue des études Sud-est Européennes* 9 (1971) 397-404; KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 404-405; AP. KAZHDAN, Chronica Simeona Logofeta. *VizVre* 15 (1959) 125-143; O. KRESTEN, Phantomgestalten in der byzantinischen Literaturgeschichte. *JÖB* 25 (1976) 207-222; MARKOPOULOS, Ψευδοσυμμεών, 164-170; S. PASCHALIDES, From Hagiography to Historiography: the Case of the Vita Ignatii (BHG 817) by Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, in: *Les vies des saints à Byzance. Genre littéraire ou biographie historique? Actes du II^e colloque international philologique «ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ» Paris, 6-7-8 juin 2002 (Dossiers Byzantins 4)* (eds. P. ODORICO – P. AGAPITOS). Paris 2004, 161-173; F. WINKELMANN, Hat Niketas David Paphlagon ein umfassendes Geschichtswerk verfasst? Ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos und des Pseudo-Symeon. *JÖB* 37 (1987) 137-152.

Finally, when relevant to the evaluation of Michael III's reign and character I will also analyse the *Vita Ignatii*, written by Niketas David Paphlagon¹⁴⁶, the homilies of patriarch Photios, Latin sources, Arab sources and so on. It remains to be examined if Michael III was the indifferent, extravagant, and drunkard emperor, who damaged the imperial dignity unprecedently (...ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἡνιοχεῖν –ὡ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας– θέαμα τυγχάνων καὶ παίγνιον πᾶσι δὴ καὶ κατάγελως)¹⁴⁷ and was a menace to the empire that had to be removed at any cost; whether he was an ideal emperor, or whether he was something in between.

¹⁴⁶ PmbZ #25712.

¹⁴⁷ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 262, 5-8.

Chapter I: The reign of Michael III: emperor and court

Michael III was born on 9-10 January 840; this is confirmed by a marginal note in the unique manuscript of Joseph Genesios, according to which: “ἡ γέννησις Μιχαήλ τοῦ υἱοῦ Θεοφίλου ἦν μ(ηνὶ) Ἰαννου(αρίῳ) θ’ ἐπὶ τ’ ἐν ἔτει σ(υμ)μ(η) ὦ(ρα) νυκτ(ὸς) πρ(ώτῃ)”¹⁴⁸. In all probability, he was crowned successor to the throne in the course of the same year; at the latest towards September 840¹⁴⁹.

It appears that Theophilos was deeply worried about designating a successor to the throne¹⁵⁰. His firstborn son, Konstantinos¹⁵¹, had already died in childhood and, prior to Michael III’s birth, he had only female offsprings:

¹⁴⁸ This marginal note is found on the codex Lips. gr. 16, on fol. 268r. On Michael III’s date of birth see: CODESO, Miguel III, 61; MANGO, Michael III, 253-258; TOBIAS, Basil, 36. However, more recently, N. Dapergolas has argued that Michael was born in 836. See: DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 101-102. His main argument is based on a passage from the Vita of Theodora: “Μετὰ δὲ τὴν τελευτὴν Θεοφίλου ἐβασίλευσε Μιχαήλ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ πέντε ἡμῖσι ἐτῶν ὑπάρχων, μετὰ Θεοδώρας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ”. See: MARKOPOULOS, ΒΘ, 265, 2-3. Yet, the Vita of Theodora is self contradictory and, as such, not a reliable source to date Michael’s birth. That is to say, on another passage, it is recorded that Michael was killed at the age of twenty nine. The numbers simply do not add up. See, MARKOPOULOS, ΒΘ, 268, 14-16. Dapergolas’ second argument that if Michael was being born in 840, he was too young to get married in 855 at the age of 15, must also be dismissed. See, DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 102. Already since the eighth century, the age of 15 appears as a threshold for young boys. They were considered *ephoboi* and mature enough to make decisions. On the matter see: CASEAU, Accountable, 22; G. PRINZING, Legal Status of children and the Stages of Childhood in Byzantium, in: *Becoming Byzantine. Children and Childhood in Byzantium (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia 1)* (eds. A. PAPACONSTANTINOU – A. -M. TALBOT). Washington 2009, 15-34 (esp. p. 19). I am inclined to believe that the date 9-10 January 840 is the correct one for Michael III’s birth.

¹⁴⁹ MANGO, Michael III, 258.

¹⁵⁰ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Εκλογή, 88. His marriage with Theodora might not have been a happy one. It could be that the latter was chosen due to a sudden impulse made in a state of mental agitation. On the matter, see: K. NIKOLAOU, Empresses and Augustae as wives, paramours and mistresses (fifth – eleventh century). *BSI* 75 (2017) 43-54.

¹⁵¹ PmbZ #3931.

Thecla¹⁵², Anna¹⁵³, Anastasia¹⁵⁴, Pulcheria¹⁵⁵ and Maria¹⁵⁶. After Michael III's birth, Theophilos hastily dealt with the matter. According to Genesios, he went to Magnaura and called for a universal assembly to let the senate know that Michael III and Theodora will succeed him¹⁵⁷. It seems that he was already not in good health; Genesios narrates that he was carried to Magnaura upon a litter, and that he already had dysentery and diarrhea¹⁵⁸.

Proof of Michael III's immediate coronation is attested on several occasions: there is the inscription on the bronze doors of Hagia Sophia, which commemorates Theophilos, Theodora, and Michael III as heir to the throne¹⁵⁹; the inscriptions on the land and sea walls of Constantinople, which refer to the reconstructions that took place under Theophilos and Michael during 840-842¹⁶⁰; and the solidi of class V of Theophilos and of the class V of his miliaresia, which mention Michael III as Theophilos' successor¹⁶¹.

Further evidence of Michael III's coronation is found on the eighteenth homily of Photios¹⁶², who states that Michael III was made emperor "from the very cradle"¹⁶³. *Annales Cavenses* also record Michael III's coronation; as stated in the Italian chronicle, "in 840 indiction 3 (i.e. before September) Michael porfirogenitus frater ejus"¹⁶⁴, i.e. that Michael III, the brother of Theophilos was

¹⁵² PmbZ #7261.

¹⁵³ PmbZ #460.

¹⁵⁴ PmbZ #231.

¹⁵⁵ PmbZ #6384.

¹⁵⁶ PmbZ #4735. According to some scholars, Alexios Mosele, who was Maria's husband, was proclaimed, prior to Michael III's birth, successor to the throne; however, this is not certain. On the matter see the lemma Alexios Mosele of the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*: PmbZ #195.

¹⁵⁷ GENESIOS, III, 51, 47-52, 68.

¹⁵⁸ GENESIOS, III, 51, 49-53. Theophilos eventually died of dysentery: PmbZ #8167.

¹⁵⁹ See below, pp. 354-359.

¹⁶⁰ See below, pp. 359-362.

¹⁶¹ See below, pp. 316-319.

¹⁶² PmbZ #6253.

¹⁶³ MANGO, Homilies, 309.

¹⁶⁴ COD. DIPL. CAVENSIS, 30; MANGO, Michael III, 258. There are also two more Italian chronicles (Monumenta ad neapolitani ducatus historiam pertinentia I, and Codex Diplomaticus Cajetanus I) that refer to Michael III as porfirogenitus. See: DAGRON, Nés, 114.

crowned. The entry of brother of (Theophilos [frater ejus]) is, however, obviously wrong¹⁶⁵. A further confirmation is provided by Hamza al-Iṣfahānī¹⁶⁶: *Regnabat Theophilus Michaelis in diebus Almanonis 22 annos et tres mensesl deinde Michael, eius filius, cum matre in diebus Almoctaderi usque ad vigesimum octavum aetatis suae annum*¹⁶⁷.

Michael III succeeded Theophilos on 20 January 842, when he was three years old¹⁶⁸. Because of his young age, the empire was governed by Theodora, who acted as regent to Michael III. Thecla, Michael III's sister, was also part of the regency; however, her participation seems to have been rather typical and was meant to ensure dynastic continuity¹⁶⁹; she has generally been ignored by the Byzantine historiographers. During the last days of Theophilos and certainly by his own initiative, a three-member council was created not only to ensure that the empire would be governed appropriately, but also to make sure that Theodora would not try to remove Michael III from the throne and rule on her own¹⁷⁰, i.e. to avoid a repetition of how Eirene¹⁷¹ treated her son, Konstantinos¹⁷².

This three-member council was comprised of Theoktistos¹⁷³ who at that time was *magistros*¹⁷⁴ and *logothetes tou dromou*¹⁷⁵, Bardas¹⁷⁶, at that time a

¹⁶⁵ DAGRON, Nés, 114; MANGO, Michael III, 258.

¹⁶⁶ On Hamza al-Iṣfahānī see: EI², III, 156-157 (Hamza al-Iṣfahānī).

¹⁶⁷ MANGO, Michael III, 254 (and cit. n. 13).

¹⁶⁸ Given that Michael III was born in 9/10 January 840, when he succeeded his father he had just entered into his third year. This is also confirmed by Theophanes Continuatus: “τὴν δὲ βασιλείαν Μιχαὴλ ὁ τούτου υἱὸς διεδέξατο, τρίτον ἔτος διανύων ἀφ’ οὗ εἰς τὸν βίον προήχθη...”. THEOPH. CONT. IV, 212, 1-3.

¹⁶⁹ GITTINGS, Women, 96 (and cit. n. 3).

¹⁷⁰ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Ἀντιβασιλεία, 41.

¹⁷¹ PmbZ #1439.

¹⁷² PmbZ #3704.

¹⁷³ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 85-95; PmbZ #8050.

¹⁷⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 294.

¹⁷⁵ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 311-312.

¹⁷⁶ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 105-116; PmbZ #791.

patrikios¹⁷⁷, and Manuel¹⁷⁸, who was a magister and domestikos ton scholon¹⁷⁹. There seems to be a disagreement in modern literature about the people that participated in this three-member council¹⁸⁰. A number of modern scholars has argued that Manuel was not part of the council because he had died in the battle of Dazimon¹⁸¹. This is based on the narrative of Symeon Magister, who records that “...ὁ δὲ Μανουὴλ τῷ πολέμῳ τρωθεὶς καὶ νοσήσας ἐτελεύτησεν...”¹⁸². However, this is simply not true; in his narrative, Genesios clearly records that “ἐπὶ μακρὸν χρόνον βιώσας ἐνδόξως ἀποβεβιώκει...(he died after living a long and glorious life)”¹⁸³. As Eirene Christou remarks, this note seems to have escaped the scholarship’s attention, who argue that Manuel had died in 838¹⁸⁴.

In the narratives of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus, it is stated that Manuel had actively participated in the public affairs of the empire –and that he had not died in the battle of Dazimon. When Theophilos died, Manuel assembled in the hippodrome all his followers and soldiers he could trust and asked them to obey him. The crowd gathered thought that he was about to propose himself for the throne, but then Manuel proclaimed “Μιχαήλ τε καὶ Θεοδώρας τὰ ἔτη πρὸς πλεῖστον ὁδεύσειεν”¹⁸⁵. When the crowd heard this

¹⁷⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 294-295.

¹⁷⁸ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 97-103; PmbZ #4707.

¹⁷⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 329-330.

¹⁸⁰ The fact that the council was consisted of three members is clearly stated by Theophanes Continuatus: THEOPH. CONT. IV, 3-8. However, P. Codeso has argued that this three-member council did not exist and that it was conceived by later historiographers. CODESO, Miguel III, 59-74.

¹⁸¹ On the Dazimon battle, see: CODOÑER, Theophilos, 279-312 (with further bibliography); HALDON, Byzantine Wars, 80-82; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 144-177.

¹⁸² WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 225, 190-191. The same reference is found in the narrative of Pseudo-Symeon. See: PSEUDO-SYMEON, 636, 22. The fact that Manuel had died in the Dazimon battle was supported by H. Grégoire, F. Dvornik, F. Halkin, A. Kaldellis, P. Karlin-Hayter, and W. Treadgold. See: DVORNIK, Photius and Iconoclasm, 69-72; GRÉGOIRE, Études, 520-524; HALKIN, Trois dates, 97; KALDELLIS, Republic, 112-113; KARLIN-HAYTER, Deux histoires, 464-465, 468; TREADGOLD, Accuracy, 172; TREADGOLD, Revival, 300-301; cf. CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 98-103; CHRISTOU, Όψη, 27-43; CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Αντιβασιλεία, 35-41.

¹⁸³ GENESIOS, IV, 61, 14.

¹⁸⁴ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 99.

¹⁸⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 55, 34-35.

proclamation, it was greatly dissatisfied, but obeyed his command and the succession was ensured¹⁸⁶. It becomes apparent that the only reason the gathered crowd was dissatisfied by Manuel's statements is that he was already known about his victorious campaigns in the East, i.e. during Theophilos' reign, and they admired him for them. This indirectly proves that Manuel did not die in the battle of Dazimon¹⁸⁷.

According to another incident narrated by Theophanes Continuatus, shortly afterwards, Manuel began suffering from a serious illness¹⁸⁸, and monks from the monastery of Stoudion approached him to save him; the monks told him that they would save him only on the condition he convinced the Byzantine court to restore the worship of the holy images. And so it was; when Manuel recovered from his illness, he met Theodora and discussed the matter¹⁸⁹.

A decade afterwards, in 855, when Manuel was informed that Bardas had assassinated Theoktistos, he prophesied Bardas' death and told him: "σπάθην γυμνώσας, Βάρδα, τοῖς ἀνακτόροις, σαυτῷ γυμνώσεις εἰς τομήν τοῦ σαρκίου" (you have bared a sword, Bardas, in the palace and you have turned its edge against your flesh)¹⁹⁰. This is yet another clue that Manuel was in fact alive. Yet, what must be discarded is the fact that Manuel helped Michael III escape from Amer's¹⁹¹ troops in the battle near Samosata in 859. This event is a sheer fabrication used only to suppress Michael III's victorious campaigns¹⁹².

¹⁸⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 55, 35-56, 37.

¹⁸⁷ CHRISTOU, Όψη, 37-38.

¹⁸⁸ It is because of this great illness that a rumor had spread at that time in Constantinople that led many to believe that Manuel had succumbed to his illness. It is probably based on this rumor that Symeon Magister records that Manuel had died: WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 225, 190-191. On the matter see also the detailed analysis of Eirini Christou: CHRISTOU, Όψη, 39.

¹⁸⁹ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 212, 21-241, 7.

¹⁹⁰ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 82-83. The prophecy is repeated in Theophanes Continuatus' narrative: "Ξίφος γυμνώσας εἰς Θεοκτίστου φόνον, ὅπλιζε σαυτὸν σφαγὴν καθ' ἡμέραν". See: THEOPH. CONT., IV, 242, 38-39. On the matter see also: CHRISTOU, Όψη, 42.

¹⁹¹ PmbZ #8552.

¹⁹² See below, pp. 274-277.

The fact that Theophilos designated a council to administer the public affairs of the empire and provide assistance to Theodora would, in theory, be sufficient for the empire to be governed appropriately during the regency. At the same time, the council would ensure that Michael III would grow up properly and that it would also be looking after his upbringing. In reality, however, things transpired differently. Not long after the council was established, the three designated members started disputing each other. A quarrel began between Theoktistos and Manuel; the former blamed Manuel for secretly organizing a coup against Theodora's regency. Manuel, in order to avoid an escalation of the quarrel, decided to leave from the palace and reside in his home, which was near the cistern of Aspar¹⁹³. Christou has remarked that his moving out of the palace to avoid any further quarrels with Theoktistos proves his genuine interest for the well-being of the empire¹⁹⁴.

Bardas and Theoktistos also had a fall out. In 844, when Theoktistos' campaign in Asia Minor against the forces of Amer¹⁹⁵ failed, Theoktistos approached Theodora and blamed Bardas for the defeat. The empress had subsequently expelled Bardas from the city¹⁹⁶. It thus becomes apparent that not long after the council was established, Theoktistos enjoyed a superior position in the regency in comparison to Bardas and Manuel. Besides, from the narratives of the sources, it is evident that Theoktistos also enjoyed Theodora's trust and that he was her most trusted adviser: "...Θεόκτιστον ὡς πιστότατον καὶ οἰκειότατον..."¹⁹⁷. In addition, the study of K. Nikolaou has demonstrated

¹⁹³ GENESIOS, IV, 61, 5-14; THEOPH. CONT. IV, 240, 1-15.

¹⁹⁴ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 100-101; CHRISTOU, Οψη, 41.

¹⁹⁵ PmbZ #8552.

¹⁹⁶ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 421, §6; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 4, 17; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 654, 19-24; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 233, 20-35.

¹⁹⁷ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, §; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, ; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 654, 20; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 233, 23.

that, although Theoktistos was a eunouch, his relationship with Theodora might have been more than intimate¹⁹⁸.

As for Theodora, shortly after she assumed the throne, the restoration of the icons took place¹⁹⁹. However, the empress did not call an official synod to condemn Iconoclasm and restore icon veneration²⁰⁰; an assembly of selected officials, i.e. among others, of Manuel, Bardas, maybe Sergios Niketiates²⁰¹ and Theoktistos, took place at the house of the latter, where it was decided that the time was right for the restoration of the icon worship²⁰². On 4 March 843 Ioannes VII Grammatikos²⁰³ was removed from the patriarchal throne and was replaced by Methodios²⁰⁴. One week later, on 11 March 843, the veneration of the icons officially took place. Theodora and the new patriarch Methodios led a procession from the Church of Vlachernae to Hagia Sophia, upholding the proceedings of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and symbolically demonstrating the restoration of the icons²⁰⁵. This event is still celebrated today on the first Sunday of the Great Lent as the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

Theodora did not convoke an official synod to condemn Iconoclasm, as she did not want to cause any civil unrest by challenging the unrepentant iconoclasts. In fact, her whole attitude towards the iconoclast clergy was rather conciliatory; she attached as a condition to the restoration of the icons that her

¹⁹⁸ On the matter, see: ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ, Θεοδώρα και Θεόκτιστος, 71ff.

¹⁹⁹ On Theodora and her attachment to the cult of the icons, see: GARLAND, Empresses, 95-104; HERRIN, Influence, 63-67; HERRIN, Women in Purple, 195-196, 202-210.

²⁰⁰ A synod to officially condemn Iconoclasm was held summoned shortly before the Easter of 861, during the sole reign of Michael III; it is known as the *πρωτοδευτέρα σύνοδος* and took place in the church of the Apostles. See below, pp. 176-179, 216.

²⁰¹ PmbZ #6664.

²⁰² There is a disagreement between the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and of Symeon Magister as to who among the three-member council influenced Theodora that the time was right for the icons to be restored. On the matter see: CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 100-101 (and cit. n. 20 and 22); CHRISTOU, Όψη, 38 (and cit. n. 30).

²⁰³ PmbZ #3199.

²⁰⁴ PmbZ #4977.

²⁰⁵ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 420, §3; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 3, 8-22; SYNODICON VETUS, 132 (§156); THEOPH. CONT. IV, 220, 15-20; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 232, 3-13.

late husband, Theophilos, would not be condemned as a heretic²⁰⁶. The first image to be restored under Theodora's regency was the one at the Chalke gate²⁰⁷. This new image was a mosaic and depicted Christ standing in full-length²⁰⁸. The work is attributed to Lazaros²⁰⁹, the famous painter who have had his hands burnt with red-hot iron leaves during Theophilos' reign as an order of the emperor himself²¹⁰. According to Mango, an epigram was inscribed beside the restored icon which was mentioning patriarch Methodios²¹¹.

Yet, despite Theodora's efforts and the fact that Methodios was in line with the empress' approach regarding the fundamental change in the empire's religious policy, peace was not established within the Byzantine church. Methodios belonged to the moderate party and his election had greatly frustrated the extremist party²¹², who sought to promote their own candidates: among them were Athanasios of Saccudion²¹³, Katasambas, the archbishop of Nicomedia and metropolitans of Cyzicos²¹⁴, and Naukratios of the monastery of Studion²¹⁵.

As a patriarch, similarly to Theodora, Methodios also sought to avoid a revival of the Iconoclastic controversy and of a general unrest in the society. He did not appoint partisans of the rigorous extremist party to any vacancies, for they were too adamant regarding the handling of iconoclast clergy who were willing to give up their iconoclast beliefs and return to Orthodoxy²¹⁶. As was

²⁰⁶ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 101; HERRIN, *Women in Purple*, 204-206; RICKELT, *Herrscherbuße*, 239-245.

²⁰⁷ On the Chalke gate see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 110-111.

²⁰⁸ MANGO, *Brazen House*, 125-126.

²⁰⁹ PmbZ #4234.

²¹⁰ THEOPH. CONT. III, 148, 9-13.

²¹¹ MANGO, *Brazen House*, 126-127.

²¹² On the moderate and extremist parties of the Byzantine church, indicatively see: DVORNIK, *Photian Schism*, 1-12.

²¹³ PmbZ #675.

²¹⁴ PmbZ #3219.

²¹⁵ Pmbz #5230.

²¹⁶ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 13.

expected, Methodios' decision to ordain partisans only from the moderate party greatly annoyed the extremist party; and the way he treated the iconoclast clergy had also provoked the criticism of the monks of the Studion monastery²¹⁷. That is to say, Methodios was willing to pardon former iconoclasts, who would make a public confession of their former heresy, and reappoint them to vacant positions²¹⁸. The quarrel ended in an internal schism. Methodios felt driven to excommunicate the most radical members of the extremist party and of the monastery of Studion. The conflict may have lasted since Methodios' death, in 14 June 847²¹⁹.

After Methodios' death, the regency of Theodora thought that it would be wise to intervene in the election of the new patriarch so as to avoid a worsening of the escalation between the two parties. F. Dvornik relates that Theodora was probably prompted by Theoktistos to decide on the choice of Ignatios²²⁰. However, this time the Byzantine government deviated from the usual procedure. In an effort to avoid aggravating the existing quarrels, Theodora did not convoke a synod so as to ordain one of the selected as the head of the Byzantine church²²¹.

Ignatios was appointed directly by the empress, and during Michael III's sole reign this would prove disadvantageous for himself. As a clergyman, Ignatios's views were closer to the extremist party and to the rigid monks of the monastery of Studion. Thus his accession to the patriarchal throne could be regarded as a victory for them. However, since he had not been directly involved in the differences between Methodios and the Studite monks, the

²¹⁷ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 13-14.

²¹⁸ On Methodios' approach regarding the expulsion of the iconoclast clergy, see D. AFINOGENOV, The Great Purge of 843: a re-Examination, in: *ΛΕΙΜΩΝ*, 79-91; HERRIN, *Women in Purple*, 210; PmbZ #4977; TREADGOLD, *History*, 449 (briefly).

²¹⁹ PmbZ #4977.

²²⁰ PmbZ #22712.

²²¹ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 17-18.

followers of Methodios did not react to his enthronement²²². Yet, soon after his ordainment, Ignatios clashed with Gregorios Asbestas²²³, who was one of Methodios' followers and also one of the leading candidates to the patriarchal throne²²⁴. Ignatios convoked a synod and excommunicated Asbestas on the grounds that the latter strongly and unduly criticized his consecration²²⁵. It thus becomes apparent that even during Ignatios's patriarchate (847-858), the internal strifes of the Byzantine church did not cease to exist; they were closely connected to and affected by imperial policies.

In 852, Boris (852-889)²²⁶ attained the throne of Bulgaria. His first step was to renew his alliance with Louis II the German²²⁷ and concentrate on expanding the Southeastern borders of Bulgaria; he started conducting raids in Thrace. The Bulgarian ruler conducted surprise attacks and ruined the fortresses of Develtos²²⁸ and Anchialos²²⁹. Afterwards, encouraged by this success, he also conducted raids on the Southwestern part of Illyricum and claimed authority of the surrounding area. Byzantium could not afford to deal with Boris at this time, as it was busy dealing with the Arab raids in Sicily²³⁰. The regency of Theodora thought it would be more sensible at this time to make a peace treaty. The subsequent peace arrangement that was conducted included territorial concessions on the Byzantine part: Boris was allowed to annex the cities of Develtos and Anchialos²³¹. However, these cities returned to Byzantine

²²² DVORNIK, Photian schism, 18.

²²³ PmbZ #22348.

²²⁴ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 18-19.

²²⁵ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 19.

²²⁶ PmbZ #21197.

²²⁷ PmbZ #24754.

²²⁸ SOUSTAL, Thrakien, 234 (Debeltos).

²²⁹ SOUSTAL, Thrakien, 175-177 (Anchialos).

²³⁰ See below, pp. 229-231.

²³¹ On the Byzantine-Bulgarian treaty of 852, see: BROWNING, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 54; HUBCHICK, Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 131; GJUZELEV, Medieval Bulgaria, 130.

authority during Michael III's sole reign, when the Bulgarians converted to Christianity²³².

In 855, Michael III, who at that time was fifteen years old, was engaged in an intimate relationship and had a love affair with Eudocia Ingerina²³³. According to Symeon Magister, Michael III's mother and Theoktistos strongly disapproved Eudocia²³⁴. Theodora decided to hold a bride show²³⁵ and to end her son's liaison with Ingerina. As with previous bride shows, the groom had little say in the decision²³⁶. When Michael III insisted on Eudocia Ingerina to be included as a contestant, Theodora and Theoktistos agreed, but compelled the choice of another candidate: Eudocia Dekapolitissa²³⁷, the daughter of Dekapolites²³⁸. Among the "defeated" contestants was Eirene Gouberina²³⁹, who later became an abbess at the monastery of Chrysovalanton²⁴⁰. Michael III was obliged to yield –at least officially– and marry the woman who was not his own choice. According to Symeon Magister, the wedding took place in the chapel of St Stephen²⁴¹ at Daphne²⁴², the reception was held in the Magnaura²⁴³

²³² See below, pp. 190.

²³³ On Eudocia Ingerina, see: MANGO, *Ingerina*, 17-27; PmbZ #21754.

²³⁴ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 421-422, §8; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 4, 30-32; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 655, 3-4; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 234, 44-45.

²³⁵ On the bride shows in Byzantium, see: MCLEES, *Bride-Shows*, 34-69, (esp. 63-64); RYDÉN, *Bride-Shows*, 175-191; W. TREADGOLD, *The Bride-Shows of the Byzantine Emperors*. *BYZ* 49 (1979) 395-413 (esp. 404-406).

²³⁶ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 104.

²³⁷ PmbZ #1631.

²³⁸ PmbZ #1274.

²³⁹ On the vita of Eirene Gouberina, see: PmbZ #21617; ROSENQVIST, *St Irene*, xvii-xxiii; RYDÉN, *Bride-Shows*, 189-191. Probably on the same year (855), Eirene's sister, Theodosia (PmbZ #7792) got married with Bardas (PmbZ #791).

²⁴⁰ On the monastery of Chrysovalanton, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 330-331.

²⁴¹ According to Symeon Magister, Theophilos also married Theodora on the chapel of St Stephen. See: WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 216, 12-13. On the marriage of Theophilos with Theodora, see: W. TREADGOLD, *The Problem of the Marriage of the Emperor Theophilos*. *GRBS* 16 (1975) 325-341. On the chapel of St Stephen, which is located in the Daphne wing of the Great Palace, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 113.

²⁴² Daphne was one of the wings of the Great Palace, where imperial marriages took place. See: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 112-113.

²⁴³ On Magnaura, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 117-118; MANGO, *Brazen House*, 57-58.

and the senate dined in the hall of the Nineteen Couches²⁴⁴. However, despite being formally married with Eudocia Dekapolitissa, Michael III kept his love affair with Eudocia Ingerina as well²⁴⁵.

During the course of the same year, the regency of Theodora was about to be abruptly terminated. Michael III and Bardas were both unhappy with Theodora's government -but for different reasons. Bardas, ambitious as he was, resented Theoktistos and felt sidelined. In addition, as I have already described, since 844, Theoktistos' accusations had as a result Michael III's uncle to be expelled from the capital. Bardas certainly knew that as long as Theoktistos was in command he would not be able to advance to higher ranks and obtain an active role in the public affairs of the empire.

Michael III, on the other hand, was apparently dissatisfied that his judgement regarding the woman he would marry was overridden²⁴⁶. It was at that time that the *parakoimomenos*²⁴⁷ Damianos²⁴⁸ persuaded the emperor to summon his uncle to the palace. Afterwards, both he and Bardas convinced Michael III that his mother intended either to marry again, or to marry off one of her daughters and thus depose Michael III and blind him²⁴⁹. Theophanes Continuatus also records that Michael III had a disgraceful private tutor²⁵⁰, who had much esteem for and wished for him to advance higher in the imperial ranks. The emperor spoke to Theoktistos about him, but the *chartoularios tou kanikleiou*²⁵¹ refused to comply with Michael III's wish. Bardas, then, used Theoktistos' refusal as an instrument and persuaded Michael III that while

²⁴⁴ On the hall of the Nineteen Couches, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 112; MANGO, *Brazen House*, 36 (cit. n. 1).

²⁴⁵ MANGO, *Ingerina*, 22.

²⁴⁶ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 104; NIKOLAOU, *Θεοδώρα και Θεόκτιστος*, 70.

²⁴⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 305.

²⁴⁸ PmbZ #1212.

²⁴⁹ As L. Garland notes, the memory of Eirene's take over must have been a powerful factor in influencing Michael. See: GARLAND, *Empresses*, 105.

²⁵⁰ PmbZ #11992.

²⁵¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 311.

Theoktistos was in charge, he would have no say in the administrative affairs of the empire. The latter was then convinced that Theoktistos had to be removed²⁵².

Theodora's sister, Maria²⁵³, and Theophanes Pharganos²⁵⁴ joined among others the conspiracy against Theoktistos. It is likely that Bardas did not actually want to assassinate Theoktistos²⁵⁵; he probably sought to humiliate and exile him –just as Theoktistos had humiliated him and forced him to go into exile in c. 844. However, things did not go as planned.

The sources are contradictory in many of their details²⁵⁶, but they all narrate a common sequence of events, which goes as follows: On 20 November 855 Michael III, Bardas and a military unit had camped in Lausiakos²⁵⁷ and waited for Theoktistos, whose duties obliged him to regularly pass through that hall so that he could reach Theodora. Meanwhile, Maria had concealed herself in an upper room nearby, where she could have a clear view of the surrounding area; when she saw that Theoktistos was approaching, she signaled Michael III and Bardas. In turn they ambushed Theoktistos, who got frightened and tried to flee. But the military unit that was on the scene encircled and restrained him. Theoktistos was subsequently brought to Skyla²⁵⁸, where Bardas ordered one of the soldiers to assassinate him. Afterwards, Manuel²⁵⁹ appeared and, as I have already mentioned, prophesied to Bardas that “σπάθην γυμνώσας, Βάρδα, τοῖς ἀνακτόροις, σαυτῷ γυμνώσεις εἰς τομὴν τοῦ σαρκίου” (you

²⁵² THEOPH. CONT., IV, 240, 1-9.

²⁵³ Also known as Kalomaria. PmbZ #4738. L. Garland remarks that Kalomaria joined the conspiracy either because she had not enjoyed her role in the palace as long as Theoktistos was in charge of the public affairs of the empire, or because she may have truly considered that Theoktistos was blocking Michael III's rightful role in the government. See: GARLAND, *Empresses*, 104-105 (and 263, cit. n. 61).

²⁵⁴ PmbZ #8150.

²⁵⁵ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 105.

²⁵⁶ On the matter, see: KARLIN – HAYTER, *Deux histoires*, 460-474.

²⁵⁷ On Lausiakos, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 115-116.

²⁵⁸ On Skyla, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 108, 116.

²⁵⁹ PmbZ #4707.

have bared a sword, Bardas, in the palace and you have turned its edge against your flesh)²⁶⁰.

According to Genesios, when Theodora heard of what was happening rushed out to Lausiakos to save Theoktistos, but she was frightened away by one of the conspirators, who told her to go back home because it was a day of coups and killing blows²⁶¹. In the account of Theophanes Continuatus, Theoktistos had already been assassinated when Theodora heard of what happened; she then appears to be reproaching Michael III and Bardas for their actions and cursing them both²⁶².

Theoktistos' murder signified the end of Theodora's regency. After Theoktistos' death, she remained in the palace till 15 March 856, the date she was formally deposed²⁶³. According to Genesios, between 20 November 855 and 15 March 856 Theodora assembled the senate, revealed to them the amount of kentenaria that she had amassed and predicted that her son's unreasonable expenditures will be the cause of his downfall²⁶⁴. In fact, this is the first time that Michael III's extravagant prodigality is mentioned²⁶⁵.

It is also likely that after her deposition, she remained in the palace until August 857 or September 858²⁶⁶; she subsequently joined her daughters in the monastery of Gastria²⁶⁷ after she was forced to become a nun²⁶⁸. Theodora and her daughters' possessions were also taken away and they were forced to live

²⁶⁰ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 82-83. The prophecy is repeated in Theophanes Continuatus' account: "Ξίφος γυμνώσας εἰς Θεοκτίστου φόνον, ὅπλιζε σαυτὸν σφαγὴν καθ' ἡμέραν". See: THEOPH. CONT., IV, 242, 38-39. On the matter see also: CHRISTOU, Όψη, 42.

²⁶¹ GENESIOS, IV, 63, 51-55.

²⁶² THEOPH. CONT., IV, 244, 3-17. P. Karlin-Hayter argues that the narrative of Genesios is more credible. See: KARLIN – HAYTER, Deux histoires, 468-469.

²⁶³ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ, Θεοδώρα και Θεόκτιστος, 67.

²⁶⁴ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 93-95.

²⁶⁵ For the economy during Michael III's reign, see below, Chapter V.

²⁶⁶ GARLAND, Empresses, 105.

²⁶⁷ On the monastery of Gastria, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 353-354.

²⁶⁸ GARLAND, Empresses, 105.

like private citizens²⁶⁹. If we are to believe that her stay in the palace was prolonged, then, according to Symeon Magister, the reason for her expulsion may have been the fact that she was involved in a plot to assassinate Bardas; the plan was discovered and the conspirators, besides Theodora, were beheaded in the hippodrome²⁷⁰. One of the masterminds behind this plan was the imperial protostrator²⁷¹, who was subsequently replaced by Basil I²⁷². Michael III's mother eventually returned to the palace in c. 862 and died there shortly after her son²⁷³.

It has to be mentioned that on the account of Theophanes Continuatus, Theodora's ousting from the palace and tonsure is presented in a negative way for Michael III and Bardas' character (ὕστερον δὲ οὐχ ἅπαξ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ δις ἀποστείλαντες εἰσεκόμισαν τὸν ἐνόντα πλοῦτον αὐταῖς, καὶ κοινῶς πῶς καὶ ἰδιωτικῶς ἀλλ' οὐ βασιλικῶς εἶασαν ζῆν)²⁷⁴. However, it is quite remarkable that on the narrative of the *Vita Basilii*, Basil's tonsuring his daughters, i.e. Anastasia²⁷⁵, Anna²⁷⁶, Helene²⁷⁷, and Maria²⁷⁸, is presented in a favorable light (τὴν θήλειαν δὲ γονὴν ἰσάριθμον οὖσαν τῇ ἄρρενι ἐν ἱερῷ σεμνείῳ τῆς πανευφήμου μάρτυρος Εὐφημίας καθιεροῖ καὶ ὡς δῶρον δεκτὸν καὶ ἀνάθημα θεῷ ἀνατίθῃσι, καὶ ἀμιάντως τῷ ἀθανάτῳ νυμφίῳ νυμφευομέναις θαρένοις Χριστῷ)²⁷⁹. The fact that for the same action, one emperor is judged negatively, whereas the other one is judged positively is

²⁶⁹ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 105.

²⁷⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 425, §14; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 8, 1-6; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 658, 13-21; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 242, 196-203.

²⁷¹ PmbZ #12085.

²⁷² FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 425, §14; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 8, 6-7; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 658, 21-23; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 242, 201-205.

²⁷³ On Theodora's death, see: P. KARLIN-HAYTER, *La mort de Théodora*. *JÖB* 40 (1990) 205-208.

²⁷⁴ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 248, 7-9.

²⁷⁵ PmbZ #234.

²⁷⁶ PmbZ #463.

²⁷⁷ PmbZ #2548.

²⁷⁸ PmbZ #4744.

²⁷⁹ VITA BASILII, 132, 9-13.

indicative of the intentions of the biased Byzantine sources, i.e. to defame Michael III's actions.

As for Michael III's sole rule, it officially began on 15 March 856. According to the narratives of the sources, during Michael III's sovereignty, Bardas was in charge of the public affairs and the empire's well-being in general. When Michael III assumed the throne, Bardas was promoted to *chartoularios tou kanikleiou*²⁸⁰ and *domestikos ton scholon*²⁸¹, and he also received the title of *magistros*²⁸²; afterwards, in 859 Bardas became *couropalates*²⁸³, and on 22 April 862 he was promoted to the rank of *caesar*²⁸⁴.

Michael III is described as being totally indifferent of the state affairs and interested only in drinking boots, attending horse races, and spending time with his group of friends, who were all unworthy and unfit to socialize with an emperor. However, a closer examination on their narratives reveals that he was far from being indifferent to the state affairs and Bardas' administration was not that absolute. I shall speak of Michael III's initiatives and participation in the public affairs in more detail later.

Yet, it still remains an undisputed fact that the decade of Bardas' administration (856-866) was one of the most brilliant in Byzantine history. The government was efficient and showed success in every sector. The secular education in Constantinople was boosted; Bardas had organized a school in Magnaura²⁸⁵, where Leo the Philosopher²⁸⁶ taught. The fortifications of the

²⁸⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 311.

²⁸¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 329-330.

²⁸² OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 294.

²⁸³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 293.

²⁸⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 293.

²⁸⁵ On the school of Magnaura, organized by Bardas, see: M. KYRIAKIS, *The University: Origin and Early Phases in Constantinople*. *BYZ* 41 (1971) 176-177; LEMERLE, *Humanism*, 184-185; P. SPECK, *Die Kaiserliche Universität von Konstantinopel: Präzisierungen zur Frage des höheren Schulwesens in Byzanz im 9. Und 10. Jahrhundert* (*Byzantinisches Archiv* 14). Munich 1974; YANNOPOULOS, *Ιστορία*, 199-201.

²⁸⁶ PmbZ #24313.

capital and of major urban centers in Asia Minor were renovated, and their reconstruction is attested on plenty inscriptions²⁸⁷. The Byzantine campaigns were successful almost everywhere, especially in Asia Minor against the Abbasid Caliphate²⁸⁸.

The final defeat of Iconoclasm also marked the redecoration of major ecclesiastical buildings, which took place during Michael III's sole reign. Despite the fact that Iconoclasm had officially ended more than ten years ago, the process of redecoration was slow. This delay was due to different reasons. First of all, there was a long period of interruption in the decoration of places of worship; this meant that the artists that could undertake such kinds of tasks were hard to find. As I have already mentioned, we are aware of only one skilled painter: Lazaros²⁸⁹.

It is worthwhile to mention three buildings that were redecorated during the concerned period. The first one is the Chrysotriklinos²⁹⁰ of the Great Palace²⁹¹. The decoration of this room is described in an epigram of the *Anthologia Graeca*²⁹², can approximately be dated between 856 and 866²⁹³, and consisted of single figures: Christ in the apse, the Virgin over the West door, flanked by Michael III, probably Photios, and other courtiers who assisted in the restoration of the Icons; the rest of the building was decorated with angels, apostles, martyrs and priests²⁹⁴.

²⁸⁷ See below, Chapter VII.

²⁸⁸ See below, pp. 273-287.

²⁸⁹ PmbZ #4234.

²⁹⁰ On the Chrysotriklinos indicatively see: FEATHERSTONE, Chrysotriklinos, 845-852; JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 108, 115-117.

²⁹¹ On the imperial palace indicatively see: J. BARDIL, The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors. *JRA* 12 (1999) 216-230; M. FEATHERSTONE, The Great Palace as Reflected in the De Cerimoniis, in: Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen – Gestalt und Zeremoniell (*Byzas* 5) (ed. F. A. BAUER). Istanbul 2005, 47-61; D. TALBOT RICE, The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors. Edinburgh 1958.

²⁹² ANTHOLOGIA GRAECA, I, 170 (n. 106).

²⁹³ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 52-54; MANGO, Art, 184; JENKINS - MANGO, Date, 139-140.

²⁹⁴ JENKINS - MANGO, Date, 140.

Another important building that was decorated during Michael III's reign is the church of the Lady of the Pharos. This church was located near the Chrysotriklinos of the Great Palace; it is first recorded in 769 and it appears to have been thoroughly renovated during Michael III's reign²⁹⁵. More specifically, as the thorough study of R.J. H. Jenkins and C. Mango has shown, the decoration of the church had been finished by 864. Evidence of this is found in the tenth homily of Photios, which can be dated between 12 April and the end of the year 864²⁹⁶. Through his homily, which must have taken place at the inauguration of the church, Photios describes in detail the decoration of the building. It is remarkable that he refers to Michael III as "πιστῶ καὶ μεγάλῳ βασιλεῖ"²⁹⁷, a title that, as I describe below, is also found in his class III *miliaresia*, whereas inscriptions in Smyrna, Nicaea and Ankara refer to the emperor as μέγα βασιλέα.

It is worth analysing this specific title and studying its background, as it seems that Michael III had a certain predilection for it. The epithet *πιστὸς* was used for the first time by Heraclios²⁹⁸. During the ninth century, it was widely used by Michael III's father, Theophilos, on his silver coins²⁹⁹, seals³⁰⁰, and inscriptions³⁰¹. Apparently, Michael III adopts his father's custom and maintains the epithet *πιστὸς* on his silver coins, and on a number of inscriptions in Constantinople. Yet, the fact that Photios describes him as *πιστὸς* in his tenth homily may not be linked with Theophilos' custom. Taking into consideration that Photios' homily must have been delivered at the inauguration of an ecclesiastical building, the description of the emperor as

²⁹⁵ On the matter, see: JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 130, 140 (cit. n. 67); H. MAGUIRE, *The Medieval Floors of the Great Palace*, in: *Byzantine Constantinople*, 171-172.

²⁹⁶ JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 130.

²⁹⁷ MANGO, *Homilies*, 184.

²⁹⁸ On the matter, see: SHAHID, *Factor*, 296; SHAHID, *Heraclius*, 225-237.

²⁹⁹ DOC III/1, 406-451. According to P. Grierson, after Theophilos' reign, the epithet *πιστὸς* on silver coins became customary. DOC III/1, 179-180.

³⁰⁰ DO Seals VI, 77.

³⁰¹ See below, pp. 359-362.

πιστὸς by the patriarch might have intended to assure the gathered crowd that the emperor was pursuing the iconophile policy of his mother.

The title βασιλεὺς³⁰² along with the epithet μέγας also appear for the first time during Heraclios' reign³⁰³. Modern scholarship has attributed the term μέγας βασιλεὺς to a number of interpretations. In 1936, F. Dölger studied the titulature of Heraclios in comparison to his crowned sons and argued that the term was used to introduce an imperial hierarchical distinction of the senior βασιλεὺς from a βασιλεὺς or βασιλεῖς of a lower rank, such as a co-emperor³⁰⁴. In 1971, P. Schreiner dealt with the title anew and maintained Dölger's point of view, i.e. that the title μέγας βασιλεὺς was used to distinguish the *Hauptkaiser* from the *Mitkaiser*³⁰⁵.

The same argument was supported by C. Mango and I. Ševčenko³⁰⁶. More recently, however, C. Zuckerman argued that when the title emerged in official documents, in the second half of the seventh century, μέγας βασιλεὺς was not used to introduce a hierarchical distinction between several βασιλεῖς, rather designate the only βασιλεύς, as opposed to his sons or brothers, who were never proclaimed emperors³⁰⁷. It remains to be examined how Michael III perceived the term μέγας βασιλεὺς and what he intended to convey to his subjects by introducing it to his coins, seals, and inscriptions.

H. Grégoire and F. Dölger argued that Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεὺς to assert his superiority to Louis II, the king of Lombardy³⁰⁸. However, as P. Grierson has demonstrated, this argument cannot be sustained;

³⁰² On the title βασιλεὺς during the early Byzantine period, see: E. CHRYSOS, The Title βασιλεύς in Early Byzantine International Relations. *DOP* 32 (1979) 29-75.

³⁰³ SHAHID, *Factor*, 296; SHAHID, *Heraclius*, 225.

³⁰⁴ F. DÖLGER, Das byzantinische Mitkaisertum in den Urkunden. *BZ* 36 (1936) 123-145 (reprinted in: DÖLGER, *Diplomatik*, 108 (n. 8), 112).

³⁰⁵ SCHREINER, *Bezeichnung*, 173-192.

³⁰⁶ C. MANGO – I. ŠEVČENKO, Three Inscriptions of the Reigns of Anastasius and Constantine V. *BZ* 65 (1972) 386-389.

³⁰⁷ ZUCKERMAN, *Βασιλεύς*, 884-885.

³⁰⁸ DÖLGER, *Diplomatik*, 112; GRÉGOIRE, Michel III et Basile, 344-345. On Louis II: *PmbZ* #24755.

the title μέγας βασιλεὺς was in use both before and after Michael III, either with the technical meaning of the senior of two associate emperors or in the more general sense “great”³⁰⁹. Thus, if Michael III wanted to highlight his superiority to the Frankish emperors, he would have to use an even more majestic title.

Nevertheless, there was no need for Michael III to assert his superiority over Louis II in the first place. On the contrary, during the last years of his reign, the relationship between the Byzantine emperor and the king of Lombardy may be characterized as prosperous. As I describe below, Louis II was proclaimed *imperator* in the synod of 867 in Constantinople, whose proceedings were destroyed. By recognizing his sovereignty Byzantium may have sought to entice Louis II and use him as a counterweight against pope Nicholas’ aspirations, i.e. the pope’s ambitions to promote the Roman primacy and act as the supreme judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West³¹⁰.

Grierson proposed that Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεὺς to distinguish himself as the senior emperor from Basil, who was crowned co-emperor³¹¹. Yet, his argument must also be dismissed. Michael III is first described as a μέγας βασιλεὺς in 856/857, in an inscription in Smyrna³¹². In 856/857, Basil had not been crowned co-emperor, so there was no need for Michael III to use the title to separate himself from his future murderer.

Thecla, on the contrary, was crowned co-emperor; she was second to Michael III. Her claim on the throne can be established from the fact that she is depicted on the class I solidi of Theodora’s regency³¹³. However, her participation in the regency was passive and she was not involved with the

³⁰⁹ DOC III/1, 455.

³¹⁰ See below, Chapter III.

³¹¹ DOC III/1, 455.

³¹² See below, pp. 372-374.

³¹³ See below, pp. 319-323.

state affairs³¹⁴ –hence this is the reason she is neglected by the Byzantine historiographers. Besides, as I describe below, solidi of class I were dropped by 852 at the latest³¹⁵. Therefore, as of 852 at the latest, Thecla’s claim on the throne was no longer conveyed to the subjects of the empire. It is thus unlikely that Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεὺς in 856/857 to distinguish himself as the senior emperor from his sister.

From my point of view –and this is my main argument– Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεὺς to emphatically convey to his subjects that he was now ruling on his own; to signify that Theodora’s regency was over and that he was now the sovereign. From my perspective, the power relations within the Byzantine court brought about the use of titles that clearly address the situation in the regime. Taking into consideration that Theodora intervened in her son’s private life (I remark that she forced him to end his liaison with Ingerina and marry Dekapolitissa), Michael III must have felt restrained by her regency and unable to make his decisions, let alone rule on his own.

As a result, when Theodora’s regency was over and Michael III assumed the Byzantine throne, on 15 March 856, he intended to declare to his subjects that he was ruling as the only βασιλεὺς. Perhaps this declaration is also addressed to rivals within the state, who attempted conspiracies to approach the emperor or seize his power. Therefore, Michael III introduced the title μέγας βασιλεὺς to a significant number of inscriptions to propagate his status. These inscriptions, placed on the renewed fortifications, acted as a medium of self-representation for the emperor³¹⁶. The same title was also introduced on his class III miliaresia. In turn, the fact that Photios refers to Michael III as μέγα

³¹⁴ YANNOPOULOS, *Ιστορία*, 179.

³¹⁵ See below, pp. 322-324.

³¹⁶ RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 352–353.

βασιλέα demonstrates Michael III's predilection to be displayed as the sovereign³¹⁷.

Emphasis should be made on the Hodegon monastery³¹⁸, which was also renovated during the reign of Michael III. Just like the two aforementioned buildings, the Hodegon monastery was likewise located near the Great Palace³¹⁹. The *Patria* of Constantinople, the oldest known reliable source on the Hodegon monastery, records that prior to Michael III's building activities, a shrine already existed there³²⁰; this indicates that Michael III had in fact renovated, rather extensively, an existing place of worship³²¹.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia, in Constantinople. The mosaic is well known among modern scholarship³²². It was uncovered by Th. Whittemore between 1935 and it was meticulously studied for the first time in 1964, by C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins. The mosaic depicts Theotokos seated, looking straight ahead and holding the Child in her lap. Her right hand touches the Child's right shoulder, and her left, which holds a handkerchief, is placed on the Child's left knee. Theotokos is depicted sitting on a throne which has no back, and its seat is covered with two cushions. As Mango and Hawkins remark, although Theotokos is meant to be resting on these cushions, they give the impression of being laid behind her back³²³. She is wearing a dark blue maphorion, which is decorated with four golden dots on

³¹⁷ MORAVCSIK, *Sagen und Legenden*, 61-62.

³¹⁸ On the Hodegon monastery, see: GROTOWSKI, *Hodegon*, 1-76 (with further bibliography).

³¹⁹ GROTOWSKI, *Hodegon*, 19.

³²⁰ *PATRIA*, III, 150-151 (n. 27).

³²¹ GROTOWSKI, *Hodegon*, 10.

³²² Among the ample bibliography, indicatively see: LIDOVA, *Hagia Sophia*, 203-210 (with further bibliography on p. 209-210); MANGO – HAWKINS, *Apse Mosaics*, 113-151; MANGO, *Homilies*, 279-286; MANGO, *Materials*, 80-83; OIKONOMIDÈS, *Remarks*, 111-115; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, 397-399; N. TETERIATNIKOV, *The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: The Fossati Restoration and the Work of the Byzantine Institute*. Washington D.C. 1998, 24 (n. 21).

³²³ MANGO – HAWKINS, *Apse Mosaics*, 123.

each shoulder. Christ is portrayed wearing a golden himation, and holds a scroll in his right hand. The background is covered with gold tesserae.

The apse mosaic is flanked by two archangels (Gabriel is on the south side and Michael on the northside of the soffit), but their figures are only partially preserved. The mosaic is accompanied by an inscription, which is placed on the apse, on the outer rim of the arch. Although only part of it is preserved, in 1904 E. Antoniadès was able not only to read the inscription, but also to identify it with a known epigram from the *Anthologia Graeca*³²⁴. The inscription reads as follows (today only the underlined letters are preserved *in situ*):

“Ἄς οἱ πλάνοι κάθεῖλον ἐνθάδ’ εἰκόνας
ἄνακτες ἐστήλωσαν εὖσεβεῖς πάλιν”.

(the images which the impostors [i.e. the Iconoclasts] had formerly cast down here, pious emperors have again set up)³²⁵. It must be remarked that the word emperors is in plural, i.e. that the inscription refers to a joint reign.

Although the apse mosaic has been thoroughly studied by modern scholarship, there is no agreement as to when it was created, or who commissioned its construction. Mango and Hawkins have proposed that the mosaic was uncovered on 29 March 867. Their main argument was Photios’ seventeenth homily, which was delivered on that day in the presence of Michael III and Basil³²⁶. According to their interpretation, Photios’ homily speaks of the unveiling of the mosaic in a very rhetoric and stately manner, because it symbolized the definite defeat of Iconoclasm and the ceremonial

³²⁴ E. ANTONIADES, Ἐκφρασις τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας. Vol. III. Leipzig-Athens 1909, 29-31.

³²⁵ English translation after: MANGO, *Materials*, 82.

³²⁶ The complete title of Photios’ seventeenth homily is “Τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἁγιοτάτου Φωτίου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ὁμιλία λεχθεῖσα ἐν τῷ ἁμβωνί τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας τῷ μεγάλῳ σαββάτῳ, ἐπὶ παρουσίᾳ τῶν φιλοχρίστων βασιλέων, ὅτε τῆς θεοτόκου ἐξεικονίσθη καὶ ἀνεκαλύφθη μορφή (Of the same most-blessed Photius, patriarch of Constantinople, homily delivered from the ambo of the Great Church, on Holy Saturday, in the presence of the Christ-loving emperors, when the form of the Theotokos had been depicted and uncovered”. MANGO, *Homilies*, 286 (and cit. n. 1).

inauguration of Orthodoxy³²⁷: “If one called this day the beginning and day of Orthodoxy (lest I say something excessive), one would not be far wrong”³²⁸.

On the other hand, the late N. Oikonomidès proposed a different dating. He argued that the apse mosaic was unveiled during the joint reign of Eirene³²⁹ and Konstantinos VI³³⁰ (787-797). During the second iconoclastic period (815-843), the apse mosaic was covered with plaster and was not visible. When Photios gave his seventeenth homily, on 29 March 867, he was describing another mosaic, which had been painted on the (perhaps decorated?) plaster that covered the apse. This mosaic resembled the iconographic image of Panagia Hodegetria, and was also flanked by two angels. According to Oikonomidès’ theory, at that time no one knew that another mosaic existed under the plaster that decorated the apse³³¹.

Afterwards, in 1346, the Eastern arch of Hagia Sophia fell, and together with it a part of the dome. During the course of that year, major earthquakes occurred in the Sea of Marmara³³². The earthquakes had damaged the interior decoration of the temple, and it needed to be repaired. Oikonomidès argues that during the repair work that took place during the second half of the fourteenth century, part of the eighth century apse mosaic appeared. Patriarch Neilos interpreted the event as a good omen, and reproduced this “newly found” image on his patriarchal seal, as did his successors³³³.

More recently, G. Pallis and M. Lidova dealt with the matter anew and argued that the apse mosaic was unveiled on 29 March 867 (Oikonomidès’

³²⁷ MANGO – HAWKINS, *Apse Mosaics*, 142-147.

³²⁸ MANGO, *Homilies*, 291.

³²⁹ PmbZ #1439.

³³⁰ PmbZ #3704.

³³¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Remarks*, 114.

³³² AMBRASEYS, *Earthquakes*, 367-369 (on p. 369, the author argues that the Eastern arch of Hagia Sophia did not collapse because of the earthquake).

³³³ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Remarks*, 115. On patriarch Neilos’ seal, see: V. LAURENT. *Le corpus des sceaux de l’ empire byzantine. Tome V: L’ église (Publications de l’ institut français d’ études byzantines)*. Paris 1963, 36-37 (n. 45).

study seems not to have been taken into consideration)³³⁴. This is certainly not the place to reject one theory over the other. Suffice it to say –and this is more important for the scope of this study– that regardless of which mosaic Photios refers to, it is only through his seventeenth homily that we learn of the redecoration of the interior of Hagia Sophia that took place in 867³³⁵. The biased Byzantine historiographers remain silent on the matter.

From the aforementioned buildings that were renovated during Michael III's reign, one can notice that they were all located within the vicinity of the Great Palace. Apparently, the Byzantine government did not want to provoke a reaction on behalf of the remaining Iconoclasts, whose strength must have been considerable³³⁶, and opted not to initially redecorate buildings in the rest of the city. It is also important to notice that all the renovating activities that took place during Michael III's rule are narrated neither by Genesisios³³⁷, nor Theophanes Continuatus or Vita Basilii. On the contrary, the latter source narrates that Michael III ordered the churches and other pious foundations to be looted for additional sums of money to be found to handle the state affairs³³⁸. The only Byzantine sources that refer to them are Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon³³⁹. For example, the aforementioned sources record that Michael III

³³⁴ M. LIDOVA, Word and Image in Byzantine Church Decoration, in: *Materials*, 203-210; G. PALLIS, Architecture and Epigraphy in St Sophia, in: *Materials*, 200 (n. 3).

³³⁵ On the matter see also S. C. Simmons, *The "God Bearing" Patriarch: Hagia Sophia's Apse Mosaic in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Politics*. MA Thesis. The Florida State University 2011. The author argued that Photios appropriated the image of Theotokos on his seventeenth homily as a political symbol to oppose the long-established imperial mimesis of Christ.

³³⁶ JENKINS, *Byzantium*, 155; JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 139-140.

³³⁷ Genesisios makes only one indirect mention on the Hodegon monastery by relating that when Bardas visited it, his cloak fell from his shoulder. The Caesar interpreted this incident as an omen of his forthcoming downfall. See: Genesisios, IV, 73, 72-82. Yet, even through this prophetic incident, it is implicitly stated that the Hodegon monastery already exists. No mention is being made on any renovating activity.

³³⁸ THEOPH. CONT., V, 106, 35-37.

³³⁹ JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 135.

ordered Konstantinos V's sarcophagus of green stone to be fragmented, for the church of the Pharos to be decorated³⁴⁰.

As T. Papamastorakis also remarks, under Konstantinos VII's command these Byzantine historiographers deliberately hushed up the renovating activities that took place during Michael III's reign. Their biased act reveals their intentions to conceal Michael III's interest in the redecoration of buildings³⁴¹. The same deliberate concealment can be observed in the recording of his military achievements and the way the Byzantine court treated pope Nicholas demands concerning the primacy of Rome. Even more remarkable is the way the aforementioned historiographers portrayed him squandering the empire's public funds, in an effort to justify Basil's murder and subsequent elevation on the throne. As regards the aforementioned cases, were it not for Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon's narratives, as well as the revealing tenth and seventeenth homilies of Photios, we would not be able to precisely date these renovations and prove that Michael III's government displayed cautiousness and diligence in redecorating public places of worship.

Yet, similarly during Theodora's regency, peace was also not established within the Byzantine church during her son's sole rule. The beginning of Michael III's sovereignty marked the end of Ignatios' first patriarchate. According to Niketas David Paphlagon, the author of the *vita Ignatii*, Bardas and Ignatios did not get along at all. According to the *vita*, rumors had circulated in the capital that Bardas, a cruel and inhumane person, had an incestuous affair with his daughter in law³⁴², while, already since 855, he was married with Theodosia Gouberina³⁴³ -Bardas' second wife. From his first

³⁴⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 430-431, §29; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 15, 9-17; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 681, 4-12; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 255, 418-427.

³⁴¹ PAPAMASTORAKIS, *History*, 194.

³⁴² PmbZ #503A or 791B (there are discrepancies in the sources as to who she actually was).

³⁴³ Theodosia Gouberina (PmbZ #7792) was the sister of Eirene Gouberina (PmbZ #21617), who contested in Theodora's bride show to become Michael's wife.

marriage, Bardas had two sons and at least one daughter³⁴⁴. His younger son was Antigonos³⁴⁵, who after the death of Theoktistos became domestikos ton scholon³⁴⁶; the identity of his elder son remains unconfirmed³⁴⁷. Bardas' daughter was married with Symbatios³⁴⁸, who became logothete of the drome³⁴⁹.

It is very likely that Bardas was having an affair with his daughter in law while Theodora was still in command. Yet, since at that time he did not hold a high ranking position, his actions did not attract great attention. However, after Theoktistos' death, when Bardas became chartoularios tou kanikleiou³⁵⁰ and domestikos ton scholon³⁵¹, his private life –especially his misbehaviors– started attracting more attention. These rumors eventually reached Ignatios, who, disregarding the high rank of Michael III's uncle, became critical of Bardas' affair and excluded him from the holy Communion during the feast of Epiphany³⁵². These public rebukes, of course, may have been dispersed by political opponents who had been severely beaten by Theoktistos' assassination and the deposition of Theodora.

However, Dvornik argues that this was not the main reason for Ignatios' depotision³⁵³. As I have already mentioned, after Theodora's plot to assassinate Bardas was discovered, Bardas and Michael III forced her to retire and become a nun. Ignatios refused to tonsure Theodora and her daughters on the account that they were unwilling to become nuns³⁵⁴. According to Vita Ignatii, at the

³⁴⁴ There is a possibility that Eirene (PmbZ #1453), Symbatios' wife (PmbZ #7169), might be Bardas' second daughter.

³⁴⁵ PmbZ #503.

³⁴⁶ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 329-330.

³⁴⁷ DVORNIK, Ignatius and Bardas, 19.

³⁴⁸ PmbZ #7168.

³⁴⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 311.

³⁵⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 311.

³⁵¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 329-330.

³⁵² VITA IGNATII, 24, 20-26, 8.

³⁵³ DVORNIK, Ignatius and Bardas, 21-22.

³⁵⁴ VITA IGNATII, 26, 25-32.

same time with Ignatios' refusal, a certain Gebo³⁵⁵ had arrived in Constantinople from Dyrrachion. This Gebo, who was epileptic and mentally ill, pretended that he was Theodora's son from another man. Subsequently, Bardas convinced Michael III to blame Ignatios for high treason on the grounds that he not only refused to tonsure Theodora and her daughters, but he was also sympathetic to Gebo's cause³⁵⁶. On 23 October 858 Ignatios was deposed and exiled on the island of Terebinthos³⁵⁷; at the same time, Gebo was assassinated on the island of Prinkipo³⁵⁸.

It thus becomes evident that it was mainly political reasons, i.e. Ignatios refusal to tonsure Theodora and her daughters, that led to Ignatios' deposition. As for the episode with Ignatios' decision to exclude Bardas from Communion, although there might be some truth in it, the whole event is exaggerated by the author of *Vita Ignatii*³⁵⁹, as is the one with Gebo's cause. Ignatios was eventually succeeded by Photios³⁶⁰, whose first patriarchate marked not only the resurgence of the Byzantine missionary work, but also the century-old rivalry between Constantinople and Rome for primacy in the universal Church.

Michael III's downfall is connected with Basil the Macedonian, his murderer and future founder of the Macedonian dynasty. The epithet Macedonian derives from the fact that Basil's parents were residing in the suburbs of Adrianople, which was the capital of the theme of Macedonia (nowadays the

³⁵⁵ PmbZ #1942.

³⁵⁶ VITA IGNATII, 28, 1-10. According to the Vita, Theodora and her daughters' expulsion from the palace precedes Ignatios deposition: "Ὁ δὲ παραχρῆμα τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς καταγαγὼν ἐν τοῖς Καριανοῦ λεγομένοις ἀπενεχθῆναι κελεύει καὶ καρῆναι. Μετὰ μικρὸν δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἀπελαύνει τοῦ πατριαρχείου τὸν Ἰγνάτιον...". See: VITA IGNATII, 28, 10-13.

³⁵⁷ On the island of Terebinthos, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 511-512.

³⁵⁸ On the islands of Prinkipo, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 510.

³⁵⁹ DVORNIK, Ignatius and Bardas, 22.

³⁶⁰ PmbZ #6253.

area of Thrace)³⁶¹. Basil's exact date of birth is not known; according to modern scholarship, he was born sometime between 831 and 836³⁶².

Despite his grandson's attempts to genealogically connect Basil from his father's side with the Arsacids, and from his mother's side with Alexander and Konstantinos the Great³⁶³ (there is a tendency among emperors of the Macedonian dynasty to be compared with Alexander the Great³⁶⁴), in all probability the future founder of the Macedonian dynasty was of Armenian origin³⁶⁵, and he might have been poor (but this is not certain)³⁶⁶. His mother's name is Pangalo³⁶⁷, whereas his father's name is unknown. Basil also had at least two brothers: Marianos³⁶⁸ and Symbatios³⁶⁹. According to the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, Basil might have had a third brother as well, whose name was Bardas³⁷⁰.

Basil's parents owned land and crops near Adrianople, which they were cultivating themselves³⁷¹. When Basil was an adolescent, his father passed away and his family faced financial problems. Having realized that the situation

³⁶¹ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 113-114 (and cit. n. 2, with further bibliography); PmbZ #832.

³⁶² On the matter, see: DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 120-135; TOBIAS, Basil I, 26-36 (N. Tobias argues that Basil was probably born in 831-832).

³⁶³ "...πατρόθεν μὲν ἔλκων τὴν ἐξ Ἀρσάκου συγγένειαν, ἣπερ εἴρηται, ἡ δὲ μήτηρ τῇ τε τοῦ μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου συγγένεια ἐκαλλωπίζετο καὶ ἀπὸ θατέρου μέρους τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου ἡῤ̄χει λαμπρότητα. ἐκ τοιούτων γεννητόρων προσελθὼν ὁ Βασίλειος...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 18, 24-28.

³⁶⁴ MOENNIG, Hero, 168.

³⁶⁵ CHARANIS, Armenians, 210; T. GREENWOOD, Basil I, Constantine VII and Armenian Literary Tradition in Byzantium, in: Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond (*Cambridge University Press*) (eds. T. SHAWCROSS – I. TOTH). Cambridge 2018, 447-466; JENKINS, Classical Background, 27; MORAVCSIK, Sagen und Legenden, 66-70; TOBIAS, Basil I, 23.

³⁶⁶ On the matter, see: JENKINS, Classical Background, 27. The British scholar argued that Basil was not really poor; it was part of the imperial propaganda orchestrated by his grandson for Basil to gain influence over the lower class.

³⁶⁷ PmbZ #5679.

³⁶⁸ PmbZ #24955 (not to be confused with Marianos [PmbZ #24956], the son of Petronas).

³⁶⁹ PmbZ #7168 (not to be confused with Symbatios [PmbZ #7169], Bardas' son-in-law, who, together with Georgios Peganes [PmbZ #22082], organized a revolt against the regime of Michael III and Basil).

³⁷⁰ PmbZ #801 (not to be confused with Bardas [PmbZ #791], Michael III's uncle).

³⁷¹ "...τῷ γὰρ καιρῷ τοῦ θέρους τῶν τοῦτου γονέων περὶ τὸν ἴδιον ἐξεληθόντων ἀγρόν...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 22, 3-4.

would not improve by harvesting land, in 854/855 he decided to try his luck in the capital³⁷². According to the *Vita Basilii*, Basil's mother at first did not consent to her son's departure³⁷³ until a number of symbolic dreams changed her mind³⁷⁴. These dreams had a propagandistic significance -as has his whole legendary descent- and were meant to demonstrate that Basil was guided by the Divine and that he was destined to assume the Byzantine throne³⁷⁵.

When Basil reached Constantinople, he spend the night at the monastery of St Diomedes³⁷⁶. Once there, Basil was firstly ignored by the abbot and the future emperor fell asleep at the entrance hall of the monastery; however, after divine intervention, the abbot was forced to accommodate Basil and make sure that he had everything he needed. Basil, in turn, asked the abbot to recommend him to some noble citizens of the capital so that he could enter their service³⁷⁷.

In turn, the abbot introduced him to Theophilos (or Theophilitzes)³⁷⁸, a frequent visitor to the monastery and a relative of Michael III and caesar Bardas. Apparently, Theophilos was immediately impressed by Basil's physical appearance and took him into his service as a groom. Later, Theophilos promoted Basil to protostrator³⁷⁹, thanks to his distinguished strength and bravery³⁸⁰. It was during his service at Theophilos that Basil got

³⁷² DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 136.

³⁷³ THEOPH. CONT., V, 30, 21-26.

³⁷⁴ TOBIAS, Basil I, 41-43.

³⁷⁵ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 135-137; TOBIAS, Basil I, 43. On the significance of the mythological narratives that portray Basil as a rigorous ruler who has unrivalled determination, willpower, and is destined to assume the Byzantine throne, see: Ath. MARKOPOULOS, *Οι μεταμορφώσεις της «μυθολογίας» του Βασιλείου Α΄*, in: ANTECESSOR. Festschrift für Spyros N. Troianos zum 80. Geburtstag (Eds. V.A. LEONTARIDOU – K. A. BOURDARA – E. SP. PAPAGIANNI). Athens 2013, 945-970.

³⁷⁶ On the monastery of St Diomedes, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 171-172.

³⁷⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 34, 1-38, 40.

³⁷⁸ PmbZ #8221.

³⁷⁹ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *Les listes*, 337-338.

³⁸⁰ THEOPH. CONT., V, 38, 40-57. The chronicles of Symeon Magister and of Pseudo-Symeon offer a different account regarding Basil's arrival at the Byzantine capital: according to their narratives Basil was firstly in the service of Tzantzes (PmbZ #8539), strategos of the theme of Macedonia, and it was some time afterwards that he got into the service of Theophilos. On the matter see: TOBIAS, Basil I, 45-49.

in touch with Danielis³⁸¹, a rich widow and a big landowner in Patra. In 856, the two men left Constantinople for Patra, which was at that time an important city of the Peloponnesian Theme. According to N. Tobias, it is likely that the mission was somehow connected with Michael III's newly acquired position as a sole emperor³⁸².

Once there, though a series of prophetic and symbolic happenings, Basil got acquainted with Danielis, who would henceforward supposedly alter his financial status. According to the *Vita Basilii*, when the two men arrived in Patra, Theophilos visited the church of St Andrew to pray. However, Basil did not join him but visited the church at a later time. *Vita Basilii* states that when the monk³⁸³ of the church saw Theophilos, he did not rise or say a prayer for him, but when he later saw Basil, he rose respectfully, as one does before a very important person and addressed to him with an acclamation that is normally offered to emperors³⁸⁴.

Some locals, who happened to be present at the scene, saw and heard what happened and reported the news to Danielis. The rich widow summoned the monk, as she knew that he was graced with the gift of foresight, and asked him what it was all about; the monk answered that Basil was not just a random visitor, but the future emperor of the Romans anointed by Christ. Having been convinced by the monk, she subsequently summoned Basil, who charmed her and became her son's³⁸⁵ godfather. Based upon this spiritual bond, the widow apparently bestowed on him many gifts, such as gold, slaves, expensive clothes etc³⁸⁶.

³⁸¹ PmbZ #21390.

³⁸² TOBIAS, Basil I, 50.

³⁸³ PmbZ #30626.

³⁸⁴ THEOPH. CONT., V, 40, 5-42, 17.

³⁸⁵ PmbZ #22780.

³⁸⁶ THEOPH. CONT., V, 44, 41-48.

These gifts are described to have been of particular importance when Basil assumed the throne, because his predecessor had allegedly squandered all the accumulated public money for no good reason, i.e. on attending horse races, excessive christening gifts to the children of his playfellows, drinking boots etc. However, the contribution of Danielis might not be simply exaggerated, but also largely fictional³⁸⁷. Yet, according to the *Vita Basilii*, when Basil returned to Constantinople, he was so wealthy that he purchased large estates in the theme of Macedonia and set up his relatives with considerable opulence. Still, despite his newly-acquired wealth, as he was humble in nature, he remained with his master and continued to serve him³⁸⁸.

After his return to Constantinople, probably in the course of 856, Basil got acquainted with Michael III. Although the exact date of Basil's first meeting with Michael III is difficult to establish, in all probability, the two men met after Michael III's accession to the throne on 15 March 856³⁸⁹. The narratives of the sources differ on the details as to how this happened, but they all share some common features: it was Basil's physical strength, enriched again with some legendary and symbolic elements, along with the fact that he was an excellent horseman. His abilities caught the attention of some courtiers and, eventually of Michael III³⁹⁰. More specifically, according to many of the sources, Basil won the favor and honor of the emperor by his horsemanship³⁹¹.

The *Vita Basilii* records the acquaintance in the following manner: Michael III had a horse that, although it was thoroughbred, large in stature and admirable for its beauty and speed, it was undisciplined and rebellious and could not be tamed by any of his servants. Once, during a hunt, Michael III

³⁸⁷ See below, pp. 308-309.

³⁸⁸ THEOPH. CONT., V, 44, 59-46, 64.

³⁸⁹ TOBIAS, Basil I, 59.

³⁹⁰ The different variations of the sources can be explained by the fact that oral traditions had altered the story as it was retold. On the variations of the sources regarding how Basil met Michael III, see: TOBIAS, Basil I, 53-61.

³⁹¹ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 144; TOBIAS, Basil I, 56.

dismounted the horse to hunt down a hare, whereupon the horse run and could not be caught. Michael III had subsequently got angry with the animal and ordered the horse's hind legs to be hamstrung so that it can be tamed. However, Bardas, who happened to be present at the hunt, urged Michael III to be lenient on the horse arguing that it should not be killed on the account of a single mistake³⁹².

Basil, who also happened to be there with his master, Theophilos, asked if he could be permitted to catch and tame the horse. When Michael III gave his permission, Basil quickly jumped on the horses' back and tamed it with ease. Michael III was apparently so impressed with Basil's skill that he took him from the service of Theophilos and made him a *strator*³⁹³, an imperial servant who looks after the horses³⁹⁴. As Tobias remarks, this event might be exaggerated by the biased Byzantine historians to enhance Basil's physical strength³⁹⁵, but its nucleus might be based on a historical fact: Michael III's love for horseracing³⁹⁶.

Remarkably, Basil's notable horsemanship aligns perfectly with Konstantinos VII's claims that his mother was a descendant of Alexander the Great. That is to say, just like Basil was exceptional at taming horses, so was Alexander. More specifically, according to Plutarch, when Alexander was eight years old, a Thessalian horsebreeder named Philonikos brought a stallion, named Bucephalas, which he tried to sell to Phillipos. The king's attendants tried to ride the horse, but it was rebellious and could not be tamed; Phillipos then lost his patience and was about to order it to be taken away when the eight

³⁹² THEOPH. CONT., V, 50, 1-52, 16.

³⁹³ THEOPH. CONT., V, 52, 16-25.

³⁹⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 338.

³⁹⁵ TOBIAS, *Basil I*, 57.

³⁹⁶ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431, §30; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 1, 18-23; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 681, 15-19; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 262, 5-8; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 255, 430-256, 433.

year old Alexander asked if he could try to tame the stallion. And, although the odds were against him, Alexander successfully tamed Bucephalas³⁹⁷.

A comparison of the above description from Plutarch's lives with the story narrated in the *Vita Basilii* reveals that both stories share some common features: they both describe a rebellious horse and their hero (Basil and Alexander respectively) is outstanding in taming horses. According to Charis Messis, the aforementioned episode serves to highlight that just like Alexander the Great, Basil's quest is to ascent to the throne³⁹⁸. Konstantinos VII has used the most praiseworthy features found in the biographies of Plutarch's lives to enhance his grandfather's attributes. At the same time, as I will later stress out in more detail, he has used the worst features of other biographies found on Plutarch's lives to blacken Michael III's image³⁹⁹.

In time, Michael III became even fonder of Basil, and when the latter proved himself in devotion and skill, the emperor promoted him to protostrator⁴⁰⁰. This promotion enabled Basil to get closer to Michael III, as the duties of his new office brought him in frequent attendance to the emperor, and he was able not only to assess Michael III's character, but also to observe how intrigues at the Byzantine court were formed⁴⁰¹. Although it is not stated by the sources, according to Tobias, it is possible that Basil learned of Theodora and the imperial protostrator's plan to assassinate Bardas and exposed it, and his promotion to protostrator was his reward⁴⁰². The exact date of Basil's promotion cannot be fixed accurately, but it was certainly after Theodora's

³⁹⁷ Plutarch's lives VII. Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar (*Loeb Classical Library* 99) (trans. B. PERRIN). Cambridge, MA – London 1967, 236, 2-238, 5.

³⁹⁸ MESSIS, Lecture, 215.

³⁹⁹ The fact that Plutarch's lives have played a key role in the development of the biographical style of writing from the tenth century onwards has been pointed out by R. J. H. Jenkins, F. Tinnenfeld and, more recently, by Th. Kampianaki. See: JENKINS, Portrait, 71-77 ; KAMPIANAKI, Plutarch's lives, 16-17; TINNENFELD, Kategorien, 100-101.

⁴⁰⁰ THEOPH. CONT., V, 52, 26-29.

⁴⁰¹ TOBIAS, Basil I, 62.

⁴⁰² TOBIAS, Basil I, 61.

failed attempt to remove Bardas and her subsequent expulsion from the palace (August or September 857⁴⁰³).

The next big step in Basil's career took place in c. 865, when Bardas had already been promoted to caesar⁴⁰⁴. During the course of that year, Bardas and the parakoimomenos Damianos⁴⁰⁵, who had previously assisted the caesar with the removal of Theoktistos, had a fallout. Damianos was apparently not happy in not succeeding Theoktistos and he was further embittered when Bardas was made caesar⁴⁰⁶. At some point, the parakoimomenos approached Michael III and claimed that Bardas had assumed too much power for himself and argued that some public affairs should be conducted otherwise⁴⁰⁷.

Bardas was eventually informed of Damianos' actions by some of his close friends; he immediately protested to Michael III and, after persuading him, the latter had Damianos arrested and tonsured⁴⁰⁸. According to the *Vita Basilii*, the post of parakoimomenos remained vacant for some time, and Bardas along with other courtiers tried to promote their own candidates. However, once more, Providence intervened and the post was given to Basil, who was also honored with the rank of patrikios⁴⁰⁹. Michael III's decision not to appoint one of Bardas' candidates had greatly surprised and worried the caesar.

In fact, it is worth noting that Michael III's choice not to satisfy Bardas' wishes demonstrates that Bardas' influence was not as powerful as the Byzantine sources would have us believe⁴¹⁰. More importantly, it proves that Michael III was energetic and capable of making his own decisions, despite the gossips within the Byzantine court. In addition, it reveals that Michael III was

⁴⁰³ GARLAND, *Empresses*, 105.

⁴⁰⁴ Bardas was crowned Caesar by Michael on 22 April 862. PmbZ #791.

⁴⁰⁵ PmbZ #1212.

⁴⁰⁶ TOBIAS, *Basil I*, 62.

⁴⁰⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 60, 1-9.

⁴⁰⁸ THEOPH. CONT., V, 60, 9-15.

⁴⁰⁹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 60, 15-62, 23. On the rank of Patrikios, see: OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 76, 294-295.

⁴¹⁰ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 1-65, 10; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 250, 1-4.

a force to be reckoned with and not an incompetent emperor, as the biased Byzantine sources would have us believe. If he was truly incompetent and indifferent of the state affairs, Bardas would not have tried to persuade him to promote one of his own candidates to the office of parakoimomenos; instead, he would have taken care of the matter directly himself⁴¹¹. This event also reveals that by that time (c. 865) the relationship between Michael III and Bardas was not cordial. It is not unlikely that, just as Michael III was feeling restrained by his mother during his adolescence, he felt similarly restrained by Bardas. This might explain that, in an effort to escape his uncle's bounds, he promoted his own favorite –Basil⁴¹².

According to the narratives of the sources, Bardas and Basil did not get along. The *Vita Basilii* narrates that when Basil was made protostrator, Bardas turned to his close friends and blamed them that they had persuaded him to expel a fox, only to let a lion in his place to gulp and swallow them all⁴¹³. The narratives of Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon also record that since then Bardas became envious of Basil and wanted to kill him⁴¹⁴. As a matter of fact, there also are numerous prophecies that predict that Basil's rise would be Bardas and Michael III's undoing.

On another occasion, when Basil was a protostrator, he joined a hunt along with the emperor, Bardas and other courtiers. Suddenly, a huge wolf appeared from the forest and caused fright and disorder among the company. However, Basil, who was equipped with an imperial club, charged the animal from behind and with one swing cut the animal's head in two. At that time, Bardas turned to some friends who were accompanying him and told them that this

⁴¹¹ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 149.

⁴¹² DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 147-153.

⁴¹³ “οἷς, ἐγὼ παρὰ τὸ δέον πεισθείς, καὶ ἐξέώσας ἀλώπεκα, λέοντα ἀντεισήγαγον, ἵνα πάντας ἡμᾶς λαφύξη καὶ καταβρώξηται”. THEOPH. CONT., V, 62, 32-34.

⁴¹⁴ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §24; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 24-25; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 675, 11-12; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 247, 285-248, 286.

man, i.e. Basil, would prove to be the undoing of our whole race⁴¹⁵. Shortly afterwards, when Basil started gaining popularity and Michael III's favor, Leo the Philosopher⁴¹⁶ pointed him with this finger and told Bardas that this man (Basil), would become the successor to you all⁴¹⁷.

On yet another occasion, even Theodora predicted that Basil would bring the demise of their family: Michael III went hunting again at the region of Armamentarea⁴¹⁸ and some of his relatives and courtiers, including Theodora and Basil, also participated. At some point, the company took a break and sat at a table to take refreshments. Michael III, Theodora, and Basil sat very close to each other and when Theodora saw Basil, she fainted. When she regained her composure she told Michael III that Basil would remove them from power. Michael III then tried to calm her down by telling her that there was not reason to fear Basil, for he is a plain simpleton and means well⁴¹⁹.

In the narrative of *Vita Basilii*, it is evident that Basil escapes all these prophecies because he is guarded by Providence⁴²⁰. The author(s) of the *Vita Basilii* know, of course, what is going to happen because they are writing almost a century afterwards. All these prophetic visions and God's intervention that are extensively used in the narrative of *Vita Basilii* serve as a medium that testifies that Basil was destined to assume the Byzantine throne⁴²¹. They also provide the setting, upon which Basil is represented as a charismatic and talented young man, who is full of potential. The same setting offers a medium of *synkrisis* upon, upon which Michael III, a supposedly worthless and irreverent emperor, assumes the role of the villain and Basil the role of the hero,

⁴¹⁵ THEOPH. CONT., V, 54, 1-20.

⁴¹⁶ PmbZ #24313.

⁴¹⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 54, 20-56, 27.

⁴¹⁸ On the region of Armamentarea, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 242, 255.

⁴¹⁹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 56, 1-58, 29.

⁴²⁰ "καὶ τότε μὲν οὕτως τὸ τοιοῦτον κύμα ὑπὸ θεοῦ φρουρούμενος παρέδραμεν ὁ Βασίλειος". THEOPH. CONT., V, 58, 29-30.

⁴²¹ All these prophetic visions and dreams have been recently studied by G. T. Calofonos. See: CALOFONOS, Narratives, 95-124.

whose rise to power goes hand in hand with the empire's salvation and recovery. The primary aim is to render Michael III's removal from the Byzantine throne a necessity and subsequently justify Basil's murder. I shall speak of Michael III's *psogos* in more detail later.

During the course of the same year, Basil's relationship with Michael III strengthened even more. It appears that Michael III suggested Basil marry his former mistress, Eudocia Ingerina⁴²². Basil was at that time married with Maria⁴²³ but promptly divorced her, gave her a noteworthy compensation, and sent her back to Macedonia. Michael III also had Thecla become Basil's mistress⁴²⁴. The marriage took place some time in 865 and, although Ingerina was formally married with Basil, she still remained Michael III's mistress. This gave rise to one of the most discussed topics of modern scholarship: the patronage of Leo VI⁴²⁵. Be that as it may, this new situation gave Basil the opportunity to further advance his career, as he was now not only close to Michael III, but also directly involved in his private life.

According to the narratives of Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon, after Basil's marriage with Eudocia, Basil's relationship with Michael III's uncle worsened; they both undermined each other at the emperor and searched for an opportunity to kill each other⁴²⁶. It has to be mentioned again that Michael III's relationship with Bardas was at that time not harmonious, so the circumstances were in Basil's favor. Yet, despite Basil's efforts, Michael III could not be convinced that the caesar plotted against him.

⁴²² THEOPH. CONT., V, 62, 23-26.

⁴²³ PmbZ #4741.

⁴²⁴ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 25-31; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 675, 13-19; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 248, 286-292.

⁴²⁵ On the matter indicatively see: DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 171-179, 194 (with further bibliography); MANGO, Ingerina, 22-27; TOUGHER, Leo VI, 42-67.

⁴²⁶ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 31-32; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 675, 20-21; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 248, 292-294.

The two aforementioned sources describe that Basil I then gained Symbatios' trust and tricked him in believing that if Bardas was removed, the emperor would promote him to caesar. Having been deluded by Basil, Symbatios approached the emperor and revealed to him that Bardas was plotting against him⁴²⁷. Such evidence, deriving not only from Basil, but also from a relative of Bardas (Symbatios was Bardas' son-in-law), must have convinced Michael III that his uncle was indeed plotting to remove him from power. It was probably at that time that Michael III consented to remove the caesar; according to the aforementioned sources, the imminent campaign to retake Crete presented a perfect opportunity, as Bardas was too popular and powerful to be eliminated in Constantinople⁴²⁸.

However, the campaign to retake Crete was never meant to arrive at its target. When the Byzantine army camped at Kepoi, Bardas was murdered in Michael III's tent and the expedition was called off. On a following chapter⁴²⁹, I describe in detail how the murder took place. Yet there are key points that have to be mentioned again. First of all, despite the attempts of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and *Vita Basilii* to downplay or even completely remove Basil from the scene, it becomes apparent that his participation was pivotal; it was him who stabbed Bardas first, and then the rest of the conspirators cut the caesar into pieces, while Michael III looked on unmoved⁴³⁰.

It must also be highlighted that at the emperor's tent, a certain group of individuals were present and involved in the plot to assassinate Bardas: Basil,

⁴²⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 32-36; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 676, 1-7; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 248, 295-301.

⁴²⁸ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 12, 6-8; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 676, 12-14; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 249, 307-309.

⁴²⁹ See below, Chapter IV, pp. 242-249.

⁴³⁰ See below, Chapter IV, pp. 242-249.

Bardas⁴³¹, Ioannes Chaldos⁴³², Marianos⁴³³, Konstantinos Toxaras⁴³⁴, Asyleon⁴³⁵, Petros “o Bulgaros”⁴³⁶, and Symbatios, the Caesar’s son-in-law⁴³⁷. P. Charanis has argued that all personages were of Armenian origin, just like Basil⁴³⁸. Although there is no concrete proof of this, these individuals might have formed a secret *hetaireia* to remove the Caesar. It is also remarkable that, as it will be described, the same group of individuals (the only difference is that Iakovitzes⁴³⁹ is recorded participating only in Michael III’s murder) is also recorded acting together at the night that Michael III was murdered by Basil I and his conspirators.

The account of *Vita Basilii* provides us with the exact date of the Caesar’s death: it was on 21 April 866⁴⁴⁰. The death of Bardas signaled the expedition’s abrupt end. Michael III wrote a letter to Photios to inform him that the Caesar had been convicted of high treason and put to death. This letter has not come down to us, but we possess the two letters that the patriarch wrote back regarding the matter. These two letters demonstrate Photios’ genuine concern for Michael III’s life and also reveal that the patriarch was suspicious about Basil’s intentions and ambitions⁴⁴¹.

After Bardas’ death, the expedition returned to Constantinople, where, according to Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon, a lot of people had gathered to greet the emperor. Among them was a monk, who strongly rebuked Michael III for Bardas’ death: “καλὸν ταξείδιον ἐποίηας, ὦ βασιλεῦ.

⁴³¹ PmbZ #801.

⁴³² PmbZ #22784.

⁴³³ PmbZ #24955.

⁴³⁴ PmbZ #23744.

⁴³⁵ PmbZ #24316.

⁴³⁶ PmbZ #6091.

⁴³⁷ PmbZ #7169.

⁴³⁸ CHARANIS, *Armenians*, 209-211.

⁴³⁹ PmbZ #22654.

⁴⁴⁰ “...πρώτην εἶχεν μετ’ εἰκάδα ὁ μὴν Ἀπρίλλιος, τῆς τεσσαρεσκαδεκάτης ἐπινεμήσεως...” THEOPH. CONT., V, 68, 59-70, 1.

⁴⁴¹ See below, pp. 251.

Τὸν ἴδιον συγγενῇ καὶ τὸ πατρῶον αἷμα ξίφει ἀνελών· οὐαί σοι, οὐαί σοι, ὅτι ταῦτα ἐποίησας...”⁴⁴². Michael III was infuriated and ordered Morotheodoros⁴⁴³ the manglabites⁴⁴⁴ to kill him. But the gathered crowd intervened and convinced the emperor not to kill the monk on the ground that he was mad⁴⁴⁵.

Shortly afterwards, i.e. on 25 May 866, Rentakios⁴⁴⁶, who at that time was protovestiarios⁴⁴⁷, was sent to inform patriarch Photios that Michael III planed to crown Basil co-emperor⁴⁴⁸. Symeon Magister narrates that on the following day, 26 May 866, the people gathered at Hagia Sophia could see that there were two imperial seats, instead of one. When Michael III went in the procession, Basil followed him dressed as parakoimomenos. When the emperor arrived at the imperial doors of Hagia Sophia, he did not remove the imperial crown from his head, as was the usual custom. Instead, he kept it on till he reached the holy gates of the church. Once he entered the church, he ascended the three steps of the ambo. Basil stood next and below the emperor, and next to him the asekretis⁴⁴⁹ Leo the Kastor⁴⁵⁰.

The latter was holding an imperial document in his hand and, when Michael III gave the order, he read it out to the gathered people: “...Βάρδας ὁ καῖσαρ ἐβουλεύσατο κατ’ ἐμοῦ ἀνελεῖν με καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὑπεξήγαγέ με τῆς πόλεως,

⁴⁴² FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428-429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 25-27; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 679, 6-10; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 251, 356-358.

⁴⁴³ PmbZ #7725.

⁴⁴⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 328.

⁴⁴⁵ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428-429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 27-30; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 679, 11-14; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 360-362.

⁴⁴⁶ PmbZ #6397.

⁴⁴⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 305.

⁴⁴⁸ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429-430, §27; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 31-33; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 362-364.

⁴⁴⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 310-311.

⁴⁵⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429-430, §27; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 14, 1-2; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 366-367. Sometimes the asekretis was the one reading the imperial decrees to the people. On the matter, see: A. GKOUTZIOUKOSTAS, *Η εξέλιξη του θεσμού των Ασηκρήτις και πρώτοασηκρήτις στο πλαίσιο της αυτοκρατορικής γραμματείας*. *Βυζαντινά* 23 (2003) 70 (and cit. n. 78). On Leo the Kastor, see: PmbZ #4512.

καὶ εἰ μὴ διὰ Συμβατίου καὶ Βασιλείου ἐνημηνύθη μοι, οὐκ ἂν ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν ἤμην· ἐτελεύτησε δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἁμαρτίας. θέλω δὲ Βασίλειον παρακοιμώμενον, ὡς πιστὸν ὄντα καὶ γυλάττοντα τὴν ἐμὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ ἐλευθερώσαντά με καὶ πόθον πρὸς μὲ πολὺν ἔχοντα, εἶναι φύλακα τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας καὶ προνοητὴν καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων εὐφημεῖσθαι ὡς βασιλέα...⁴⁵¹” (...caesar Bardas plotted against me in order to kill me, and for this reason he lured me away from the City and, if this had not been announced to me by Symbatios and Basil, I would not have been among the living. Bardas died as a consequence of his own sin. Now I want Basil the parakoimomenos, who is faithful to me and who guards my imperial power and who has saved me from my enemy and loves me dearly, to be the guardian of my power and take care of me, and I want him to be universally hailed as emperor...)⁴⁵².

When Leo finished reading the decree, Michael III took off the imperial crown from his own head and gave it to Photios, who placed it on the altar and recited a prayer over it. Basil was then dressed in the divitision, tzangia and chlamys, and knelt before the emperor. Photios then crowned Michael III, who, in turn, crowned Basil. The customary acclamation was then heard from the gathered crowd: “Μιχαήλ καὶ Βασιλείου πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη”⁴⁵³.

The account provided by Symeon Magister regarding Basil’s crowning, and which is almost word for word reproduced by Pseudo-Symeon⁴⁵⁴, is the most comprehensive. Genesios’ account on the matter is very brief and chronologically confusing; in his fourth book it is recorded that after the Cretan campaign came to an end, Basil was honored with the title of patrikios, was married with Eudocia Ingerina, was adopted by the emperor and became

⁴⁵¹ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429-430, §27; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 14, 7-13; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 375-253, 381.

⁴⁵² English translation after S. Wahlgren. See: WAHLGREN, *Chronicle*, 189.

⁴⁵³ WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 253, 389.

⁴⁵⁴ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 679, 15-680, 6.

magistros, afterwards he was made parakoimomenos and was finally crowned co-emperor⁴⁵⁵.

Theophanes Continuatus gives a more convenient narrative for Basil's promotion: he records that Michael III adopted him as his son because he had no children and promoted him to magistros. Afterwards, due to the fact that Michael III was unable to govern by himself, and in order to forestall a revolt plotted by the senate, he crowned Basil to improve the general situation⁴⁵⁶. The same story is recorded in *Vita Basilii*; the main difference is that in the narrative of the latter, it is the intervention of Divine Providence that leads Basil closer to his destiny, i.e. to become the Byzantine emperor⁴⁵⁷.

Yet, after Basil's promotion, Symbarios⁴⁵⁸, whom Basil had tricked into believing that the emperor wanted to promote him to Caesar once his father-in-law was removed from power, realized that he was not going to receive the promotion he was promised. Together with his friend, Georgios Peganes⁴⁵⁹, the strategos of the Opsikian theme, rebelled. However, their revolt, which took place in September 866 was crushed a few months afterwards, as the majority of the army remained loyal to the Byzantine government and the two aforementioned rebels were caught, blinded and placed in front of the palace of Lausos⁴⁶⁰ and in front of the Milion⁴⁶¹ respectively⁴⁶².

The joint reign of Michael III and Basil lasted one year and four months (26 May 866 to 24 September 867). At the beginning, emperor and co-emperor had no hostile motives against each other. However, during those sixteen months, certain incidents reveal that their relationship had deteriorated. Michael III

⁴⁵⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 79, 47-52.

⁴⁵⁶ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 294, 1-9.

⁴⁵⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 70, 1-74, 41.

⁴⁵⁸ PmbZ #7169.

⁴⁵⁹ PmbZ #22082.

⁴⁶⁰ On the palace of Lausos, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 379.

⁴⁶¹ JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 60.

⁴⁶² On Symbarios' revolt see below, pp. 249.

might have also regretted the death of Bardas, who, though greedy, was remarkable in administering the state affairs. Or it could have been that Michael III realized that he had simply traded one lustful colleague for another.

The narratives of the sources are not unanimous as to what caused their relationship to fall apart. Genesios, for example, narrates that anonymous courtiers were envious of the harmonious relationship between Michael III and Basil and sought to destroy it. They managed to convince them both that each one of them was planning to eliminate the other⁴⁶³. Indeed, such kind of gossips within the Byzantine court must have existed, but it is unlikely that they had such a great impact on Michael III and Basil's minds. If Michael III was truly convinced that Basil was planning to eliminate him, he could have easily assassinated Basil⁴⁶⁴. As for the Macedonian groom, he similarly did not have any substantial reason to believe that his benefactor was plotting against him; from the very moment he entered his service, Michael III embraced him⁴⁶⁵. It is probable that through his narrative, Genesios intended to disassociate Basil with anything that had to do with Michael III's murder⁴⁶⁶.

The narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii* provide a different interpretation regarding the causes that led to Michael III and Basil's initial rupture. They narrate that when Basil became co-emperor, he attempted to reason Michael III and prevent him from daily participating in horse races, drinking bouts, and other shameless acts; for this reason Michael III started considering him as a hated enemy, instead of a well-intended and loyal friend⁴⁶⁷. In fact, according to the *Vita Basilii*, Michael could not even stand Basil's presence around him⁴⁶⁸. Through these narratives Michael III is portrayed

⁴⁶³ GENESIOS, IV, 80, 69-81, 76.

⁴⁶⁴ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 189-193.

⁴⁶⁵ TOUGHER, Michael III and Basil, 157.

⁴⁶⁶ TOBIAS, Basil, I, 73-74.

⁴⁶⁷ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 296, 1-9. This has already been remarked by K. Nikolaou and Eir. Christou: NIKOLAOU – CHRISTOU, Violence, 99.

⁴⁶⁸ VITA BASILII, 94, 28-29.

as an immoral emperor, indifferent for the state affairs, whereas Basil as the pious co-emperor who is interested only in the empire's well-being.

Yet, regardless of the reasons, the first sign of their deteriorating relationship took place on 1 September 867 at the latest, which, according to Symeon Magister, was the day Leo VI⁴⁶⁹ was born⁴⁷⁰. On that day the emperor held chariot races in the palace of St. Mamas⁴⁷¹. He personally participated in those chariot races on behalf of the blue party of the Constantinopolitan demes⁴⁷² and was challenged by three other contestants: Agallianos⁴⁷³, who was representing the green party, Konstantinos the Armenian⁴⁷⁴, who was *drungarios tes viglas*⁴⁷⁵ and was representing the white party, and Krassas⁴⁷⁶, on behalf of the red party.

When the emperor won, he celebrated the victory with a feast, which was attended among others by Basil, Eudocia Ingerina and the *patrikios*⁴⁷⁷ Basiliskinos (or Basiliskianos)⁴⁷⁸. The latter praised the emperor for his skills as a chariot racer. Michael III was apparently delighted by this compliment and ordered Basiliskinos to stand up and try the imperial *tzangia*⁴⁷⁹; The *patrikios* hesitated and looked over to Basil, who nodded him not to comply. Infuriated, the emperor repeated the order once more. Basiliskinos then turned to Basil again and this time Basil nodded in agreement.

⁴⁶⁹ PmbZ #24311.

⁴⁷⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431, §30; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 15, 18-20; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 255, 427-430.

⁴⁷¹ The palace of St. Mamas was situated on the European bank of the Bosphoros, in the contemporary Beşiktaş neighbourhood. On St. Mamas see: GROTHOWSKI, *Hodegon*, 33; JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 194-196, 473-474.

⁴⁷² On the demes in the hippodrome of the imperial palace see: CAMERON, *Circus factions*, 1-154, 193-311; S. G. GIATIS, *The organization of chariot-racing in the great hippodrome of Byzantine Constantinople*. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17/1 (2000) 36-68; OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 326-327.

⁴⁷³ PmbZ #116.

⁴⁷⁴ PmbZ #3962.

⁴⁷⁵ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 331-332.

⁴⁷⁶ PmbZ #4155.

⁴⁷⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 294-295.

⁴⁷⁸ PmbZ #977.

⁴⁷⁹ Τζάγγιον was used to describe the emperor's shoes, usually boots or sandals. On the Tzangion, see: K. WESSEL, *"Insignien"*, *RbK* 3, 445-447.

Basiliskinos eventually put on the imperial shoes and then Michael turned to Basil and rhetorically asked him “They suit him better than they suit you; I have made you an emperor and, don’t I have the power to make another man emperor if I will?” At that time Eudocia approached the emperor and with tears she told him “The imperial dignity is great, and we too have been honored with it undeservedly; it is not right to treat it with content”. Michael III then appears to have reassured the attendants that he is serious and that he is ready to crown Basiliskinos an emperor as well⁴⁸⁰.

The same incident is recorded in the narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii. The difference is that Michael III does not present Basiliskinos at a feast, but in front of the senate⁴⁸¹. As a result, one can reasonably assume that Michael III’s intentions regarding Basiliskinos were real. To Basil, this was a serious threat to his position, as it demonstrated that the emperor now had a new favorite.

A number of scholars have suggested that Michael III and Basil’s relationship might have been homosexual already since 865, when Basil became Michael III’s *parakoimomos*, a rank usually given to eunuchs⁴⁸². In reality, whether Michael III and Basil had a sexual relationship or not, it is something that cannot be answered with certainty; but if this is the case, then Basil may have looked upon Basiliskinos not only with political envy, but also with *phthonos*⁴⁸³. In any case, Basil was greatly angered and distressed by the appearance of Basiliskinos⁴⁸⁴.

⁴⁸⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431, §30; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 15, 24-16, 1; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 256, 435-446.

⁴⁸¹ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 296, 9-19; VITA BASILII, 96, 1-100, 28.

⁴⁸² RINGROSE, *Servant*, 130; TOUGHER, *Eunuch*, 58.

⁴⁸³ MESSIS, *Lecture*, 215-217; RAPP, *Brother-Making*, 201-216; TOUGHER, *Michael III and Basil*, 149-158 (with older bibliography).

⁴⁸⁴ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431, §30; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 16, 1; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 256, 446-447.

There are two noteworthy incidents that took place before the murder of Michael III. The first one concerns an alleged attempt on Michael's behalf to eliminate Basil. According to the narratives of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus, one day Michael III and Basil were hunting together; at some time, Michael III supposedly ordered one of the participants to the hunt⁴⁸⁵ to strike Basil with a spear. At the time of his death, the man confessed that he had been ordered to lance the spear. But Divine Providence protected Basil and the man missed⁴⁸⁶. Whether this incident really took place is doubtful, but it has to be mentioned that it reminds of Basil's fatal accident, which also took place on a hunting trip⁴⁸⁷. Besides, as I have already mentioned, if Michael III truly wanted to eliminate Basil, he could have easily done it. And, as Dapergolas remarks, even if the aforementioned incident did take place and Michael III's attempt to murder Basil misfired, the emperor would have tried to assassinate him again. But no other attempts against Basil are recorded⁴⁸⁸.

The above incident is not recorded in the narrative of Symeon Magister. Quite on the contrary, Symeon Magister narrates that it was Basil who orchestrated a plan to eliminate Michael III. According to this narrative, after the incident with Basiliskinos, a monk⁴⁸⁹ approached the emperor and warned him that Basil was planning to eliminate him; after this, Michael III also began to plot against Basil⁴⁹⁰. Whether this incident took place is also uncertain. As Dapergolas remarks, it is only mentioned by Symeon Magister⁴⁹¹. If Michael III was truly plotting against Basil, the biased Byzantine historians would have certainly recorded it⁴⁹².

⁴⁸⁵ PmbZ #12045.

⁴⁸⁶ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 298, 38-46; VITA BASILII, 94, 38-96, 54.

⁴⁸⁷ VITA BASILII, 334, 1-4.

⁴⁸⁸ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 191.

⁴⁸⁹ PmbZ #12042.

⁴⁹⁰ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 431, §31; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 16, 2-4; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 256, 447-449.

⁴⁹¹ It is also reproduced almost word for word by Pseudo-Symeon. See: PSEUDO-SYMEON,

⁴⁹² DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 191.

The next event that the sources narrate is the actual murder of Michael III, which took place on the night of 23/24 September 867 in the palace of St. Mamas and for which there are four variations. Genesios narrates that it was the aforementioned anonymous courtiers that eliminated Michael III. After failing to convince Basil of Michael III's plot, they took it upon themselves to eliminate the emperor, because they feared that Michael was already suspicious and anticipated a coup against himself; if they had not acted fast, the emperor would have struck first and eliminate them instead⁴⁹³.

Theophanes Continuatus relates that when Michael III's attempt to murder Basil at the hunting trip failed, it became known to the senate and to Basil's friends. As a result, they took it upon themselves to murder Michael III and protect Basil, because they did not want to see the future founder of the Macedonian dynasty be slaughtered like Bardas and Theoktistos⁴⁹⁴.

The account of *Vita Basilii* emphatically narrates that Michael III's ending is related to the imperial funds having been almost depleted. In fact, according to this source, the condition was such, that in order for the payrolls to be dealt with, churches and pious foundations had to be despoiled, and wealthy taxpayers to be stripped of their belongings and sentenced to death. It was then that the worthiest of the magistrates and of the members of the senate decided to cooperate and slay Michael III⁴⁹⁵. Yet as I demonstrate below, this was a sheer fabrication, only for Michael III's murder to be justified⁴⁹⁶.

From the preceding narratives, which all belong to the group of the biased Byzantine historiographers, and whose work was commissioned and supervised by Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, one can observe that Basil is completely exonerated from Michael III's murder. It is also evident that they

⁴⁹³ GENESIOS, IV, 80, 79-84.

⁴⁹⁴ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 298, 45-55.

⁴⁹⁵ VITA BASILII, 106, 38-108, 43.

⁴⁹⁶ See below, Chapter V.

drew from each other. According to their narrative, Basil does not appear to have participated either in the plan or in the actual murder⁴⁹⁷. One can also argue that their narratives are without depth. They refer to members of the senate or to friends of Basil without mentioning their names.

However, if we turn to the narrative of Symeon Magister, not only do we find their names, but we also note that it is the same group of people that participated in the murder of Bardas. According to Symeon Magister, on 23 September 867, Michael III had invited Basil and Eudocia Ingerina to dine with him at St. Mamas. Basiliskinos and Rentakios the protovestiarios were also at St. Mamas' palace, but were not to dine with the emperor. At some time, Theodora, who had returned to the palace, invited Michael III to dine with her at the house of Anthemios on the following day. On being invited by Theodora, Michael III sent Rentakios and his intimates to hunt and bring the catch to his mother. Basil was already angered by Michael III and this presented to him an excellent opportunity to realize his plan.

While at the dinner, at some point Basil excused himself, rose from the table and went to the emperor's bedchamber. Once there, he bent the bedchamber's key so that it could not be locked; afterwards he returned and continued to dine with Michael III. By that time Michael III was drunk and when the time came to call it a night, Basil accompanied the emperor to his room and, once there, he kissed his hand and left. Basiliskinos was also in the emperor's chamber, who, because Rentakios was absent, was to sleep at the protovestiarios' bed and offer protection to Michael III. Undoubtedly this presented a unique opportunity for Basil to get rid of them both.

Ignatios⁴⁹⁸ the koitonites⁴⁹⁹ went to lock the door of the bedchamber, but, to his astonishment, he found out that its lock was broken. Then, suddenly, Basil

⁴⁹⁷ TOBIAS, Basil, 74-75.

⁴⁹⁸ PmbZ #2675.

⁴⁹⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 305.

with his eight associates entered Michael III's quarters. Michael III was at that time too drunk to realize what was happening. Symeon Magister gives the names of all of Basil's associates that were present at Michael III's bedchamber. These were: Bardas⁵⁰⁰, Ioannes Chaldos⁵⁰¹, Marianos⁵⁰², Konstantinos Toxaras⁵⁰³, Asyleon⁵⁰⁴, Petros "o Bulgaros"⁵⁰⁵, Symbatios⁵⁰⁶, and Iakobitzes⁵⁰⁷ the apalates.

When Ignatios saw them, he realized that they did not have good intentions and begged Basil not to go any further. At that moment Michael III woke up, but there was not much he could do. At once, Ioannes Chaldos attacked the emperor and cut off his hands, whereas Iakobitzes stabbed Basiliskinos and hurled him to the floor. While this was happening, the rest of Basil's associates stood on guard outside of the bedroom, making sure that none of the nearby guards would realize what was happening.

After the initial attack, Basil and his men gathered together to discuss the situation. Asyleon argued that it was too dangerous for Michael III to be kept alive; he then turned back and saw the emperor lying on his couch without hands and begging for mercy. Yet, Asyleon showed none; he stabbed his sword in Michael III's heart and thus killed the last member of the Amorian dynasty. He then turned back to Basil and the other associates and bragged about his act⁵⁰⁸. Michael III reigned for sixteen years as a minor, while his mother was exercising actual power, for ten years as a sole ruler and for sixteen months along with Basil I.

⁵⁰⁰ PmbZ #801.

⁵⁰¹ PmbZ #22784.

⁵⁰² PmbZ #24955.

⁵⁰³ PmbZ #23744.

⁵⁰⁴ PmbZ #24316.

⁵⁰⁵ PmbZ #6091.

⁵⁰⁶ PmbZ #7168.

⁵⁰⁷ PmbZ #22654.

⁵⁰⁸ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431-432, §31-32; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 16, 4-35; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 256, 450-258, 485.

Considering the aforementioned narrative, which is by far the most detailed one, there is a number of facts worth observing. First of all, despite the efforts of the biased historiographers, whose works were commissioned by Basil's grandson in an effort to justify Michael III's murder and conceal Basil's participation in it, the actual plan is revealed to us through Symeon Magister's account. This is not just a matter of whose narrative one chooses to follow; there are also other remarks that point to the fact that Symeon Magister's account is closer to the truth⁵⁰⁹. That is to say, if Michael III had indeed plotted against Basil, as Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii* would have us to believe, then he would not have invited Basil to dine with him; and he would not have sent Rentakios away.

As Dapergolas remarks, Michael III would not also have allowed Basil to wander freely at the palace, as the latter had done on the night of Michael III's murder. Additionally, on the fateful night Ignatios the koitonites was really surprised to see Basil and his associates entering the emperor's bedchamber; at the same time, Basil's accomplices are also described to have wandered at the palace of St. Mamas without the imperial guard noticing anything suspicious. All these details point to the fact that Michael III was not afraid of Basil⁵¹⁰. And if he was indeed warned by the monk about Basil's plot against him, he did not take these warnings seriously.

From my point of view, the way the murder was executed is also indicative that it was Basil who was plotting against his benefactor all along. Basil had an exceptional influence upon his patrons. This becomes apparent by the way Theophilitzes⁵¹¹ treated him; he initially hired Basil as a groom, but shortly

⁵⁰⁹ Staffan Wahlgren, who has published the critical edition of the first redaction of Symeon Magister's text and its English translation (and currently working on the second redaction) has also pointed out that Symeon's description of the night of Michael III's murder is not only more detailed, but also revealing Basil's participation in its plan. See: WAHLGREN, *Chronicle*, 192 (cit. n. 7).

⁵¹⁰ DAPERGOLAS, *Michael III*, 193-195.

⁵¹¹ PmbZ #8221.

afterwards promoted him to protostrator. Similarly, when he got into the emperor's service, promotions duly followed (strator, protostrator, patrikios, parakoimomenos, co-emperor).

After Basil became co-emperor, he had nothing more to gain from Michael III. That does not necessarily mean that he intended to eliminate Michael III from the very first day. But Basiliskinos' presence must have certainly alerted and distressed Basil, who might have realized that he was no longer the emperor's favorite and that his position was precarious. This also explains that on the night of the murder, Michael III was not simply assassinated; his hands were first cut off and he was left to suffer and beg for mercy before being put to death. This shows not only political motives on behalf of the attackers, but also personal hatred.

Yet, considering that Basil's associates are the same people who assassinated Bardas, the possibility that Basil sought to eliminate his benefactor from the moment he was relieved from Bardas cannot be disregarded. Quite on the contrary, it is very likely that this group of people might have founded a secret *hetaireia* to remove Bardas and, eventually, the Byzantine emperor.

Basil must have been the leader of this *hetaireia*, and he proselytized people by convincing them that they would obtain prominent ranks once he becomes emperor. Although there is no concrete evidence of this, the theory does gain ground considering that this is how Basil convinced Symbarios⁵¹², Bardas's son-in-law, i.e. that once Bardas is removed, he would take his place and be promoted to caesar. It is probable that he used similar methods to convince his associates to act for his interest. Yet, Symeon Magister narrates that shortly after Basil assumed the throne, his associates were punished by God for their crimes;

⁵¹² PmbZ #7169.

some of them died unexpectedly during accidents that took place on hunting trips, whereas others were brutally murdered⁵¹³.

According to Symeon Magister's account, after the murder, Basil and his conspirators gathered at the Golden Horn, crossed over, and went to the house of Eulogios, a Persian⁵¹⁴. Next, they took Eulogios with them and headed to Marina neighbourhood⁵¹⁵. There, Basil and two of his men broke through an enclosure of the wall and reached the palace gates. When they all got inside the palace, Eulogios reached out for his countryman, Artavasdos⁵¹⁶ the hetaeriach⁵¹⁷ and in Persian told him that Michael III had been killed by the sword, and that he should open the door for the new emperor. Subsequently, Artabasdos ran to the papias⁵¹⁸, took the keys from him by force and opened the gate. On the next day (25 September 867), Basil made designated Gregorios⁵¹⁹ as the new papias.

Next, Basil sent a messenger to the palace of St. Mamas to bring Eudocia Ingerina to the palace. He also sent Ioannes⁵²⁰ the praipositos⁵²¹ to take Eudocia Dekapolitissa from the palace and bring her to her parents, and Paulos⁵²² the koitonites⁵²³ to bury Michael III. When the latter arrived at Michael III's bedchamber, he found the murdered emperor wrapped in a saddlecloth⁵²⁴ and his mother and sisters nearby mourning for his death. Michael III did not have

⁵¹³ ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 17, 31-18, 15; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 260, 5-261, 23.

⁵¹⁴ PmbZ #21760.

⁵¹⁵ Marina neighbourhood was probably situated North or Northeast of the Great Palace and East of Hagia Sophia and Hagia Eirene. See: GROTHOWSKI, Hodegon, 33-34.

⁵¹⁶ PmbZ #20627.

⁵¹⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 327-328.

⁵¹⁸ PmbZ #12056. On the office of papias see: OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 305.

⁵¹⁹ PmbZ #2505.

⁵²⁰ PmbZ #3321.

⁵²¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 300.

⁵²² PmbZ #5869.

⁵²³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 305.

⁵²⁴ It was probably one of the cloths he was wearing when he was participating in horse races. See: WAHLGREN, Chronicle, 194 (cit. n. 6).

the burial worthy of an emperor. He was transferred to the Philippikos⁵²⁵ monastery of Chrysopolis⁵²⁶ and was buried there⁵²⁷, whereas all the Byzantine emperors from Konstantinos I to Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos were buried at the monastery of the Holy Apostles⁵²⁸.

The last member of the Amorion dynasty was buried there till 886. When Leo VI succeeded Basil, one of his first actions was to give Michael III a burial worthy of a Byzantine emperor. Leo VI sent Andreas⁵²⁹ the stratelates⁵³⁰ along with clerics and senators to Chrysopolis; they took Michael III's body from the tomb and put him in a coffin of cypress wood and transferred it to the church of the Holy Apostles. There, they honored him accordingly and put him in a sarcophagus⁵³¹. S. Tougher has suggested that Michael III's reburial might have taken place on the anniversary of his death, i.e 23/24 September 886⁵³².

The accounts of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii do not provide us with any information regarding Michael III's burial; it is only in the narrative of Symeon Magister that we find out what happened to Michael III's body. In his narrative, the first entry records how this emperor brought the body back to Constantinople and buried it in the mausoleum that was destined to serve as the resting-place for most of the Byzantine emperors⁵³³.

Leo VI's action have led a number of scholars to believe that once he assumed the Byzantine throne, he sought to publicly demonstrate that Michael

⁵²⁵ On the monastery of Philippikos, see: JANIN, *Églises*, 24-25.

⁵²⁶ On Chrysopolis, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 494-495.

⁵²⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 432-433, §33; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 16, 35-17, 19; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 258, 485-259, 505.

⁵²⁸ On the monastery of Holy Apostles, see: DOWNEY, *Tombs*, 27-51.

⁵²⁹ PmbZ #20351.

⁵³⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 296.

⁵³¹ Leo VI did not construct a new sarcophagus to use for Michael III's body, but used an existing one, which looked identical with the one used to host Justinian I's body. This has created a problem regarding the identity of Michael III's coffin. On the matter see: DOWNEY, *Tombs*, 34, 48-51; GRIERSON ET AL, *Tombs*, 27, 46.

⁵³² TOUGHER, *Leo VI*, 62 (cit. N. 102).

⁵³³ ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 25, 4-10; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 270, 4-271, 10.

III was his real father. Yet, as Tougher has convincingly demonstrated, it is more probable that Leo VI only sought to restore the memory of Basil I's crime in favor of the Macedonian dynasty⁵³⁴.

⁵³⁴ TOUGHER, Leo VI, 62-67 (with further bibliography). Cf. DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 171-179. The Greek scholar has recently counted –mostly– on Mango's point of view (MANGO, Ingerina, 22-27) and again argued that Leo VI is Michael III's son.

Chapter II: Michael III, the drunkard, indifferent, and disrespectful emperor: a historical reality or an invention of the court?

The Byzantine court historians of the tenth century, whose work was commissioned by Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, display Michael III as a drunkard, indifferent, and disrespectful emperor whose sole interests were horse racing, drinking bouts with his contemptible and worthless friends. They argue that it is on those friends that the emperor chose to waste the public funds, for they entertained him with their unscrupulous acts. These accusations are based on descriptive incidents, that they emphatically narrate. All these incidents are then used as a political tool so as to highlight Michael III's negative personal traits and display him as an unworthy emperor⁵³⁵. These incidents also offer a medium of comparison between the two personalities, in which Michael III serves as a villain, and Basil as the hero, who is guided by Divine Providence to assume the Byzantine throne and save the empire from Michael III's rule.

It is worthwhile to examine each of these accusations and incidents separately for a number of reasons: (i) it can reveal whether they are real or fabricated; (ii) it can highlight that even if the incident's core is based on a historical fact, it was deliberately modified so as to smear Michael III's image; (iii) it can point out the model(s) the biased Byzantine historians used to create a suitable-for-their-intentions image of Michael III; (iv) it can, wherever possible, unveil authentic traits of Michael III, so that one can have a clearer picture of his character.

⁵³⁵ NIKOLAOU – CHRISTOU, *Violence*, 97-98.

The first of these accusations that we ought to examine is Michael III's love for horseracing. The biased Byzantine historians narrate several incidents that demonstrate Michael III's outrageous passion for horseracing. Theophanes Continuatus accounts that the emperor was not at all interested in the affairs of the state; he delegated them to Bardas, so that he can attend to the horseraces; the same argument is recorded in the narrative of Genesios⁵³⁶. But he not only loved to spectate, but also drove the horses himself and thus damaged the imperial dignity: “ὡς τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας- θέαμα τυγχάνων καὶ παίγνιον πᾶσι δὴ καὶ κατάγελως”⁵³⁷.

On another occasion, Michael III was about to participate in horseraces that were held in St. Mamas⁵³⁸. Shortly before they commence, a papias informed the emperor of an Arab raid on the Eastern frontier in Asia Minor. These news reached Constantinople via the beacons, a warning system that had been invented by Leo the Philosopher⁵³⁹. Apparently, when Michael III heard of the Arab attack, he ordered the beacon system to be dismantled so that the announcement of danger would not cancel the horse races⁵⁴⁰.

Another time, Michael III was again going to participate in a horse race with two other contenders; when he was about to cross the starting line, a protonotarios⁵⁴¹ approached him and informed him that Amer⁵⁴² was conducting a raid on the Thracesian theme and was about to attack Malagina⁵⁴³.

⁵³⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 70, 72-76.

⁵³⁷ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 262, 5-8.

⁵³⁸ The fact that a hippodrome existed in the suburban palace of St. Mamas is confirmed by the Patria of Constantinople. See: PATRIA, III, 206-207 (n. 159).

⁵³⁹ PmbZ #24313. On the beacons as a warning system, see: LEMERLE, Humanism, 178-180; PATTENDEN, Warning System, 258-299.

⁵⁴⁰ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 280, 1-282, 24.

⁵⁴¹ PmbZ #12025.

⁵⁴² PmbZ #8552.

⁵⁴³ BELKE, Bithynien und Hellespont, 748-750 (Malagina).

On hearing this, Michael III became furious and accused the protonotarios of interrupting him, while all he cared about was to compete in horseracing⁵⁴⁴.

Similarly, the account of *Vita Basilii* also narrates that Michael III loved to participate in horse races held in the imperial palace, as well as in the palace of St. Mamas, and squander the public money on his fellow charioteers⁵⁴⁵. To the best of my knowledge, Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon also record two events of Michael III participating in horse races. On the first one they briefly refer that Michael III loved to spend his time at hunting, and competing in chariot races on the hippodrome, as well as at all other kinds of immoral actions⁵⁴⁶. The second one is the one dated on 1 September 866, almost a year before he was murdered by Basil and his conspirators⁵⁴⁷.

Remarkably, the same sources account that Theophilos, Michael III's father, organized⁵⁴⁸ and participated in horse races as well. And, unlike Michael III, Theophilos was venerated for his actions: “*χρώματι δὲ ἀφικόμενος εἰς τὴν πόλιν τὰ λάφυρα ἐθριάμβευσεν, ἵππικὸν ποιήσας καὶ τὸ πρῶτον βάλιον παίξας, ἄρματι λευκῷ μὲν ἐποχησάμενος, χρωμάτι δὲ τῷ βενέτῳ ἀμφιασάμενος. καὶ νικήσας ἐστεφανώθη, τῶν δῆμων ἐπιβοώντων· καλῶς ἦλθες ἀσύγκιτε φακτωνάρη* (welcome, superior charioteer)⁵⁴⁹”. It should also be mentioned that they both raced on behalf of the blue party. Yet, aside from the two aforementioned Amorion emperors, many Byzantine emperors,

⁵⁴⁴ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 282, 1-16.

⁵⁴⁵ VITA BASILII, 82, 1-9.

⁵⁴⁶ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 421-422, §8; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 4, 28-30; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 655, 1-2; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 233, 39-234, 41.

⁵⁴⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431, §30; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 15, 18-23; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 681, 13-19; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 255, 430-256, 434.

⁵⁴⁸ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 625, 13-21; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 217, 22-24.

⁵⁴⁹ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 634, 19-22; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 223, 162-166.

already since the early Byzantine period, held and participated in horse races; this is clearly stated in the *Patria* of Constantinople⁵⁵⁰.

R. J. H. Jenkins has argued that Michael III's love for horseracing may be completely fictional; the Belgian scholar highlighted that it might be a negative trait culled from Plutarch's *vita* on the Roman emperor Nero (54-68)⁵⁵¹. The work of Plutarch on Nero is lost, but, as Jenkins notes, evidence that Konstantinos VII used Plutarch's Nero can be extracted from two passages from the narrative of the *Vita Basilii*; firstly, when Michael III presented Basiliskinos to the senate⁵⁵². Secondly, just as after the prodigal Nero ruled the attentive Galba (68-69)⁵⁵³, similarly, after the extravagant Michael III ruled the economical Basil⁵⁵⁴. Nowadays, we know about Nero's love for horseracing from Suetonius' works on the lives of Caesars⁵⁵⁵ and from Tacitus' *Annals*⁵⁵⁶.

⁵⁵⁰ PATRIA, III, 194-195 (n. 129), 206-207 (n. 159). On the Byzantine emperors' participation in horse races in the hippodrome, see: CAMERON, *Circus factions*, 157-192; KARLIN-HAYTER, *Charioteers*, 326-315; MANGO, *Daily life*, 341-349.

⁵⁵¹ JENKINS, *Portrait*, 75-76.

⁵⁵² : "...ἐξάγει τε αὐτὸν πρὸς τὴν σύγκλητον τῆς χειρὸς ἅμα κρατῶν καὶ ὑπουργῶν αὐτῷ, ὡς ὁ Νέρων ἐκεῖνος πάλαι τὸν πολυθρόνητον † Ἔρωτα, † καὶ φησιν ἐπὶ λέξεως...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 98, 14-16.

⁵⁵³ "Βουλόμενος δὲ τῆς περὶ τὰς δωρεὰς ἀμετρίας καὶ πολυτελείας τοῦ Νέρωνος ἀποδεικνύναι μεγάλην μεταβολήν, ἀστοχεῖν ἐδόκει τοῦ πρόποντος. Κάνου γὰρ αὐλήσαντος αὐτῷ παρὰ δεῖπνον (ἀκρόαμα δὲ ἦν ὁ Κάνος εὐδοκιμούμενον) ἐπαινέσας καὶ καὶ ἀποδεξάμενος ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ κομισθῆναι τὸ γλωσσόκομον καὶ λαβὼν χρυσοῦς τινας ἐπέδωκε τῷ Κανῷ, φήσας ἐκ τῶν ιδίων, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν δημοσίων χαρίζεσθαι...". PLUTARCH'S LIVES XI, 238, 1.

⁵⁵⁴ "...τὴν αὐτοκράτορα ἦλθεν ἀρχὴν ὁ Βασίλειος, ὥσπερ ἐνδεικνυμένου θεοῦ τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν πραγμάτων μεταβολήν, συνέβη πολλῶν ἐπινικίων ἀγγελίαν τὴν βασιλεύουσιν ταύτην καταλαβεῖν καὶ ἀνάγκησιν πλήθους αἰχμαλώτων ἀγγελοῦναι Χριστιανῶν. πρόοδον οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπὶ τὸν μέγαν τοῦ θεοῦ ναὸν τὸν τῆς ἐκείνου Σοφίας ἐπώνυμον ποιησάμενος καὶ τὰς περὶ πάντων ὁμοῦ εὐχαριστίας αὐτῷ ἀποδοῦς, ἐν τῷ ὑποστρέφειν ὑπάτευσεν καὶ χρήματα πολλά, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν δημοσίων (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν) ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 112, 1-10.

⁵⁵⁵ "Equorum studio vel praecipue ab ineunte actate flagravat plurimusque illi sermo, quanquam vetaretur, de circensibus erat (From his earliest years he had a special passion for horses and talked constantly about the games in the Circus, though he was forbidden to do so)". Suetonius, *Lives*, 118-119, 3 (chapter XXII).

⁵⁵⁶ "Vetus illi cupido erat curriculo quadrigaum insistere, nec minus foedum stadium cithara ludicrum in modum canere. (It was an old desire of his to drive a chariot and team of four, and an equally repulsive ambition to sing to the lyre in the stage manner)". Tacitus, *Annals*, 128-129 (Book XIV, chapter XIV).

Jenkins' argument is, from my point of view, definitely plausible; especially taking into consideration that, as it will be shown, Konstantinos VII has undeniably used Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to either create or emphasize on existing negative traits on Michael III's character.

But, as regards the tenth century Byzantine sources, one can remark that Michael III's love for horseracing is not attested only by the biased Byzantine historians that belong to the group of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos; Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon also mention it. And if we regard that what these sources account was a reality, then in this case we do observe that Michael III not only loved to watch horse races, but also to participate in them personally. It is also possible that through his actions, Michael III wanted to imitate his father. Be that as it may, the two latter sources do not mention that Michael III's love for horseracing had any negative impact on the public state affairs, nor do they record that Michael III squandered the public funds on his fellow charioteers. They simply associate Michael III's love for horseracing with other "impure" actions.

As several scholars have remarked, although many Byzantine emperors took part in horse races, their participation was not unanimously approved. Not everyone enjoyed watching the emperor taking the reins into their own hands, risking losing and damaging the imperial dignity; this was an activity that would fit better to a common subject of the empire⁵⁵⁷.

As for Michael III, even if his passion for horseracing is a historical fact, the author(s) of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii have twisted it so that it fits their narrative. In this way, Michael III appears not only as an unworthy emperor, but also as an emperor who neglects the welfare and the real dangers of the empire for his personal entertainment. More specifically, a number of

⁵⁵⁷ DAGRON, Constantinople, 177; DAGRON, Organisation, 124-125; JUANNO, Μυθιστόρημα, 594-596; KARLIN-HAYTER, Charioteers, 326-333.

Byzantinists have argued that the episode in which Michael III orders the beacons to be dismantled was fabricated only to smear his image⁵⁵⁸.

Personally, I agree with the aforementioned statement and I would like to add that the argument of Michael III neglecting the Arab danger for his personal entertainment is very contradictory. In spite of how much Michael III loved to attend and participate in horse races, he himself participated in campaigns and personally commanded Byzantine armies against the Abbasid Caliphate⁵⁵⁹. The attempt to blacken Michael III's image becomes clearer if we reverse the situation and ask ourselves the following: if Michael III did opt to disregard the empire's state affairs, why did he on other occasions personally participate in campaigns in the Eastern frontier? Would it not be more comfortable for him to spectate and take part in horse races while his officers command the Byzantine troops?

I believe that under this prism it becomes apparent that the author(s) of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii have customized Michael III's love for horseracing by adding disparaging anecdotes so as to portray him as an unworthy and indifferent emperor. Besides, it should also be noted that Michael III raced mainly in the private hippodrome of St. Mamas⁵⁶⁰. Therefore, his passion must not have been a topic of significant gossip among his subjects –certainly not significant enough to make him appear unworthy and indifferent.

The next incident that must be examined is the one displaying Michael III dining with a woman⁵⁶¹ in her house. According to the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, one day the emperor was walking on the street when he met a

⁵⁵⁸ LILIE, *Reality and Invension*, 175; LEMERLE, *Humanism*, 178-179; PATTENDEN, *Warning System*, 258

⁵⁵⁹ See below, chapter "Emperor at war".

⁵⁶⁰ MANGO, *Daily life*, 348-349.

⁵⁶¹ PmbZ #10115.

woman whose child⁵⁶² was his godchild. The woman had just come out of the baths and had a water pitcher and a towel in hand. When Michael III saw her he swiftly dismounted from his horse, dispatched all the senators that were accompanying him, and chose other disreputable men to join him; he then approached the woman, took the water pitcher from her hands, and said “ἄγε δὴ, ὦ γύναι, θαρροῦσα, ἐμὲ κατὰ τὸ οἶκομά σου ἀπόδεξαι, ψωμοῦ πιτυρώδους ἔφεσιν ἔχοντα καὶ ασβεστοτύρου (come now, woman, take me to your house and serve me some bran bread and white cheese)”⁵⁶³. The woman was apparently left speechless by this unusual request and, although she was very poor, she could not refuse the emperor’s request. Once at her house, because she had neither table nor tablecloths, Michael III took the towel she had brought from the baths, spread it on the ground, and dined with her there.

Judging by his actions, the author(s) of the Theophanes Continuatus narrates that Michael III thus assumed not only the role of the emperor, but also acted as a table-servant, a cook, and a guest (βασιλεύς, τραπεζοποιός, μάγειρος, δαιτυμῶν). When he finished dining with her he walked from her house to the palace on foot, and on his way he supposedly mocked the dignity of the previous emperors (κακείθεν βάδην αὐθις ἀπῆει πρὸς τὰ ἀνάκτορα, πολλῆς εὐθείας καὶ ἀλαζονείας καὶ τύφου καταγινώσκων τῶν πρὸ τοῦ βασιλέων)⁵⁶⁴. If they had heard about his undermining actions, they would have told him that he should instead wage war and dine with the soldiers, and not spend time with depraved women innkeepers. All this caused Michael III to be hated and rightly brought God’s wrath upon him.

This incident is not recorded in the narration of Genesios and of Vita Basilii; it is attested only in the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus⁵⁶⁵ and,

⁵⁶² PmbZ #10115A.

⁵⁶³ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 9-11.

⁵⁶⁴ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 19-21.

⁵⁶⁵ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 282, 17-284, 26.

subsequently, almost word for word, by Pseudo-Symeon⁵⁶⁶. The only difference is that on the latter's narrative, Michael III bestows fifty nomismata on the woman's husband⁵⁶⁷. Modern scholarship has thoroughly discussed the above incident and has concluded that it is questionable whether the scene relates a factual incident or a fabricated one⁵⁶⁸. This incident not only reminds us of theatrical performances⁵⁶⁹, but it is also irrational and contradictory.

First of all, the woman was not unknown to the emperor; Michael III was the godfather of her child. That means that both the woman and her child were related to the emperor –hence the emperor's spontaneity to invite himself at the woman's house⁵⁷⁰. Although she was very poor and did not even have a tablecloth, Michael III (if we are to follow Pseudo-Symeon's narrative) donated fifty nosmimata to her husband to furnish their home, but that was apparently not enough⁵⁷¹.

Next, Michael III appears to be mocking the imperial dignity by walking on foot from the woman's house to the imperial palace. This accusation is self-contradictory, to say the least. On the very same source, one finds that Theophilos is being praised for his walking on the Mese street⁵⁷²; Michael III's father presented as the emperor of justice, because he passed by the Mese street on a weekly basis. In this way Theophilos appears to be close to his subjects, as he hears their complaints and observes the pricing of the wares of the market (... πολλήν ἐνδεικνύμενον σπουδὴν πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ...) ⁵⁷³.

⁵⁶⁶ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 660, 16-661, 12.

⁵⁶⁷ On the gift of money, see: PSEUDO-SYMEON, 661, 4-5.

⁵⁶⁸ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 173.

⁵⁶⁹ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 172-173; LJUBARSKIJ, Kaiser als Mime, 40-43; LUDWIG, Sonderformen, 369-372.

⁵⁷⁰ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 172.

⁵⁷¹ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 172.

⁵⁷² On the Mese street, indicatively see: A. BERGER, Streets and Public Spaces in Constantinople. *DOP* 54 (2000) 161-172; JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 36-37.

⁵⁷³ THEOPH. CONT. III, 128, 14-15.

At the end of the episode, the woman is described as an innkeeper and wicked “γυναίων καπηλίδων καὶ μοχθηρῶν”⁵⁷⁴. Through this characterization it is implied that Michael III is surrounded by people whose social status is low and, in this way, damages the imperial dignity⁵⁷⁵. The effect of this accusation is doubled by the assumption that if the former Byzantine emperors could see what Michael III was doing, they would have reprimanded him and advised him to act accordingly⁵⁷⁶. As R. J. Lilie remarks, as a whole the aforementioned scene’s truth is irrelevant to the author’s intention, which is to emphatically demonstrate that due to socializing with people of low social status Michael III is unworthy to reign⁵⁷⁷.

Yet, as for Michael III walking on the streets of the capital, that might be based on a historical fact. The Patria, Symeon Magister, and Pseudo-Symeon narrate that Michael III had built and lavishly decorated a stable⁵⁷⁸ for his horses. At that time, there was a man in Constantinople called Petros the Ptochomagistros⁵⁷⁹. When the stables were finished, the emperor invited him at the stables and showed him the building. Michael III probably wanted to be praised by him, so he said to him that he will always be remembered for this building project. But, Petros replied to the emperor that “even Ioustinianos, who built the Great Church and had it decorated with precious ornaments is not remembered these days; why should anyone remember you simply for building a resting place for the horses?” Failing to receive the expected praise, Michael III had Petros kicked out of the stables and beaten⁵⁸⁰.

⁵⁷⁴ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 25.

⁵⁷⁵ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 173.

⁵⁷⁶ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 172-173.

⁵⁷⁷ LILIE, Reality and Invension, 173.

⁵⁷⁸ These stables were located in the Tzykanisterion, which lies within the precincts of the Great Palace. On the Tzykanisterion, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 118-119.

⁵⁷⁹ PmbZ #6094.

⁵⁸⁰ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 426, §21; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 10, 3-13; PATRIA, III, 152-155 (n. 29); PSEUDO-SYMEON, 666, 16-667, 6; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 244, 234-245, 246.

As E. Kislinger has observed, if it was simply praise that Michael III was looking for, he could have easily showed the building to one of his relatives; in that way he would have certainly received compliments. However, it is not unlikely that Michael III, through such kind of actions wanted –again– to imitate his father and be popular among its subjects⁵⁸¹. His interest as to what his people thought of him might have been genuine. This theory gains more ground considering that Michael III personally commanded Byzantine troops in the Eastern frontier against the Abbasid Caliphate⁵⁸²; and he is also personally commemorated for his renovative building projects in a great number of inscriptions, the majority of which are located in the capital and in major cities in Asia Minor⁵⁸³.

The *Patria* accounts yet another incident that portrays Michael III as a popular emperor among his subjects. During the reign of Theophilos, there was a widow⁵⁸⁴ whose large cargo ship had been taken away by the *praipositos*⁵⁸⁵ Nikephoros⁵⁸⁶. For quite some time the widow was trying to obtain an audience with Theophilos, but her request was not accommodated as Nikephoros was preventing it. Then, when Michael III was ruling, he was informed about the widow's cause; he ordered Nikephoros to be arrested and the widow to immediately recover her possessions⁵⁸⁷. Yet, despite the colorful description of the episode, its authenticity is highly questionable; in fact, it reproduces a well-known anecdote dating back to the reign of Valentinian and the year 364. It is only the names that are different⁵⁸⁸.

⁵⁸¹ KISLINGER, *Image und Realität*, 395-396.

⁵⁸² See below, Chapter IV.

⁵⁸³ See below, Chapter VIII.

⁵⁸⁴ PmbZ #10095.

⁵⁸⁵ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 300.

⁵⁸⁶ PmbZ #5312.

⁵⁸⁷ PATRIA, III, 150-153 (n. 28).

⁵⁸⁸ PATRIA, III, 310 (n. 35).

In any case, the episode with Michael III and the woman on the street is not the only one that describes the emperor spending time with contemptible people and denigrating the imperial dignity. According to Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, *Vita Basilii*, and *Vita Ignatii*, Michael III had a detestable company, which he kept for his private entertaining⁵⁸⁹. With the emperor included, in total this company consisted of twelve personages⁵⁹⁰ –the symbolic number of Apostles. During that time Ignatios (847-858) is said to have been the patriarch of Constantinople.

Apparently, Michael III mocked him and pretended to have appointed in his place the senator and protospatharios Theophilos⁵⁹¹, who had the nickname Gryllos⁵⁹². The latter was described as the leader of the group and bishop of Koloneia⁵⁹³. At the same time, the remaining eleven members of the companion were given the ranks of metropolitans, while Michael III reserved for himself the rank of archbishop. This company was apparently a group of like-minded men, who were behaving like satyrs and mimes (...περὶ αὐτὸν μίμων καὶ γελοίων καταστησάμενος...) ⁵⁹⁴, as if they were worshippers of Dionysus (...εἶπεν ἄν τις αὐτοὺς θιασώτας εἶναι Διονύσου καλῶς...) ⁵⁹⁵, and together they were mocking Christianity.

⁵⁸⁹ "...πολλῶ πλέον τὰ τῆς ἐξουδενώσεως ἐκ τοῦ ψευδοφανοῦς πατριάρχου καὶ συνεπαγομένου αὐτῷ αἰσχίστου κλήρου..." GENESIOS, IV, 73, 57-58; "Καὶ τὸ δὴ χαλεπώτερον, ἢ τῶν ὧν εἶχε μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ φατρία...". THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 1; "...συνόντων αὐτῷ μιᾶρῶν καὶ ἀσελγῶν ἀνδρογύνων...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 82, 12; "...καὶ δὴ μιᾶρωτάτους τινὰς ἀνθρωπίσκους καὶ βεβηλοτάτους καὶ εὐτραπέλους ἐκλεξάμενος..." VITA IGNATII, 60, 20-22.

⁵⁹⁰ VITA BASILII, 82, 14.

⁵⁹¹ PmbZ #8222.

⁵⁹² In ancient Greek, Gryllos was a synonym to the animal pig. It was mostly used as a joking name. See: LUDWIG, *Sonderformen*, 373; DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 1707; J. HAMMERSTAEDT, Gryllos. Die antike Bedeutung eines modernen archäologischen Begriffs. *ZPapEpig* 129 (2000) 42-43.

⁵⁹³ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 6-9; VITA BASILII, 84, 20-21.

⁵⁹⁴ THEOPH, CONT. V, 80, 23-82, 24.

⁵⁹⁵ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 2-3.

On a day that the people of Constantinople were to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, Michael III's detestable company donned ecclesiastical vestments and staged an Eucharist. However, they filled the sacred vessel, which was used in the consecrated celebration of the people, not with Holy Communion, but with an unsavory mixture of vinegar and mustard. This was all done with laughter and disrespect⁵⁹⁶.

On another occasion, Gryllos is recorded to be riding a white donkey and performing public processions, while being grateful for the followers he had. One day, during his procession, he came across the patriarch Ignatios. When Gryllos saw him, he and the rest of his companions joined Ignatios' procession. However, instead of peacefully following the patriarch's procession, they raised their stoles and other musical instruments and began to play loudly and sing melodies containing foul language. Thus they greatly disturbed the pious men following the procession⁵⁹⁷. The patriarch eventually noticed them and asked around who they were and what was the purpose of their actions. When he found out that Michael III was the root of all this, he was greatly disappointed and prayed that God would put an end to such blasphemies⁵⁹⁸.

Once, Michael III came up with the following hoax: he and Gryllos went to the Chrysotriklinos, where there were two thrones; one for the emperor and one for the patriarch. Michael III sat on the emperor's throne, while Gryllos, robed in patriarchal vestments and pretending he was Ignatios, sat on the patriarch's one. Michael III then sent a message to his mother, who was still living in the palace, to come by and receive a blessing from the patriarch. Theodora showed up at once, and without noticing that Gryllos was substituted for Ignatios she threw herself at the floor in front of the "patriarch" and asked for his blessing. Gryllos then rose from his throne, turned his back

⁵⁹⁶ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 284, 10-15; VITA BASILII, 84, 29-86, 36.

⁵⁹⁷ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 286, 16-23.

⁵⁹⁸ VITA BASILII, 86, 16-88, 23.

at the empress and farted at her. Apparently, when Theodora realized what had been done, she foretold that her son had withdrawn himself from the Providence and from the hand of God⁵⁹⁹.

On yet another occasion, Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii account that one of Michael III's companions, the patrikios Imerios⁶⁰⁰, who was also given the disparaging epithet Pig⁶⁰¹, burped so loudly during a dinner that the light of a nearby torch was blown out. Michael III, who happened to be present at the dinner, was apparently so impressed by Imerios' achievement that he bestowed on him one hundred pounds of gold. The emperor is also presented giving another one hundred pounds of gold to Cheilas⁶⁰², a fellow charioteer, when he stood godfather to his son⁶⁰³. In fact, the aforementioned biased Byzantine historiographers argued that it was due to such lavish expenditures that Michael III managed to empty the imperial treasury and had, therefore to be removed from the imperial throne for the empire to be saved.

It has to be remarked that the aforementioned scenes are recorded in the biased narratives of the Vita Basilii and of Theophanes Continuatus. The latter's episodes are then reproduced by Pseudo-Symeon⁶⁰⁴. Yet, Pseudo-Symeon adds one more event not found in any other Byzantine source. He relates that Photios was Michael III's habitual boon companion: “ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄμιλλαν μετὰ τοῦ ἀθλίου βασιλέως Μιχαὴλ ὑπὲρ τοῦ τίς ἂν πλεον πῆ ἐνστησάμενος δέκα κώθωσιν αὐτὸν ὑπερέβαλλεν· τοῦ Μιχαὴλ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ν' πεπληρωμένου,

⁵⁹⁹ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 286, 1-9; THEOPH. CONT. V, 88, 1-90, 33.

⁶⁰⁰ PmbZ #2591.

⁶⁰¹ Imerios has apparently given this pejorative nickname because his face resembled a pig. “...ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ πατρικίῳ Ἱμερίῳ, ὃν Χοῖρον αὐτὸς μὲν ὁ βασιλεὺς διὰ τὴν τῆς ὄψεως ὠνόμαζεν ἀγριότητα, διὰ δὲ τὸ χοιρῶδες τοῦ βίου μᾶλλον καὶ ὀυπαρὸν ἄξιος ἦν τῆς τοιαύτης προσρήσεως...”. THEOPH. CONT. V, 104, 17-20. There is a disagreement in modern scholarship as to who Cheilas actually was; on the matter see: WINKELMANN, Quellenstudien, 173.

⁶⁰² PmbZ #1069.

⁶⁰³ PmbZ #1069A.

⁶⁰⁴ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 661, 13-662, 16.

οὗτος ὁ Φώτιος τοὺς ξ' ἐκπεπωκῶς ἐνεκαυχᾶτο ὡς μὴ μεμεθυκῶς"⁶⁰⁵ (once, Photios took part in a drinking contest with the emperor and beat him; whereas Michael III drunk fifty cups of wine and became drunk, Photios had drunk sixty and was not overcome). In all probability this anecdote was taken from an anti-Photian source, which could have been written by Niketas David Paphlagon⁶⁰⁶.

On the contrary, Symeon Magister does not mention any of these episodes, whereas Genesisios refers to Michael III's detestable company very briefly without mentioning any names or specific episodes⁶⁰⁷. The same applies to the narrative of Vita Ignatii; it is attested that Michael III enjoys the company of impious men, because he is simpleminded, corrupted by his youthful desires, and because he regarded the sacred matters a joke⁶⁰⁸.

In Vita Ignatii's narrative, none of the aforementioned scenes are attested; it is plainly related that Michael III had his own patriarch, the protospatharios Theophilos. Photios was Bardas' patriarch, whereas his Christian subjects had Ignatios (Ἐμοὶ μὲν πατριάρχης ὁ Θεόφιλος, ὁ Φώτιος δὲ τῷ καίσαρι καὶ τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ὁ Ἰγνάτιος καθέστηκεν)⁶⁰⁹. Several scholars have remarked that, in all probability, the episodes narrated in the narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii are fictional and are only meant to highlight that by entertaining himself with lousy companions, Michael III was unfit to rule⁶¹⁰.

⁶⁰⁵ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 663, 13-17.

⁶⁰⁶ On the matter see: J. GUILLARD, Le Photius du Pseudo-Syméon Magistros. *Revue des études Sud-est Européennes* 9 (1971) 397-404; KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 404-405; AP. KAZHDAN, Chronica Simeona Logofeta. *VizVre* 15 (1959) 125-143; O. KRESTEN, Phantomgestalten in der byzantinischen Literaturgeschichte. *JÖB* 25 (1976) 207-222; MARKOPOULOS, Ψευδοσυμμεών, 164-170; F. WINKELMANN, Hat Niketas David Paphlagon ein umfassendes Geschichtswerk verfasst? Ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos und des Pseudo-Symeon. *JÖB* 37 (1987) 137-152.

⁶⁰⁷ GENESIOS, IV, 73, 56-66.

⁶⁰⁸ VITA IGNATII, 60, 14-31.

⁶⁰⁹ VITA IGNATII, 62, 3-4.

⁶¹⁰ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 132-133 (and 133, cit. n. 1); HARRIS, Folly, 25-27; LILIE, Reality and Invension, 172-176; LUDWIG, Sonderformen, 373-374; H. MAGUIRE, Parodies of Imperial Ceremonial and Their Reflections in Byzantine Art, in: Court Ceremonies, 417-420; MAGUIRE, Parody, 128-131, 134-135.

Jenkins has observed –and this is truly remarkable– that Plutarch’s Antony and Nero, as described in his *Parallel Lives*, have served as models for negative traits to be drawn from and be used to create a distorted image of Michael III. In fact, Jenkins argues that Konstantine VII’s Michael III is a conflation of the worst features of Plutarch’s Antony with a now unidentifiable part of Plutarch’s Nero⁶¹¹. Antony, says Plutarch, was surrounded by mimes and jesters (...νύκτωρ δὲ κώμους καὶ θέατρα καὶ διατριβὰς ἐν γάμοις μίμων καὶ γελωτοποιῶν)⁶¹². Michael III was also surrounded by unlikable companions and mimes (...ἀντιτύπους τῶν σεμνῶν ἱερέων ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν μίμων καὶ γελοίων καταστησάμενος...)⁶¹³.

As has Michael III perpetrated a hoax on Theodora (the aforementioned one, where Gryllos, robed in patriarchal vestments farted on her face), so has Antony perpetrated one on his spouse, Fulvia⁶¹⁴. According to Plutarch, when Julius Caesar landed a victory in Spain, many people went to congratulate him for his achievement. But Antony returned to Rome, where, at that time, a false rumor had spread that the caesar was dead and his enemies were advancing upon the country. Antony got dressed up as a slave and turned up at Fulvia’s house and pretended he had a message from Antony. Then Fulvia, in great distress, before taking the letter, asked whether Antony was still alive or not; Antony, after handing her the letter and without saying a word, threw his arms around her and kissed her when she began reading it⁶¹⁵. This is not the place to examine whether Plutarch’s narrated episode is fictional or not. For the scope of this study, suffice it to say that both leading figures of these episodes (Antony and Gryllos) share the same trait: they act as mimes.

⁶¹¹ JENKINS, *Portrait*, 73.

⁶¹² PLUTARCH’S *LIVES IX*, 158, 3-4.

⁶¹³ THEOPH, *CONT. V*, 80, 23- 82, 1.

⁶¹⁴ JENKINS, *Portrait*, 74-75.

⁶¹⁵ PLUTARCH’S *LIVES IX*, 160, 4-162, 5.

Michael III's reckless extravagance also aligns perfectly with Antony's excessive spending⁶¹⁶. Once, says Plutarch, Antony decides to give two hundred and fifty drachmas (a sum which the Romans call "decies") to a friend; his steward, who was ordered to carry out the donation, deposited the money in full view, so that Antony can realize the magnitude of the sum. Antony, passing by, asked what that was; and when his steward told him that it was the gift he ordered, Antony replied with arrogance that he thought the "decies" was more. Thus he ordered the steward to double the amount of the donation⁶¹⁷. When visited Ephesos Antony is also recorded giving a house to a cook who had simply served him a pleasant dinner⁶¹⁸. Eventually, both Antony and Michael III become bankrupt and are forced to pillage the savings of pious people to make up for their lavish expenditures⁶¹⁹.

It has to be emphasized that this specific negative trait of Plutarch's Antony is reproduced by Konstantinos VII in a very suspicious way. Arguing that Konstantinos VII tried to intentionally falsify the financial situation so as to justify Basil's murder might not be a far-fetched conjecture. As I demonstrate below, this theory gains more ground considering that the imperial treasure was not depleted during Michael III's reign. Although the economy might have declined during Michael III's reign, the imperial treasury was not empty and the empire was even after his death completely functional⁶²⁰.

The last negative trait I wish to examine is the epithet drunkard (ὁ μέθυσος⁶²¹), that the biased Byzantine historiographers attributed to Michael

⁶¹⁶ JENKINS, Portrait, 73.

⁶¹⁷ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 146, 4-148, 1.

⁶¹⁸ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 4.

⁶¹⁹ "ἀφηρεῖτο γὰρ εὐγενεῖς ἀνθρώπους τὰ ὄντα μαστιγίαις καὶ κόλαζι χαρίζομενος. πολλῶν δὲ καὶ ζώντων ὡς τεθνηκότων αἰτησάμενοί τινες οὐσίας ἔλαβον". PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 4. "ἀνάγκη ἐπήρητο τοὺς ἐν τέλει πάντας φανερώς ἀποσφάττεσθαι καὶ δημεύεσθαι τὰς οὐσίας αὐτῶν, ἵν' ἔχοι πόρον ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡνιόχοις καὶ πόρναις καὶ ἀσελγέσιν ἀνθρώποις χαρίζεσθαι...". THEOPH. CONT., V, 104, 2-5.

⁶²⁰ See below, chapter "The economy during Michael III's reign".

⁶²¹ DIMITRAKOS, Μέγα Λεξικόν, 4527.

III. Drunkard is the epithet that derives from the noun drunkenness (ἡ μέθη⁶²²). Wine was excessively consumed in Byzantium, and there were also various kinds of wines and drinks that were being produced⁶²³. Yet, the habit of heavy drinking was always disapproved. Already since the fourth century, Basil the Great condemned drinking in one of his homilies⁶²⁴. Theophanes the confessor narrates that in the early seventh century the green faction mocked Phokas (602-610) for his drinking: “πάλιν εἰς τὸν καὺκον ἔπιες· καὶ πάλιν τὸν νοῦν ἀπώλεσας (you have drunk again from the cup; and you have again lost your mind)”⁶²⁵.

During the tenth century, the negative attitude towards drinking is clearly expressed in the Book of the Eparch, according to which taverns were prohibited to operate during religious feasts and Sundays before the second hour of the day, and had to be closed at the second hour of the night⁶²⁶. The relevant *lemma* of the Suda lexicon also shows that drinking was criticized⁶²⁷. The two latter sources are, from a chronological perspective, of particular importance, as they were compiled approximately during the same time with the work of Genesios, and with the accounts of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii. As such, they also reflect the general mindset on drinking during the concerned period, which obviously remained negative. Based on the available sources, it remains to be examined whether Michael III was truly a

⁶²² DIMITRAKOS, Μέγα Λεξικόν, 4521-4522.

⁶²³ I. GENOV, Vorbereitung des Weins und Weinsorten in Byzanz. *EtBalk* 25/2 (1989) 114-123; JEANSELME, Alcoolisme, 289-295; E. KISLINGER, Dall' ubriacone al krasopateras. Il consumo del vino a Bisanzio, in: *La civiltà del vino: Fonti, temi e produzioni vitivinicole dal Medioevo al Novecento* (ed. G. ARCHETTI). Brescia 2003, 139-163; E. KISLINGER, Retsina e balnea: Consumo e commercio del vino a Bisanzio, in: *Homo edens: Storie del vino* (ed. P. SCARPI). Milan 1991, 277-284; Ph. KOUKOULES, Βυζαντινῶν τροφαὶ καὶ ποτὰ. *ΕΕΒΣ* 17 (1941) 95-112; KOUKOULES, Βυζαντινῶν βίος V, 121-135; G. C. MANIATIS, The Winemaking Industry. *BYZ* 83 (2013) 229-274 (with further bibliography).

⁶²⁴ S. P. N. Basilii. *Caesareae Cappadociae Archiepiscopi*. PG 31: 444-464 (homily XIV: Κατὰ μεθύοντων).

⁶²⁵ DE BOOR, Theophanes, 296, 26-27.

⁶²⁶ DAS EPARCHENBUCH, 132-133 (19:3).

⁶²⁷ ADLER, *Suidae lexicon* III, 347 (n. 420).

worthless drunkard, or if the biased Byzantine historiographers of the tenth century, who were writing under the directions of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, took an already heavily blamable vice and adjusted it to their distorted image of Michael III to further assassinate his character.

Remarkably, the first time that Michael III is referred to as drunkard does not come from a Byzantine source; it is found in the *Liber Pontificalis*, in the *vita* of pope Hadrian II (867-872)⁶²⁸, which was written in 891 at the latest⁶²⁹. The *vita* remains unfinished and does not cover the events that transpired after December 870⁶³⁰. It does, however, cover the events of 869, the year the Byzantine embassy arrived in Rome and presented the acts of the council of 867 to pope Hadrian II; it is the very council where Photios excommunicated Boris, Nicholas, and the false doctrines that the papal missionaries were preaching in Bulgaria⁶³¹. It has to be highlighted that the *vita* is extremely hostile towards Photios and Michael III. The reasons are, of course, the way the Byzantine court treated Nicholas' demands concerning the Roman primacy, as well as his claims on the direct jurisdiction of Illyricum⁶³² and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria⁶³³. As such, the information that concerns the Byzantine court does not necessarily reflect the historical reality.

It must also be remarked that in 869 Basil had already assumed the Byzantine throne and sought to come to terms with the papacy's demands, as were expressed by pope Nicholas' last letter⁶³⁴. Basil considered the embassy dispatched to Rome and their subsequent meeting with pope Hadrian II as a

⁶²⁸ PmbZ #22537.

⁶²⁹ DAVIS, *Lives*, vii.

⁶³⁰ DAVIS, *Lives*, 249.

⁶³¹ See below, pp. 208.

⁶³² PmbZ #5248.

⁶³³ For a historic synopsis on the battle for jurisdiction over Illyricum, see: CHADWICK, *East and West*, 106-108.

⁶³⁴ See below, Chapter III.

⁶³⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 90 (MGH VI) 498-512.

preliminary hearing to the council that would be held next year in Constantinople (869-870) ⁶³⁶.

This embassy consisted of representatives of Ignatios, Photios, and the Byzantine emperor: Ioannes⁶³⁷, the metropolites of Syliaion, was the representative of Ignatios; Petros⁶³⁸, the metropolites of Sardeis, was the representative of Photios, and spatharios Basileios⁶³⁹ was representing the Byzantine emperor. Petros of Sardeis perished on the way, and only the monk Methodios⁶⁴⁰, who accompanied Petros, was left representing the Photian side. However, the monk declined to undertake Photios' defence, either because he felt unable to do so, or because he thought that it was pointless to defend him as the papacy would have never judged him positively. As a result, Photios was not represented in Rome⁶⁴¹.

According to the Vita of pope Hadrian II⁶⁴², when the Byzantine envoys reached Rome they met with the pope at the church of St Mary Major, where they presented the Acts of the council of 867. The vita narrates that Ignatios' representative came forth, presented the acts, and exclaimed that just as Photios was cursed in Constantinople, so may he be cursed in Rome as well; he also referred to him as a devil's servant, new Simon, and a fabricator of lies (*Te minister diabolic Photius, novus Symon, mendacii compiler...*)⁶⁴³. The spatharios Basil then came forth and added that Photios had persuaded Michael III to sign the document at night, when he was very drunk (*...quem ebriosissimum subscriber noctu suasit...*)⁶⁴⁴. He also mentioned that Basil's

⁶³⁶ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 140.

⁶³⁷ PmbZ #22785.

⁶³⁸ PmbZ #6088.

⁶³⁹ PmbZ #20843.

⁶⁴⁰ PmbZ #25063.

⁶⁴¹ LP II, 178, 9-11.

⁶⁴² LP II, 178, 12-179-9.

⁶⁴³ LP II, 179, XXVIII.

⁶⁴⁴ LP II, 179, 6.

signature –for he had also signed the acts of the council– was a forgery (*Nam et subscriptionem Basilii nostril imperatoris...falsissime continent*)⁶⁴⁵.

I reiterate that Hadrian II's *vita* is extremely hostile towards Photios and Michael III. Therefore, it would be wrong to take it at face value and adopt its testimonies without considering that its author had every reason to defame Michael III, Photios, and the way the acts of the synod of 867 were signed; the ultimate aim remained, of course, to annul the decisions taken at the synod. Further proof of this is also found in the *vita*, where it is stated that Photios did not have the right to pass sentence on Nicholas in the first place⁶⁴⁶. Be that as it may, this is the first time that Michael III is referred to as drunkard from a contemporary source.

The matter that naturally arises is whether the Byzantine sources that describe Michael III as drunkard took inspiration from the *vita* of pope Hadrian II. There is a possibility that the author of Hadrian II's *vita* might be Ioannes (Hymnonides) the deacon, best known as the author of the life of pope Gregory⁶⁴⁷. To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence that Hadrian II's *vita* was available at Constantinople in the tenth century. His *vita* was not popular and its diffusion was very limited⁶⁴⁸. Even Flodoard of Rheims, the Frankish chronicler who visited Rome in 936-937, was not able to study the *vita* and highlights its limited diffusion⁶⁴⁹.

The manuscript tradition also depicts that Hadrian II's *vita* had limited circulation. There are only four manuscripts that contain Hadrian II's *vita*, which was probably the penultimate *vita* ever written. The oldest surviving manuscripts are dated on the eleventh century and are located in Rome and

⁶⁴⁵ LP II, 179, 5-6.

⁶⁴⁶ LP II, 178, 26-27.

⁶⁴⁷ DAVIS, *Lives*, 249.

⁶⁴⁸ DAVIS, *Lives*, XII; ROBERTS, Flodoard, 165.

⁶⁴⁹ DAVIS, *Lives*, XII; ROBERTS, Flodoard, 164-165.

Paris respectively⁶⁵⁰. From my point of view, the above parameters render it highly unlikely –if not impossible– that Hadrian II's *vita* was available at the Byzantine court during the reign of Konstantinos VII and that it was from that particular source that Basil's grandson learned of Michael III's vice. As a result, the source that Konstantinos VII drew upon and described Michael III as a drunkard must be sought elsewhere.

Next, we should also examine if there existed an oral tradition, according to which it was known within the Byzantine court that Michael III was a sot. The *vita* of patriarch Ignatios, written during the late ninth century or at the beginning of the tenth century⁶⁵¹, also informs us about the aforementioned Byzantine embassy. This *vita* records the names of the representatives⁶⁵² and the fact that the synod of 867 in Constantinople was fake –and so were its acts⁶⁵³. Remarkably, *Vita Ignatii* does not state that the acts were signed by the emperor when he was drunk. But, he does describe that Michael III was shallow (...τῷ κούφῳ Μιχαήλ...) ⁶⁵⁴ and that he picked up some of the most impious men as his companions (...καὶ δὴ μιαιφώτους τινὰς ἀνθρωπίσκους καὶ βεβηλοτάτους καὶ εὐτραπέλους ἐκλεξάμενος ἀμοίρους...) ⁶⁵⁵.

The preceeding quotations demonstrate that the *Vita Ignatii* is clearly not painting a favorable image of Michael III. Yet, not once is he referred as drunkard. Therefore, it is unlikely that an oral tradition existed that would have Michael III be known for his drinking habit. We may ask ourselves the following: if Michael III was indeed a drunkard, how come an almost contemporary and hostile to him source does not mention it? Under this prism

⁶⁵⁰ DAVIS, *Lives*, XIII-XIV.

⁶⁵¹ VITA IGNATII, XI.

⁶⁵² VITA IGNATII, 86, 2-11.

⁶⁵³ VITA IGNATII, 76, 7-16.

⁶⁵⁴ VITA IGNATII, 38, 31.

⁶⁵⁵ VITA IGNATII, 60, 20-22.

it becomes apparent that the source that Konstantinos VII drew upon and described Michael III as drunkard must again be looked for elsewhere.

The earliest Byzantine sources that describe Michael III as drunkard are Genesios, the Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii. They all belong to the group of historians who were writing under the supervision of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, whose main concern was to disparage Michael III's image in any way possible.

Genesios's comment on the matter is very brief and comes as an implication from a third party. In fact, Genesios mentions only once that Michael III was a sot. He vaguely narrates that anonymous courtiers tried to persuade Basil that the emperor was an unsteady character and an empty-minded sot (...ταὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο αὐτὸν ὑποστήσασθαι παρὰ Μιχαήλ ἐξ ἀστάτου φρονήματος, οἶνοφλυγίαν καλοῦντες καὶ ματαιόφρονα)⁶⁵⁶. It is noteworthy that Genesios does not elaborate on Michael III's drinking habit; he does not mention that the emperor used to overdrink and misbehave, nor does he refer to anything relevant on the matter. This has led a number of scholars to believe that since Genesios, a source hostile to Michael III, does not mention the emperor's drinking vice, Michael III might not have been a sot in the first place⁶⁵⁷.

On the contrary, Vita Basilii and Theophanes Continuatus elaborate much more on Michael III's drunkenness. These sources relate that when Michael III was drunk, he behaved like a tyrant and issued frightful commands. Once, he ordered a man to be deprived of his ears, and another his nose, and another his head. But the courtiers who stood by him knew that he was drunk, so they neglected the emperor's orders. Yet, Michael III had drunk so much that it was impossible for him to regain his rectitude and act according to his imperial

⁶⁵⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 80, 75-77.

⁶⁵⁷ JENKINS, Portrait, 74 (cit. n. 1).

status⁶⁵⁸. Unsurprisingly, Basil is not mentioned in any of those improper incidents and features as the righteous emperor, who refrains from such kind of impure actions.

In fact, the description recorded on the *Vita Basilii* is much more interesting. In his unique study, Jenkins argued that all of the negative traits –the drunkenness included– that the *Vita Basilii* attributes to Michael III are taken from Plutarch's *vitae* on Nero and Mark Antony⁶⁵⁹. This theory gains more ground considering that the *Vita Basilii* especially shows the influence that Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* had for its compilation in every page; Basil's *vita* shares the same vocabulary, conjunctive phrases, the arrangement of material, gnomic and platitudes⁶⁶⁰. Under this prism, it is interesting to examine how is Michael III's drunkenness recorded in the *Vita Basilii* compared to Plutarch's description on Antony's equivalent indulgence.

⁶⁵⁸ “εἰς τοσαύτην γὰρ ὁ Μιχαὴλ πολλάκις ἄνοιαν ἐξ ἀκρατοποσίας καὶ μέθης ἐξώκειλεν ὡς κατ’ αὐτὴν μὲν καὶ τὸν ταύτης καιρὸν δεινὰ τινα καὶ πέρα δεινῶν ἐγκελεύεσθαι· τοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὰ ὦτα καὶ ἄλλου τὴν ῥίνα καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐτέρου προσέταπτεν· ἂ εἰ μὴ τινες οἰκτῶ κρατούμενοι παρημέλουν καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὖριον ἔπεμπον, ἀνάκλησίν τινα καὶ μεταμέλειαν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐκδεχόμενοι, ὅπερ καὶ ἦν, καὶ ἀπώλετο σύμπας ὁ παραμένων αὐτῷ καὶ συγκαρτερῶν.” THEOPH, CONT. IV, 298, 27-33.

“ὅτε οὖν ὁλος τοῦ ἀκράτου καὶ τῆς μέθης ἐγένετο καὶ πάντῃ τὰς οἰκείας φρένας ἀπώλεσεν, πρὸς φόνους ἐχώρει καὶ πρὸς ἀναιτίων ἀνθρώπων ἀλλοκότους ποινὰς καὶ σφαγὰς, καὶ τοῖς ὑπηρεταῖς ἐνεκελεύετο· «τὸν δεῖνα,»” φησί, «καὶ δεῖνα λαβόντες τῷ δημίῳ παραδότε, καὶ τοὺς πόδας ἐκκόψατε. καὶ οὗτος κεφαλικῶς τιμωρεῖσθω, καὶ κεῖνος γινέσθω πυρίκαυτος.» οὗς λαβόντες οἱ ὑπηρεταῖ, καὶ τὸ ἔξω τῶν φρενῶν αὐτὸν τυγχάνειν ὅταν ἐξῆγε τὰ ἀποφάσεις γινώσκοντες, ἢ ἐμφρούρους μὲν αὐτοὺς ἐποιοῦν, ταῖς ποιναῖς δὲ οὐ καθυπέβαλλον. πολλάκις δὲ, εἰ ἔτυχεν τις πρὸς ὃν οὐκ εἶχον ἡδέως ἀλλ’ ἀπεχθῶς, ἀπεχρῶντο τῇ βασιλικῇ κελεύσει καὶ τῇ τιμωρίᾳ τὸν ἀθῶον ἐξεδίδουν κατάδικον. εἴτα ὁ δειλῆος ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἄθλιος τότε μὲν οὐδ’ ἐν οἷς ἐστὶν εἰδῶς, παρὰ τῶν κατευναστῶν τῷ βασιλικῷ προσανεκλίνετο σκίμποδι καὶ τῷ γείτονι τοῦ θανάτου ὕπνῳ ὡς ἀνδράποδον ἐξεδίδοδο· ἔωθεν δὲ, τοῦ ὕπνου τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου ἀτμούς καὶ τὴν παχεῖαν ἐκείνην ἀχλὺν μόλις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου διασκεδάσαντος, ἐξεγειρόμενος οὐδὲν τῶν ἐν τῇ ἐσπέρᾳ ἐμέμνητο, καὶ ἐξῆτει πολλάκις τινὰς ἀφ’ ὧν ἐν τῇ μέθῃ κατεψηφίσατο καὶ τῷ θανάτῳ ἐξέδωκεν· μανθάνων δὲ παρὰ τῶν δορυφόρων τε καὶ ὑπηρετῶν ἃ ἐν τῇ ἐσπέρᾳ κατ’ αὐτῶν ἀπεφῆνατο, μετεμελεῖτο καὶ ἔστενε. καὶ ἄλλοτε μὲν εὐρίσκοντο οἱ ζητούμενοι, ἄλλοτε δὲ ἀνόνητος ἦν αὐτῷ ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνοσίοις τῶν ἔργων μετάνοια, τῶν ἐκδοθέντων ἀνηρημένων. πάλιν δὲ τῆς ἐσπέρας καταλαβούσης, καὶ νεανικῶς τοῦ πότου πόρῳ τῶν νυκτῶν μετὰ τῶν ἀκολάστων ἔργων καὶ λόγων προκόπτοντος, ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐγίνετο.” THEOPH, CONT. V, 100, 7-102, 33.

⁶⁵⁹ JENKINS, Portrait, 71-77.

⁶⁶⁰ JENKINS, Portrait, 72-73.

According to Plutarch, Antony: "...Διόνυσον αὐτὸν ἀνακαλουμένων χαριδότην καὶ μελίχιον. ἦν γὰρ ἀμέλει τοιοῦτος ἐνίοις, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς ὠμῆστῃς καὶ ἀγριώνιος"⁶⁶¹. When Konstantinos VII mentions Michael III's drunkenness for the first time, he narrates: "Πλὴν οὐ τὸ μελίχιον μόνον καὶ λυαῖον καὶ τρυφηλὸν τε καὶ ἀνειμένον καὶ ἀπαλὸν καὶ παρακεκνηκὸς ἐκ τῆς μέθης ἐκέκτητο τοῦ χαριδότου Διονύσου, ὃν μιμεῖσθαι ὤρετο καὶ ἐσπούδαζεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς ὠμῆστῃς πάλιν κατ' αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον εἶχεν τὸ ἐρινυῶδες τε καὶ τιτανικόν..."⁶⁶².

From the above passages it becomes apparent that Vita Basilii's narration on Michael III's drunkenness is a paraphrase from Plutarch's Antony. The intertextuality is obvious. They both imitate Dionysos, the god of wine, and although to some they both appear as pleasant and beneficent (μελίχιον καὶ χαριτοδότην), to the majority of their subjects they behave as man-eaters and savages (ὠμῆστῃς καὶ ἀγριώνιος / ὠμῆστῃς πάλιν... τιτανικόν). Even the vocabulary Konstantinos VII uses to describe Michael III's vice is identical to the one Plutarch uses on Antony.

From my standpoint, and as Jenkins has already argued, Konstantinos VII has used Antony's drunkenness –as has done with the rest of his negative traits that Plutarch records– and deliberately adapted it to a modified image of Michael III that would suit his needs. The fact that this modified image was not representative of Michael III's true character was, of course, irrelevant to Basil's grandson. Konstantinos VII found in drunkenness a vice that was heavily criticized by the Byzantine society; he adapted it in his narration in the Vita Basilii and enhanced it with fictional episodes to further stress Michael III's impiety. All these episodes serve the Macedonian propaganda that portrays

⁶⁶¹ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 3-5.

⁶⁶² THEOPH, CONT. V, 100, 1-5.

Michael III as a menace to the Byzantine empire which had to be removed by any means necessary.

Of course, that does not mean that Michael III was not drinking at all. As Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon narrate, on the fatal night of 23/24 September the emperor was drunk⁶⁶³. Michael III was undoubtedly drinking, but so did many of his predecessors. There are several notable examples worth mentioning: in his brief necrology, Ammianus Marcellinus records that Jovian (336-364) was an excessive eater and consumed by his love to wine and women (...edax tamen et uino uenerique indulgens...) ⁶⁶⁴.

As I have already mentioned, Phokas (602-610)⁶⁶⁵ was criticized for his drinking: “πάλιν εἰς τὸν καὺκον ἔπιες· καὶ πάλιν τὸν νοῦν ἀπώλεσας (you have drunk again from the cup; and you have again lost your mind)”⁶⁶⁶. The vita of St Stephen the younger⁶⁶⁷, written by Stephanos Diakonos⁶⁶⁸ also describes that Konstantinos V⁶⁶⁹ was a drinker: “Ὁ δὲ φερώνυμος Δράκων καὶ τυραννώδης βασιλεὺς, ὁ πᾶσαν Ἑλληνικὴν σπονδὴν μυσαρωτάτως ἐκτελῶν, τὸ κατ’ ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ Βρουμάλιον, ἥτοι ἐορτὴν δαιμονιώδη, ἐξετέλει, Διόνυσον καὶ Βροῦμον εὐφημῶν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τελετὴν, ὡς τῶν σπερμάτων καὶ τοῦ οἴνου γενεσιουργός”⁶⁷⁰.

Emperors of the Macedonian dynasty were drinking as well. Alexander (912-913)⁶⁷¹ is recorded to be living a life of luxury, eating and drinking:

⁶⁶³ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 431-32, §32; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 4, 17; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 684, 15-16; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 257, 466.

⁶⁶⁴ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res Gestae* I, 380, 15. On Jovian, see: J. W. DRIJVERS, *Jovian between History and Myth*, in: *Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire (Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean 1)* (eds. D. W. P. BURGERSDIJK – A. J. ROSS). Leiden – Boston 2018, 234-256; NICHOLSON, *Antiquity*, 837 (Jovian).

⁶⁶⁵ On Phokas, see: NICHOLSON, *Antiquity*, 1189 (Phocas).

⁶⁶⁶ DE BOOR, *Theophanes*, 296, 26-27.

⁶⁶⁷ PmbZ #7012.

⁶⁶⁸ PmbZ #7055.

⁶⁶⁹ PmbZ #3703.

⁶⁷⁰ *Vita Sancti Stephani Junioris, Monachi et Martyris*. PG 100, 1169B.

⁶⁷¹ PmbZ #20228.

“...ἀλλὰ διάγων ἐν τρυφαῖς καὶ ἀσελγείαις καὶ μέθαις καὶ περὶ ταῦτα ἀεὶ διακείμενος...”⁶⁷². Even Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, the emperor who sought to blacken Michael III’s image by portraying him as an indifferent, disrespectful and drunkard emperor, is accounted to be drinking excessively: “...οἴνου τε γὰρ ἥττητο, καὶ τῶν ἐπιπόνων τὰ ῥᾶστα προέκρινε...”⁶⁷³. Ioannes Skylitzes narrates that Ioannes I Tzimiskes was also into drinking: “...θωπείαις οὖν ὑπελθὼν ποτε καὶ δώροις ἐξαπατήσας τὸν ἐγγχεῖν εἰωθότα τὸν οἶνον τῷ βασιλεῖ...”⁶⁷⁴. Later on, Niketas Choniates relates that both Isaac II Angelos and Alexios IV Angelos were drunkards: “ἤδεσαν γὰρ ἐκ μακροῦ τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων οἱ ἀφ’ ἐσπέρας ἀρχὴν ἐς μηδὲν ἕτερον περιστᾶσαν ἢ κραιπάλην καὶ μέθην καὶ τὴν Βυζαντίδα Σύβαριν ἀτεχνῶς τὴν ἡμνουμένην ἐπὶ τρυφῇ”⁶⁷⁵.

The list of the Byzantine emperors described as drunkards is remarkably lengthy. It would extend the scope of this study to examine each of these cases separately, or to reflect on the bias of each source in detail; suffice it to say that in most cases it is hostile. Yet, this does not mean that they were indifferent to the state affairs, because they are recorded drinking, and that this vice caused the decline of the empire. It is only logical to assume that emperors, who were invested with absolute power and immense wealth, would occasionally overlook their imperial status in court banquets and would not behave according to the imperial dignity. This may be especially applicable to young emperors, such as Michael III.

It is equally interesting to highlight that courtiers, high-ranking officials, and clergymen are recorded as having a similar inclination to overdrink and misbehave. For example, Niketas Choniates describes Ioannes Kamateros as a

⁶⁷² WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 295, 14-16. On Alexander’s reign, see: P. KARLIN-HAYTER, The Emperor Alexander’s Bad Name. *Speculum* 44/4 (1969) 585-596.

⁶⁷³ SKYLITZES, 287, 11-12.

⁶⁷⁴ SKYLITZES, 312, 16-17.

⁶⁷⁵ CHONIATES, *Historia*, 541, 54-56.

drunkard, who surpassed every other drinker. The Byzantine historian relates that Kamateros, although he had tasted the highest learning only by the tip of his tongue, and although he was not a strict lover of divine philosophy, nor was he a quick-learner, his speech flew, his words were streaming like beautifully flowing spring water, which is running down the hill, thanks to which he secured a great fame for himself.

Being the worst glutton (ὀψοφαγώτατος) and the mightiest drunkard, he sang to the accompaniment of a small lyre. He moved himself rhythmically to the sound of the cithara and danced kordax (καὶ κόρδακα ὠρχεῖτο), swinging his legs to and fro. With his mouth wide open, he was filling himself (χανδόν ἐμφορούμενος) with wine, he poured himself seas of it and, like sponges, he frequently soaked it in (κατὰ τοὺς θαλαττίους χάας καὶ τὰς σπογγιάς συχνάκις τὸ ποτὸν ἀνιμώμενος). He did not pludge his mind into the sea of drunkenness with such irrigation, nor did his mind fail him, just as happens with drunkards, nor did he throw his head from one side to the other while being flooded with drunkenness. Instead, he would say something wise, and through drinking, he excited and watered his reasoning (ἀλλ' ἔλεγε τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον), and he rather strengthened himself to audacious speaking.

Pursuing drinking parties, he not only pleased the emperor, but also greatly endeared himself to the rulers of these nations who were devoted to carousing. When he was sent as an envoy to them, he outdid in drinking those who it took a long time to be brought back from their drunken stupor and be revived to their senses. He also kept pace with others: these were the men who emptied the entire casks into their stomachs, held the amphorae as if they were wine

glasses, and their after-dinner vessel was as huge as the one used by Hercules⁶⁷⁶.

Yet, as T. Labuk remarks, there are a number of allusions in the aforementioned passage that refer to Aristophanes' comedies, i.e. the epithet *ὀψοφαγώτατος*, gluttony and drunkenness⁶⁷⁷. As a result, it may also be questioned if its description corresponds to reality. It may be that Choniates used known condemnable vices to besmear Kamateros' image.

Be that as it may, modern scholarship has already highlighted that Genesios does not emphasize Michael III's turpitudes and negative traits enough. As I have demonstrated, he is only briefly mentioning his love for horseracing; he does not refer at all to the incident regarding the woman on the street, whereas he is only briefly mentioning Michael III's detestable company without narrating any of their immoral conducts. Furthermore, he is mentioning that Michael III might have been a drunkard only once.

The result is that Genesios does not besmear Michael III's image adequately and does not satisfy the Macedonian propaganda to justify Basil's murder⁶⁷⁸. Therefore, Konstantinos VII, by excersizing his imperial authority on historiographical projects, commissions the same historical period to be rewritten by the author(s) of the Theophanes Continuatus. In this regard, it comes as no surprise that all the aforementioned turpitudes and misconducts are emphatically stressed in the latter's fourth book.

It is questionable whether Konstantinos VII's commissioned historical works and efforts to display Michael III as a drunkard had the desired impact on the Byzantine subjects of the tenth century. Yet, the one it had on future Byzantine historians was extraordinary. More specifically, on speaking about Michael III's

⁶⁷⁶ CHONIATES, *Historia*, 113, 88-114, 13. English translation of the quoted passage by: LABUK, *Aristophanes*, 141-142.

⁶⁷⁷ LABUK, *Aristophanes*, 142. On Aristophanes' plays, see also: DAVIDSON, *Courtesans*, 20, 155.

⁶⁷⁸ KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II*, 319, 325; MAGDALINO, *Knowledge*, 201-209; NEVILLE, *Historical Writing*, 96; VLYSIDOU, *Αποκλίσεις*, 75-83, 98-99, 101-103.

drunkenness Ioannes Skylitzes reproduces the same episodes from the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus: “ἀκραποτῶν γὰρ ὁ Μιχαήλ καὶ μεθυσκόμενος κατὰ τὸν τῆς μέθης καιρὸν πολλὰ καὶ ἄτομα προσέταττε πράττεσθαι, τοῦ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὰ ὦτα, ἄλλου τὴν ῥίνα, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἑτέρου”⁶⁷⁹. Unsurprisingly, Kedrenos copies almost *verbatim* the relevant passages from Skylitzes; on his *Synopsis Historion* one reads: “ἀκραποτῶν γὰρ ὁ Μιχαήλ καὶ μεθυσκόμενος κατὰ τὸν τῆς μέθης καιρὸν πολλὰ καὶ ἄτομα προσέταττε πράττεσθαι, τοῦ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὰ ὦτα, ἄλλου τὴν ῥίνα, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἑτέρου”⁶⁸⁰.

During the twelfth century, in his *Epitome Historion* Ioannes Zonaras records: “Ἰππηλασίαις δὲ καὶ συμποσίοις ἀεὶ σχολάζων ὁ Μιχαήλ καὶ συνεχῶς μεθυσκόμενος καὶ τῶν φρενῶν ἐξιστάμενος...”⁶⁸¹. Konstantinos Manassis also records in his *Synopsis Chronike* that Michael III “τοῦ δὲ κρατοῦντος καταγνοῦς ὡς πότου καὶ μεθύσου καὶ κώμοις ἐπιχαίροντος καὶ θεατρομανοῦντος...”⁶⁸². Michael Glykas relates “Μιχαήλ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ μέθυσος σὺν Θεοδώρᾳ τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ ἔτη ιδ΄, καὶ μόνος ὁ Μιχαήλ ἔτη ια΄”⁶⁸³; and on another occasion, when referring to the beginning of Basil’s reign: “Κρατεῖ οὖν μετὰ Μιχαήλ τὸν μεθυστὴν Βασίλειος ὁ Μακεδὼν ἔτη κ΄”⁶⁸⁴.

During the thirteenth century, the chronicle of Joel records “μετὰ δὲ Θεόφιλον ἐβασίλευσε Μιχαήλ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, ὁ λεγόμενος Μεθυστής...”⁶⁸⁵. Ephraem, the chronicler from Ainos in Thrace, narrates that: “σωροὺς Μιχαήλ χρημάτων καὶ πραγμάτων ὅλαις ἀμαξαῖς ἐκκενοῦντος ἀφθόνως κώμοις,

⁶⁷⁹ SKYLITZES, 113, 40-43.

⁶⁸⁰ KEDRENOS, 182, 2-5.

⁶⁸¹ ZONARAS, XVI, 415, 6-8.

⁶⁸² MANASSIS, 280, 5170-5172.

⁶⁸³ MICHAEL GLYKAS, 458.

⁶⁸⁴ MICHAEL GLYKAS, 546, 7-8.

⁶⁸⁵ JOEL, 54, 22-23.

μέθαις, κόλαξιν, ἔργοις ἀτόποις...”⁶⁸⁶. Later on, the brief chronicle of Pseudo-Kodinos also describes Michael III as a drunkard: “Μιχαήλ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ μεθυστὴς μετὰ Θεοδώρας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, τῆς εὐσεβεστάτης καὶ ὀρθοδόξου, ἔτη ιε’. ὁ τοιοῦτος ἀνηγορεύθη κατὰ τὸ ζ’ ἔτος. καὶ μόνος ὁ μεθυστὴς ἔτη ι’”⁶⁸⁷.

To this day, there are still Byzantinists who uncritically adopt the distorted image of Michael III as depicted through the biased Byzantine historiographers of the tenth century and narrate that the emperor was unfit to rule, because he was consumed by his obsession for horseracing, banquets, and drinking bouts⁶⁸⁸.

Yet Michael III was not an unworthy emperor. In all probability, the aforementioned accusations and recorded episodes of his far-fetched vices are fictional and do not correspond with Michael III’s true character. They are used by the biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty historiographers of the tenth century to justify Basil’s murder. The last member of the Amorian dynasty was almost certainly a popular emperor among his contemporary subjects and, as I demonstrate in the following chapters, a very energetic one.

Chapter III: The emperor, the patriarch, the pope, and Boris of Bulgaria

The election of Photios as patriarch of Constantinople on 25 December 858⁶⁸⁹ marks not only the resurgence of the Byzantine missionary work, but also the century-old rivalry between Constantinople and Rome for primacy in the

⁶⁸⁶ EPHRAEM, 94, 2506-2508.

⁶⁸⁷ PSEUDO-KODINOS, 154, 5-7.

⁶⁸⁸ For example, LOUNGHS, Δοκίμιο, 210.

⁶⁸⁹ PmbZ #6253.

universal Church. In this chapter I aim to analyze: (i) the reaction of pope Nicholas⁶⁹⁰ to the election of Photios as patriarch of Constantinople; his letters to the Byzantine emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople reveal his beliefs regarding the Roman primacy and his jurisdictional limits; (ii) how Michael III and Photios treated pope Nicholas and defended the jurisdictional limits of the Byzantine church, and (iii) Boris' conversion to Christianity. The papal attempt to place the newly-found Bulgarian church under Roman jurisdiction turned into a struggle between the Old and New Rome, which eventually led to the opening of a severe doctrinal conflict.

As E. Chrysos accurately remarks⁶⁹¹, for the confrontation between Rome and Constantinople under pope Nicholas and Photios the historiographical sources do not provide us with any significant evidence and their narrative is often biased⁶⁹². On the contrary, the letters that Nicholas exchanged with Michael III and Photios offer a more comprehensive analysis of how the confrontation evolved; they are also indicative of how Michael III, Photios and Nicholas perceived the authoritative position of their offices and justified it⁶⁹³.

In 860, when Photios thought that his position as a patriarch was established, he sent a letter to pope Nicholas, the so called *enthronistica*⁶⁹⁴; through the letter, Photios formally announced his election and included a confession of faith. At the same time, he also sent his inaugural letters to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch⁶⁹⁵.

Regarding his letter to the pope, Photios had also referred to his election and the fact that it took place against his will and only after his predecessor,

⁶⁹⁰ PmbZ #5248.

⁶⁹¹ I am greatly indebted to professor E. Chrysos for providing me his recent research on the conflict between Rome and Constantinople under Nicholas and Photios.

⁶⁹² I refer mainly to the Vita Ignatii, the Synodicon Vetus and the Liber Pontificalis.

⁶⁹³ CHRYSOS, Γρατικοί και Ρωμαίοι, 103.

⁶⁹⁴ CHRYSOS, Imperium and Sacerdotium, 321; DÖLGER, Regesten, 55 (457); DVORNIK, Photian schism, 70-71.

⁶⁹⁵ Phot. Epist. 289 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 121-123.

Ignatios, had resigned: “εἰ καὶ <τιμαὶ> βασιλικῶν ἀξιωμάτων τὴν ὁρμὴν καθέλκουσαι ἐφ’ ἑτέρας μετατρέπειν εἰς χειρὸς κατηνάγκαζον, ἀλλ’ οὖν οὐδέποτε θάρσος ἐπὶ φορητὸν ἐμοὶ τὸ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης ὑπεισελθεῖν ἐργαζόμενον ἀξίωμα. ἦν γάρ, ἦν ἐμοὶ διὰ πάντος αἰδέσιμόν τε καὶ φοβερόν...”; “...Ἄρτι τοιγαροῦν τοῦ πρὸ ἱερατεύειν λαχόντος τῆς τοιαύτης ὑπεκελθόντος ἀξίας, οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως ὁρμηθέντες ἐπιτίθενταί μοι κραταιῶς ὅσοι τε κληρῶ κατειλεγμένοι ἐτύγχανον καὶ τῶν ἐπισκόπων τε καὶ μητροπολιτῶν τὸ ἄθροισμα, καὶ πρὸ γε τούτων καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς ὁ φιλευσεβὴς καὶ φιλόχριστος βασιλεύς...”; “...ἐν δὲ τούτῳ καὶ μελετήσασιν καὶ λέγειν ἐξασκήσασιν, τὸ δεῖν ἐμὲ πάντως καὶ μὴ βουλόμενον τὸ φορτίον τῆς ἐπιστάσεως αὐτῶν ἀναδέξασθαι. ἐπεὶ δὲ μοι πανταχόθεν αἱ ὁδοὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις παρακλήσεων ἀπεφράτοντο, προεπήδα τὰ δάκρυα, καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀπορίας ἀχλύς, τὰ ἔνδοθεν πάντα πληρώσασα τῆς συγχύσεως καὶ μέχρις αὐτῶν γε τῶν ὀμμάτων προσαράξασα, εἰς ῥεῖθρόν μετεσκευάζετο...”; “οὐδ’ οὕτω γὰρ ἀνῆκαν οἱ βιαζόμενοι, μέχρις ἂν ὅπερ ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀβούλητον, ἐκείνοις δὲ ὅπερ ἦν εὐχῆς ἔργον διεπέπρακτο...”⁶⁹⁶.

At the same time, Michael III also sent a formal letter to Rome. The Byzantine emperor intended to summon a synod, whose main purpose was to re-confirm the icon worship, condemn Iconoclasm, and deal with the bishops and clergymen who were ordained during Iconoclasm but had subsequently given up on their iconoclastic beliefs. Through his letter he asked the pope to send legates to Constantinople to participate in the synod⁶⁹⁷.

Both letters were sent to Rome by a delegation consisting of the protospatharios⁶⁹⁸ Arsaber⁶⁹⁹, who was a relative of Michael III and of Photios,

⁶⁹⁶ Phot. Epist. 288 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 114-120.

⁶⁹⁷ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 321; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 70-74; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 104; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 55-58.

⁶⁹⁸ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *Les listes*, 297.

⁶⁹⁹ PmbZ #610.

Methodios of Gangra⁷⁰⁰, the bishops Samuel of Colossos⁷⁰¹, Theophilos of Amorion⁷⁰², and Zacharias of Taormina⁷⁰³.

It should be pointed out that as a pope, Nicholas intended to establish the Roman primacy over secular and ecclesiastical power both in the West and the East⁷⁰⁴. In order to accomplish his goals, Nicholas used a collection of forgeries known as *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*. This collection of texts, which is considered by modern scholarship as the largest forgery in European history, contains more than 94 forged letters; it was given the name *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* because it was supposedly written by Isidorus Mercator, who is probably nonexistent. The collection aims to expand the pope's secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction; it includes letters that were allegedly written by popes of the first centuries in the form of *epistolae decretales* (letters relating to papal edicts on doctrines or church laws). In addition, it contains forged imperial laws and decrees by Frankish rulers and falsified acts and canons of the ecumenical councils – especially of the council of Chalcedon⁷⁰⁵. As Chrysos meticulously observes, pope Nicholas was the first to adjust his policy in accordance with the purposes of the collection⁷⁰⁶.

The letters of Michael III and of Photios presented a unique opportunity for Nicholas I to get involved in the affairs of the Byzantine Church and exercise factual jurisdiction. The pope answered to the Byzantine emperor and to the patriarch of Constantinople as well. His very first letter to Michael III, which is

⁷⁰⁰ PmbZ #4981.

⁷⁰¹ PmbZ #26978.

⁷⁰² PMmbZ #28136.

⁷⁰³ PmbZ #8629. On the Byzantine delegation to Rome see also: LOUNGHIS, *Ambassades*, 189.

⁷⁰⁴ PmbZ #5248; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 58-61.

⁷⁰⁵ On the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, see: CHADWICK, *East and West*, 97-99; CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 331ff (and cit. n. 90 and 91, with further bibliography).

⁷⁰⁶ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 31-32. On the contrary, V. Vlysidou does not take into consideration at all the fact that Nicholas used the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* in order to promote the Roman primacy and act as the supreme judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West. Instead, she claims that it was Photios who had “papal initiatives (παπικές πρωτοβουλίες)”. See: VLYSIDOU, *Θεσμός*, 39.

dated on 25 September 860⁷⁰⁷, bears witness to the way Nicholas I understood the primacy of Rome. At the beginning of his letter, Nicholas refers to the Roman primacy, the fact that he is the successor of St. Peter and, subsequently, that he is the ecumenical leader, entitled to exercise final judgement in all open church affairs⁷⁰⁸.

On the basis of these declarations, Nicholas expressed his astonishment regarding the deposition of Ignatios and openly criticized Michael III for convening a synod without papal authorization⁷⁰⁹, i.e. the synod that proclaimed Photios as the new bishop of Constantinople. Besides, followers of Ignatios had already reached Rome and informed the pope that their master was in fact forced to resign⁷¹⁰. He also stated that the evidence produced to him regarding Ignatios' deposition seemed unconvincing⁷¹¹.

Nicholas I then moved to his main complaint, namely to condemn the election of Photios. The pope declared that he cannot accept Photios' election and ordination as canonically valid because at the time of his election Photios was a layman and thus forbidden. As evidence in support of his arguments Nicholas I cited the canon 10 of the council of Serdica in the year 343, i.e. the canon that prohibits such rise of laymen to ecclesiastical dignities: "...if it happens that either a rich man or a jurist from the forum, or an administrator, shall have been asked for a bishop, he shall not be ordained before he has discharged the function of lector and the office of deacon and the ministry of presbyter, that he may ascend [by these] grades one by one (if he is suitable) to the summit of the episcopate..."⁷¹².

⁷⁰⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 433.

⁷⁰⁸ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 433, 17-23.

⁷⁰⁹ "sine romani consulto pontificis". Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 434, 8-9.

⁷¹⁰ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 32.

⁷¹¹ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 434, 7-8.

⁷¹² HESS, *Development of Canon Law*, 221 (Hamilton Hess mistakenly cites it as number 13, but it is actually the canon number 10; cf. PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 108).

However, at the very next sentence of his letter, Nicholas I modifies his decision regarding Photios' election and states that the final decision will depend on the assessment of the papal legates Radoald⁷¹³ and Zacharias⁷¹⁴, the Bishop of Anagni, who would go to Constantinople, investigate the ecclesiastical affairs, and particularly the conditions of Ignatios' removal from the patriarchal throne, and submit their report in Rome. Afterwards, Nicholas I would examine the report personally, and only after that would he decide what was to be done next⁷¹⁵.

Surprisingly, the pope states that neither the emperor, nor anyone else shall try to influence his legates and affect their judgement⁷¹⁶. At the same time, he requests that the direct jurisdiction of Illyricum⁷¹⁷ and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria be returned to the bishop of Rome⁷¹⁸. As Chrysos remarks, it is the first time that a pope had dared to criticize an emperor with such a harsh manner; it was the first time that a pope had openly doubted the truthfulness of what the emperor had written to him and claimed for himself the unique right to be the supreme judge of the ecclesiastical affairs that took place in Constantinople⁷¹⁹.

As regards Nicholas I's letter to Photios, which is dated on the 24th of September 860⁷²⁰, the pope initially praised him for his confession of faith, as Photios had professed at his *enthronistica* letter. However, it is remarkable that in his letter he refers to Photios merely as "prudentiam vestram"⁷²¹, notably

⁷¹³ LOUNGHS, Ambassades, 189; PmbZ #6404.

⁷¹⁴ LOUNGHS, Ambassades, 189; PmbZ #28477.

⁷¹⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 436, 32-37.

⁷¹⁶ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 439, 16-18.

⁷¹⁷ For a historic synopsis on the battle for jurisdiction over Illyricum, see: CHADWICK, East and West, 106-108.

⁷¹⁸ Nicolaus I, ep. 82 (MGH VI), 439, 4-8.

⁷¹⁹ CHRYSOS, Imperium and Sacerdotium, 322-323.

⁷²⁰ E. Perels, the editor of MGH VI, gives the date 18 March 860; however, as E. Chrysos points out, the correct date is 24 September 860. See: Nicolaus I, ep. 83 (MGH VI), 440; cf. CHRYSOS, Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation, 23 (cit. n. 17).

⁷²¹ Nicolaus I, ep. 83 (MGH VI), 440, 9.

without mentioning any ecclesiastical title. This is an indication that Nicholas I refused to recognize Photios' election⁷²². Next, Nicholas states that since Photios' election did not follow the correct order, he would not consent to Photios' consecration till the return of his legates; what is more, Nicholas I declared that Photios status as a layman should not have allowed him to be consecrated to the archiepiscopal dignity⁷²³.

Professor Chrysos points out that just as Nicholas' letter to the Byzantine emperor was harsh, so was the one to Photios. It was actually the first time that a pope had dared to doubt the personal and moral conduct of the patriarch of Constantinople and act as a superior ecclesiastical judge. In fact, this proves that Nicholas' true intentions were to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the church of Constantinople⁷²⁴. I shall speak of Nicholas' true intentions in more detail later.

At this point, there are a number of facts that must be taken into consideration: (i) the initiative of the Byzantine emperor to convene a synod had already been established since the reign of Konstantinos the Great⁷²⁵. According to this pattern, the Byzantine emperors convoked and participated in the general or ecumenical councils and acted as arbitrators, guaranteeing the unity of the Church; they were not allowed to make decisions or enact laws on their own, but they were responsible for taking care of all the practical issues, i.e. the travelling of the bishops from their offices to the venue of the council, guaranteeing that the council's proceedings would reach all the appropriate addressees etc⁷²⁶.

⁷²² CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 29.

⁷²³ Nicolaus I, ep. 83 (MGH VI), 440, 17-21.

⁷²⁴ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 30.

⁷²⁵ SIECIENSKI, *Constantine*, 1-2.

⁷²⁶ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 315; DVORNIK, *Emperors*, 3, 14, 22-23, 110. DAGRON, *Emperor and priest*, 296-297.

(ii) It was the election of Ignatios, and not that of Photios, that was truly uncanonical. Unlike his successor, Ignatios was appointed patriarch (3 July 847 – 23 October 858) directly from Theodora, without the convergence of an elective synod⁷²⁷.

(iii) Photios' election was indeed a hurried affair. It is true that Photios, though he was a layman (he was *protasekretes*⁷²⁸ before his election), received all the degrees of priesthood within one week (20th to 25th of December 858)⁷²⁹. That is to say, he received every day successive ordinations from the status of a layman through the ecclesiastical grades of (a) monk's tonsure, (b) lector, (c) subdeacon, (d) deacon, (e) presbyter and (f) ordained and installed as patriarch of Constantinople⁷³⁰. Such ordinations, where the nominee spends the minimum time on each ecclesiastical grade (one day) before he advances to the next one, are described as *ἀθρόον* ordinations⁷³¹ (Latin: *subito*)⁷³².

However, taking into consideration that the Byzantine government wanted to avoid any further revolts within the Byzantine church, i.e. between the "extremists" and "moderates", Photios was selected and ordained, as he was the most suitable candidate. Besides, the fact that a layman was selected for the patriarchal throne was not an isolated event. Previously, the patriarchs Paulos III⁷³³ in 687, Tarasios⁷³⁴ in 784, and Nikephoros⁷³⁵ I in 806, were all laymen at the time of their election⁷³⁶. And they were all ordained *ἀθρόον*. Of course, as F.

⁷²⁷ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 320; PmbZ #2666.

⁷²⁸ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 310-311.

⁷²⁹ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 25; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 50.

⁷³⁰ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 25 (also cit. n. 4); ZYMARIS, *Tonsure and Cursus Honorum*, 321-322.

⁷³¹ On the *ἀθρόον* ordinations see: P. ZYMARIS, *Athron Ordinations in the Tradition of the Church*. *GOTR* 53 (2008) 31.

⁷³² CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 24.

⁷³³ PmbZ #5768.

⁷³⁴ PmbZ #7235.

⁷³⁵ PmbZ 5301.

⁷³⁶ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 36; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 50-51. VLYSIDOU, *Θεσμός*, 35.

Dvornik remarks, the Byzantines knew that this procedure was against the canon laws, but under exceptional circumstances they considered themselves exempt from the habitual practice⁷³⁷. Besides, Christmas was approaching and a patriarch was needed for the liturgical ceremonies⁷³⁸.

(iv) Michael III's letter to pope Nicholas did not refer to Ignatios' deposition and Photios' election, and it had nothing to do with the jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria. Michael III considered the election of the patriarch an internal ecclesiastical affair of the Byzantine government –and in any case considered the issue a closed case⁷³⁹.

The Byzantine emperor simply invited the pope to send his legates to the synod in order to re-confirm icon worship, condemn Iconoclasm, and deal with the bishops and clergymen who were ordained during Iconoclasm but had subsequently given up on their iconoclastic beliefs. Even the *Synodicon Vetus*, a source hostile to Photios⁷⁴⁰, confirms that Photios and Michael III's letters asked from Nicholas legates to be sent to the synod in Constantinople so as to deal exclusively with ecclesiastical affairs: "...καὶ πρὸς ἀποβολὴν τελείαν τῆς τῶν εἰκονομάχων αἰρέσεως τοποτηρητὰς πεμφθῆναι αὐτοῦ μεγάλως ἰκέτευεν..."⁷⁴¹.

The letters of pope Nicholas I produced amazement and displeasure to the emperor and the patriarch. However, they decided to tolerate this unheard-of demand with the expectation that they would be able to reach an agreement with the papal legates⁷⁴². According to F. Dvornik and V. Pheidas, the fact that Michael III and Photios agreed to accommodate Nicholas' demands stands for a substantial loss of prestige. That is to say, by consenting to the judgement of

⁷³⁷ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 50.

⁷³⁸ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 51.

⁷³⁹ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 76.

⁷⁴⁰ SYNODICON VETUS, XV (Introduction).

⁷⁴¹ SYNODICON VETUS, 134 (§159).

⁷⁴² CHRYSOS, Imperium and Sacerdotium, 323.

the patriarch by the legates of the pope, Constantinople recognized Rome as the supreme arbitrator of the church in disciplinary matters⁷⁴³.

Be that as it may, the synod, which is known as the *πρωτοδευτέρα σύνοδος*, took place in the church of the Apostles⁷⁴⁴ shortly before the Easter of 861⁷⁴⁵. The synod had in total 318 members and among them were Michael III, Bardas, Photios, and the papal legates⁷⁴⁶. Unfortunately, the proceedings of this synod were destroyed at the council of 869-70 in Constantinople⁷⁴⁷; we possess merely a few brief descriptions of what took place in the narratives of biased sources, such as the *Synodicon Vetus*⁷⁴⁸ and the life of patriarch Ignatios, written by his champion, Niketas David Paphlagon⁷⁴⁹. We do possess, however, a summary of the proceedings in the work of the cardinal Deusdedit, *collectio canonum*⁷⁵⁰. This summary, which contains valuable information regarding the synod's decisions, was edited and published by V. Wolf von Glanvell⁷⁵¹. Of particular importance for the purpose of this study is the seventeenth canon, which was promulgated by Photios and was meant to prohibit future ἀθρόον ordinations. The canon reads as follows:

“Since we have been occupied with matters of ecclesiastical good order [εὐταξία], it was thought to be of advantage to decree also this, that... henceforth none of the laymen or monks shall be allowed to ascend to the height of the episcopacy precipitately [ἀθρόον], but, on the contrary, by being

⁷⁴³ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 91; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 104.

⁷⁴⁴ MÜLLER – WIENER, *Bildlexikon*, 406.

⁷⁴⁵ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 323; CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 32; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 78ff.

⁷⁴⁶ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 323.

⁷⁴⁷ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 76.

⁷⁴⁸ *SYNODICON VETUS*, 134 (§159).

⁷⁴⁹ For a comprehensive list of the sources that refer to the *πρωτοδευτέρα σύνοδος* see: DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 76; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 168-174; V. GRUMEL, *Le patriarcat byzantine. Série I. Les registres des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople. 1,2 (Les registres de 715 à 1043)* Istanbul 1936, 73 (n. 459).

⁷⁵⁰ PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 50.

⁷⁵¹ WOLF VON GLANVELL, *Die Kanonessammlung*, 603-610.

duly examined with reference to the various ecclesiastical degrees or grades, let them thus attain to ordination to the episcopacy. For even if hitherto and up to now some laymen and some monks have been enabled to attain to the honour of the episcopate immediately and without further ado, and they have distinguished themselves for virtuousness and have exalted their churches, yet the fact is that what is of rare occurrence cannot be made a law of the Church; we therefore decree that this shall no longer be done hereafter and henceforth, but that the person to be ordained must pass through the priestly degrees in a reasonable manner by fulfilling the required length of service of each order before proceeding to the next higher rank”⁷⁵². As Dvornik remarks, Photios promulgated this canon in order to meet Nicholas’ demands and, thus prohibit future precipitate ordinations⁷⁵³.

It appears that during the sessions of the council –four in total⁷⁵⁴- the papal claim for the return of the direct jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria to Rome was not discussed at all⁷⁵⁵. As regards Ignatios’ deposition and Photios’ election, although the legates were ordered to simply investigate the affair and report their findings to Nicholas, who would make the ultimate decision, they eventually agreed in Constantinople against the re-installment of Ignatios and in favor of Photios’ election⁷⁵⁶.

The legates consciously exceeded their mandate and gave their judgement in Constantinople after Michael III and Photios’s demand; as Dvornik remarks, the Byzantine emperor and the patriarch persuaded the legates that they would consent to the re-trial of Ignatios’ case on condition that

⁷⁵² I copy the English text, as provided by professor E. Chrysos. See: CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 32. For the original greek text, see: RHALLER – POTLES II, *Σύνταγμα*, 701.

⁷⁵³ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 92.

⁷⁵⁴ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 323; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 78-84.

⁷⁵⁵ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 91.

⁷⁵⁶ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 323; CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 32; DVORNIK, 83ff; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 106.

they declared their verdict in Constantinople. It appears that Michael III and Photios claimed that a final verdict given during the synod would promote the pacification of the church and was worth concession⁷⁵⁷.

M. V. Anastos, on the other hand, believes that the papal legates were bribed and indoctrinated to make their decision during the synod in Constantinople⁷⁵⁸. His arguments are indeed convincing, as he quotes the pope's letters dated on 18 March 862 and 13 November 866 respectively, in which the pope argues that his legates were threatened and intimidated until they agreed to disregard his instructions and proceed in the manner suggested by the Byzantine emperor⁷⁵⁹. The bribing of the legates is also recorded in the *Synodicon Vetus*⁷⁶⁰ and in the life of Patriarch Ignatios⁷⁶¹.

However, Anastos takes it for granted that Nicholas' intentions were to assist Ignatios' return to the patriarchal throne⁷⁶²; this is an argument I disagree with and will later on argue that his true intentions were completely different. As for the papal legates, it is only logical to assume that Radoald and Zacharias were intimidated both by pope Nicholas I before they began their mission to Constantinople, and by Michael III and Photios during their stay in the Byzantine capital. Yet, all these are of minor importance, as, when the legates returned to Rome with the synod's decision regarding Ignatios' trial and Photios election, Nicholas I refused to accept their judgement and temporarily punished them with deposition⁷⁶³.

⁷⁵⁷ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 78, 89.

⁷⁵⁸ ANASTOS, Legates, 175-200.

⁷⁵⁹ In these letters Nicholas maintains that his legates, during their long stay in Constantinople (c. 100 days) were threatened until they agreed to disregard his instructions and proceed in the manner suggested by Michael III. See: ANASTOS, Legates, 190 (and cit. n. 22).

⁷⁶⁰ SYNODICON VETUS, 136-137 (§160).

⁷⁶¹ VITA IGNATII, 58, 21-27.

⁷⁶² "Nicholas was disposed to favor Ignatius...". ANASTOS, Legates, 186.

⁷⁶³ CHRYSOS, Imperium and Sacerdotium, 323; DVORNIK, Photian schism, 91; SIMEONOVA, Diplomacy, 66.

When the synod was over, Photios decided to write to pope Nicholas I. This letter⁷⁶⁴, the second Photios had sent to the pope and which has also been described as a letter of “apology”⁷⁶⁵, is a detailed response to the first letter that Nicholas sent to Photios⁷⁶⁶. This letter was delivered to Nicholas by the ambassador Leon⁷⁶⁷.

In his letter Photios does admit that he had climbed ecclesiastical ranks directly from the status of a layman, but he questions which canons he violated: ποῖοι δὲ καὶ κανόνες ὧν ἡ παράβασις, οὓς μέχρι καὶ τήμερον ἡ Κωνσταντινουπολιτῶν ἐκκλησία οὐ παρείληφεν; ἐκείνων λέγεται παράβασις, ὧν ἡ φυλακὴ παραδέδοται· ἃ δὲ μὴ παραδέδοται, οὐδὲ μὴ φυλασσόμενα παραβάσεως φέρει ἔγκλημα⁷⁶⁸ (which are these canons that were transgressed, those ones which until today the Church of Constantinople has never received? A transgression occurs only when the canons are received. But there is no crime of transgression when rules have not been received⁷⁶⁹).

Joseph Hergenröther has accused Photios of lying at this point and that he ought to be aware that the canons of the synod of Serdica had been received in Constantinople (at the council of Trullo)⁷⁷⁰. Dvornik, on the other hand, has argued that Photios did not mean that the canons of the synod of Serdica were unknown in Constantinople; all he implied was that the tenth canon⁷⁷¹, quoted by the pope, had not been carried into practice by the Church of Constantinople⁷⁷².

⁷⁶⁴ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 123-138.

⁷⁶⁵ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 38; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 106.

⁷⁶⁶ i.e. the letter n. 82 (MGH VI), 433-439; DÖLGER, *Regesten*, 56 (460).

⁷⁶⁷ PmbZ #4509.

⁷⁶⁸ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 128.

⁷⁶⁹ English translation of the text after E. Chrysos. See: CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 33.

⁷⁷⁰ HERGENRÖTHER, *Photius I*, 444-445.

⁷⁷¹ HESS, *Development of Canon Law*, 221.

⁷⁷² DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 92 (and cit. n. 2).

Photios then mentions that his predecessors, Tarasios⁷⁷³ and Nikephoros⁷⁷⁴, had also become bishops directly from the laity, had excelled in their ecclesiastical duties, and they had all been in communion with the contemporary popes of their times⁷⁷⁵. In order to make his argumentation stronger, Photios includes a similar case, which took place in Italy; he refers to St. Ambrose of Milan, who was elevated to the episcopal throne of Milan under similar conditions⁷⁷⁶.

As E. Chrysos notes, Photios tried to raise doubt on the validity of the prohibitions of the canon 10 of the council of Serdica that Nicholas had referred to⁷⁷⁷. His intention was to demonstrate that the variety of customs that were practiced in Rome and in Constantinople were of relative value in each Church, and not important enough to raise disputes⁷⁷⁸. Remarkably, Photios does admit that there was a canonical violation regarding his own election. But, in order to meet Nicholas' demands regarding the ἀθρόον ordinations, he mentions that he had personally taken care of the issue by promulgating a canon at the *πρωτοδευτέρα σύνοδος* –i.e. the canon 17, that would henceforward prohibit precipitate ordinations⁷⁷⁹.

Regarding the return of the jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria to the bishop of Rome, Photios states that he would have been willing to satisfy Nicholas' demands, but he was not authorized to make such a concession⁷⁸⁰; the pope would have to negotiate with the emperor over such matters. Chrysos and Pheidas observe that the whole argumentation in

⁷⁷³ PmbZ #7235.

⁷⁷⁴ PmbZ 5301.

⁷⁷⁵ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 128-129.

⁷⁷⁶ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 133. For St Ambrose of Milan, see: CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 37 (and cit. n. 47).

⁷⁷⁷ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 38.

⁷⁷⁸ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 38; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 108.

⁷⁷⁹ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 134.

⁷⁸⁰ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 137-138.

Photios' second letter is dominated by a plea for mildness and understanding⁷⁸¹; apparently, Constantinople wanted to avoid an open confrontation with Rome⁷⁸².

At the end of his letter of "apology", Photios requests from Nicholas to refrain from giving audience to Byzantine ambassadors who might visit him without letters of recommendation⁷⁸³. The Byzantine patriarch feared that a pro-Ignatian delegation would misrepresent the Church of Constantinople in Rome and further perplex his case.

Indeed, a pro-Ignatian delegation reached Rome during 862 or at the beginning of 863⁷⁸⁴. The most prominent among this delegation was Theognostos⁷⁸⁵, who acted as Ignatios' spokesman. Although none of them had letters of recommendation from the patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas gladly welcomed them and listened to their views on Ignatios' case⁷⁸⁶. But the pope did not need the Ignatian representatives to arrive in Rome to become resentful about the Photian affair.

As I have already said, when the legates returned to Rome with the synod's decision in favor of Photios' election, Nicholas categorically refused to accept their judgement and temporarily punished them with deposition⁷⁸⁷. In response to the synod's decisions, the pope wrote two letters, one to Michael III⁷⁸⁸ and another to Photios⁷⁸⁹. At the same time, Nicholas tried, for the first time in this unravelling conflict, to secure the Eastern patriarchs' support. He

⁷⁸¹ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 38; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 108.

⁷⁸² SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 64.

⁷⁸³ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 137-138.

⁷⁸⁴ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 96.

⁷⁸⁵ PmbZ #28010.

⁷⁸⁶ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 96.

⁷⁸⁷ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 323; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 91; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 66.

⁷⁸⁸ Nicolaus I, ep. 85 (MGH VI), 442-446.

⁷⁸⁹ Nicolaus I, ep. 86 (MGH VI), 447-451.

sent a circular letter to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and tried to persuade them to join his side and not recognize Photios as a patriarch; he also ordered them to make his letter known throughout their dioceses⁷⁹⁰. However as Dvornik and Simeonova remark, it is highly unlikely that the pope's letter ever reached its destinations⁷⁹¹.

In his letter addressed to the emperor, which is dated on 18 March 862, Nicholas writes that the legates had informed him of the decisions of the synod and he had also studied the synod's proceedings. He declares that on the basis of this evidence, he rejects the synod's decisions and refuses to condemn Ignatios and recognize the election of Photios as a patriarch. He argues that the verdict on the case of Ignatios was not adequate and not according to his own instructions⁷⁹².

The letter sent to Photios was even harsher in tone. At the very beginning, Nicholas addresses Photios as *prudentissimo viro Photio* (most prudent Photios)⁷⁹³, implying that he does not acknowledge his election. In this letter Nicholas describes the nature of the papal authority and of the primacy of Rome. Afterwards, he declares that he refuses to recognize him as a patriarch and even refers to him as *moechus*⁷⁹⁴ (adulterer) for having captured the patriarchal throne of someone else. In response to Photios' assertion in his letter of "apology" about the canons of Serdica, Nicholas refuses to believe that Constantinople did not receive them⁷⁹⁵. The pope ends his letter by declaring that until the investigation comes to an end, he can neither regard Ignatios as deposed nor recognize Photios even as a low-ranking member of the clergy⁷⁹⁶.

⁷⁹⁰ Nicolaus I, ep. 84 (MGH VI), 440-442.

⁷⁹¹ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 95-96; SIMEONOVA, Diplomacy, 68.

⁷⁹² Nicolaus I, ep. 85 (MGH VI), 443, 20-22; 444, 1-3.

⁷⁹³ Nicolaus I, ep. 86 (MGH VI), 447, 11.

⁷⁹⁴ Nicolaus I, ep. 86 (MGH VI), 450, 3.

⁷⁹⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 86 (MGH VI), 450, 8-18.

⁷⁹⁶ Nicolaus I, ep. 86 (MGH VI), 450, 19-451, 23.

Through these exchange of letters, it is remarkable that Constantinople tried to soothe Nicholas I' attitude and accommodate his demands; the pope, on the contrary, evidently demonstrated how he perceived his authority by acting as the ultimate judge of all ecclesiastical affairs in the East and West. Yet, despite all his demands, Michael III and Photios decided not to reply to any of Nicholas I's letters.

However, in 863, incited by the pro-Ignatian delegation that was in Rome, which was commanded by Theognostos⁷⁹⁷, Nicholas I convoked a synod in Rome, at which he reconfirmed his own decision against Photios and in favor of Ignatios⁷⁹⁸. It is of significant importance to mention that Nicholas I agreed to recognize Ignatios as the legitimate patriarch only upon the condition that he would respect the rights of the papal throne in connection with Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity. As Dvornik notes, the Ignatians must have reassured Nicholas I of their submission to the Roman primacy⁷⁹⁹.

In fact, this condition regarding Ignatios' recognition as patriarch unveils Nicholas I true intentions; the pope never meant to assist Ignatios to reoccupy the patriarchal throne; it was a pretext for him to get involved in the ecclesiastical affairs of the church of Constantinople⁸⁰⁰. From the above condition it also becomes evident that all Nicholas I wanted was to force the church of Constantinople to recognize Rome as the supreme arbiter of all ecclesiastical affairs.

⁷⁹⁷ PmbZ #28010.

⁷⁹⁸ For the acts of this synod, see: W. HARTMANN, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankenreich und in Italien*. Paderborn 1989, 288; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 98-101; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 174-179; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 108-109. These acts are also preserved in the letter sent by Nicholas on 13 November 866 to the Eastern patriarchs. See: Nicolaus I, ep. 91 (MGH VI), 512-533, chiefly 517-523.

⁷⁹⁹ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 100.

⁸⁰⁰ CHRYSOS, *Rome and Constantinople in Confrontation*, 42.

Yet, it seems that the Byzantines were already aware that Boris⁸⁰¹, the ruler of Bulgaria was about to accept Christianity by the Eastern Franks⁸⁰². It seems that in 862, when the ambassador Leon⁸⁰³ returned to Constantinople along with Nicholas I's responses to Michael III and Photios, he also revealed the pope's plans regarding the Christianization of the Bulgarians by the Eastern Franks⁸⁰⁴. At this time, and as Chrysos and Dvornik remark, the emperor and the patriarch decided that it was for that moment pointless to write back to the pope; the Byzantine government would rather deal with the expansion of the Empire's religious and political influence, which was flourishing already since the regency of Theodora.

More specifically, already during the regency of Michael III's mother, the Byzantine court sought to re-establish its contact with Armenia, of which there is no direct evidence since the first half of the eighth century⁸⁰⁵. In 850, the caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, al-Mutawakkil⁸⁰⁶, sent Abu Sa 'id Muhammad bin Yusuf to Armenia to collect the so-called "royal-taxes"⁸⁰⁷. Although the taxes were paid, the Abbasid representative clashed with the principal Artsruni and Bagratuni princes. As a result, the relation between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Armenian noble families deteriorated substantially. Two years later, the

⁸⁰¹ PmbZ #21197.

⁸⁰² Regarding the good relations between Bulgaria and the Eastern Franks during the ninth century, see: GJUZELEV, *Bulgarish-fränkische Beziehungen in der ersten Hälfte des 9. Jahrhunderts*. *Bbulg* 2 (1966) 15-39; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 128ff; FINE, *Balkans*, 118; HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 134-435; VLASTO, *Entry*, 158; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 77-78.

⁸⁰³ PmbZ #4509.

⁸⁰⁴ We also possess a letter where Nicholas I wishes to Louis the German (PmbZ #24754) every success in his campaign against Rastislav of Moravia, and hopes for an imminent conversion of Bulgaria to Christianity; the letter is dated in 864. See: Nicolaus I, ep. 26 (MGH VI), 290-293, especially 293, 1-9.

⁸⁰⁵ GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 128. On the Armenian – Byzantine relation during the concerned period, indicatively see also: I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Arméniens et Byzantins à l' époque de Photius: Deux débats théologiques après le triomphe de l'orthodoxie* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 609; *Subsidia* 117). Louvain 2004.

⁸⁰⁶ EI², VII, 777-778 (al-Mutawakkil 'alā 'Ilāh).

⁸⁰⁷ On the "royal taxes", see: TAKIRTAKOGLU, *Αρχμενία*, 136-139.

caliph sent Bughā al-Kabir⁸⁰⁸ to Armenia to quash the Armenian resistance. The Abbasid military commander embarked on a series of campaigns against the Armenian princes by killing them, or sending them to exile as captives to Samarra, capital of the Abbasid Caliphate⁸⁰⁹. A few of them, however, managed to escape.

In 853-854, fleeing from Bughā, Gurgēn Apupelč Artsruni sought refuge with Grigor Bagratuni, prince of Sper. The latter had recently captured an unidentified Byzantine fortress called Aramaneak. When the Byzantine strategos⁸¹⁰ attempted to recover the fortress, both princes opposed him. Apparently, the Byzantine military official was so impressed by Gurgēn's courage that he informed the Byzantine court of his reaction and, in turn, the regency of Theodora invited him to Constantinople, offering to reward him. Gurgēn refused, but he persuaded Grigor to return the fortress of Aramaneak to Byzantium and to subsequently fight with the Byzantine troops against Bughā's army⁸¹¹. This is the first recorded contact between Byzantium and an Artsruni prince during the ninth century.

The next noteworthy event between Byzantium and Armenia took place during Michael III's sole rule. According to T. Greenwood, having failed to attract Gurgēn, in 858 the Byzantine court turned its attention to another Artsruni prince, Grigor, who was Gurgēn's rival; the Byzantine government sought to aid the former by providing him additional troops, so that he could seize Vaspurakan. This approach was also unsuccessful, as Grigor died one year later. However, Byzantium's attempt does demonstrate that by approaching the concerned princes, the empire sought to exploit the

⁸⁰⁸ EI², I, 1287 (Bughā al-Kabir). On Bughā's campaigns in Armenia between 853/854-855 see: TAKIRTAKOGLU, Αρμενία, 175-184 (with further bibliography on the matter and commentary on the primary sources).

⁸⁰⁹ GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours*, 349; GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 131.

⁸¹⁰ To the best of my knowledge, his name is not known.

⁸¹¹ GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours*, 349; GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 131.

contemporary turmoil in Armenia and establish its foothold in the region. In turn, this proves that, just like during Theodora's regency, the Byzantine administration continued to function effectively during Michael III's sovereignty and was determined to expand its political and religious influence in the Eastern frontier⁸¹².

Next, in 859-860 Thomas Artsruni narrates that Michael III got in touch with Gurgēn Apupelč, who was at arms with Ashot Artsruni's brother and namesake, Gurgēn, regarding the authority of Vaspurakan. The emperor intended for Gurgēn Apupelč to come to Constantinople, so that he could honor him with the rank of *hipatos*⁸¹³, and thus strengthen their relation⁸¹⁴. Yet, even this attempt was unsuccessful. Gurgēn was arrested and handed over to Ašot I. Bagratuni⁸¹⁵, who sentenced him in exile in Samarra⁸¹⁶. Despite these initial setbacks, Byzantium did not abandon its efforts to re-establish contacts with the Armenian noble families. As T. Greenwood remarks, on the eve of the accession of Photios, Byzantium was already deeply involved in Armenia and began to develop ties with lesser Arcruni princes, who were eager to establish themselves in Vaspurakan⁸¹⁷.

When Photios became patriarch of Constantinople, he sought to re-establish contact with the Armenian church in the context of the renewed Byzantine involvement in Armenia⁸¹⁸. Between 858 and 862, he exchanged letters with Zacharia⁸¹⁹, the *catholikos* of the Armenian church. The Byzantine patriarch tried to heal the confessional breaches that existed between the two churches.

⁸¹² GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours*, 350-351; GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 131.

⁸¹³ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 296.

⁸¹⁴ THOMSON, *Thomas Artsruni*, 267.

⁸¹⁵ PmbZ #20642.

⁸¹⁶ THOMSON, *Thomas Artsruni*, 267.

⁸¹⁷ GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 132.

⁸¹⁸ GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours*, 351; HURBANIČ, *Concept*, 108.

⁸¹⁹ PmbZ #28496.

His efforts resulted in the council at Shirakawan, which was convened between April and October 862 by Zacharia⁸²⁰.

The council promulgated fifteen canons⁸²¹, of which the thirteenth and fourteenth have attracted the most attention: the thirteenth canon prohibits monophysites to masquerade as Chalcedonians, whether for reason of personal ambition or gain. On the other hand, the fourteenth canon prohibits those who have accepted the Chalcedonian council to slander it as Nestorian⁸²². The aftermath of the council cannot be assessed meticulously, but it does demonstrate that the relationship between the two churches was progressing⁸²³.

Further evidence of this can be found in the encyclical letter Photios sent to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem in 867. According to the letter, Photios argues that those who are dwelling in Armenia, had long turned their backs on the right, reverent doctrine. Yet, today, the covenant of the Armenians has found the strength to correct their long-established error and worships the Christian faith purely and in orthodox fashion⁸²⁴. On November 862, (after the council of Shirakawan was convened) Ašot I. Bagratuni⁸²⁵, received from the caliph al-Musta 'in (862-866)⁸²⁶ the title *išxan išxanac* (prince of princes), indicating responsibility for oversight of Armenia on behalf of the caliph⁸²⁷. Byzantium acknowledged his title (as ἄρχον τῶν ἀρχόντων / ἡγεμὼν τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας) shortly afterwards⁸²⁸. After some initial setbacks, it

⁸²⁰ GREENWOOD, Failure, 133.

⁸²¹ On the canons of the council at Shirakawan, see: GREENWOOD, Failure, 146 (cit. n. 101, with further bibliography).

⁸²² GREENWOOD, Armenian Neighbours, 351; GREENWOOD, Failure, 146; HURBANIČ, Concept, 108.

⁸²³ GREENWOOD, Failure, 150; HURBANIČ, Concept, 108.

⁸²⁴ Phot. Epist. 2 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 41. GREENWOOD, Failure, 150 (according to the author, Photios may have overstated his success to impress his fellow patriarchs).

⁸²⁵ PmbZ #20642.

⁸²⁶ EI², VII, 722-723 (al-Musta 'in).

⁸²⁷ GREENWOOD, Failure, 133.

⁸²⁸ J. LAURENT, L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu' en 886. Nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour par M. Canard. Lisbon 1980, 344-345.

seemed that Byzantium would entrench its influence in Armenia. However, these hard-fought successes were not meant to last.

After Basil assumed the throne, Photios was swiftly deposed and Ignatios was reinstated to the patriarchal throne of New Rome. By the time Photios was reappointed patriarch, on 26 October 877⁸²⁹, the situation in Armenia had changed unfavorably. Zacharias, Photios' spiritual brother and correspondent, had died and Ašot I. Bagratuni had strengthened his relation with the Abassid Caliphate and was wary of the Byzantine initiatives in the area⁸³⁰. The reappointed Byzantine patriarch tried to improve the situation by sending conciliatory letters to the *išxan išxanac* and referring to him as "Your most eminent piety, your most powerful authority, your Highness among the same stock, you Ašot prince of Greater Armenia", by dispatching to him a relic of the True Cross, and by reporting that relics of Saint Grigor the Illuminator, one of the most revered Armenian saints, were found in Constantinople⁸³¹.

However, Photios' attempts were rebuffed and the patriarch was unable to recover lost ground. The Armenian correspondents declared that they remain loyal to their monophysite doctrine. As a result, despite the initial success that took place during Michael III's reign and Photios' first patriarchate, the empire was not able to expand its political and religious influence in Armenia.

Be that as it may, in 863, Rastislav⁸³², the ruler of Moravia, turned to Byzantium and asked from Michael III to send him Orthodox missionaries. Rastislav turned to Byzantium for aid not only because he was trying to stall the growth of Frankish influence in his country, but also because he feared a

⁸²⁹ PmbZ #6253.

⁸³⁰ GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours*, 351.

⁸³¹ On the matter, see: GREENWOOD, *Failure*, 152-160; T. GREENWOOD, *The discovery of the relics of St Grigor and the development of Armenian tradition in the ninth-century Byzantium*, in: *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization. In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman* (ed. E. JEFFREYS). Cambridge 2006, 177-191.

⁸³² PmbZ #6393.

Frankish-Bulgarian military encirclement⁸³³. The Byzantines readily embraced this opportunity to extend their sphere of political and religious influence to a remote territory. Besides, as Simeonova remarks, an alliance with the Moravians would provide the Byzantines a geographical tool to exercise pressure to Bulgaria, which is layed in between⁸³⁴.

Cyril⁸³⁵ and his brother Methodios⁸³⁶ were sent to Moravia in 863 and began to spread Christianity. The two brothers devised the Glagolitic alphabet and, as a result, the Slavic-speaking people could convert to Christianity through their own language. Two years earlier, in 861, Cyril was also sent to Khazaria in an effort to spread Christianity. However, the Khagan court had already embraced Judaism and Cyril managed to baptize only a small number of Khazars⁸³⁷.

In 863, after the Byzantines managed to secure their position in Asia Minor against the Abbasid Caliphate, they were able to turn their attention to the matters in the Balkans⁸³⁸. Fearing Boris' potential conversion to Christianity by the Eastern Franks, the Byzantine government acted quickly and accelerated its plan to impose the Christian Orthodox faith to Bulgaria. Byzantium could not afford its Balkan neighbor to be Christianized under Frankish missionaries, as that would extend the Frankish influence in the heart of the Balkan peninsula.

⁸³³ FINE, *Balkans*, 113-114; HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 135.

⁸³⁴ SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 75-76.

⁸³⁵ PmbZ #3927.

⁸³⁶ PmbZ #4975.

⁸³⁷ For the Byzantine missions to spread Christianity, see: DVORNIK, *Les légendes*, 148-229, 226-231; DVORNIK, *Byzantine missions*, 49-159; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 102-103; FINE, *Balkans*, 113-114; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 130-132; HURBANIČ, *Concept*, 112-115; IVANOV, *Missions*, 315ff; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 71-78; C. ZUCKERMAN, *On the Date of the Khazar's Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor. A Study of the Anonymous Khazar Letter from the Genizah of Cairo*. *REB* 53 (1995) 237-270. The aforementioned lemmata of the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* for the two brothers (PmbZ #3927; PmbZ #4975) are also of great importance and offer further bibliography on the matter.

⁸³⁸ See below, pp. 279-282,

In 864, when Boris was overseeing the military operations against Moravia, the Byzantines made a surprise attack; they sent troops to invade Bulgaria from its Southeastern border and, at the same time, their fleet attacked Mesembria⁸³⁹. On learning of the Byzantine attack, Boris immediately capitulated. According to the peace terms that Byzantium imposed, Boris was to cease all military operations, accept the Orthodox Christian conversion for him and his subjects and break off his Frankish alliance, and return to Byzantium the cities of Mesembria, Develtos⁸⁴⁰, and Anchialos⁸⁴¹. As a friendly concession, Boris would be officially permitted to annex Struma and Mesta, and the Northwestern parts of Macedonia and Albania⁸⁴².

Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity has already been –rather adequately– studied by modern scholarship and it would be pointless to enter here into any lengthy discussions and repetitions regarding their conversion⁸⁴³. It is of more importance for the scope of this study to examine the manner Bulgaria's conversion is attested in the Byzantine sources –the event is rather briefly described.

Genesios narrates that Byzantium's victories in 863 against the Abbasid Caliphate, along with the fact that at that time his subjects were oppressed by famine as a sign of divine punishment for their pagan beliefs made Boris capitulate at once⁸⁴⁴. Theophanes Continuatus relates that Boris was coaxed towards Christianity by Theodore Koupharas⁸⁴⁵, a Byzantine monk who was

⁸³⁹ HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 135. On Mesembria see: SOUSTAL, *Thrakien*, 355-359 (Mesēmbria).

⁸⁴⁰ SOUSTAL, *Thrakien*, 234 (Debeltos).

⁸⁴¹ SOUSTAL, *Thrakien*, 175-177 (Anchialos).

⁸⁴² HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 136; KYRIAKES, *Realpolitik*, 459.

⁸⁴³ For Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity, see: BROWNING, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 55-56, 145-169; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 103-131; FINE, *Balkans*, 117-130; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 115ff; HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 135-143; IVANOV, *Missions*, 318-320; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 110-124; Siecienski, *The Filioque*, 100-101; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 77-81; VLASTO, *Entry*, 58-165; ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 345-412.

⁸⁴⁴ GENESIOS, *IV*, 67, 42-52.

⁸⁴⁵ PmbZ #7723.

captive in a Bulgarian prison⁸⁴⁶, and by his sister⁸⁴⁷, who had spend some time in the Empire as a hostage (and during her time there she had been converted to Christianity). Theodora eventually exchanged Koupharas with Boris' sister⁸⁴⁸. As G. Calofonos and V. Gjuzelev remark, in the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, both Theodore Koupharas and Boris' sister are highly credited for Boris's subsequent conversion to Christianity⁸⁴⁹. The Bulgarian ruler was eventually persuaded to convert to Christianity after a famine had struck his land –again



Boris and his people praying for the famine to go away. Skylitzes Matritensis, fol 68r.

as a sign of divine punishment for the pagan beliefs of his people. Once converted to Christianity, he obtained deliverance from all his dangers and was re-named Michael, after the name of the Byzantine emperor⁸⁵⁰.

It is noticeable that Michael III's victorious campaigns against the Abbasid Caliphate are not mentioned. Instead, it is Divine Providence that orchestrates Bulgaria's Christianization. It is noteworthy to examine how Bulgaria's return to the fold of the Constantinopolitan church is attested in the narration of Vita Basilii, as it took place during Basil I's reign (in 870): by repeated exhortations, splendid receptions, and magnanimous generosity and gifts, Basil I persuaded the Bulgarians to accept an archbishop and allow their country to be covered with a network of bishoprics⁸⁵¹. The founder of the Macedonian Dynasty is apparently exalted. The above descriptions also demonstrate that Michael III's

⁸⁴⁶ For Theodoros Koupharas and for the prisoner exchange in general, see: KOUTRAKOU, Diplomacy and Espionage, 125-144 (mainly 140-141).

⁸⁴⁷ PmbZ #1035A.

⁸⁴⁸ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 232, 1-17.

⁸⁴⁹ CALOFONOS, Narratives, 107-108; GJUZELEV, Medieval Bulgaria, 134.

⁸⁵⁰ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 232, 17-26.

⁸⁵¹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 312, 6-13.

achievements that are briefly mentioned in Genesisios' narrative are afterwards, i.e. in the narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii, completely removed in an effort to further blacken Michael III's image.

The narratives of Symeon Magister⁸⁵² and Pseudo-Symeon⁸⁵³ are similar to Genesisios': when Boris was informed of Michael III and Bardas' campaign against Bulgaria, he capitulated at once, renounced his pagan beliefs, and was baptized and received the additional name



The baptism of Boris. Skylitzes Matritensis, fol 68v.

(of Michael III). Afterwards, he made peace with Byzantium. It is evident that Michael III's achievements are suppressed only in the narratives in Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii.

As the majority of the Byzantine sources describe, when Boris was baptized, he was given the additional name Michael, after Michael III, who acted as a godfather to the newly-baptized Bulgarian ruler. M. Isoaho remarks that the first pagan rulers who were baptized were given the names of the ruling Byzantine emperors, who acted as godfathers to them⁸⁵⁴.

Michael III's features and achievements also influenced the Bulgarian apocryphal literature and were also transferred over to Bulgarian historical personalities. Of course, in the original Bulgarian compilations, the features and achievements of Michael III were first of all applicable to the figure of Boris-Michael. I provide three indicative examples. First, on the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Annals*, a work of the eleventh century and one of the most

⁸⁵² FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 426, §19; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 8, 19-26; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 232, 13-16.

⁸⁵³ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 665, 11-18.

⁸⁵⁴ ISOAHO, Last Emperor, 47.

important historical works for the Bulgarian popular tradition⁸⁵⁵, we read: “After the death of Tsar Isot his son Boris took over the Bulgarian tsardom. He was pious and very devout. This tsar converted the entire country of Bulgaria and built many churches all over the Bulgarian land and round about the river Bregalnitsa and there took over the tsardom...”⁸⁵⁶.

Next, we come to the *Interpretation of the Prophet Daniel*, a work of the popular Bulgarian tradition of the eleventh century. On a passage we read “And then the harsh beginning of the entire world will begin. Michael, the khagan of the Bulgarians, will rise. He took over without violence the tsardom of the Bulgarians given to him”⁸⁵⁷. The author of the work clearly speaks for Boris, who was baptized by Michael III⁸⁵⁸.

Finally, we come to the *Narration of Isaiah*, a Bulgarian text of the twelfth century, where Boris is mentioned only as Michael⁸⁵⁹. There, we read: “after that the Lord will send down a tsar. He will be the fortieth tsar sent by God and his name will be Michael. He will reign over the entire universe. He will set off and will get to the throne where a maiden holds the crown of the pious and faithful Tsar Konstantinos. He will place the crown on his head and God will grant him fifty-three years to live. There will be much joy and delight and happy life under that tsar, such as has not been since the beginning of the world. In those days [Michael] will consecrate the holy churches and will build silver altars, and will give to the people knives in the place of weapons. He will turn the weapons into tools and the swords into sickles. Then the simple people will live like *bolijars*, the *bolijars* like *voevodi*, and the *voevodi* like tsars. People will spread all over the land. In those days only the dead will be idle. In those

⁸⁵⁵ The *Bulgarian Apocryphal Annals* are preserved only in one manuscript: IVANOV, Bogomiski knigi i legendi, 280–87. See PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 194.

⁸⁵⁶ PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 196.

⁸⁵⁷ PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 204.

⁸⁵⁸ PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 204 (cit. n. 106).

⁸⁵⁹ On the *Narration of Isaiah* see: PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 207-214; TÄPKOVA-ZAIMOVA – MILTENOVA, *Historical - Apocalyptic Literature*, 191.

years of Tsar Michael one vine will yield a measure of wine, one sheaf, a measure of wheat, the fleece of one sheep will yield a whole bundle of wool; there will be much honey and butter. In those years people and beasts will multiply. There will be neither death, nor war, nor robberies”⁸⁶⁰.

Michael III also served as an ideal king-savior for the Medieval Byzantine and Slavonic apocalyptic literature. More specifically, among other things, the Byzantine and Slavonic apocryphal Literature have been inspired from his successful military achievements against the Abbasid Caliphate and his victory against the Rhos in 860⁸⁶¹. I have in view here the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara*, an apocryphal work known both in Byzantine, Latin, and Slavo-Russian apocryphal literature.

The *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara*, originally written in Syriac in North Mesopotamia during the seventh century, was attributed to Methodios, archbishop of Patara⁸⁶², who died as a martyr in 311. This apocryphal work gained huge popularity and was rapidly translated into Greek and Latin. Later on, Slavonic, Bulgarian, and Armenian redactions were also composed⁸⁶³. For the scope of our study, it is important to examine the Greek, Latin, and Slavonic redactions⁸⁶⁴.

⁸⁶⁰ PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 209.

⁸⁶¹ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 237.

⁸⁶² On Methodios, archbishop of Patara, see: APOCALYPSE OF PSEUDO-METHODIOS, vii-xviii; Methodius of Olympus. *State of the Art and New Perspectives* (ed. K. BRACHT). Berlin 2017; L. G. PATTERSON, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ*. Washington 1997.

⁸⁶³ ALEXANDER, *Apocalypses*, 13-60; MILTENOVA, *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse*, 165-168; TÄPKOVA-ZAIMOVA – MILTENOVA, *Historical - Apocalyptic Literature*, 218-256; VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 237 (cit. n. 2).

⁸⁶⁴ For the Greek and Latin redactions, I use the recent Dumbarton Oaks critical edition (quoted as: APOCALYPSE OF PSEUDO-METHODIOS); for the Slavonic edition, I use Istrin’s text (quoted as: ISTRIN, *Revelations*). On the Slavonic redaction, see also: S. CROSS, *The Earliest Allusion in Slavic Literature to the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius*, *Speculum* 4 (1929) 329-339; MILTENOVA, *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse*, 165-189 (with further bibliography); F. THOMSON, *The Slavonic Translations of Pseudo-Methodius of Olympus Apocalypse*, in: *Kulturo razvitie na bulgarskata durzhava: krajat na XII-XIV vek: chetvurti Mezhdunaroden simpozium Veliko Turnovo*, 16-18 oktombrii 1985 (eds. A. DAVIDOV et al). Sofia 1985, 143-173.

In Methodius' *Revelation*, the narration of the whole history of the world begins with Adam and ends with the second Advent of Christ; the narration of the events is set within seven millennia. For the scope of this study, the seventh millennium is the most interesting. According to the Greek and Latin redactions of the *Revelation* the Ishmaelites (i.e. the Arabs) will come out and many Greeks will fall at the point of their swords. Ishmaelite domination will be cruel. They will devastate Persia, Romania, Cilicia, Syria, and other regions..."

Then suddenly, "the Emperor of the Greeks that is of the Romans will rise upon them with great strength; he will wake as a man from sleep, who has drunk wine, whom men regarded as dead and worthless...; ...his yoke will be seven times heavier than that of the Ismaelites. Then, after his victories, wonderful fertility will spread over the earth; and all men will live in peace. The Greeks will rebuild cities, and the priests will be released from violence. But, during this peace, a disaster will befall them. Then the gates of the north will open, and the forces of the peoples who have been shut within will emerge. The whole earth will be shocked by their appearance; men will be frightened and will flee away and hide themselves upon mountains, in caves and tombs. For the peoples coming from the north eat human flesh and drink blood of animals like water and eat unclean things. But, after seven years, when they have captured the city of Ioppe, the lord God will send one of his Archistrategi and smite them in a moment. Then the Greek emperor will come to Jerusalem, and ten years and a half after his coming the Antichrist will be born⁸⁶⁵".

The above events, which are narrated in the Greek and Latin redactions of the *Revelation*, fail to name the emperor they refer to. However, the fact that they refer to the emperor as a man who woke up, drunk wine and was regarded

⁸⁶⁵ APOCALYPSE OF PSEUDO-METHODIOS, 56, §11-62, §21 (Greek redaction); APOCALYPSE OF PSEUDO-METHODIOS, 126, §6-132, §21 (Latin Redaction).

as worthless, entirely fits with the image of Michael III, as was established by the biased in favor of the Macedonian Dynasty historiographers⁸⁶⁶. Yet this may not disturb us here; it simply means that the author of the *Revelation* had also consulted the works of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus.

The fact that the *Revelation* speaks of Michael III becomes evident if we consider the following: the emperor's march upon the Ishmaelites can represent Michael III's victorious campaigns against the Abbasid Caliphate⁸⁶⁷; the passage that mentions the fertility of the Greeks and their rebuilding of their cities may reflect on the restoration of the fortifications that took place in Nicaea, Ankara, and Smyrna under Michael III⁸⁶⁸. That the priests will be released from violence is an indication that the Iconoclastic period was finally over and that the images were restored in 843⁸⁶⁹. The detailed description of the customs of the people who invaded the Empire from the North stands for the Rhos, who invaded Byzantium on 860⁸⁷⁰. In fact, as Vasiliev remarks, the description of the Russians given in the *Revelation* is similar to the one Photios gives on the withdrawal of the Rhos⁸⁷¹. The capture of the city of Ioppe by the Russians is clearly an exaggeration; and the coming of the emperor to Jerusalem and the birth of the Antichrist is also purely a legend that was wide-spread in the Middle Ages⁸⁷².

Now, if we turn to the interpolated Slavonic version of the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara*, we do find the name of the emperor: it was Michael. We read: "...and then an endless multitude will be destroyed by the Tsar Michael, and others will be driven away like cattle; the pagan Ishmaelites will

⁸⁶⁶ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239.

⁸⁶⁷ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239. For Michael III's victorious campaigns against the Abbasid Caliphate see below, pp. 273-287.

⁸⁶⁸ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239. For the renovation of the fortifications that took place in Asia Minor see below, pp. 372-392.

⁸⁶⁹ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239.

⁸⁷⁰ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239. For the Russian attack see below, 253-265.

⁸⁷¹ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239; cf. MANGO, *Homilies*, 95-110.

⁸⁷² VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239.

be humiliated from fear of God, and they will bow before the Tsar Michael saying "We are thy prisoners""⁸⁷³. This version of the Revelation includes some fragments from other apocryphal works, such as a part of the *Vision of Daniel* and a part of the *Vision of Andrew the Simpleton*⁸⁷⁴. V. M. Istrin had, already since the end of the nineteenth century (1897), identified the Michael of the interpolated version of the *Revelation* as Michael III⁸⁷⁵.

Afterwards, in 1946, Vasiliev endorsed Istrin's point of view and added the following thoughtful remark: it is of course unfortunate that the Greek texts of the *Revelation* that are at present known to us fail to mention Michael's name. But, if earlier versions of the legend had come down to us, they might have contained his name. This argument gains more ground if we consider that the Slavonic translation of the Revelation was based on the Greek original texts⁸⁷⁶. It goes without saying that the far reach of Michael III's achievements and the impact they had on the Slavonic and Bulgarian apocryphal literature serve as a new element in order to rehabilitate his legacy.

Of course, a historian must naturally assess whether such kind of interpolated texts can be of any validity, especially since in their narratives historical events are intertwined with eschatological prophecies⁸⁷⁷. In our case their eschatological contents are based on historical events. It is Michael III's historical achievements, i.e. the defeat of the Arabs, the rebuilding of Greek cities in Asia Minor, the defeat of the Russians etc., that are intertwined with eschatological prophecies, such as the coming of the Antichrist. This not only

⁸⁷³ For the entire Slavonic interpolated text, see: ISTRIN, *Revelations*, 115-131.

⁸⁷⁴ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 239. All these texts have been studied and published by A.A. Vasiliev, P. Alexander, K. Petkov, and Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova. See: ALEXANDER, *Tradition*, 13-95; PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 194-216; TĂPKOVA-ZAIMOVA – MILTENOVA, *Historical - Apocalyptic Literature*, 87-98 (with older bibliography); VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 237-248.

⁸⁷⁵ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 241-242.

⁸⁷⁶ VASILIEV, *Apocryphal Literature*, 242.

⁸⁷⁷ It is a common feature for the historical events to precede the eschatological prophecies in apocalyptic texts. See: ALEXANDER, *Apocalypses*, 998-999.

credits these sources with certain validity, but also proves that Michael III served as an ideal king-savior for the Slavonic and Bulgarian apocryphal literature. In addition, it illustrates the manner that he was portrayed by contemporaries and future historiographers beyond the borders of the Empire.

Be that as it may, in 865 Boris received a letter from Photios entitled “Τῷ περιφανεστάτῳ καὶ περιβλέπτῳ ἡγαπημένῳ ἐν κυρίῳ πνευματικῷ υἱῷ Μιχαήλ τῷ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχόντι Βουλγαρίας”⁸⁷⁸. This letter was full of rhetoric and contained a detailed history of the Byzantine church (focusing on doctrine matters, theological disputes, and decisions from previous ecumenical councils) and instructions for Boris’ duties and activities as a Christian ruler⁸⁷⁹. However, Photios did not grant Boris the right to elect his own patriarch and found his own independent Bulgarian Church, which were Boris’ primary goals. The Bulgarian church would remain under the authority of Photios and Boris would be a Byzantine client. As a result, Boris turned again to Louis the German⁸⁸⁰ and also to Nicholas I.

In the course of the same year, Michael III decided to reply to Nicholas’ letters written on March 862. As Dvornik notes, it may be that Michael III had watched and chosen that moment to write to the pope, as at that time the Bulgarian incident seemed to be closed for good and Boris had received baptism⁸⁸¹. Unfortunately, Michael III’s letter has been lost, but some of its content can be restored from Nicholas’ reply, dated on 28 September 865⁸⁸². According to Chrysos, whose recent meticulous studies have shed light on the

⁸⁷⁸ Phot. Epist. 1 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I) 1-39. English Translation in: WHITE – BERRIGAN, Patriarch and Prince, 39-79.

⁸⁷⁹ L. Simeonova provides an exhaustive analysis of the letter. See: SIMEONOVA, Diplomacy, 112-156.

⁸⁸⁰ PmbZ #24754.

⁸⁸¹ DVORNIK, Photian Schism, 103.

⁸⁸² Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 454, 1-16.

matter, Michael III's letter must have been very severe in tone and harsh in content⁸⁸³.

With this letter Michael III put an end to the soothing and appeasing attitude that Constantinople had till that point adopted towards Nicholas' persistence to recognize the election of Photios as canonical. The Byzantine emperor was determined to stop Nicholas I from using Ignatios' case in order to act as the ultimate judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West. Michael III also protested against a revision of Ignatios' trial, as had been requested by Nicholas on March 862⁸⁸⁴. The emperor pointed out that he had never asked from the pope to send his legates to try Ignatios; it was an internal affair and was already settled by a local synod⁸⁸⁵.

It also appears that the Byzantine court was aware that a pro-Ignatian delegation was in Rome and was commanded by Theognostos⁸⁸⁶. Michael III warned Nicholas that he should either repatriate these monks, or he would resort to military intervention to bring them back. To the best of my knowledge, it was not common for the papacy to be threatened with military intervention; in its entire history, only a few military attempts against the papacy have been recorded. The last time was under Ioustinianos II⁸⁸⁷, whose iconography Michael III copied and re-introduced the bust of Christ in his solidi.⁸⁸⁸

When pope Sergios⁸⁸⁹ refused to sign the tomes of the Quinisext council⁸⁹⁰, Ioustinianos II sent the magister⁸⁹¹ Sergios⁸⁹² to arrest the two most important

⁸⁸³ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 326.

⁸⁸⁴ Nicolaus I, ep. 85 (MGH VI), 443, 20-22; 444, 1-3.

⁸⁸⁵ BISHOP, Nicholas I, 101-102; DÖLGER, *Regesten*, 56-57 (464).

⁸⁸⁶ PmbZ #28010.

⁸⁸⁷ PmbZ #3556.

⁸⁸⁸ See below, pp. 324-325.

⁸⁸⁹ PmbZ #6689.

⁸⁹⁰ On the canons of the Quinisext council see: *The Council in Trullo Revisited (KANONIKA 6)* (eds. G. NEDUNGATT – M. FEATHERSTONE). Rome 1995, 41-185.

⁸⁹¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 294.

⁸⁹² PmbZ #6542.

councillors of the pope, Ioannes, the bishop of Porto⁸⁹³, and Boniface the counselor⁸⁹⁴. Ioustinianos II judged that they were the ones responsible for the pope not signing the tomes, so he had them arrested and brought to Constantinople. Yet, Sergios remained adamant. Ioustinianos II then sent protospatharios⁸⁹⁵ Zacharias⁸⁹⁶ to Rome to arrest the pope himself and bring him to the Byzantine capital, but his plan failed⁸⁹⁷. It is not unlikely that Michael III tried to imitate Ioustinianos II's vigor shown towards the papacy. However, this can only remain a conjecture. J. Hergenröther has argued that Michael III's letter of 865 had been written by Photios⁸⁹⁸, but, as Dvornik notes, there is nothing to prove it –the letter itself is not preserved. Pope Nicholas also does not seem to have thought of that⁸⁹⁹.

As I have already mentioned, Nicholas I response to Michael III's letter is dated on 28 September 865⁹⁰⁰. Although at the beginning of the letter Nicholas is referred as its sender, it is later clearly stated in the letter that it was Anastasios Bibliothecarios⁹⁰¹ who truly wrote it, without any involvement of the pope⁹⁰². It has been recently studied by Chrysos, who observed that its content was exploited in the next centuries from the papacy in order to promote the primacy of the See of Rome⁹⁰³. For the scope of this study, that documents

⁸⁹³ PmbZ #2724.

⁸⁹⁴ PmbZ #1025.

⁸⁹⁵ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 328.

⁸⁹⁶ PmbZ #8606.

⁸⁹⁷ For Justinian II's confrontation with pope Sergios, see: HEAD, *Justinian II*, 72,79; LEONTSINI, *Papal independence*, 104; STRATOS, *Seventh Century*, 53-56 (with annotations on the primary sources and further bibliography).

⁸⁹⁸ HERGENRÖTHER, *Photius*, 553.

⁸⁹⁹ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 105.

⁹⁰⁰ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 454, 25-27.

⁹⁰¹ PmbZ #20341.

⁹⁰² Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 474, 2-60. CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 326 (cit. n. 65).

⁹⁰³ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 326. On the matter see also: CHRYSOS, *A war*, 261-275; CHRYSOS, *Γράκοι και Ρωμαίοι*, 103-117.

in a comprehensive way the papal position in the ongoing rivalry and confrontation between Rome and Constantinople⁹⁰⁴.

Judging by Nicholas' response, in the lost imperial letter Michael III had called himself *imperator romanorum*, a fact that had notably annoyed the pope⁹⁰⁵. It is also evident that in his letter the Byzantine emperor used some insulting expressions for the Latin language by calling it "barbaric and Scythian"⁹⁰⁶. This is apparent from the following phrase in the pope's response: "*Quiescite igitur vos nuncupare Romanorum imperatores, quoniam secundum vestram sententiam barbari sunt, quorum vos imperatores esse asseritis. Romani quippe hac lingua, quam barbaram vos et Scythicam vocatis, utuntur*"⁹⁰⁷ (Stop calling yourself *imperator Romanorum*, because in your opinion barbarians are those whose emperor you claim to be. Indeed this language is used by the Romans, which you call barbaric and Scythian⁹⁰⁸).

Nicholas I's irritation by Michael III's titulature becomes more apparent if we take into consideration that on at least two other occasions (the first one was in his synod in Rome in 863 against Photios; the second one in his letter to Hincmar in 867⁹⁰⁹), he addressed Michael III as emperor of the Greeks⁹¹⁰. Nicholas I knew of course that Michael III, just like all the Byzantine emperors, claimed the title "emperor of the Romans". Yet, by denying Michael III the relevant title, Nicholas I implies that there is no Roman emperor in Constantinople and, subsequently, that the papacy is independent from

⁹⁰⁴ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 326.

⁹⁰⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 459, 30-32.

⁹⁰⁶ It seems that this expression had particularly annoyed the pope, as a result in his reply he insisted on rebuffing Michael III's argument six times. These six phrases have been gathered and translated by E. Chrysos. See: CHRYSOS, *A War*, 262-263.

⁹⁰⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 459, 30-32.

⁹⁰⁸ English translation after: CHRYSOS, *A War*, 262 (n. 6).

⁹⁰⁹ "...a Grecorum imperatoribus, Michaele scilicet et Basilio..." Nicolaus I, ep. 100 (MGH VI), 601, 15-16.

⁹¹⁰ BISHOP, *Nicholas I*, 110.

Byzantium⁹¹¹. This is yet another example of how Nicholas I perceived the authoritative position of his office.

Through his defiant arguments against Michael III, Nicholas I adds for the first time (but not for the last) a new criterion of distinction between the papacy and Byzantium: the language. As M. T. Fögen remarks, the pope essentially tells Michael III that since you do not know a word of Latin, you better cease calling yourself emperor of the Romans; if Latin is barbaric, then you better call yourself emperor of barbarians⁹¹². These exclamations were alarming, to say the least, as they contradict the *Kaiseridee* regarding the legitimization of the Byzantine emperor as emperor of the Romans⁹¹³.

From my point of view, these threatening accusations along with the defiant tone of the papal letter provoked Michael III not only to keep using the title *imperator romanorum*, but also to mint coins and seals, on which he is referred as *imperator* and *imperator basileus*⁹¹⁴. Through this action Michael III may have personally intended to demonstrate that the pope was under no circumstances in the position to dictate what a Byzantine emperor may or may not do.

Next, Nicholas I carries on with a typical representation of the See of Rome: "The privileges of the Roman church were founded by Christ upon saint Peter and from antiquity were ordered and preserved, celebrated by the ecumenical councils and honored by the whole of Christendom. These privileges cannot be diminished, impaired or altered. No man's effort can remove what God has founded [...]. We repeat, eternal are these privileges. Their root is in God who has planted them. One can thrust against them, but not shift them, one can hurt but not destroy them. They have been there before your Empire and with God's grace they will remain after you [...]. These privileges were granted to our

⁹¹¹ BISHOP, Nicholas I, 110.

⁹¹² FÖGEN, Reanimation, 21-22.

⁹¹³ FÖGEN, Reanimation, 21.

⁹¹⁴ See below, pp. 331-333, 347-349.

church by Christ, not by synods, which merely have celebrated and venerated them”⁹¹⁵. As Chrysos remarks, the author of the letter is keen to underline the differences and exhibit the advanced alienation between Rome and Constantinople⁹¹⁶.

Then, the author refers to Michael III’s request for the repatriation of the pro-Ignatian delegation to Constantinople. He refuses to comply with the emperor’s demands and argues that Rome has the laws and authorities to summon any monk or clergyman from any diocese when the ecclesiastical order requires so. However, he adds, you (Michael III) do not have the right to summon monks unless you want to show compassion for them or listen to their prayers⁹¹⁷.

It is truly remarkable that, at this point, Anastasios, in an effort to promote the primacy of Rome, completely ignored –or rather chose to ignore– the Byzantine doctrine, as it had evolved since the reign of Konstantinos I. According to the Byzantine doctrine, which was in use already since the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325), the emperor had the responsibility to convoke council, and he was also officially responsible for approving, signing, and applying their decisions; he also acted as the arbitrator of the council and guaranteed the unity of the Church. He was not allowed to make decisions or enact laws on his own, but he was responsible for taking care of all the practical issues, i.e. the traveling of the bishops from their offices to the venue of the council, guaranteeing that the council’s proceedings would reach all the appropriate addressees, etc⁹¹⁸. Afterwards, Anastasios Bibliothecarios responds to Michael III’s threat of military intervention; he wrote that with the grace and

⁹¹⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 474, 35 – 475, 7. English translation after E. Chrysos. See: CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 326-327.

⁹¹⁶ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 327.

⁹¹⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 478, 20-25.

⁹¹⁸ CHRYSOS, *Imperium and Sacerdotium*, 315; DVORNIK, *Emperors*, 3, 14, 22-23, 110. DAGRON, *Emperor and priest*, 296-297; SIECIENSKI, *Constantine*, 1-2.

protection of Christ, Rome was never frightened and was not going to be frightened at that time. They trusted in the protection of the holy angels on its walls⁹¹⁹.

At the end of the papal letter Anastasios states that he (i.e. the pope) wishes to offer concession to Michael III and declares his readiness to revise the case of Ignatios and Photios, but only in Rome. These two rivals must appear before the pope and be judged by him, or send their representatives to him. The emperor must send his representatives as well. This is yet another example of how Nicholas –or in this case Anastasios Bibliothecarios on behalf of Nicholas– perceived the authority of his office and acted as if he were the ultimate judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West. At the same time, it is also remarkable that in this letter Nicholas does not refer to the jurisdiction of Illyricum, nor to Bulgaria's Christianization. He had probably given up on the idea that he could gain anything out of it and he could not have anticipated what was going to happen in Bulgaria in the next months.

Boris, disappointed as he was from Photios' refusal to be granted a patriarch and an independent Bulgarian church, turned to Louis the German⁹²⁰, and also to pope Nicholas I. In summer 866, he sent envoys in Regensburg and requested from Louis the German Frankish bishops and clergymen to be sent to Bulgaria. Boris was apparently planning the revival of the Frankish-Bulgarian alliance⁹²¹.

At the same time, on 29 August 866, a delegation from Boris arrived in Rome, headed by his relative, the kavkhan⁹²² Petros, and by the boyars Ioannes and

⁹¹⁹ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 479, 1-7.

⁹²⁰ PmbZ #24754.

⁹²¹ BROWNING, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 148; FINE, *Balkans*, 121; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 144.

⁹²² The kavkhan was one of the most important officials in the Bulgarian state. He was one of the chief commanders of the Bulgarian army and also a state diplomat. In the Byzantine sources it is often found as "καυκάβος" or "καυχάβος". See: G. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica II. Sprachreste der Türkvölker in den byzantinischen Quellen*. Leiden 1983, 156; SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 74 (and cit. n. 127 with further bibliography).

Martin. Nicholas was delighted at that opportunity to extend the authority of the Roman See to Byzantiums' neighbours; this would provide him with yet another opportunity to claim the jurisdiction of Illyricum⁹²³. The envoys were to obtain from the pope the right to elect their own patriarch and set up an independent Bulgarian church, and to pose questions regarding the ecclesiastical organization and Christian conduct; unfortunately, Boris' letter is not preserved⁹²⁴. The pope prepared in response a long letter with answers raised by Boris and sent it to the Bulgarian ruler⁹²⁵.

Unlike Photios' letter, which was full of rhetoric, Nicholas' letter was more pragmatic; he gave to the Bulgarian ruler practical advice on Christian life and church organization. However, just like Photios, he refused to grant Boris the right to obtain his own patriarch. More specifically, Nicholas answered tactfully and was careful not to dismay Boris. He reported that at first his legates would have to report to him about the extent of the spread of Christianity in Bulgaria. In the beginning, he could grant Boris a bishop and in due time either an archbishop or a patriarch⁹²⁶. Boris was persuaded. At the same time, as a continuation of the letter sent to Michael III in 865, in November 866 Nicholas, or rather Anastasios Bibliothecarios, sent another letter to Photios, which was insulting to the patriarch. He also called him a fratricide, a snake and a jew and urged him to give his place to Ignatios⁹²⁷. The conflict was still escalating.

⁹²³ BROWNING, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 148-149; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 113; FINE, *Balkans*, 120-121; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 143; HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 138-139; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 110; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 157-158, 175-188.

⁹²⁴ ROSENWEIN, *Reading*, 165.

⁹²⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 99 (MGH VI), 568-600. There is an English translation of the letter. See: *The Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Questions of the Bulgars A.D. 866 (letter 99)*. Translated by W. L. North from the edition of Ernest Perels in MGH *Epistolae VI*, Berlin 1925, 568-600.

⁹²⁶ Nicolaus I, ep. 99 (MGH VI), 589, 32-590, 3.

⁹²⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 92 (MGH VI), 533-540. For a summary of Boris' questions on the Christian faith and the relevant commentary, see: SIECIENSKI, *The Filioque*, 100-102; SIMEONOVA, 198-222.

In late November 866, the papal clergymen headed by Formosus⁹²⁸, the bishop of Porto, Paul⁹²⁹, the bishop of Populonia, Donatus⁹³⁰, the bishop of Ostia, the presbyter Leo⁹³¹, and the deacon Marinus⁹³² arrived in Bulgaria to start their missionary work. In the meantime, the Frankish delegation headed by Hermenrich of Passau, had arrived in Bulgaria prior to the papal envoys and had already started preaching. On behalf of Nicholas, the papal clergymen requested Boris to expel not only the Frankish missionaries, but also the Greek ones who were already in Bulgaria since 864⁹³³.

After spending some time in Bulgaria, Donatus, the presbyter Leo, and the deacon Marinus left for Constantinople. They carried with them papal letters for Michael III, for his wife, Eudocia, for his mother, Theodora, for Ignatios, Photios, Bardas, for the Byzantine church and the senate⁹³⁴. These letters were given to them by Nicholas on 13 November 866 when they departed from Rome. In the letter to Michael III, Nicholas mostly repeats what he had already said in his previous letter; he refuses to recognize the condemnation of Ignatios and urges Michael III to remove Photios from the patriarchal throne⁹³⁵. Dvornik remarks that this letter was calmer in tone⁹³⁶ than the one sent on 28 September 865⁹³⁷.

With the letter to the Byzantine church Nicholas repeated almost word-for-word what he had said to Michael III⁹³⁸. In the letter to Photios, Nicholas recites the crimes that the former had committed⁹³⁹. The letter to Ignatios is written in

⁹²⁸ PmbZ #22001.

⁹²⁹ PmbZ #5892.

⁹³⁰ PmbZ #21589.

⁹³¹ PmbZ #4241.

⁹³² PmbZ #24983.

⁹³³ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 114; GJUZELEV, Medieval Bulgaria, 149.

⁹³⁴ Nicolaus I, ep. 90-97 (MGH VI), 488-553.

⁹³⁵ Nicolaus I, ep. 90 (MGH VI) 498-512.

⁹³⁶ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 115.

⁹³⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 454-487.

⁹³⁸ Nicolaus I, ep. 91 (MGH VI), 512-533.

⁹³⁹ Nicolaus I, ep. 92 (MGH VI), 533-540.

a more comforting manner. The pope states that he strives to restore him to the patriarchal throne⁹⁴⁰. In the letter to Bardas, Nicholas urges the caesar to restore Ignatios, the legitimate patriarch, at the head of the Byzantine church⁹⁴¹. Apparently, the pope did not know that the caesar had already been murdered.

However, when the papal envoys reached the Byzantine border, Theodore⁹⁴², who was either a *kleisouraches*⁹⁴³ or a *strategos*⁹⁴⁴ of the Thracian theme, stopped them and told them that the emperor no longer needed them⁹⁴⁵. He dispatched a messenger to Constantinople to ask for further instructions whilst the papal envoys were left waiting for forty days at the frontier⁹⁴⁶. Apparently, in Constantinople the Byzantine government must have been aware of what was going on in Bulgaria; the expelled Byzantine missionaries must have informed Photios of Boris' defection. These missionaries must have also informed Photios that their papal and Frankish rivals in Bulgaria were disseminating modified doctrines⁹⁴⁷. The most serious of them was the Filioque, i.e. that the Holy Ghost proceeded not only from the Father, but also from the Son⁹⁴⁸. To the eyes of every Christian Orthodox this deviation was considered a heresy and deserved condemnation by a synod⁹⁴⁹.

⁹⁴⁰ Nicolaus I, ep. 94 (MGH VI), 544-547.

⁹⁴¹ Nicolaus I, ep. 93 (MGH VI), 540-544.

⁹⁴² PmbZ #7731.

⁹⁴³ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 341.

⁹⁴⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 341, 345.

⁹⁴⁵ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 116-117; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 149.

⁹⁴⁶ LP II, 165,6-31 ; DAVIS, *Lives*, 242-243.

⁹⁴⁷ This is a perfect example of how missionaries also acted as informants. See the recent studies of N. Drocourt and P. Delogu: DROCOURT, *Ambassadors*, 81-82; P. DELOGU, *The post-Imperial Romanness of the Romans*, in: *Transformations of Romanness (Millenium Studies 71)* (eds. W. POHL et al.). Berlin – Boston 2018, 162-163.

⁹⁴⁸ On the Filioque, see: GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 188-248; SIECIENSKI, *Filioque*, 100-109; SIECIENSKI, *Papacy*, 224-226.

⁹⁴⁹ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 117-118; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 189-197; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 244.

Photios took action at once and wrote to the Eastern patriarchs inviting them to join a synod and cooperatively condemn these false practices⁹⁵⁰. As a result, the conflict between Photios and Nicholas over the jurisdiction of Bulgaria was widened and encompassed all the Eastern patriarchates. This was the first step that led to the schism of 867 –the so-called Photian schism⁹⁵¹.

Although the proceedings of this synod were destroyed, we do possess some scant information, which comes exclusively from anti-Photian sources⁹⁵². The synod was summoned in the summer of 867 and the Byzantine patriarch excommunicated Boris, Nicholas, and the false doctrines that the papal missionaries were preaching in Bulgaria⁹⁵³. During this synod, Louis II, the king of Lombardy⁹⁵⁴ was also proclaimed *imperator*; Michael III and Photios sent him and Engelberga⁹⁵⁵ letters containing the synod's proceedings referring to Louis II's proclamation and the condemnation of Nicholas⁹⁵⁶.

Shortly after the synod was concluded, Zacharias Kophos⁹⁵⁷, the metropolitans of Chalkedon, and Theodoros⁹⁵⁸, the metropolitans of Laodikeia, were sent to Lombardy, in northern Italy to deliver its acts. They departed from Constantinople with many gifts for the Frankish king. Yet, the Byzantine embassy never meant to reach its destination; not long after Michael III's

⁹⁵⁰ "...καὶ προθύμους καὶ συναγωνιστὰς γενέσθαι ἐπὶ τῇ καθαιρέσει τῶν δυσσεβῶν τούτων καὶ ἀθέων κεφαλαίων παραινουμέν τε καὶ δεόμεθα, καὶ μὴ λιπεῖν τὴν πατρῴαν τάξιν, ἣν ὑμᾶς οἱ πρόγονοι δι' ὧν ἔπραξαν κατέχειν παραδεδώκασιν, ἀλλὰ σπουδῇ πολλῇ καὶ προθυμίᾳ ἀνθ' ὑμῶν τοποτηρητὰς τινὰς ἐλέσθαι καὶ ἀποστεῖλαι..." Phot. Epist. 2 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 49, 278-283.

⁹⁵¹ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 119-124.

⁹⁵² SIECIENSKI, The Filioque, 103. DVORNIK, Photian schism, 117-124.

⁹⁵³ P. Gemeinhardt provides a complete list of the decisions of the synod, gathered from the anti-Photian sources. See: GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 198-201.

⁹⁵⁴ PmbZ #24755.

⁹⁵⁵ PmbZ #438.

⁹⁵⁶ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 121; GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 199-200; VLYSIDOU, Θεσμός, 36.

⁹⁵⁷ PmbZ #8635.

⁹⁵⁸ PmbZ #7726.

assassination, a messenger sent from Basil I reached the diplomatic mission and called it back⁹⁵⁹.

I disagree with Vlysidou's remark on the fact that Louis II proclamation as *imperator* must be considered as a serious setback regarding the exclusive authority of the Byzantine emperor⁹⁶⁰. The recognition of a second emperor⁹⁶¹ had already taken place during Michael I Rhangabe's⁹⁶² reign. In 812, Michael I Rhangabe, yielding to serious political circumstances, i.e. his own precarious position on the Byzantine throne, the pressure by Charlemagne⁹⁶³ regarding the jurisdiction of Dalmatia and Venice, the Bulgarian invasions at the Northern borders etc, signed the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, through which the title of *imperator* and *basileus* (without the indication *Romanorum*) was recognized for Charlemagne⁹⁶⁴.

However, this act, as perceived by Byzantium, did not undo the *ecumenicity* of their empire, for the titles given to Charlemagne did not contain the indication *Romanorum*; to Byzantine thinking, this adjustment simply meant that Charlemagne was recognized as a ruler superior (*imperator*) to the other kings (*reges*) of the West⁹⁶⁵. Similar notions have led the Byzantine court during Michael III's reign to recognize Louis II as an *imperator*. The *ecumenicity* of their empire was -again- not threatened, whereas attempting to entice Louis II by recognizing his sovereignty could result in Byzantium gaining a valuable ally

⁹⁵⁹ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 124.

⁹⁶⁰ VLUSIDOU, Θεσμός, 35-37.

⁹⁶¹ This topic is described in modern scholarship as the *Zweikaiserproblem*. Indicatively see: CHRYSOS, East and West, 280-281; KOLIA-DERMITZAKI, Byzantium and the West, 358-362 (with further bibliography on the matter).

⁹⁶² PmbZ #4989.

⁹⁶³ PmbZ #3628.

⁹⁶⁴ KOLIA-DERMITZAKI, Byzantium and the West, 362.

⁹⁶⁵ CHRYSOS, East and West, 280; DÖLGER, Byzanz, 304-305; KOLIA-DERMITZAKI, Byzantium and the West, 362.

against Nicholas' aspirations, i.e. to promote the Roman primacy and act as the supreme judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West⁹⁶⁶.

Lastly, all the anti-Photian sources but Metrophanes⁹⁶⁷, the metropolitans of Smyrna, record that Michael III presided over the synod –Metrophanes also records the presence of Basil, who at that time was co-emperor⁹⁶⁸.

After the synod concluded, the above mentioned messenger was sent back to the frontier bringing the decisions of the synod to the papal legates. They were either to acknowledge and sign them, or withdraw back to Bulgaria along with the papal letters. Unable to accept these conditions, the papal envoys returned to Bulgaria and, as a result, Nicholas's letter never reached the Byzantine emperor⁹⁶⁹. At the same time, Photios, in the name of Michael III, sent a letter to Boris, informing him of his condemnation⁹⁷⁰. However, when Boris received the letter, he handed it over to the papal envoys, who were about to depart for Rome; in turn they delivered it to Nicholas. Of this we know from the letter Nicholas sent to Hincmar⁹⁷¹.

Nicholas I felt compelled to react accordingly to this attack from the Eastern patriarchates. He wrote to both Frankish kings of Eastern and Western Francia and to the archbishops and bishops of the West and asked them to express their solidarity to Rome by condemning the heretic Greeks for their wrong practices⁹⁷². However, it is important to highlight that Photios' blames and condemnations were restricted only to the papal teachings in Bulgaria; Photios did not aim at attacking the whole Latin church and its customs⁹⁷³.

⁹⁶⁶ GRUMEL – DARROUZÈS, *Regestes I*, 121-122 (n. 499-500).

⁹⁶⁷ PmbZ #25088.

⁹⁶⁸ GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 198; cf. MANSI, XVI, 417D: "ὑπογραφὰς... τῶν δύο βασιλέων".

⁹⁶⁹ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 117.

⁹⁷⁰ SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 193.

⁹⁷¹ Nicolaus I, ep. 100 (MGH VI), 604, 3-7.

⁹⁷² CHRYSOS, *A War*, 271 (and cit. n. 43); SIECIENSKI, *Filioque*, 104-105.

⁹⁷³ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 121-124; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 201; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 111-113. Simeonova erroneously states that at the council of 867

The pope exploited the letter Photios wrote in the name of Michael III in 866 to Boris regarding the false papal teachings and intentionally generalized the accusations made by the Byzantine patriarch so as to give the impression that the Eastern patriarchates attacked the whole Latin church. Apparently, Nicholas' ultimate goal was to gain support from the whole Western church – and he did it⁹⁷⁴. At the same time, as Chrysos remarks, in contradiction to the customary way of distinguishing the Christian world in geographical terms as Eastern and Western, through his arguments in his letters to the archbishops and bishops of the West, Nicholas added a new criterion of distinction: the language. Nicholas constructed an *us versus them* binarism to identify the Eastern Christians as Greeks, and therefore not Romans. He implied that those who do not speak Latin, do not share the Roman identity; in this way, he justified the Christian West as the Latin world and their exclusive right to bear the Roman identity⁹⁷⁵.

The letter that Nicholas I sent to Hincmar, the archbishop of Rheims, dated on 23 October 867 is still preserved⁹⁷⁶, and we can closely follow Nicholas I's arguments to persuade his addressee: "they say that we fast on Saturdays; that we say the Holy Spirit proceeds from the father and from the son [filioque]; that we forbid priests to have wives, that we forbid priests to anoint with chrism the foreheads of the baptized. Those Greeks also say that we Latins make chrism from river-water; and they blame us Latins for not abstaining, as is their custom, from eating meat during the eight weeks before Easter and from eating cheese and eggs for seven of those eight weeks. They allege further that at Easter, in Jewish fashion, we bless and offer a sheep on the altar, along with

Photios condemned the teachings of the Latin church. This generalization is wrong; cf. SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 245.

⁹⁷⁴ CHRYSOS, *A War*, 271; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 123; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 201.

⁹⁷⁵ CHRYSOS, *A War*, 272-275.

⁹⁷⁶ The letter is preserved in: Nicolaus I, ep. 100 (MGH VI), 601-609.

the Lord's body. They are also enraged against us because with us, clerics shave their beards; and they claim that with us, a deacon can be ordained a bishop without having received the office of priesthood"⁹⁷⁷.

Hincmar's reaction was positive and without delay. The archbishop of Rheims received Nicholas' letter in Charles the Bald's palace in Corbenay, read it out and forwarded it to other bishops and archbishops⁹⁷⁸. Preserved are also the responses of two more distinguished bishops; Aeneas, the archbishop of Paris, and Ratramnus, the abbot of the Corbie monastery⁹⁷⁹. In 868, Louis the German⁹⁸⁰, the king of East Francia, summoned in Worms a synod where the bishops of his kingdom decided that it was the Greeks who committed heresy⁹⁸¹. We can thus observe how the papal-Byzantine friction over disciplinary matters, i.e. Photios recognition, and spheres of jurisdiction eventually evolved into a doctrinal controversy that separated the Christian world between *occidentales* and *orientales*.

Yet, this controversy was not meant to last. When Basil assumed the Byzantine throne, on 24 September 867, his first step was to force Photios to resign and reinstate Ignatios⁹⁸². Modern scholarship argues that Basil could not rely on Photios, who had been assisted by Bardas and Michael III to ascend the ecclesiastical ranks, for he had murdered both of them. The founder of the Macedonian dynasty was thus forced to turn to Ignatios, reinstate him, and

⁹⁷⁷ Nicolaus I, ep. 100 (MGH VI), 603, 23-34. English translation after: L. NELSON, *The Annals of St- Bertin*. Manchester 1991, 141-142. On Photios' accusations see also: DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 118-119 (briefly); SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 193, 236-240. Hincmars own critique against the "Greeks", which actually reproduces Nicholas' arguments, is recorded in the second part of the *Annales Bertiniani*. See: ANNALES BERTINIANI, 89.

⁹⁷⁸ CHRYSOS, *A War*, 271.

⁹⁷⁹ CHRYSOS, *A War*, 271; GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 210-226; SIECIENSKI, *Filioque*, 104-107.

⁹⁸⁰ PmbZ #24754.

⁹⁸¹ On the synod of Worms and its decisions see: CHRYSOS, *A War*, 272 (cit. n. 49); GEMEINHARDT, *Filioque-Kontroverse*, 204-209.

⁹⁸² DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 132-137.

inevitably change the religious policy of his predecessor and seek to be on good terms with Rome⁹⁸³.

Yet, as regards the reasons of Photios' deposition, Symeon Magister adds an interesting event that is not found in the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus or in the Vita Basilii. According to Symeon Magister, when Basil assumed the throne he went to Hagia Sophia to receive the Holy Communion. When he entered the church, Photios called him a robber, a murderer, and unworthy of the Holy Communion (Φώτιος δὲ ὁ πατριάρχης τοῦ βασιλέως ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ μέλλοντος αὐτοῦ κοινωνεῖν τοῦτον ληστήν καὶ φονέα ἔλεγεν καὶ ἀνάξιον τῆς θείας κοινωνίας). His accusations infuriated Basil, who subsequently ousted Photios from the patriarchal throne and reinstated Ignatios⁹⁸⁴.

From my point of view, it is not unlikely that Photios was aware of Basil's ultimate goal, i.e. to assume the Byzantine throne by any means necessary. Further evidence of this can be found by the way Photios reacted when he heard of Bardas' assassination in 866. That is to say, after Bardas was assassinated in Kepoi, Michael III sent Photios a letter to inform him that the caesar had been convicted of high treason and put to death. This letter has not come down to us, but we possess the two letters that the patriarch wrote back regarding the matter.

On the first one Photios initially congratulates Michael III for escaping the plot⁹⁸⁵. The patriarch then goes on to question, in a very subtle manner, if the circumstances of Bardas' murder were as described in Michael III's letter –in the one that has not survived- or if they had been fabricated and presented in such a manner so as to condemn the caesar⁹⁸⁶. As J. Bury has rightfully

⁹⁸³ BISHOP, Nicholas I, 120; DVORNIK, Photian schism, 132, 138; PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 114-115.

⁹⁸⁴ ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 18, 28-34; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 262, 35-40.

⁹⁸⁵ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 68, 2-69, 8.

⁹⁸⁶ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 69, 30-35.

remarked, with this excerpt Photios delicately wonders if the imperial letter was dictated by Basil I, or if there was foul play regarding Bardas' murder⁹⁸⁷. This quotation is of particular importance, as it testifies that Basil I's motives and intentions were already questioned by Photios. The letter is concluded with the patriarch urging the emperor to return to Constantinople⁹⁸⁸. The same instigation is expressed in the second and shorter letter as well; Photios urges Michael III to return to Constantinople⁹⁸⁹. It could be that Photios was worried that Michael III might too be assassinated by Basil.

In 868 Basil sent spatharios⁹⁹⁰ Euthymios⁹⁹¹ to Rome to inform Nicholas about the events that took place in the Byzantine court in 867⁹⁹². However, when Euthymios reached Rome, Nicholas had passed away (on 13 November 867⁹⁹³), probably without hearing that he was condemned by Photios in the Synod of 867 in Constantinople⁹⁹⁴ and it was his successor, Hadrian II⁹⁹⁵, who received Basil's letter⁹⁹⁶. Afterwards, Photios was temporarily condemned in the Synod of 870⁹⁹⁷, which the Latin Church regards as the eight ecumenical council⁹⁹⁸.

As for the Bulgarians, they eventually returned to the ecclesiastical sphere of Constantinople. It appears that between 866 and 870, Boris' requests from the papacy to obtain an archbishop were not fulfilled: in 867, Boris' request to ordain Formosus⁹⁹⁹ as archbishop of Bulgaria was rejected by pope Nicholas. Similarly, his second request to ordain the deacon Marinus¹⁰⁰⁰ as archbishop

⁹⁸⁷ BURY, ERE, 173.

⁹⁸⁸ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 70, 51-60.

⁹⁸⁹ Phot. Epist. 19 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 70-71.

⁹⁹⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 297-298.

⁹⁹¹ PmbZ #21915.

⁹⁹² DVORNIK, Photian schism, 138.

⁹⁹³ PmbZ #5248.

⁹⁹⁴ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 130.

⁹⁹⁵ PmbZ #22537.

⁹⁹⁶ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 138ff.

⁹⁹⁷ GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 238-240; PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 122.

⁹⁹⁸ GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 234; PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 118-120.

⁹⁹⁹ PmbZ #22001.

¹⁰⁰⁰ PmbZ #24983.

was also rejected by Hadrian II. Boris was therefore disappointed and felt compelled to turn to the church of Constantinople. At the same time, if we are to believe the narrative of *Vita Basilii*, "...by repeated exhortations, splendid receptions, and magnanimous generosity and gifts, Basil I persuaded the Bulgarians to accept an archbishop and to allow their country to be covered with a network of bishoprics..."¹⁰⁰¹.

During the last session of the synod of 870, Bulgarian envoys, headed by the *kavkhan* Peter, unexpectedly showed up. They were instructed by Boris to ask the council whether Bulgaria belonged to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome or of Constantinople. Initially, the papal legates bitterly protested and argued that they did not have the authority to vote over the the Bulgarian issue. However, Basil and the reinstated patriarch Ignatios, along with the Byzantine clergymen and the representatives of the Eastern patriarchates prevailed; the issue was thus discussed and it was decided that Bulgaria initially was and would henceforth be under the jurisdiction of Constantinople¹⁰⁰².

It is rather ironic that Ignatios for whom Nicholas fought to restore to the patriarchal throne upon the condition that he would not interfere with the papal interests in Bulgaria, was eventually the one responsible for removing Bulgaria from papal jurisdiction. Boris was eventually granted a semiautonomous archbishop and promises that in the future the Bulgarian church would be more independent, a fact that satisfied him.

During the concerned in-study period (858-867), it becomes apparent that Byzantium tried to avoid an open confrontation with the papacy. However, Photios' first letter to Nicholas gave him an opportunity to get involved with the affairs of the Byzantine church. More specifically, Photios was perhaps too

¹⁰⁰¹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 312, 6-13.

¹⁰⁰² DVORNIK, Photian schism, 151-156; FINE, Balkans, 124-126; GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 228-244; GJUZELEV, Medieval Bulgaria, 154-159; HUPCHICK, Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 139-141; PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 122-124; SIMEONOVA, Diplomacy, 261-273.

polite and honest to Nicholas, as he stated that he was ordained against his will¹⁰⁰³. Nicholas' replies to the Byzantine emperor and patriarch were truly unexpected; he refused to identify Photios as a patriarch and openly questioned the emperor's right to summon a council without the pope's approval and, acting as a superior ecclesiastical judge, doubted the personal and moral conduct of the patriarch of Constantinople.

The pope's attitude and response was truly unheard of. He explained that he could not consent to Photios' election and the recognition of his ordination until he found out by his own legates that Ignatios had indeed given up on his throne freely. Afterwards, these legates, i.e. Radoald and Zacharias, were to return to Rome and submit a report to the pope, which he would then have to examine it, and only after that would he ultimately decide what was to be done. In an effort to soothe Nicholas' demands, they came to terms with his far-fetched requests. But Byzantium's attempt to change Nicholas policy did not bear fruit; the pope refused to accept the decisions of the subsequent *πρωτοδευτέρα σύνοδος* (861). Nevertheless, as Dvornik and Pheidas claim, the fact that the Byzantine church consented to Nicholas demands and accepted a re-trial of Ignatios case meant that Constantinople recognized Rome as the supreme arbitrator in all ecclesiastical affairs¹⁰⁰⁴.

Photios' second letter to the pope made matters worse. When Nicholas requested the return of the jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria to the bishop of Rome, Photios stated that he would have been willing to satisfy his demands, but he was not authorized to make such a concession¹⁰⁰⁵; Nicholas would have to negotiate with the emperor over such matters. Such statements apparently reinforced Nicholas' aspirations that Illyricum and the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria could become Roman

¹⁰⁰³ Phot. Epist. 288 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 114-120.

¹⁰⁰⁴ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 91; PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 104.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Phot. Epist. 290 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK III), 137-138.

again. It has to be pointed out that Nicholas' argumentation was based on the forged collection of the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, whose ultimate aim was to promote the Roman primacy. In fact, under Nicholas' time, it was the first time that this forged collection was used to serve the pope's arguments¹⁰⁰⁶.

In 864, the Christianization of Bulgaria took place and their ruler, Boris, was baptized and received the additional name of Michael, from Michael III, who acted as a godfather to the newly-baptized Bulgarian ruler. Yet, the Christianization of Bulgaria was not straightforward; in 866 Boris turned once more to Louis the German and to Nicholas I. The situation was eventually settled in 870, with the Bulgarian envoys unexpectedly showing up in 870 in the last session of the synod held in Constantinople. Yet, I would like to underline that when Byzantium first heard of pope's plans regarding the Christianization of the Bulgarians by the Eastern Franks, probably in 862 from the ambassador Leon¹⁰⁰⁷, it reacted quickly; in 864 the Byzantines made a surprising combined attack from land and sea and forced Boris to capitulate immediately.

On behalf of the Byzantine empire, this shows that under the reign of Michael III state and church, despite the internal conflicts between the "extremists" and "moderates", were functioning in harmony. In the meanwhile, it must be noted that Byzantium could not afford an expansion of papal authority and Frankish influence into the heart of the Balkan peninsula. For Byzantium, it was of utmost importance that Bulgaria would be converted to Christianity according to the Christian Orthodox doctrine and be placed under the ecclesiastical sphere of Constantinople.

At the same time, the Christianization of Boris was considered to be a landmark in the history of Bulgaria; his conversion is attested not only in the

¹⁰⁰⁶ CHRYSOS, Imperium and Sacerdotium, 332-333.

¹⁰⁰⁷ PmbZ #4509.

Bulgarian apocryphal literature, which I have presented above, but also on an inscription found in Ballsh (Glavinica)¹⁰⁰⁸. Michael III's features and achievements had also influenced the Bulgarian Apocryphal literature and were also transferred over to the figure of Boris-Michael. This demonstrates that contemporary and future historiographers beyond the borders of the empire did not regard Michael III as a drunken, pathetic, and indifferent emperor, but rather as an ideal emperor, whose achievements had eschatological meaning.

In 865, Byzantium changed its attitude towards Nicholas I. Michael III sent a letter to pope Nicholas I, with which he put an end to the soothing and submissive attitude of Constantinople towards the pope's demands¹⁰⁰⁹. Although the imperial letter is not preserved, we do know that it was very severe in tone, and that it contained insults for the Latin language. These insults were in 867 exploited by Nicholas I, in his effort to unite the Western church against the "heretic Greeks". However, his endeavor was not meant to last; during the course of the same year he passed away, while Photios was forced to resign by Basil, who aimed to be on good terms with Rome.

Overall, during Nicholas I's pontificate, Constantinople witnessed an unprecedented challenge from the papacy, through which he asserted to promote the Roman primacy and its jurisdictional limits, and become the ultimate judge in all ecclesiastical affairs in both East and West. Yet, ultimately, he did not gain anything; the jurisdiction over Illyricum and the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria were retained by the church of Constantinople, Ignatios was not reinstated according to Nicholas I's conditions, and Bulgaria remained

¹⁰⁰⁸ See below, pp. 368-372.

¹⁰⁰⁹ CHRYSOS, *A War*, 261.

under the ecclesiastical sphere of Constantinople. During his last days, even the citizens of Rome were dissatisfied with this policy¹⁰¹⁰.

¹⁰¹⁰ Anastasios Bibliothecarios, in his letter to Ado of Vienna, dated in 14 December 867, describes that the dissatisfaction of Nicholas' policy was at that time widespread in Rome. See: Anastasius bibliothecarius, ep.3, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi V. Monumenta Germaniae Historica VII* (ed. P. KEHR). Berlin 1928, 400-402.

Chapter IV: Emperor at war

During the reign of Michael III, in the military sense, one of the most glorious eras of Byzantine military history takes place. Not only was the Eastern frontier strengthened and had its fortifications reinforced, but the Arab raids were also held under control. Between 856 and 863, the Byzantine campaigns against the Arabs were marked with brilliant success; and on some of these campaigns the Byzantine emperor was personally leading the expedition.

Since 863, namely after the battle of Poson, no important Arab success in the East is recorded. At the same time, in 860 the Rhos attacked the Byzantine capital for the first time. Although the emperor and his uncle Bardas were not in Constantinople, the attack of the Rhos was successfully repulsed; the former were once more campaigning against the Arabs in Asia Minor.

The biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty historiographers i.e. Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii, have described Michael III's campaigns in a very partial and misleading manner; sometimes they merely speak of his victories, sometimes they make no mention of the outcome of the expeditions, whereas sometimes they even describe deliberately an imaginary defeat of his army. As a result, his military achievements have not been adequately presented and appreciated.

Beginning with the regency of Theodora, in this chapter I present in a chronological order the military operations that took place between 842 and 867. For a more comprehensive allocation of the events that took place, I have divided the chapter to three sub-chapters: (i) Sicily and Southern Italy, (ii) Crete, (iii) Constantinople: The Russian attack on the Byzantine capital in 860, and (iv) Asia Minor. To conduct an as much impartial study as possible, I have also included the narration of the events by non-Byzantine

sources¹⁰¹¹. Not only is their account on the events fuller and more accurate -as they do not aim at suppressing or distorting the outcomes of Michael III's campaigns, but they also serve as a medium of *synkrisis* in order to extract historical truth from propaganda.

Sicily and Southern Italy (i)

In 841 the Aghlabid Arabs¹⁰¹² captured Bari¹⁰¹³, which was once a major port of the Byzantines on the Adriatic coast. The Arab conquest of Bari was perceived as a serious loss for the Byzantine government; in the same year, Constantinople asked Venice to send a fleet to Southern Italy in order to restore the control over the area, but the fleet was eventually thrashed by the Arabs¹⁰¹⁴. Although under Lombard rule, the emperors of the Amorian dynasty had overall still viewed Sicily as part of the Empire; it was considered as an area of great strategic importance as it repelled the the Arab raids and reassert dominion in Southern Italy¹⁰¹⁵. Theophilos' endeavors to establish a common line of defence between Byzantium and the Franks against the Arabs that invaded Sicily and the fact that he sent Alexios Mosele¹⁰¹⁶, who was

¹⁰¹¹ I do not present an exhaustive list of the non-Byzantine sources that narrate the events; I only refer to the one that provides the most detailed account of the event. I also refrain from dealing with the number of the troops involved in the expeditions. My main focus is on the outcome of the expeditions and whether the historical truth has been masked or not, as part of the biased Byzantine historians to blacken Michael III's image.

¹⁰¹² The Aghlabid Arabs were a Muslim dynasty whose territory included Ifrīqīyah (modern Tunisia) and Algeria, whose capital was al-Kayrawān. In 800 they were granted considerable rights of autonomy, but they were still reigning under the authority of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Aghlabid Arabs were mostly occupied with their struggle in Sicily, the nearby islands and Southern Italy; they did not get involved with naval warfare on the Eastern Mediterranean. On the Aghlabid Arabs, indicatively see: CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 40-41; EI², II, 247-250 (Aghlabids or Banu I'-Aghlab); KENNEDY, *Prophet*, 313-314.

¹⁰¹³ BURY, *ERE*, 298; KREUTZ, *Normans*, 35; METCALFE, *Muslims*, 19ff.; NASSE, *Villages*, 20; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, *Δρόμων*, 48; VENNING, *Chronology*, 252. Vasiliev dates the event in 842. See: VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 209, 442; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 281.

¹⁰¹⁴ MUSCA, *L' emirato*, 15-20; KREUTZ, *Normans*, 25. VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 182.

¹⁰¹⁵ KREUTZ, *Normans*, 24; TOBIAS, *Basil I*, 152-153; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 282ff.

¹⁰¹⁶ PmbZ #195.

inaugurated caesar, to be in charge of the Byzantine military troops on the island are evident on the matter¹⁰¹⁷.

Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus are silent of the event; the capture of Bari is attested only in the account of Vita Basilii. The anonymous author of Basil I's biography reports that the Arabs, having failed to seize Ragusa, lifted the siege, crossed over to Langobardia and captured Bari¹⁰¹⁸. He does not neglect to belittle Michael III by mentioning that he was indifferent on the matter (καίτοι σχεδὸν οὐκ ἀγν<ο>οῦντες ὥς εἰς ἄλλα μᾶλλον ὁ κρατῶν ἀπησχόληται¹⁰¹⁹).

The most notable local source that reports the event is the anonymous medieval chronicle known as the Chronicle of Cambridge; it survives in two versions, a Greek and an Arabic one and it covers the events from 827 to 965¹⁰²⁰. The Liber Pontificalis is briefly mentioning the advance of the Arabs¹⁰²¹. The principal Arab source for the emirate of Bari is al-Balādhurī. His work, Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān (Book of the conquests of lands)¹⁰²², provides a detailed description of the Arab conquests and campaigns in the Italian mainland¹⁰²³. Afterwards, many of his descriptions were copied based on the letter by Ibn al-Athīr¹⁰²⁴. The majority of Arab historians has remarkably not mentioned the capture of Bari, as they considered it as a rather minor achievement of the early Islamic history¹⁰²⁵.

¹⁰¹⁷ CODOÑER, Theophilos, 168, 321-328; EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 178-179; VLYSIDOU et al., Στρατεύματα, 284, 288.

¹⁰¹⁸ THEOPH. CONT., V, 192, 33-194, 45.

¹⁰¹⁹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 190, 15-16.

¹⁰²⁰ For the Greek version, see: Kleinchroniken I, 326-340 (text and commentary); also, commentary of the Chronicle by A. Vasiliev in: VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 342-346.

¹⁰²¹ LP II, 81, 21-29 (life of Gregory [PmbZ #2524]).

¹⁰²² AL-BALĀDHURĪ, Origins, 371-375 (English translation).

¹⁰²³ METCALFE, Muslims, 19.

¹⁰²⁴ METCALFE, Muslims, 19.

¹⁰²⁵ METCALFE, Muslims, 19.

By the end of Theophilos' reign, most of the western part of Sicily was occupied by the Arabs¹⁰²⁶. In 847 the emirate of Bari was founded, which was used by the Arabs to make further advances on Southern Italy¹⁰²⁷. The first Arab emir to rule the emirate was Kalfon¹⁰²⁸; he ruled from 847 to 853 and continued the disruptive raids in the area¹⁰²⁹. The second one was al-Mufarraġ bin Sallām (853-856)¹⁰³⁰; during his reign, the political and religious awareness of the emirate had grown¹⁰³¹. The last emir of Bari was Sawdān, also known as Seodan or Saugdan, and he ruled from 861 to 871¹⁰³². On 2 February, 871 Bari was retaken by Louis II¹⁰³³, and a few years later, in 875, Bari was once again occupied by the Byzantines¹⁰³⁴. However, even after the fall of Bari, Southern Italy was still raided by the Arabs, but their raids were less threatening¹⁰³⁵.

The Aghlabid Arabs were invading Sicily since 827¹⁰³⁶. During that period, many of its inhabitants were forced to abandon their belongings and flee to Peloponnesos¹⁰³⁷. One of them was Athanasios¹⁰³⁸, bishop of Methone¹⁰³⁹. While he was at a young age, his parents were forced to seek refuge in Patras to avoid

¹⁰²⁶ VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 285.

¹⁰²⁷ On the emirate of Bari see: EICKHOFF, *Seekrieg*, 180-186; MUSCA, *L' emirato*, 28ff. (with quotations from the primary sources); PRYOR – JEFFREYS, *Δρόμων*, 48-49; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 282 (also cit. n. 128, with further bibliography)

¹⁰²⁸ AL-BALĀDHURĪ, *Origins*, 371-372; PmbZ #23660.

¹⁰²⁹ METCALFE, *Muslims*, 20.

¹⁰³⁰ METCALFE, *Muslims*, 20.

¹⁰³¹ AL-BALĀDHURĪ, *Origins*, 372; METCALFE, *Muslims*, 20.

¹⁰³² AL-BALĀDHURĪ, *Origins*, 372; PmbZ #26997; Alex Metcalfe gives the dates 857 to 865; see: METCALFE, *Muslims*, 21.

¹⁰³³ PmbZ #24755. On the subsequent events of 871 at Bari, see: KREUTZ, *Normans*, 57; VENNING, *Chronology*, 273; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 303ff. (with further bibliography on the matter); VLYSIDOU, *Πολιτική*, 305.

¹⁰³⁴ On the events that transpired in 875 see: VENNING, *Chronology*, 275; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 305 (and cit. n. 278, with further bibliography on the matter).

¹⁰³⁵ VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 305ff.

¹⁰³⁶ EI², II, 248 (Aghlabids or Banu I'-Aghlab); FREGOSI, *Jihad*, 130ff.; KISLINGER, *Regionalgeschichte*, 126; METCALFE, *Muslims*, 9ff.; NASSE, *Villages*, 20; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, *Δρόμων*, 48; *Kleinchroniken I*, 45/1, 331; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 282.

¹⁰³⁷ EICKHOFF, *Seekrieg*, 189; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 219.

¹⁰³⁸ PmbZ #20663.

¹⁰³⁹ For Methone (Modon) in medieval times, see: E. FOLLIERI, *Santi di Metone: Atanasio vescovo, Leone taumaturgo*. *BYZ* 41 (1971) 378-399.

the massacre. In his funeral oration, written by Petros of Argos in the late ninth century, the misfortunes the Arabs inflicted on the local population are described¹⁰⁴⁰.

In 831 they sacked Palermo¹⁰⁴¹, and in c. 838 they sacked Bridisi, an important seaport of the Adriatic sea, which was at that time held by the Lombards¹⁰⁴². In 839-840 they occupied Taranto¹⁰⁴³. After capturing Bari, in 841 they established their position on the island and were able to raid much farther north along the Adriatic coast than ever before¹⁰⁴⁴. On the same year, Capua was also sacked¹⁰⁴⁵. A couple of years later, in 844-845 Messina was sacked¹⁰⁴⁶ and in 845 the fort of Modica also fell to the Arabs¹⁰⁴⁷. Messina and Modica were considered as two of the most important Byzantine strongholds in Italy and their loss had greatly alarmed the Byzantine government¹⁰⁴⁸.

It was then when the regency of Theodora decided to send more troops to Sicily to reinforce its defences and reassert dominion on the island. These troops were stationed near the fort of Butera, West of Modica fort, where the battle of Charzanites took place, which ended with the heavy defeat of the

¹⁰⁴⁰ PETER OF ARGOS, Funeral Oration, 78-79.

¹⁰⁴¹ On the capture of Palermo by the Arabs, see: NEF, Palermo, 31ff. (with further bibliography on the matter); BURY, ERE, 304; FREGOSI, Jihad, 133; KISLINGER, Regionalgeschichte, 127; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 48; Kleinchroniken I, 45/3, 331.

¹⁰⁴² CODOÑER, Theophilos, 321; KREUTZ, Normans, 25; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 48; VLYSIDOU et al., ΣΤΡΑΤΕΥΜΑΤΑ, 282.

¹⁰⁴³ KREUTZ, Normans, 25; VLYSIDOU et al., ΣΤΡΑΤΕΥΜΑΤΑ, 282.

¹⁰⁴⁴ KREUTZ, Normans, 25ff; METCALFE, Muslims, 19; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 48-49.

¹⁰⁴⁵ KREUTZ, Normans, 54; METCALFE, Muslims, 19.

¹⁰⁴⁶ On the matter, see: ALEXANDER, Tradition, 85; BURY, ERE, 305-406; E. KISLINGER, War Messina bereits ab 842/843 arabisch? In: ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ. Studi di onore di Rosario Anastasi II (ed. A. CARILE et al.), Catania 1994, 207-208 (with quotations from the primary sources); PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 48; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 205, 442; VLYSIDOU et al., ΣΤΡΑΤΕΥΜΑΤΑ, 285.

¹⁰⁴⁷ BURY, ERE, 306; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 205, 442; VENNING, Chronology, 254; VLYSIDOU et al., ΣΤΡΑΤΕΥΜΑΤΑ, 285.

¹⁰⁴⁸ The capture of Modica by the Arabs is also attested in the Chronicle of Cambridge. “ἔτους ,ςτνγ’ ἐπιόσθησαν τὰ καστέλλια τῆς Τουρακιναίας καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Ἀνανίας τῆς Μούτικας, ἰνδικτιῶνος η’”. See: Kleinchroniken I, 45/6, 331.

Byzantine forces¹⁰⁴⁹. The name of the battle derives from the fact that the Byzantine troops that took part originated from Charsianon, which was probably a *kleisoura* at the time¹⁰⁵⁰. In spite of their defeat near the fort of Butera, the fact that Byzantine troops were sent overseas from Asia Minor to Southern Sicily testifies the direct interest of Theodora's regency in Sicily –as a continuation of Theophilos' policy on the island¹⁰⁵¹, and that the Byzantines were aware of the growing Arab threat¹⁰⁵².

Having conquered most of Sicily and made considerable advances in Southern Italy, the Arabs attack Rome in August 846¹⁰⁵³. The Arab danger was already known; according to *Liber Pontificalis*, the source that provides the most detailed narrative of the event¹⁰⁵⁴, two weeks before the attack, Adalbert, the count of Corsica, sent a letter to Pope Sergios II¹⁰⁵⁵ to warn him about the imminent Arab attack, but the warning had not been taken seriously¹⁰⁵⁶. It should be noted that the Byzantine sources make no mention of the Arab attack on Rome, nor is it recorded on the *Chronicle of Cambridge*.

The Arab raid landed at Ostia and Portus. In a desperate –and rather late– attempt to hold them off, a neophyte army consisting of Saxons, Frisians, Franks and local militia was recruited and was sent to Ostia¹⁰⁵⁷. Having spent a few days stationed in Ostia, the neophyte army managed to annihilate only a limited number of Arab raiders, as they did not come across the main Arab

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Kleinchroniken* I, 45/7, 332; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 205-206, 442; VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 285-286.

¹⁰⁵⁰ VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 299-300.

¹⁰⁵¹ CODOÑER, *Theophilos*, 321-328.

¹⁰⁵² VLYSIDOU et al., *Στρατεύματα*, 286-288.

¹⁰⁵³ EICKHOFF, *Seekrieg*, 182-183; KREUTZ, *Normans*, 26ff.; METCALFE, *Muslims*, 18; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, *Δρόμων*, 48; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 210-212, 442; VENNING, *Chronology*, 255.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *LP* II, 100, 6-101, 11 (life of Sergius II).

¹⁰⁵⁵ *PmbZ* #6691.

¹⁰⁵⁶ KREUTZ, *Normans*, 26 (and cit. n. 29, with comments on the primary sources).

¹⁰⁵⁷ KREUTZ, *Normans*, 26.

army. However, when they were about to return to Rome, the Arabs intercepted them and slaughtered the defending army¹⁰⁵⁸.

The Arabs were now free to advance to Rome, which was their main target¹⁰⁵⁹. When they reached the outskirts of Rome, they plundered some of the most impressive churches of Christianity, including St. Peter's and the basilicas dedicated to St. Paul and St. Lawrence; these churches were outside the Aurelian walls and thus easy targets for the Arabs¹⁰⁶⁰.

Unlike other Arab attacks on Southern Italy, the Arab attack on Rome had a huge impact on the mindset of the local contemporary historiographers. The compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis*, who describes the event as if he had experienced it, narrates that the Arab attack was considered as a divine vengeance for the state to which pope Sergios and his brother had reduced the church¹⁰⁶¹. Unfortunately, the narrative of LP ends abruptly just when the citizens of Rome had gathered to resist the approaching invaders at "the field of Nero"¹⁰⁶². We do learn that the Arabs essentially accomplished their objectives; they desecrated the most holy churches and shrines, i.e. St. Peter's high altar¹⁰⁶³.

The Arab attack of 846 on Rome had wide-ranging repercussions on a political level as well; this was the first time the Holy City had been attacked since the fifth century¹⁰⁶⁴. Lothair¹⁰⁶⁵, the king of Italy and son of Louis the Pious¹⁰⁶⁶, quickly arranged for troops to be sent on South Italy to secure the

¹⁰⁵⁸ KREUTZ, Normans, 26.

¹⁰⁵⁹ KREUTZ, Normans, 26.

¹⁰⁶⁰ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 182-183; KREUTZ, Normans, 27; VENNING, Chronology, 255.

¹⁰⁶¹ LP II, 104, n.38; also DAVIS, Lives, 74.

¹⁰⁶² The compiler most likely means the area once known as the circus of Nero, which is outside the Aurelian walls and between the Tiber and St. Peter's. See: KREUTZ, Normans, 27.

¹⁰⁶³ KREUTZ, Normans, 27 (and cit. n. 33).

¹⁰⁶⁴ KREUTZ, Normans, 27.

¹⁰⁶⁵ PmbZ #4619.

¹⁰⁶⁶ PmbZ #4625.

city's defences and repel the invaders; this army was led by his son¹⁰⁶⁷, the future king Louis II¹⁰⁶⁸. In addition to that, he funded the construction of the Leonine walls, which could surround the church of St. Peter and the papal enclave¹⁰⁶⁹. In practice, these measures would prove to be crucial in the near future. In 849, when the Arabs threatened Rome again, their attack was successfully repelled; later in the spring of the same year, the Carolingian triumph was concluded with the naval battle at Ostia, where the Arab fleet was crashed¹⁰⁷⁰. Since then, the Holy City was never threatened again from the Arabs.

Having achieved the goals of their attack, on November of 846 the Arabs headed South, along the Appian Way, in order to get to their ships near Gaeta and sail off. There, a Carolingian naval force had assembled to confront them, but was eventually crashed¹⁰⁷¹. In general, from the very first years since the emirate of Bari was founded (847), the Byzantine and Carolingian forces had been overwhelmingly defeated by the Arabs. This trend was set to continue for the next decades as well. To make matters worse, as B. Kreutz thoroughly remarks, the Arabs were not only sacking some of the most important cities of Southern Italy, they were also pillaging the Christian monasteries and churches¹⁰⁷².

Continuing their operations, in 846-847 the Arabs sacked Lentini, in Sicily. It appears that the Arabs were aware of the defensive plan of the Byzantines¹⁰⁷³. A Byzantine fleet was sent –probably from Syracuse- to assist the defenders,

¹⁰⁶⁷ KREUTZ, Normans, 27.

¹⁰⁶⁸ PmbZ #4620.

¹⁰⁶⁹ KREUTZ, Normans, 28.

¹⁰⁷⁰ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg 187; KREUTZ, Normans, 28, 35; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 211, 442; VENNING, Chronology, 256.

¹⁰⁷¹ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 183; KREUTZ, Normans, 27.

¹⁰⁷² KREUTZ, Normans, 28.

¹⁰⁷³ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 206-207, 442; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 288-289.

but it was sank to a storm near Mondello¹⁰⁷⁴. In 848, Ragusa was also sacked by the Arabs. In the same year, the Chronicle of Cambridge records that a famine took place in Sicily¹⁰⁷⁵, a fact that seems to have favored the Arab operations.

By 853 the Arabs had raided the South-East part of Sicily; they had sacked the surroundings of Catania, Syracuse and Noto, and they raided the fort of Butera¹⁰⁷⁶. This is the second time that the Arab army gathered at Butera; they were previously pillaged by the fort in 845, where they had crushed the Byzantine forces in the so-called battle of Charzanites. This time they besieged the fort for five months, forced the Byzantine troops to surrender and freed c. five thousand Arab prisoners¹⁰⁷⁷. As V. Vlysidou claims, although the Byzantines were almost regularly defeated, the fact that the Arabs had to besiege the fort of Butera for five months, before its garrison capitulated, indicates that the Byzantines had not given up on their authority on the island and were a formidable adversary¹⁰⁷⁸.

Over the course of the next years, the Aghlabid Arabs continued their operations on the Southeastern part of Sicily by plundering villages and destroying Byzantine forts. In 855-856, the Arabs ravaged the suburbs of Enna (Castrogiovanni)¹⁰⁷⁹, and in 857-858 Syracuse, Taormina, possibly the fort of Gagliano, as well as the fort of Cephaloedum¹⁰⁸⁰. The Arab winning streak was brought to an end in 858, at the naval battle that took place most likely near Syracuse¹⁰⁸¹. Having lost the battle, the remaining Arab fleet retreated to

¹⁰⁷⁴ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 188; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 207; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 289.

¹⁰⁷⁵ “ἔτους ,ςτνς’ παρελήφθησαν οἱ Ρογοὶ καὶ ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἰσχυρὸς, ἰνδυκτιῶνος ια’”. See: Kleinchroniken I, 45/9, 332.

¹⁰⁷⁶ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 207-208; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 289.

¹⁰⁷⁷ “ἔτους ,ςτξβ’ παρελήφθη ὁ Βοθήρ, ἰνδυκτιῶνος [ι]β’”. See: Kleinchroniken I, 45/11, 332.

¹⁰⁷⁸ VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 289.

¹⁰⁷⁹ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 219.

¹⁰⁸⁰ BURY, ERE, 307; EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 189; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 219; VENNING, Chronology, 259.

¹⁰⁸¹ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 203-204; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 289 (and cit. n. 183).

Palermo¹⁰⁸². According to Vlysidou, in charge of the Byzantine fleet was Leon¹⁰⁸³, also known as Kretikos, who held the rank of *droungarios tou ploimou*¹⁰⁸⁴.

It is worth mentioning that since 15 March 856, Michael III was the sole ruler of the Empire. The fact that a Byzantine fleet was sent to Sicily in 858 testifies that during Michael III's reign the Arab invasion in Sicily and South Italy was not regarded as a matter of lesser importance; Sicily and Southern Italy were still considered parts of the empire, just as they were during Theodora's regency and Theophilos and Michael II's reign. The naval victory of 858 is not mentioned in the Byzantine sources; we learn of it from the *Chronicle of Cambridge*¹⁰⁸⁵ and the Arab sources¹⁰⁸⁶. As A. Rémondon has rightfully pointed out, the Byzantine sources deliberately concealed the naval victory, as they did with the rest Byzantine naval victories in the East between 853 and 859, in an effort to further blacken Michael III's image¹⁰⁸⁷.

The Byzantine naval victory was not enough to disrupt the Arabs from gradually conquering the island. On the 24th of January 859, the fort of Enna (Castrogiovanni) was sacked by the Arabs¹⁰⁸⁸. Enna was of great importance to the Byzantine dominion in Sicily and its loss greatly concerned the Byzantine government, so they responded immediately¹⁰⁸⁹. In 859-860, a large Byzantine fleet was sent to Sicily in a new effort to stop the Arabs from making further advances on the island. In charge of the Byzantine fleet was Ioannes¹⁰⁹⁰, who

¹⁰⁸² VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 219-220; VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 289.

¹⁰⁸³ PmbZ #4455.

¹⁰⁸⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 342.

¹⁰⁸⁵ “ἔτους ,ςτξς’ ἐπιάρσθησαν τὰ καράβια τοῦ Ἀλί, ἰνδικτιῶνος ς’”. See: *Kleinchroniken I*, 45/12, 332.

¹⁰⁸⁶ For the Arab sources who mention the event, see: BURY, *ERE*, 307 (and cit. n. 6).

¹⁰⁸⁷ RÉMONDON, *Damiette*, 249.

¹⁰⁸⁸ “ἔτους ,στξζ’ παρεδόθη τὸ Ἐννε, ἰνδικτιῶνος η’”. See: *Kleinchroniken I*, 45/13, 331.

¹⁰⁸⁹ VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 292.

¹⁰⁹⁰ PmbZ #3309.

was droungarios tou ploimou¹⁰⁹¹ and Konstantinos Kontomytes¹⁰⁹², the strategos¹⁰⁹³ of the Thracesion and Sicilian Theme. The Byzantine fleet landed near Syracuse but was utterly defeated by the Arabs¹⁰⁹⁴.

This defeat, which is also mentioned in the Chronicle of Cambridge¹⁰⁹⁵, was the last attempt on behalf of Michael III's government to try to revert the situation in Sicily. Since then, during Michael III's reign no Byzantine fleet was sent to Sicily to try to suppress the Arab raids and defend the remaining Byzantine cities on the island. At the same time, no major Arab raid is recorded between 861 and 865; probably because the Arabs were facing internal conflicts during that period¹⁰⁹⁶. However, the fact that no more Byzantine troops were sent to Sicily was not because of the lack of Arab operations during that period; nor was it because the Byzantines were more focused on the Eastern frontier of the Empire and could not afford to send troops in the west.

The argument of the Theophanes Continuatus, “Ἀκολουθῶς γὰρ τοῖς καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἐσπέραν πραγμάτων ἐπὶ πλεον ἄμεληθέντων ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Μιχαήλ, καὶ πάσης σχεδὸν Ἰταλίας...” (Michael had neglected the matters in the west, along with everything else), should be reviewed very cautiously¹⁰⁹⁷. From my point of view, this should be considered an indicative example of the biased Byzantine historiographers' pattern to further blacken his image. This becomes more apparent if we reverse the argument. If Michael III was indeed neglecting the matters in the West, no Byzantines troops would have been sent to Sicily after 15 March 856, i.e. the date he assumed the throne as a sole ruler.

¹⁰⁹¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 342.

¹⁰⁹² PmbZ #3929.

¹⁰⁹³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹⁰⁹⁴ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 191; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 221; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 292.

¹⁰⁹⁵ “ἔτους ,στξη΄ κατῆλθεν ὁ Κονδομύττης, ἰνδικτιῶνος η΄”. See: Kleinchroniken I, 45/14, 332.

¹⁰⁹⁶ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 261-262; VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 296.

¹⁰⁹⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 188, 1-3.

However, as I have already described, two major operations have taken place in the West post 15 March. The first one is dated in 858; having met the Arabs near Syracuse, the Byzantine fleet, with Leon Kretikos¹⁰⁹⁸ in charge, managed to score a noteworthy victory against the Hagarenes. The second one is dated in 859-860 and regards the aforementioned naval defeat of Ioannes¹⁰⁹⁹, and Constantinos Kontomytes¹¹⁰⁰. Although the outcome of the battle was grim for the Byzantines, it does testify that Michael III was not indifferent to the matters in the West.

The lack of any Byzantine operation in the West after 860 is closely connected with the shift in the diplomatic and religious affairs between the Old and the New Rome. Nicholas I's endeavors to regain jurisdiction over Illyricum and the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria, along with the fact that he fought with Constantinople over the religious missions in the Balkans and the conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity, had as a result the deterioration of his affiliation with Constantinople¹¹⁰¹. As Vlysidou remarks, taking into consideration Nicholas I's religious policy, Constantinople was no longer willing to undertake any further military operations in the West¹¹⁰²; combating the Arabs in Sicily and Southern Italy and offering military aid to a pope, who was disturbing their political and religious affairs, was no longer seen as a matter of primary importance. On the other hand, taking advantage of the conflicts between the Papacy and the patriarchate of Constantinople, the Arabs made further advances on the island. In Sicily, when Michael III died, in 23-24 September 867, only Syracuse and Taormina were controlled by the Byzantines¹¹⁰³.

¹⁰⁹⁸ PmbZ #4455.

¹⁰⁹⁹ PmbZ #3309.

¹¹⁰⁰ PmbZ #3929.

¹¹⁰¹ See above, Chapter III.

¹¹⁰² VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 296.

¹¹⁰³ VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 297.



Locations of the battles that took place in South Italy and Sicily (Bing Maps):

1. In 841 the Aghlabid Arabs capture Bari, and in 847 they found the emirate of Bari.
2. In 831 the Aghlabid Arabs sack Palermo.
3. In 838 the Aghlabid Arabs sack Bridisi.
4. In 839-840 the Aghlabid Arabs occupy Taranto.
5. In 841 Capua is sacked by the Aghlabid Arabs.
6. In 844-845 the Aghlabid Arabs sack Mesina and the fort of Modica.
7. In 845 the battle of Charzanites takes place near the fort of Butera, West of the fort of Modica; the Byzantines are defeated.
8. Rome is raided in 846. The Aghlabid Arabs pillage St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Lawrence.
9. In November 846 the Aghlabid Arabs defeat the Carolingian fleet near Gaeta.
10. In 846-847 the Aghlabid Arabs sack Lentini.
11. In 848 Ragusa is sacked by the Aghlabid Arabs.
12. In 843 the Aghlabid Arabs sack the surroundings of Catania (12a), Syracuse (12b), and Noto (12c).
13. In 856 the castle of Castrogiovanni in Enna is sacked by the Aghlabid Arabs.
14. In 857-858 Syracuse (14a) and Taormina (14b).
15. In 858 the Byzantines defeat the Aghlabid Arab fleet near Syracuse and bring an end to their winning streak.
16. On 24 January 859 Enna is sacked by the Aghlabid Arabs.
17. In 859/860 the large Byzantine fleet is defeated by the Aghlabid Arabs near Syracuse.

Crete (ii)

Crete was the target of Arab incursions as early as the time of Mu'āwīya (661-680)¹¹⁰⁴. The Arabs that conquered Crete and founded the emirate of Crete (c. 824-961) were Andalusian Arabs, i.e. Arabs of Spain¹¹⁰⁵. At the beginning of the ninth century, these Arabs, who were mostly situated in Cordoba, were ruthlessly suppressed by the Umayyad emir al-Hakam, and were forced to leave their country¹¹⁰⁶. A party of them reached Morocco and settled there. Another party became pirates in the central and Eastern Mediterranean. Their leader was Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar¹¹⁰⁷.

Upon fleeing from Spain, this group passed by Sicily and the African coast, and conducted raids in the Aegean coast and Crete. It is very likely that they first raided on Crete on 813¹¹⁰⁸, before they eventually settled in Alexandria around 814-815¹¹⁰⁹. There, taking advantage of the internal conflict that existed in the Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt, they managed to seize Alexandria in 818, while at the same time they continued their raids in the Aegean coast and Crete¹¹¹⁰. However, a few years later, the Caliph al-Ma'mūn¹¹¹¹ sent his general 'Abd Allāh bn. Tāhir to recapture the city; in 825, the Andalusian Arabs were defeated, but they were allowed to leave on the condition that they would not try to settle to any other Muslim-owned land¹¹¹².

¹¹⁰⁴ PmbZ #5185. On the Arab incursions on Crete see the detailed account of the Encyclopaedia of Islam: EI², III, 1082-1087 (Ikṛīṭish).

¹¹⁰⁵ EI², III, 1082-1087 (Ikṛīṭish).

¹¹⁰⁶ CHRISTIDES, Conquest, 81-83; TSOUGARAKIS, Crete, 30-31.

¹¹⁰⁷ PmbZ #69.

¹¹⁰⁸ TSOUGARAKIS, Crete, 37.

¹¹⁰⁹ CHRISTIDES, Conquest, 84.

¹¹¹⁰ CHRISTIDES, Conquest, 84; TSOUGARAKIS, Crete, 30. On the connections between the Andalusian Arabs and the Egyptian authorities see: KUBIAK, Damietta, 53-54.

¹¹¹¹ PmbZ #4689.

¹¹¹² TSOUGARAKIS, Crete, 31.

The conquest of Crete by the Andalusian Arabs was not a coincidental event; it was a mission already planned. According to V. Christides, the Egyptians even urged the Andalusians to conquer Crete by providing the navy transport to the island. It also seems that they were aware of the revolt of Thomas the Slav, the disorder it had caused to the Byzantine empire, as well as that Crete was not adequately protected¹¹¹³.

The date of the conquest of Crete by the Andalusian Arabs has caused much debate for a long time. The main problem is that the dates provided by the Greek, Arabic and Syriac sources are conflicting¹¹¹⁴. N. Panayotakes mentions that the solution appears to be that the conquest of the island took place in chronological stages –hence the chronological contradictions in the sources¹¹¹⁵. This theory is also endorsed by Christides, who adds that the conquest of Crete had started immediately after the revolt of Thomas the Slav (821-823) and continued gradually¹¹¹⁶. However, this cannot be chronologically correct, as the Andalusian Arabs were expelled from Alexandria in 825¹¹¹⁷.

As D. Tsougarakis accurately remarks, it is only logical to assume that the conquest of Crete by the Andalusians must postdate their expulsion from Alexandria, i.e. in 825¹¹¹⁸. Thus, to avoid any further confusions and put it in a chronological order: the Andalusian Arabs had started raiding Crete since c. 813. But they did not conquer the island, they were simply plundering it. After they were expelled from Alexandria in 825, they were forced to look for a new home, which would not be occupied by Muslims. Since they were already aware of the island of Crete and its land, they chose to settle there; and the

¹¹¹³ CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 83-84.

¹¹¹⁴ On the primary sources and their chronological contradictions see: CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 85-88 (with quotations from the primary sources as well).

¹¹¹⁵ N. PANAYOTAKES, *Ζητήματα τινα περὶ τῆς κατακτίσεως τῆς Κρήτης ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀράβων. ΚΡΗΤΙΚΑ ΧΡΟΝΙΚΑ* 15-16 (1961-1962) 17.

¹¹¹⁶ CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 87.

¹¹¹⁷ TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 31.

¹¹¹⁸ TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 38.

actual conquest of Crete began in 825-826. Afterwards they gradually continued the conquest of the island¹¹¹⁹.

The loss of Crete proved to be a historical event with grim realizations and far-reaching consequences for Byzantium. The naval fleet of the empire proved to be inadequate, a fact that instigated its reorganization. More significantly, with the conquest of Crete, the Arabs managed to secure a powerful stronghold that enabled them to raid far more aggressively in the Aegean coast¹¹²⁰.

Three expeditions were sent out in the following years to recover Crete; the exact date of these expeditions is uncertain, but they certainly took place either during Michael II's last years (826-829), or during the reign of Theophilos¹¹²¹. It should be mentioned, however, that they were all unsuccessful¹¹²²: the first one was under Photeinos¹¹²³, strategos¹¹²⁴ of the theme of Anatolikon, and Damianos¹¹²⁵, who was protospatharios¹¹²⁶ and komes tou autokratorikou ippostasiou¹¹²⁷. The second expedition was under Krateros¹¹²⁸, strategos of the naval theme of Kibyrrhaiotai¹¹²⁹. The third one was under the commands of Ooryphas¹¹³⁰, who was droungarios tes viglas¹¹³¹. This expedition did not even

¹¹¹⁹ Tsougarakis provides the most accurate analysis on the conquest of Crete. See: TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 30-41.

¹¹²⁰ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 207-209; MAKRYPOULIAS, Expeditions, 347; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 46-47; TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 30. Also, YANNOPOULOS, Βυζαντινοί και Άραβες, 230-248 (with annotations on the primary sources).

¹¹²¹ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 41-46.

¹¹²² CHRISTIDES, Conquest, 162-163; MAKRYPOULIAS, Expeditions, 347-351; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 46; TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 40-58.

¹¹²³ PmbZ #6241.

¹¹²⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹¹²⁵ PmbZ #1209.

¹¹²⁶ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 297.

¹¹²⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 338 (Komes of the imperial stables).

¹¹²⁸ PmbZ #4159.

¹¹²⁹ SAVVIDES, Prosopography, 30-31 (n. 21. Craterūs). On the theme of Kibyrrhaiotai see: AHRWEILER, Mer, 81-85, 131-135; LOUNGHIS, Byzantine war navy, 27.

¹¹³⁰ PmbZ #5654.

¹¹³¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 331.

reach Crete. Ooryphas was carrying out raids on the nearby islands, as many of them were exposed to attacks by the Andalusian fleet¹¹³².

The Byzantine attempts to reconquer Crete continued during the regency of Theodora as well. Unlike the previous ones, it is well known that this expedition started on 18th March 843, i.e. immediately after the restoration of the icons¹¹³³. As Tsougarakis remarks, the great number of ships and troops involved in the operation implies that its plan was conceived during the reign of Theophilos, but his death delayed its actualization¹¹³⁴. The fact that this expedition was led by Theoktistos and Sergios Niketiates is indicative of the political and military importance that the reconquest of the Crete had for Byzantium. Theoktistos was the most distinguished member of the regency at that time¹¹³⁵, and Sergios Niketiates may have played an important role in the restoration of the icons¹¹³⁶.

It is worthwhile to examine and critically review the narratives of the sources as they shed light not only on how the expedition unfolded, but also on the dynamics of the regency, and, more particularly, on the relation between Theodora and Theoktistos. To begin with, the chronicle of Symeon Magister records that Theoktistos "...ἀπελθὼν μετὰ πολλοῦ πλήθους καὶ στόλου μεγάλου σφόδρα μὲν ἐπτόησε τοὺς Ἀγαρηνοὺς ἀδυνατοῦντας ἔτι πρὸς τὴν στρατείαν ἐκείνου ἀνταγωνίζεσθαι..."¹¹³⁷ (having landed with large fleet and plenty of troops [in Crete], he [Theoktistos] spread terror among the Agarenes, who could not match his strength).

¹¹³² CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 162-163; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, *Δρόμων*, 46; TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 34-35, 41-45.

¹¹³³ TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 46 (and cit. n. 94, with quotations from the primary sources).

¹¹³⁴ TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 46.

¹¹³⁵ PmbZ #8050. See above, pp. 90.

¹¹³⁶ PmbZ #6664.

¹¹³⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 421, §5; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 4, 9-11; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 232, 13-16.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that Sergios Niketiates is not mentioned by the Byzantine historiographers; his role seems to have been completely neglected. His participation in the Cretan expedition is mentioned only in the Synaxarium of Constantinople: Τοῦ δὲ ῥωμαϊκοῦ στόλου κατελθόντος τῷ τότε χρόνῳ τῇ Κρήτῃ, αὐτὸς ἀπεστάλη παρὰ Μιχαήλ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ πάσης τῆς συγκλήτου, μόλις εἰς τοῦτο αὐτόν πεισάντων, ἐξάρχειν καὶ κυριεύειν παντὸς τοῦ στρατοπέδου δι' εὐφυΐαν καὶ τὸ ἱκανὸν εἶναι τῶν ῥωμαϊκῶν πραγμάτων προΐστασθαι¹¹³⁸. The mention “ἐξάρχειν καὶ κυριεύειν παντὸς τοῦ στρατοπέδου” probably means that he was in charge of the army¹¹³⁹.

The aforementioned quotation of Symeon Magister would naturally have us believe that the Byzantines were, at least in the beginning, successful, as they made strides against the enemy and managed to liberate part of the island. However, according to Tsougarakis, it is more plausible that the Byzantine fleet had just landed safely on a part of the island, which was not yet occupied by the Andalusian Arabs¹¹⁴⁰. This would suggest that, as it already been stated, the conquest of Crete by the Arabs was a slow and continuous process¹¹⁴¹. This argument gains further ground if we take into consideration that Ibn Khurdādhbeh, in his work *Kitāb al Masālik w'al Mamālik* (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms), which was initially written c. 846-847, mentions Crete among the Byzantine lands¹¹⁴². Similarly, the *Taktikon* Uspensky, which is dated between 842-843¹¹⁴³, mentions an ἄρχων¹¹⁴⁴ and a strategos¹¹⁴⁵ of Crete, implying that the island was still considered as a part of the empire¹¹⁴⁶.

¹¹³⁸ SYN. ECC. CONST., 778, 4-10.

¹¹³⁹ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 48.

¹¹⁴⁰ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 47.

¹¹⁴¹ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 47.

¹¹⁴² IBN KHURDĀDHBEH, *Kitāb al Masālik*, 84-85.

¹¹⁴³ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 41, 45-47.

¹¹⁴⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 53.

¹¹⁴⁵ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 49.

¹¹⁴⁶ On the matter see also: MAKRYPOULIAS, *Expeditions*, 360; TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 47, 169-178.

Despite the initial success of the expedition –or what the sources describe as a success- Crete was not meant to be recovered at that time. The Arabs managed to bribe a number of Byzantine officials, who spread a false rumor, according to which Theodora had elevated a new emperor to the throne: This rumor made Theoktistos hastily sail from Crete to Constantinople¹¹⁴⁷.

The Byzantine sources have generally considered his departure as the cause of the expedition's failure. Theophanes Continuatus narrates that “καὶ αὖθις κατὰ τῶν ἐν Κρήτῃ Ἀράβων στρατεύσας ἄπρακτος ὑπέστρεψεν, οὐκ ὀλίγους τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἐκεῖσε καταλιπὼν διὰ τὸ φυγῇ χρησάμενον ἀθρόως ἀπαλλαγῆναι αὐτῆς”¹¹⁴⁸. Symeon Magister is also harshly critical on Theoktistos' departure, adding “...σφοδρότερον δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπτοήθη καὶ τὴν φυγαδεῖαν ἡσπάσατο τὴν αὐγούσταν μαθὼν, ὡς ἄλλον βασιλέα προεχειρίσατο. ὅπερ μεθόδῳ Σαρακηνῶν καὶ δωροληψία τῶν μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐκπλήξαν αὐτὸν πέπεικε πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἐπανελθεῖν καὶ καταλιπεῖν τὸν στρατὸν μαχαίρας ἔργον τοῖς ἐν Κρήτῃ γενόμενον”¹¹⁴⁹.

As Tsougarakis insightfully points out, his departure certainly must have left the expeditionary forces weaker; having heard the rumor about the changes in the regency, he would have probably taken a part of the Byzantine forces with him¹¹⁵⁰. Although it cannot be established whether Theoktistos' departure from Crete was enough for the expedition to fail –regardless of how caustic the Byzantine narratives are, it is apparent that it did not help either. At the same time, Sergios Niketiates seems to have stayed in Crete (probably as the commander of the army left there), where he died¹¹⁵¹.

¹¹⁴⁷ CHRISTOU, Εξουσία, 90-91; MAKRYPOULIAS, Expeditions, 351; NIKOLAOU, Θεοδώρα καὶ Θεόκτιστος, 71; TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 48.

¹¹⁴⁸ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 288, 34-36.

¹¹⁴⁹ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 421, §5; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 4, 10-14; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 232, 16-233, 20. The same narrative is almost *verbatim* reproduced in Pseudo-Symeon. See: PSEUDO-SYMEON, 654, 12-15.

¹¹⁵⁰ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 48.

¹¹⁵¹ MAKRYPOULIAS, Expeditions, 351; TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 48.

Another interesting point worth observing is that Theoktistos, having heard the rumor about Theodora appointing a new co-regent, rushed to the capital and abandoned the operation, whose conception and preparation could very well have begun during the last years of Theophilos¹¹⁵², i.e. an operation that was meticulously organized. This naturally brings up the question of the nature of the relation between Theodora and Theoktistos. As I have already mentioned, K. Nikolaou has conducted thorough studies on the matter and duly proposed that their relation could have been more than intimate. That would certainly explain why Theoktistos rushed to Constantinople, abandoning the expedition and his men¹¹⁵³.

The next operation to retake Crete occurred during the sole reign of Michael III; it was launched on Easter Sunday¹¹⁵⁴ (7 April 866¹¹⁵⁵). The scale of the operation seems to have been very large; the Byzantine army and navy had assembled at Kepoi, at the Meander river on the coast of the Thracesion theme. Not only Bardas and Basil I were participating in it, but also the emperor himself. The narratives of the sources differ as to who conceived and prepared the operation. Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus mention that it was Bardas who facilitated and was in charge of it¹¹⁵⁶. On the account of Vita Basilii it is plainly described that both Michael III and Bardas set out on a campaign against Crete¹¹⁵⁷, whereas Vita Ignatii records that the expedition was organized by the emperor, and Bardas simply joined¹¹⁵⁸.

¹¹⁵² MAKRYPOULIAS, *Expeditions*, 357.

¹¹⁵³ NIKOLAOU, *Θεοδώρα και Θεόκτιστος*, 71ff.

¹¹⁵⁴ "...ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Πάσχα...". FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428, §6; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 12, 30; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 249, 321.

¹¹⁵⁵ For the date of Easter in 866 see: GRUMEL, *Chronologie*, 276.

¹¹⁵⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 73, 67; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 290, 1.

¹¹⁵⁷ THEOPH. CONT., V, 62, 1-2.

¹¹⁵⁸ VITA IGNATII, 74, 17-19.

Symeon Magister, on the other hand, mentions that it was Basil I, planning to murder Bardas, that talked Michael III into organizing the expedition¹¹⁵⁹. Modern scholarship leans towards the former possibility, making Bardas the mastermind behind the expedition¹¹⁶⁰. The time was also suitable for a new attempt to reconquer Crete; Al-Tabarī narrates that in 853 the Byzantines raided Damietta, burnt the town and looted the weapons that were meant to be shipped to Crete¹¹⁶¹. So, one could argue that the Andalusian Arabs in Crete were more vulnerable to an external attack.

Shortly before the departure from Constantinople, Bardas declined to participate in the expedition because he was fearing for his life. Prior to this, Bardas had also received numerous prophecies and dreams about his grim future. In 855, when Bardas' plan to remove Theoktistos, which also had Michael III's consent, ended in the logothete of the drome being murdered, Manuel¹¹⁶² revealed to Bardas: “σπάθην γυμνώσας, Βάρδα, τοῖς ἀνακτόροις, σαυτῷ γυμνώσεις εἰς τομὴν τοῦ σαρκίου” (you have bared a sword, Bardas, in the palace and you have turned its edge against your flesh)¹¹⁶³.

A few days before the expedition, Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus narrate that Bardas had invited a group of his acquaintances to his house; after they had drunk together, Bardas revealed to them his imminent downfall. He had visited the monastery of Hodegon and, while he was standing before the entrance, his cloak was suddenly snatched of his shoulders and fell to the ground. Bardas reportedly interpreted this event as a sign of his inevitable doom and addressed requests to the Virgin to be spared from death¹¹⁶⁴.

¹¹⁵⁹ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 12, 5-8; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 249, 307-309.

¹¹⁶⁰ TREADGOLD, *History*, 453; TSOUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 49.

¹¹⁶¹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 125 (1417).

¹¹⁶² PmbZ #4704.

¹¹⁶³ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 82-83. The prophecy is repeated in Theophanes Continuatus: “Ξίφος γυμνώσας εἰς Θεοκτίστου φόνον, ὅπλιζε σαυτὸν σφαγὴν καθ’ ἡμέραν”. See: THEOPH. CONT., IV, 242, 38-39. On the matter see also: CHRISTOU, Ὁψη, 42.

¹¹⁶⁴ GENESIOS, IV, 73, 72-82; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 290, 1-10.

A more alarming sign of his imminent death is related in the aforementioned accounts, and in the life of patriarch Ignatios as well; this time it was a dream of Bardas: the caesar, along with Michael III enter



The death of Bardas predicted in his dream. Skylitzes Matritensis, fol 79r.

Hagia Sophia on a feast day. As they enter, they see an old man, identified as St. Peter, who is seated on a throne and is flanked by two angels; next to them is the deposed patriarch Ignatios, who demands vengeance from the Byzantine emperor and his uncle. St. Peter reportedly grants his request and orders one of his angels to dismember Bardas. The other angel informed Michael III that he would meet the same fate too¹¹⁶⁵. In fact, this dream prefigures the brutal assassination of Bardas by the group of conspirators headed by Basil.

A final sign occurred to Bardas concerning his future death while they were at Kepoi. Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus narrate that during the expedition Theodora had sent him a garment, but it was too short for him. The caesar is presented wondering why it is too short and conjecturing that the undersized garment stood as a sign that his days were numbered and revealed Theodora's wish to avenge the murder of Theoktistos¹¹⁶⁶.

The account of Genesios goes on to narrate that earlier than that, an earthquake had occurred and knocked down a statue, which stood on a column near St. Anna, known as «the second». Leo the Philosopher¹¹⁶⁷ interpreted this natural phenomenon as a sign that caesar Bardas would be killed by Basil, who would succeed him¹¹⁶⁸. This earthquake, along with the narration that the

¹¹⁶⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 73, 83-74, 3; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 288, 1-290, 20; VITA IGNATII, 72, 4-74, 9.

¹¹⁶⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 74, 4-16; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 294, 1-7.

¹¹⁶⁷ PmbZ #24313.

¹¹⁶⁸ GENESIOS, IV, 74, 16-22.

column was knocked down, down does not appear in any other narrative. This earthquake is also not included in the study of Ambraseys on the earthquakes in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The prophetic visions and signs, and their subsequent deviations can be summed to this: they are mentioned in the narrations of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and the *Vita Ignatii*; and they are also repeated on the vita of St. Eirene, the abbess of Crysobalanton¹¹⁶⁹. G. Calofonos, in his detailed study about the dream narratives found in Theophanes Continuatus remarks that although these dream-visions can be classified as prophetic, they are merely predictions¹¹⁷⁰ -probably because the author(s) already knows what's going to happen. They do, however, serve as a means to point out that Divine Will intervened in order for Basil to become sole emperor¹¹⁷¹. This becomes more evident if we examine the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and of Symeon Magister on how the expedition unfolded. For, this large expedition was never meant to land in Crete.

On 21 April 866, Bardas was murdered in Michael III's tent by Basil and a group of



The assassination of Bardas. Skylitzes Matritensis, fol 80r. top.

conspirators. The Byzantine sources are not unanimous about who manned that group, or about who murdered the caesar. However, considering their contradictions in general, along with the fact that they are politically biased, this is hardly surprising.

Genesios narrates that among the murderers was Ioannes Chaldos¹¹⁷², whose surname was Tziphinarites. Together with them was also Konstantinos

¹¹⁶⁹ DO Hagiography Database Nr. 57; PmbZ #21617; ROSENQVIST, St Irene, 48-53.

¹¹⁷⁰ CALOFONOS, Narratives, 109-110.

¹¹⁷¹ CALOFONOS, Narratives, 110.

¹¹⁷² PmbZ #22784.

Maniakes,¹¹⁷³ *droungarios tes viglas*¹¹⁷⁴, who allegedly protected Michael III in the subsequent tumult¹¹⁷⁵. On the contrary, Theophanes Continuatus narrates that it was Symbatios¹¹⁷⁶, who ordered his father-in-law to be murdered by making the sign of the cross on his face¹¹⁷⁷. Both Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus mention that after the murderers had killed Bardas, they went on to fix his genital organs on a pole and triumphantly paraded with them around the camp; in this manner they hoped to torment him even after his death¹¹⁷⁸.

It is remarkable that none of the two aforementioned authors attribute the murder of Bardas to Basil I. Genesios suppresses his role on the event of the assassination. He merely narrates that Basil and Symbatios had devised a plan to draw away Antigonos¹¹⁷⁹, the domestic of the schools¹¹⁸⁰, to witness a horse race at a sufficient distance from Michael III's tent, so that he would not try to rescue his father¹¹⁸¹. However, prior to this, he states that the plan against caesar Bardas was devised by God, had the assent of the emperor and was even known to Bardas himself¹¹⁸². Two interesting remarks are worth emphasizing at this point: not only is Genesios contradicting himself, but God, i.e. Divine Will, gets involved and assists Basil to get closer to the throne.

Theophanes Continuatus, on the other hand, assigns a part of the murder to Basil I, but only a minor one so as to minimize his involvement. According to this account, Michael III appears to be the organizer of the plot. When the moment came for the plan to be set in action, Michael III gave the order to

¹¹⁷³ PmbZ #3962.

¹¹⁷⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 331.

¹¹⁷⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 75, 40-46.

¹¹⁷⁶ PmbZ #7169.

¹¹⁷⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 292, 27-29.

¹¹⁷⁸ GENESIOS, IV, 75, 49-51; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 292, 45-46.

¹¹⁷⁹ PmbZ #503.

¹¹⁸⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 329-330.

¹¹⁸¹ GENESIOS, IV, 75, 28-34.

¹¹⁸² GENESIOS, IV, 73, 70-72.

Symbatios to bring in the assassins; but they hesitated, because they fear Bardas' power.

Michael III subsequently calls Basil I, who was at that time his *parakoimomenos*¹¹⁸³, to encourage them by saying “ὦ τῆς ἀνανδρίας εἰπὼν καὶ ἀτόλμου ψυχῆς (Oh what unmanliness and gutlessness of soul)” and forced them to get on with it¹¹⁸⁴. In this account, it is not clear who murdered the caesar. Remarkably, Konstantinos Maniakes,¹¹⁸⁵ *droungarios tes viglas*¹¹⁸⁶, appears on this narration as well; his role is, similar to the narration of Genesios, to save the emperor from the tumult¹¹⁸⁷; for, although the plan was to assassinate Bardas, Michael III is somehow presented being in danger.

In the narrative of *Vita Basilii* the prophetic visions are completely removed, but, once again, Michael III is the organiser of the plot: πλὴν ἔσχεν πολλοὺς ὁ βασιλεὺς τοὺς κοινωνοῦντας αὐτῷ τοῦ βουλευματος καὶ κατεπαγγελλομένους καταπράξασθαι τὴν σφαγὴν¹¹⁸⁸. *Vita Basilii* describes that Bardas had generally handled matters with arrogance and issued orders imperiously. After a while, slander began to reach Michael III regarding Bardas' behavior. According to this narrative, when the Byzantine expedition arrived at Kepoi, the imperial tent was pitched on a low and level ground, whereas the one of Bardas was set up on a high and prominent spot. Those who had for long hated the caesar seized this opportunity and convinced Michael III that he was openly insulting him; it was under these circumstances that Michael III started plotting against his uncle¹¹⁸⁹.

Like the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, the narrative of the *Vita Basilii* records that Symbatios signaled to the assassins to enter the emperor's

¹¹⁸³ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 305.

¹¹⁸⁴ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 292, 39-40.

¹¹⁸⁵ PmbZ #3962.

¹¹⁸⁶ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 331.

¹¹⁸⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 292, 48-294,51.

¹¹⁸⁸ THEOPH. CONT., V, 66, 26-28.

¹¹⁸⁹ THEOPH. CONT., V, 64, 16-18.

tent and kill Bardas. However, they hesitated. The emperor subsequently sent an imperial chamberlain to Basil I, alerted him of the assassins' cowardice and urged him to resolve the issue. Basil I, then, stormed to the emperor's tent, encouraged the coward assassins to kill him under the emperor's very feet¹¹⁹⁰. The Vita Ignatii briefly records the assassination, mentioning that Bardas was pursued by divinely inspired anger and was wretchedly cut to pieces by the sword¹¹⁹¹.

Symeon Magister gives a more complete narration of the caesar's assassination and provides a medium of *synkrisis* so as to extract the historical truth from historical falsification. As I have already described, before the start of the campaign, Symeon Magister relates that Basil I, who was jealous of Bardas, gained Symbatios' trust and promised him that once Bardas is eliminated, he will become caesar¹¹⁹². Afterwards, the account of Symeon adds one very insightful detail: "...ὥς τοῦ βασιλέως ἀγάπην πολλήν ἔχοντος πρὸς σε κἀμοῦ σπουδάζοντος τὰ ὑπὲρ σου μελετᾷ μὲν προβάλεσθαι σε καίσαρα, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν πενθερόν σου τοῦτο ἀδυνατεῖ ποιῆσαι... (the emperor has great affection for you and he thinks about promoting you to the rank of caesar, but because of your father-in-law, this cannot be done)"¹¹⁹³. If we are to follow this narrative, from this quotation it becomes apparent that Basil I's plan was to murder Bardas all along, regardless of who was the initial mastermind behind the operation.

Michael III's uncle had apparently heard those rumors and was convinced to join only after Michael III and Basil solemnly swore to guarantee his safety;

¹¹⁹⁰ THEOPH. CONT., V, 68, 41-58.

¹¹⁹¹ VITA IGNATII, 74, 19-22.

¹¹⁹² FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 32-36; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 248, 295-301.

¹¹⁹³ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 38-12, 1; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 248, 301.

at the same time, Leo the Philosopher¹¹⁹⁴ appears to be consulting Bardas to stay away from Basil I and not participate in the expedition¹¹⁹⁵.

Symeon Magister also provides a more complete account regarding the people that joined the expedition. N. Tobias remarks that his account might be nearer to the truth, as, unlike the Byzantine court historians that were writing on behalf of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, he had little to conceal¹¹⁹⁶. The chronicler mentions that in the campaign to retake Crete were participating Ioannes Chaldos¹¹⁹⁷, Bardas¹¹⁹⁸, Marianos¹¹⁹⁹, Konstantinos Toxaras¹²⁰⁰, Asyleon¹²⁰¹, Basil's cousin, Petros "o Bulgaros"¹²⁰², Symbatios¹²⁰³, and Ioannes Neatokomites¹²⁰⁴. The latter one is mentioned to have visited Bardas' tent at sunset and warned Prokopios¹²⁰⁵, who was Bardas' protovestiarios¹²⁰⁶; he said to Prokopios that "αὔριον μεληδὸν κατακόπτεται ὁ δεσπότης ἡμῶν καῖσαρ" (tomorrow our lord will be cut in pieces)¹²⁰⁷.

Bardas does not appear to have taken the warnings of Ioannes seriously; he told Prokopios to tell Ioannes that was raving, because he wanted to be made a patrikios¹²⁰⁸. But, thinking of his warnings, he eventually did not rest during the night. The next day, when he told his friends about his worries, his friend

¹¹⁹⁴ PmbZ #24313.

¹¹⁹⁵ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 12, 21-29; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 249, 309-311, 319-321.

¹¹⁹⁶ TOBIAS, *Basil I*, 69.

¹¹⁹⁷ PmbZ #22784.

¹¹⁹⁸ PmbZ #801.

¹¹⁹⁹ PmbZ #24956.

¹²⁰⁰ PmbZ #23744.

¹²⁰¹ PmbZ #24316.

¹²⁰² PmbZ #6091.

¹²⁰³ PmbZ #7169.

¹²⁰⁴ PmbZ #22838.

¹²⁰⁵ PmbZ #6377.

¹²⁰⁶ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 305.

¹²⁰⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428-429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 2; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 250, 330-331.

¹²⁰⁸ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428-429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 3-8; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 250, 331-334.

Philotheos¹²⁰⁹, the *genikos logothetes*¹²¹⁰, told the Caesar “αὔριον ὦ δέσποτα, περιβαλοῦ τὸν χρυσοπερσικὸν σου χιτῶνα καὶ ὄφθητι τοῖς ἔχθροῖς σου, καὶ ἀπὸ προσώπου σου φεύξονται” (tomorrow, despot, put on your gold colored cloak and appear to your foes, and they will flee before you)¹²¹¹.

On the fateful day of his death, Bardas mounted his horse and rode to the emperor’s tent; Eustathios Argyros¹²¹² was accompanying him. Konstantinos Toxaras, who was also at the emperor’s tent, informed Basil about Bardas’ arrival. The latter then greeted the caesar and led him to the emperor. Bardas sat before the emperor and announced that the troops were assembled and ready and that they would embark soon. At that moment, Basil I stabbed him, and the rest of the conspirators rushed in to murder the caesar in the presence of the emperor, who witnessed the slaughter unmoved. Symeon Magister must have had access to some very precise information, because he records that the murder took place at the third hour of the day¹²¹³. An identical narrative on the events regarding the conceived plan to murder Bardas and how it transpired on the emperor’s tent is also provided by Pseudo-Symeon¹²¹⁴.

From my point of view, and despite the discrepancies in the sources, the turn of events can be reconstructed in a rather safer manner. The plan to assassinate Bardas was already conceived at the Byzantine capital, prior to the departure of the army. This plan was not devised by God, as Genesios has it¹²¹⁵; it was conceived by Basil I. It was also known to Michael III, who had been tricked by Basil and Symbatios into believing that Bardas was plotting against him. This is not a conjecture of mine.

¹²⁰⁹ PmbZ #6191.

¹²¹⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 313–314.

¹²¹¹ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 8-10; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 250, 337-339.

¹²¹² PmbZ #21828.

¹²¹³ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 13, 8-21; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 251, 350-352.

¹²¹⁴ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 678, 6-679, 6.

¹²¹⁵ GENESIOS, IV, 73, 70-71.

The fact that Michael III had been convinced by Basil and Symbatios about Bardas' plot to remove him from power is also attested in the emperor's decree delivered in Hagia Sophia on 26 May 866, the day Basil was crowned co-emperor. As Symeon Magister narrates, according to the imperial decree, which was delivered by Leo the Kastor¹²¹⁶ "...Βάρδας ὁ καῖσαρ ἐβουλεύσατο κατ' ἐμοῦ ἀνελεῖν με καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὑπεξήγαγέ με τῆς πόλεως, καὶ εἰ μὴ διὰ Συμβατίου καὶ Βασιλείου ἐμηνύθη μοι, οὐκ ἂν ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν ἦμην· ἐτελεύτησε δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἀμαρτίας..."¹²¹⁷ (...caesar Bardas plotted against me in order to kill me, and for this reason he lured me away from the City and, if this had not been announced to me by Symbatios and Basil, I would not be among the living. Bardas died as a consequence of his own sin...)¹²¹⁸. This passage has generally gone unnoticed by modern scholarship, but it does testify that Basil and Symbatios did indeed work together in an effort to convince Michael III about his uncle's future plans.

One must also keep in mind that, at that time Michael III's relationship with Bardas was not cordial; the caesar was upset because, after Damianos¹²¹⁹ removal, it was Basil that was promoted to the rank of parakoimomenos and not one of his own candidates. At the same time, Michael III probably felt that he was being restrained by his uncle and sought a way out of the situation. Michael III's impression for his uncle can also explain why he remained unmoved in seeing his uncle being slaughtered in front of his own eyes.

As I have already mentioned, according to the narrative of Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon,¹²²⁰ in the plan to assassinate the caesar, certain individuals

¹²¹⁶ PmbZ #4512.

¹²¹⁷ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 429-430, §27; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 14, 7-10; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 375-253, 381.

¹²¹⁸ English translation after S. Wahlgren. See: WAHLGREN, *Chronicle*, 189.

¹²¹⁹ PmbZ #1212.

¹²²⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 428, §26; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 12, 33-35; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 678, 9-13; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 252, 375-378.

were involved, namely: Basil I, Bardas¹²²¹, Ioannes Chaldos¹²²², Marianos¹²²³, Konstantinos Toxaras¹²²⁴, Asyleon¹²²⁵, Petros “o Bulgaros”¹²²⁶, and Symbatios¹²²⁷. Although there is no concrete proof of this, these individuals could very well have forged a secret *hetaireia* to remove the caesar. It is also remarkable that the same group of individuals is also recorded acting together the night that Michael III was murdered by Basil I¹²²⁸. This time, when they were at Kepoi, at the emperor’s tent, these individuals hesitated to realize the plan, so Basil I stepped in and assassinated Michael III’s uncle.

Further proof of this can be found in the case of Symbatios. To accomplish his plan, Basil I had tricked Symbatios, i.e. a member of the aforementioned *hetaireia*, by promising him his father-in-law’s title of caesar. Yet, after Bardas’ murder, Symbatios did not receive his expected promotion. Basil was promoted to magister and was crowned co-emperor, whereas Antigonos, Bardas’ son from his first marriage who was *domestikos ton scholon*¹²²⁹, was relieved of his office and was replaced by Marianos¹²³⁰, Basil’s brother. Having realized that he was tricked by Basil and that he would not be promoted to the rank of caesar, he rebelled. His friend, Georgios Peganes¹²³¹, who was *strategos* of the Opsikian theme, also joined the *coup*. The revolt was eventually crushed a few months afterwards, as the majority of the army remained loyal to the government¹²³².

¹²²¹ PmbZ #801.

¹²²² PmbZ #22784.

¹²²³ PmbZ #24955.

¹²²⁴ PmbZ #23744.

¹²²⁵ PmbZ #24316.

¹²²⁶ PmbZ #6091.

¹²²⁷ PmbZ #7169.

¹²²⁸ See above, pp. 135.

¹²²⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 329-330.

¹²³⁰ PmbZ #24955. On Marianos promotion, see: WINKELMANN, Quellenstudien, 89-91.

¹²³¹ PmbZ #22082.

¹²³² CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Ιστορία Β1, 239; DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 179-180; TOBIAS, Basil I, 72-23.

N. Dapergolas has proposed a different interpretation of Symbatios' revolt; the Greek scholar argued that Symbatios' aim was not to revenge Basil, but to dethrone Michael III and usurp the Byzantine throne for himself. His main arguments are that Symbatios and Georgios Peganes were driven by envy to obtain more power and that their subsequent punishment (they were both blinded; Symbatios was placed in front of the palace of Lausos¹²³³ and Georgios Peganes in front of the Milion¹²³⁴, where the people who passed by could see them¹²³⁵) is applied to captured usurpers¹²³⁶.

Personally, I believe that this argument can only partially be justified. Symbatios did of course feel envy and rage when he saw that Basil tricked and surpassed him in hierarchy; yet even the biased account of Vita Basilii, although it remarkably omits the part where Basil tricked Symbatios, records that the rebels moved against Basil, not Michael III¹²³⁷. In fact, this incident is also indicative for Basil's unpopularity among high ranking officers and hence his need to remove them from their offices when he assumed the throne. As for the usurper's punishments, it is only logical to be punished as usurpers who aimed for the throne, mainly because Basil was at that time co-emperor and part of Michael III's government.

With the death of Bardas, the expedition came to an abrupt end. Michael III wrote a letter to Photios to inform him that the caesar had been convicted of high treason and put to death. This letter has not come down to us, but we possess the two letters that the patriarch wrote back regarding the matter.

¹²³³ On the palace of Lausos, see: JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 379.

¹²³⁴ JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 60.

¹²³⁵ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 430, §28; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 14, 21-15, 8; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 680, 6-681, 3; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 254, 404-255, 418.

¹²³⁶ DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 182 (and cit. n. 125).

¹²³⁷ "...πείσαντες δὲ καὶ τὰ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ(ς) στρατεύματα εἰς ἔργον ἐξάγουσι τὰ βουλευόμενα, εὐφημοῦντες μὲν τὸν Μιχαὴλ ὡς βασιλέα διὰ τὸ ἐκ τοῦτου τὰ πλήθη ἐπάγεσθαι καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν πτέρναν ἀπόστασίας αἰρεῖν κατὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, δυσφημοῦντες *** ὕβρεσι". THEOPH. CONT., V, 74, 6-10.

On the first one, Photios initially congratulates Michael III for escaping the plot¹²³⁸. The patriarch then goes on to question in a very subtle manner, if the circumstances of Bardas' murder were as described in Michael III's letter –in the one that has not survived- or if they had been fabricated so as to condemn the caesar¹²³⁹. As J. Bury has rightfully remarked, with this excerpt Photios delicately wonders if the imperial letter was dictated by Basil I, or if there was foul play regarding Bardas' murder¹²⁴⁰. This quotation is of particular importance, as it testifies that Basil I's motives and intentions were already questioned by Photios. The letter is concluded with the patriarch urging the emperor to return to Constantinople¹²⁴¹. It could be that Photios was worried that Michael III might too be assassinated by Basil.

The same instigation is expressed in the second –and shorter– letter as well; Photios urges Michael III to return to Constantinople¹²⁴². It is remarkable that this letter was addressed to Michael III in Crete, hinting that the patriarch was misinformed about Michael III's expedition and believed that it had already reached Crete¹²⁴³. But it did not; the Byzantine troops that were gathered at Kepoi returned to the Byzantine capital, and Basil I was shortly after crowned co-emperor.

Overall, as C. Makrypoulias remarks, a closer look at the expeditions that were perceived and took place during the concerning period proves that Crete was still regarded as one of the primary targets of the Byzantine offensive strategy¹²⁴⁴. The expedition of Theoktistos and Sergios Niketiates took place in 843, barely a year after the death of a Byzantine emperor, whose wife had to assume the throne as Michael III was still an infant; even less time had elapsed

¹²³⁸ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 68, 2-69, 8.

¹²³⁹ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 69, 30-35.

¹²⁴⁰ BURY, ERE, 173.

¹²⁴¹ Phot. Epist. 18 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 70, 51-60.

¹²⁴² Phot. Epist. 19 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 70-71.

¹²⁴³ TSOUGARAKIS, Crete, 49 (cit. n. 103).

¹²⁴⁴ MAKRYPOULIAS, Expeditions, 357.

since the restoration of the Icons¹²⁴⁵. Regarding the expedition of Bardas, even if we accept that it was Basil I's plan to murder Bardas, as Symeon Magister has narrates¹²⁴⁶, this does not explain why Bardas decided to go along with the plan –for Basil I's intentions must have been known to him, unless the recapturing of Crete was of great importance¹²⁴⁷.

The question that naturally arises is whether the campaign of 866 to retake Crete was genuine, or if it was just a means to remove Bardas from the scene. Taking into consideration all the aforementioned campaigns that took place during the first half of the ninth century, the eagerness to retake Crete must have been genuine. This campaign must have been known to the people that were close to the emperor, i.e. to Basil, Symbatios, Bardas etc. And, although the sources do not provide a relative indication, one can –rather reasonably– argue that the plan of 866 was conceived by Bardas in the first place, and that it was on this plan that Basil was based on and subsequently turned Symbatios to his side.

Afterwards, during the reign of Basil I, no new attempt was made to recover Crete from the Andalusian Arabs. On the contrary, after 866, the Arabs intensified their raids in the Aegean coast and reached even the Propontis¹²⁴⁸. Crete was eventually recovered in 960-961. This expedition was led by the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas. Thus, the emirate of Crete came to an end and the island was converted into a Byzantine theme¹²⁴⁹.

¹²⁴⁵ MAKRYPOULIAS, *Expeditions*, 357.

¹²⁴⁶ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427-428, §25; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 12, 5-8; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 249, 307-321.

¹²⁴⁷ MAKRYPOULIAS, *Expeditions*, 357.

¹²⁴⁸ On these raids, see: TSUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 49ff.

¹²⁴⁹ On the recapture of Crete indicatively see: CHRISTIDES, *Conquest*, 172-191; D. SULLIVAN, *The Rise and fall of Nikephoros II Phokas: Five Contemporary Texts in Annotated Translations (Byzantina Australiensia 23)*. Leiden 2018; TSUGARAKIS, *Crete*, 58ff. (with further bibliography and quotations from the primary sources); YANNOPOULOS, *Βυζαντινοί και Άραβες*, 257ff.

Constantinople (iii): The attack of the Rhos on the Byzantine capital in 860¹²⁵⁰

Before describing the first hostile attack of the Rhos in Constantinople, I would like to refer to the campaign that took place in c. 842, against the Slavs of Peloponnesos, who had risen in revolt¹²⁵¹. This Byzantine raid was led by Theoktistos Bryennios¹²⁵², who was protospatharios¹²⁵³ and strategos¹²⁵⁴ of Peloponnesos.

Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos informs us that the Slavs of Peloponnesos had revolted during the reigns of Theophilos and his son Michael III¹²⁵⁵, and had become independent¹²⁵⁶. Having arrived in Peloponnesos with a large number of troops, Bryennios managed to subdue all the rebel Slavs of the area. Konstantinos VII also narrates that the Byzantines managed to subdue the two most insubordinate factions of the area, the Ἐζερίται and Μηλιγγοί, and forced them to pay a tribute of 300 and 60 nomismata respectively¹²⁵⁷.

During the sole reign of Michael III, in the military sense, Byzantium was continuously occupied; the Byzantine fleet conducted operations not only in Sicily, but also in the Southeastern Mediterranean. On land, the Byzantine

¹²⁵⁰ In this sub-chapter I present the attack of the Rhos on Constantinople in 860. Since this event has been studied thoroughly by modern scholarship (see: S. FRANKLIN – J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence of the Rus 750-1200 (Longman History of Russia)*. London – New York 1996; A. VASILIEV, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860*. Cambridge 1946), it would be pointless and out of place to enter here into any lengthy discussions and repetitions regarding every aspect of the Russian expedition. My aim is to present the event focusing on the efforts made by the empire during Michael III's reign to repel the Rhos.

¹²⁵¹ On this revolt, see also: KONTE, Πελοπόννησος, 36; OIKONOMIDÈS, Andrew, Joseph, and the Slavs, 75.

¹²⁵² PmbZ #8052.

¹²⁵³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 297.

¹²⁵⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹²⁵⁵ Basically, Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos means during the regency of Theodora.

¹²⁵⁶ DAI, ch. L, 232, 6-11.

¹²⁵⁷ DAI, ch. L, 232, 13-23.

troops were engaged in a continuous campaign in Asia Minor¹²⁵⁸ against the Arabs of the Abbasid Caliphate¹²⁵⁹. As a result, the Byzantine capital was almost always inadequately protected and unprepared for any attack –especially from the North. Since 853, the regency of Theodora had concluded a peace treaty with Bulgaria¹²⁶⁰. It was during that time, that the first attack of the Rhos against Constantinople took place.

The attack of the Rhos on the Byzantine capital started on June 18, 860; this date is known to us from the publication of Franz Cumont, who, in 1894, on the basis of the manuscript 11376 of the Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles, printed an anonymous Byzantine Chronicle, which contained the exact date of the incursion of the Rhos. The date was indicated in three ways: by indiction, by the year of the of Michael III's reign, and by the year from the creation of the world¹²⁶¹. This attack ended in failure sometime during 861, with the withdrawal of the fleet of the Rhos; I shall speak of their retreat in more detail later.

Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos informs us that normally every year, in June, Russian traders visited Constantinople to trade¹²⁶². This time, however, it was different. Under the leadership of the Kievan princes, Askold and Dir¹²⁶³,

¹²⁵⁸ See below, 265-287.

¹²⁵⁹ The Abbasid Caliphate was the dynasty of the Caliphs that succeeded Umayyad Caliphate. The Abbasid Arabs took their name from its ancestor, al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al Muttalib b. Hashim, who was the uncle of Muhammad, and ruled from 750 to 1258; during the concerned period, Samarra was their capital. On the Abbasid Caliphate, indicatively see: EI², I, 15-23 ('Abbasids or Banu 'L 'Abbās); KENNEDY, Prophet, 123-197; J. LASSNER, The Shaping of the Abbasid Rule. Princeton 1980. On Samarra see: O. ISMAIL, The Founding of a New Capital: Sāmarrā. SOAS 31/1 (1968) 1-13.

¹²⁶⁰ BROWNING, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 54; HUPCHICK, Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 131; VASILIEV, Russian attack, 150.

¹²⁶¹ CUMONT, Manuscrit 11370, 33, 15-19. On the Manuscript 11376 see: FRANLIN – SHEPARD, Emergence, 52; A. KÜLZER, Studien zum Chronicon Bruxellense. BYZ 61 (1991) 413, 425, 446-448. On the date of the attack, see also: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 102.

¹²⁶² DAI, ch. IX, 56-62; SHEPARD, Photios' sermons, 121; SHEPARD, Problems, 17.

¹²⁶³ On Askold and Dir, see: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 177-182.

two hundred Russian ships¹²⁶⁴ had appeared in Bosporos. According to Vasiliev, their goal was rapacity, desire for devastating and acquiring booty and wealth¹²⁶⁵. Although they did not manage to breach the Byzantine walls, the suburbs of Constantinople and its nearby islands on Bosporos were savaged and stripped of their treasures. This attack not only caught Byzantium unprepared, but Michael III and Bardas were also not present in Constantinople; they had already left to continue the campaign in Asia Minor¹²⁶⁶.

The most significant sources that narrate the attack of the Rhos are the Primary Chronicle of Kiev, life of Patriarch Ignatios, written by Niketas David Paphlagon and the two homilies (homilies III and IV) of Photios. As a matter of fact, in the homilies of Photios, it is for the first time in a Greek text that the Russians are mentioned as Rhos¹²⁶⁷. Previously, they were described under the name Tauroscythians¹²⁶⁸. Genesios does not mention the event at all, whereas Theophanes Continuatus¹²⁶⁹, Symeon Magister¹²⁷⁰, and Pseudo-Symeon¹²⁷¹ make a brief mention of the event. The attack of the Rhos might also have influenced Joseph the Hymnographer¹²⁷²; one of his kanones might refer to the attack of the Rhos on Constantinople.

¹²⁶⁴ On the number of ships that the Russian fleet consisted of, see: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 189.

¹²⁶⁵ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 186.

¹²⁶⁶ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §23; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 10, 33-34; MANGO, Homilies, 74-75, 89; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 674, 13-13; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 245, 257-246, 258; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 278, 4-5.

¹²⁶⁷ SHEPARD, Photios' sermons, 111; VASILIEV, Russian attack, 187. On the name *Rhos* or *Rus* in the Byzantine sources, see: G. SCHRAMM, Viel Lärm um vier Buchstaben. Der Name Rus' als Beispiel für die Rückständigkeit einer historischen Hilfswissenschaft. *JbGost* 55 (2007) 67-79.

¹²⁶⁸ For example "...τοῦς ἐκ Ταυρικῆς καθ' ἐταιρείαν Σκύθας ὁ βασιλεὺς...". GENESIOS, IV, 63, 65; the author describes the decisive part of the Tauroscythians in the murder of Theoktistos, in 856.

¹²⁶⁹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 1-9.

¹²⁷⁰ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §26; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 10, 33-11, 13; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 245, 257-247, 273.

¹²⁷¹ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 674,

¹²⁷² On Joseph the Hymnographer see: PmbZ #23510. On the Kanon that might refer to the Russian attack, see: A. KAZHDAN, Joseph the Hymnographer and the first Russian attack on

The first homily –homily III– of Photios that deals with the attack, was delivered in Hagia Sophia while the attack was taking place; it was addressed to the citizens of Constantinople, who were frightened of the Rhos. In an oratory manner, Photios states that the Rhos attacking Constantinople was a punishment delivered from God, for the Byzantines had sinned and had deviated from the path of virtue¹²⁷³.

Photios does not fail to mention that the emperor and his armies were absent and the Rhos were free to raid the outskirts of Constantinople: “Where is now the Christ-loving emperor? Where are the armies? Where are the arms, the engines, the military deliberations and preparations?... The emperor endures long labours beyond the frontier, and the army has marched away to toil with him”¹²⁷⁴. The fact that the Rhos had surrounded the Byzantine capital and had devastated its suburbs is also attested in the second contemporary source that narrates the event, the *Vita Ignatii*. In fact, the attack of the Rhos in 860 is one of the few events that the Byzantine sources describe without contradicting each other.

During the raid, Ignatios was living in exile¹²⁷⁵ in Terebinthos¹²⁷⁶, on the Princes islands, where he had founded three monasteries. One on the island of Plati¹²⁷⁷, one on the island of Hyatros¹²⁷⁸, and the last one on Terebinthos. Niketas David Paphlagon, on the account of the –at that time deposed patriarch– narrates that the Rhos advanced across the Black Sea to the Bosphoros

Constantinople, in: *From Byzantium to Iran. Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan* (eds. J-P. MAHÉ – R. W. THOMSON). Atlanta, 1996, 187-196; P. TOMA, *Joseph the Hymnographer. Kanones on saints According to the Eight Modes. Critical Edition by Paraskevi Toma* (*Byzantinische Studien und Texte* 12). Münster 2018, 339-340; E. TOMADAKIS, Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ὑμνογράφος. Βίος καὶ ἔργον (Σειρά διατριβῶν καὶ μελετημάτων 11). Athens 1971, 77-232.

¹²⁷³ MANGO, *Homilies*, 83-84.

¹²⁷⁴ MANGO, *Homilies*, 89.

¹²⁷⁵ PmbZ #2666.

¹²⁷⁶ On Terebinthos, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 511-512.

¹²⁷⁷ On Plati, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 509-510.

¹²⁷⁸ On Hyatros, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 508.

plundering every region and all the monasteries, and executing all the people they captured¹²⁷⁹.

The monasteries of Ignatios were also looted and the Rhos seized twenty-two of his servants and executed them¹²⁸⁰. Although Niketas does not mention whether the Rhos raided the other Princes' islands, it is generally accepted that these islands had been plundered as well¹²⁸¹. Remarkably, the author of the *Vita Ignatii* states that when the Byzantine high authorities heard that Ignatios had managed to survive, they felt regret rather than sympathy¹²⁸².

The Primary Chronicle of Kiev, which was composed in the twelfth century, begins with a description of the postdiluvian world (the period after the flood described in the Bible), showing how the different nations were spread around the globe¹²⁸³. After this introduction, the annual entries of the Chronicle begin with the year 6360 (852), which states the following: "In the year 6360 (852), the fifteenth of the indiction, at the accession of the Emperor Michael, the land of the Rus' was first named. We have determined this date from the fact that in the reign of this Emperor Rhos attacked Tsar'grad..."¹²⁸⁴.

There are two key points worth taking into consideration: (i) the Primary Chronicle begins its yearly entries with the accession of Michael III and the attack of the Rhos against Byzantium. The date is obviously wrong; Michael III was not crowned in 852, nor did the Rhos attack Constantinople in that year. But this does not affect the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that these chronological errors occur because the compiler of the Chronicle copied, along

¹²⁷⁹ VITA IGNATII, 42, 32-44,3.

¹²⁸⁰ VITA IGNATII, 44, 15-19.

¹²⁸¹ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 199.

¹²⁸² VITA IGNATII, 44, 26-31.

¹²⁸³ ISOAHO, Last Emperor, 45.

¹²⁸⁴ PRIMARY CHRONICLE, 58, §17. On the Primary chronicle of Kiev, see also: S. GRIFFIN, *The Liturgical Past in Byzantium and Early Rus (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: Fourth Series 112)*. Cambridge 2019, 35-61.

with its errors, the chronological table of the Continuator of George Hamartolos¹²⁸⁵.

After this entry (ii), the author of the Chronicle did not continue recording the subsequent Byzantine emperors and dealt only with the Russian princes, right up to the death of Svyatopolk¹²⁸⁶. Thus, it becomes apparent that in the Primary Chronicle Michael III serves as a historical figure, as he links the written history of the Rhos with the contemporary written universal history, counting the time from the Creation, as described in the introduction to Michael III¹²⁸⁷.

As I have already mentioned, the troops that were usually stationed in Constantinople, along with Michael III and Bardas were absent and the capital was lacking any substantial land defence. According to Symeon Magister, the defence of the capital was entrusted to Ooryphas¹²⁸⁸, who was at that time the eparchos of the Constantinople¹²⁸⁹. Having realized the scale of the Russian raid, Ooryphas quickly alerted Michael III, who at that time was at the Mauropotamos (in Turkish Kara-su) river, which is located in Cappadocia and is a tributary of the Sangarios river¹²⁹⁰. Upon hearing the news, Michael III rushed to return to Constantinople; by the time he reached the capital, the Rhos had already surrounded it and he was barely able to enter the city.

¹²⁸⁵ The compiler of the Chronicle was based on the chronological table of the Continuator of George Hamartolos. See: ISOAHO, *Last Emperor*, 45; PRIMARY CHRONICLE, 30.

¹²⁸⁶ PRIMARY CHRONICLE, 59, §18.

¹²⁸⁷ ISOAHO, *Last Emperor*, 46.

¹²⁸⁸ PmbZ #25696.

¹²⁸⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 319-320.

¹²⁹⁰ The exact location of Mauropotamos is disputed; it is either a tributary of the Sangarios river in Bithynia, or a tributary of the Halys river in Cappadocia. On the Mauropotamos river, see: HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 233 (Melas). There was a discrepancy regarding Michael III's location at the time he was informed about the Russian raid. On the matter, see: VASILIEV, *Russian attack*, 195-196.

Michael III and Photios rushed to invoke divine aid in the Blachernae church of the Theotokos¹²⁹¹. They took up Her precious garment¹²⁹², which had been preserved inside the church, paraded it round the walls and symbolically dipped it into the sea. Immediately, a storm arose and the ships of the Rhos were smashed up; only few of them managed to return home¹²⁹³. According to Vasiliev, it is not the first time the particular vestment had been used; it was also used during the siege of the city by Avars, Scythians, and Persians in 626¹²⁹⁴. The Russian scholar remarked that although the religious performances deeply impressed the superstitious citizens of Constantinople, they definitely failed to impress the Rhos, who had probably seen a procession moving round the walls¹²⁹⁵.

According to the narratives of the Byzantine sources, mainly from the homilies of Photios and the account of Symeon Magister, Constantinople was saved from the Russian raid due to divine intervention, i.e. from the storm that arose by the virtue of Theotokos and sank the Russian ships. However, if we are to disregard the heavenly intervention, it becomes apparent that there are also other –earthly– factors that contributed to the failure of the raid of the Rhos.

Taking into consideration that the Rhos managed to plunder the suburbs, raid the Princes' islands and lay siege on the Byzantine capital, it becomes evident that the attack did not last a few days or weeks, but a few months and was still underway during 861¹²⁹⁶. During these months the Rhos must have certainly exhausted themselves. Vasiliev, believes that exhaustion was the

¹²⁹¹ On the Blachernae church of the Virgin indicatively see: MÜLLER – WIENER, *Bildlexikon*, 82.

¹²⁹² On the garment of Theotokos, see: S. T. SHOEMAKER, *The Earliest "Life of the Virgin" and Constantinople's Marian Relics*. *DOP* 62 (2008) 73; J. WORTLEY, *The Marian Relics at Constantinople*. *GRBS* 45/2 (2005) 176ff (with further bibliography).

¹²⁹³ ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 11, 7-13; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 246, 266-247, 269.

¹²⁹⁴ VASILIEV, *Russian attack*, 219.

¹²⁹⁵ VASILIEV, *Russian attack*, 219.

¹²⁹⁶ VASILIEV, *Russian attack*, 217.

general cause of the Russian failure¹²⁹⁷. He also remarks that there is no notion of the Byzantine land forces or fleet getting involved with the Rhos¹²⁹⁸; as I have already mentioned, the Byzantine fleet was absent, conducting operations in Sicily and Southeastern Mediterranean.

From my point of view, there is also another factor, which contributed to the failure of the Russian raid and has generally gone unnoticed by modern literature; I refer to the walls of Constantinople. The walls of the Byzantine capital had saved the city from previous sieges as well, i.e. from the siege by the Avars and Persians in 626, from the siege by the Arabs in 674-678 etc. During the reign of Michael III, an extensive renovation of the walls took place. Undoubtedly, these renovations contributed to adequately protecting the citizens¹²⁹⁹. Having surrounded Constantinople, as attested in the homily of Photios¹³⁰⁰ and in the account of Symeon Magister¹³⁰¹, the Rhos lacked the strength to demolish the Byzantine walls. As a result, I find it more plausible that it was a combination of exhaustion along with the inability of the Russians to besiege Constantinople that led to their retreat.

Unlike the date of the appearance of the fleet of the Rhos before Constantinople, the day of their retreat is not so accurately dated. The Synaxarium of Constantinople gives the date June 5: “Ἡ ἀνάμνησις τῆς μετὰ φιλανθρωπίας ἐπενεχθείσης ἡμῖν φοβεράς ἀνάγκης ἐν τῇ τῶν βαρβάρων ἐπιδρομῇ, ὅτε μέλλοντας πάντας ὑπ’ αὐτῶν δικαίως αἰχμαλωτίζεσθαι καὶ φόνῳ μαχαίρας παραδίδοσθαι ὁ οἰκτίρμων καὶ φιλάνθρωπος Θεὸς διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους αὐτοῦ παρ’ ἐλπίδα πᾶσαν ἐλυτρώσατο ἡμᾶς,

¹²⁹⁷ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 228.

¹²⁹⁸ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 227-228.

¹²⁹⁹ In my study I devote a separate chapter regarding the extensive renovation program that took place during Michael III's reign in Constantinople and in the Byzantine provinces. See below, Chapter VIII.

¹³⁰⁰ MANGO, Homilies, 89.

¹³⁰¹ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 427, §23; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 11, 3-4; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 246, 265.

πρεσβεούσης αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῆς ἀχράντου καὶ παναγίας δεσποίνης ἡμῶν τὸν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος δι’ αὐτῆς φυλλαττόμενον”¹³⁰² (On this day is commemorated the terrific disaster which was inflicted upon us in the form of an incursion of the barbarians; when all were ready to be deservedly captured by them and subjected to slaughter, the merciful and benevolent God, by the bowels of His mercy, contrary to all hope, delivered us, through the intercession in our behalf of our Immaculate and All-holy Lady with Him Who through her protects humanity)¹³⁰³.

However, according to Vasiliev, this date cannot be accepted as a definite date regarding the retreat of the Rhos; it could simply imply that it was on that date that the last Russian ship withdrew from Bosporos, or –and this is more likely– that it is only the date that was later fixed by the Church to be regarded as an approximate chronological indication for the closure of the Russian campaign¹³⁰⁴.

He claims that the failure of the Rhos was already accomplished in March 861. He claims that proof of this can be found on the *Akathistos Hymnos*, which was performed on March 22, 861¹³⁰⁵. Vasiliev remarks that the *Akathistos Hymnos* is closely connected with the commemoration of the victory against the Russians and the withdrawal of their ships. As a result, the fact that during 861 it was performed on March 22 suggests that by that time the Russian raid was over and that the Rhos were already retreating¹³⁰⁶. To sum up, although the exact date of the retreat cannot be set with accuracy, it is plausible that the last Russian ships left the Byzantine shores some time in April or May¹³⁰⁷.

¹³⁰² SYN. ECC. CONST. 729, 30- 731,5.

¹³⁰³ English translation after: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 210.

¹³⁰⁴ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 217.

¹³⁰⁵ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 216-217.

¹³⁰⁶ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 216-217.

¹³⁰⁷ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 217.

The majority of the Byzantine sources attribute the retreat of the Rhos to the intervention of Theotokos. In his second homily (homily IV), which was delivered after the withdrawal of the Russian fleet, Photios narrates that “...since we have been delivered from the threat, and have escaped the sword, and the destroyer has passed us, who have been covered and marked out with the garment of the Mother of the World, let us all in common with Her send up songs of thanksgiving to Christ our God, Who was born of Her...”¹³⁰⁸. The fact that Photios attests that it was through Theotokos that Constantinople was saved, i.e. through divine intervention, should not come as a surprise. Similarly, the Brussels Chronicle, published by Cumont, mentions that the Rhos were defeated and destroyed through the intercession of Theotokos¹³⁰⁹. However, the accounts of Theophanes Continuatus, Symeon Magister and of Pseudo-Symeon are more plain on the Russian retreat; they narrate that the Rhos were defeated by a miraculous storm¹³¹⁰, and that they returned home having had their fill of divine wrath¹³¹¹.

It is worthwhile delving into the conditions the Russian retreat took place. Theophanes Continuatus narrates that “καὶ μετ’ οὐ πολὺ πάλιν τὴν βασιλεύουσαν πρεσβεία αὐτῶν κατελάμβανεν, τοῦ θεοῦ βαπτίσματος ἐν μετοχῇ γενέσθαι αὐτοὺς λιτανεύουσα, ὃ καὶ γέγονεν.” (and not long afterwards an embassy from them reached the imperial city again beseeching that they might become participants in divine baptism, and this came to pass)¹³¹². According to this text, shortly after the withdrawal of the Rhos, a Russian embassy came again to Constantinople beseeching to be converted to Christianity.

¹³⁰⁸ MANGO, *Homilies*, 109.

¹³⁰⁹ CUMONT, *Manuscrit 11370*, 33, 19-21.

¹³¹⁰ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 427, §23; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 11, 9-13; PSEUDO-SYMEON, 674, 20-675, 3; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 247, 269-273.

¹³¹¹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 278, 5-7.

¹³¹² THEOPH. CONT., IV, 278, 7-9.

As Vasiliev remarks, the word *πάλιν* (again), which Theophanes Continuatus uses is crucial for understanding the events that took place. From the above narration it becomes apparent that at least two embassies had arrived in Constantinople. The first one had taken place immediately after the Russian retreat –or even just before¹³¹³, i.e.during ca. 861 and probably concerned the conditions of the terms of the Russian retreat. The second one took place shortly after and concerned the conversion of the Rhos to Christianity.

Photios' circular letter to the Oriental Patriarchs, which dates back to 867¹³¹⁴, enables us to date the conversion of the Rhos more precisely. Photios narrates that "...ἀλλά γε δὴ καὶ τὸ παρὰ πολλοῖς πολλάκις θρυλούμενον καὶ εἰς ὠμότητα καὶ μαιφονίαν πάντας δευτέρους ταπτόμενον, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ καλούμενον Ῥῶς, οἳ δὴ καὶ κατὰ τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἀρχῆς, τοὺς πέριξ αὐτῶν δουλωσάμενοι κάκειθεν ὑπέρογκα φρονηματισθέντες, χειῖρας ἀντήραν. ἀλλ' ὅμως νῦν καὶ οὗτοι τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν καθαρὰν καὶ ἀκίβδηλον θρησκείαν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς καὶ ἀθέου δόξης ἐν ἣ κατείχοντο πρότερον ἀντηλλάξαντο, ἐν ὑπηκόων ἑαυτοὺς καὶ προξένων τάξει ἀντὶ τῆς πρὸ μικροῦ καθ' ἡμῶν λεηλασίας καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου τολμήματος ἀγαπητῶς ἐγκαταστήσαντες"¹³¹⁵ (...the invasion upon the empire by the race which in cruelty and blood-thirstiness left all other peoples far behind, the so-called Ros, and now indeed, even they have changed their Hellenic and godless religion for the pure and unadulterated faith of the Christians, and have placed themselves under the protection of the empire, becoming good friends instead of continuing their recent robbery and daring adventures¹³¹⁶). In the above

¹³¹³ VASILIEV, Russian attack, 229; YANNOPOULOS, *Ιστορία*, 195,

¹³¹⁴ Phot. Epist. 2 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 39; SHEPARD, Problems, 17.

¹³¹⁵ Phot. Epist. 2 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 50, 294-302.

¹³¹⁶ English translation of Photios' text after: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 229-230.

quoted text, Photios probably refers to the second embassy of the Rhos, which is also mentioned in the narration of Theophanes Continuatus¹³¹⁷.

In his letter to the Oriental patriarchs, Photios describes the raid of the Rhos and their subsequent conversion to Christianity after having described the Christianization of Bulgaria. Taking this into consideration -along with the fact that when Photios refers to the conversion of the Rhos, he narrates “...ἀλλ ὁμῶς νῦν καὶ οὗτοι... ἀντηλλάξαντο” (even they converted)- it becomes evident that the Rhos adopted Christianity after the Bulgarians. Since the baptism of the Bulgarian ruler Boris took place in 864, this date becomes a *terminus ante quem* for the conversion of the Rhos as well. Apparently, the *terminus post quem* is 867, the year Photios sent his letter to the Patriarchs of the East¹³¹⁸. As a result, we can establish that the Rhos adopted Christianity sometime between 864 and 867¹³¹⁹.

To sum up, since the scope of this study is to critically review the reign of Michael III, a number of facts should be considered. First of all, despite the subjective narrative of the sources, the Byzantine capital was truly unprepared for a siege; Michael III was not present in the city, nor was the majority of the Byzantine troops normally stationed in Constantinople. Afterwards, having heard the news on the Russian siege, the emperor immediately returned to the capital. This action proves the military readiness of the Byzantine government and its eagerness to repel the enemy and defend the capital of the empire. The intelligence and insightfulness of the Byzantine government during Michael

¹³¹⁷ “...Φωτίου τὸ θεῖον ἐξιλεωσαμένου τοῦ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοὺς οἰάκας ἔχοντος, οἵκαδε ἐπεπόρευοντο· καὶ μετ’ οὐ πολὺ πάλιν τὴν βασιλεύουσαν πρεσβεία αὐτῶν κατελάβανεν, τοῦ θεοῦ βαπτίσματος ἐν μετοχῇ γενέσθαι αὐτοὺς λιτανεύουσα, ὃ καὶ γέγονεν”. THEOPH. CONT., IV, 278, 1-9.

¹³¹⁸ On the encyclical letter, see also: HURBANIČ, Concept, 104-106, 111-112.

¹³¹⁹ This argument was originally expressed by Vasiliev. See: VASILIEV, Russian attack, 229-230. On the Byzantine-Rhos relations after the attack of 860, see: SHEPARD, Problems, 18ff.

III's reign is also attested by the fact that they concluded peace treaties with the Rhos and managed to convert them to ὑπηκόων ἑαυτοῦς καὶ προξένων¹³²⁰.

Asia Minor (iv)

A detailed description of the campaigns undertaken during Michael III's sole reign reveals not only the brilliance of the Byzantine government regarding the military affairs; it also attests the method, according to which the biased Byzantine historians suppressed the truth and deliberately falsified the outcome of these campaigns, in order to misrepresent Michael III. Regarding the concerned period, the campaigns in Asia Minor had already started during the regency of Theodora. During the regency of Theodora the raids against the Paulicians were intensified. The Paulicians were a sect of Armenian origin, who resided on the Eastern provinces of Asia Minor. Although they had often served as a bulwark, defending Byzantine lands from Arab raids since the reign of Michael II, they were systematically persecuted for their religious beliefs¹³²¹.

Soon after the restoration of the icons, in 843, a decree was promulgated that demonstrated the hostility and the adamant approach of the regency of Theodora against the then harmless sect. According to Theophanes Continuatus, a Byzantine expedition was sent to the Paulicians to deliver this decree. This expedition was led by three officials: Argyros¹³²², the son of Doux¹³²³ and Soudales¹³²⁴. The Paulicians were either to renounce their religious errors and convert to the Christian Orthodox faith as it existed, or be

¹³²⁰ Phot. Epist. 2 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 50, 300.

¹³²¹ On the Paulicians, their origin and doctrine, see: GARSOÏAN, *Heresy*, 13ff; GARSOÏAN, *Reinterpretation*, 87ff (and cit. n. 3, with further bibliography); C. DIXON, *Polemics and persecution: East Romans and Paulicians c. 780-880*. Unpublished Phd Thesis. University of Nottingham, 2018; LEMERLE, *Paulicians*, 1ff; HAMILTON et al., *Dualist Heresies*, 5-25, 62-63; S. RUNCIMAN, *the Medieval Manichee*. Cambridge 1947.

¹³²² PmbZ #4506.

¹³²³ PmbZ #436.

¹³²⁴ PmbZ #7155.

executed¹³²⁵. Naturally, they refused to give up their beliefs and the Byzantine regiments annihilated them. Theophanes Continuatus narrates that one hundred thousand Paulicians were executed and their lands were confiscated by the state¹³²⁶.

The aggression on the Paulicians had severe political and military consequences for the Byzantine empire. Karbeas¹³²⁷, who was one of the Paulicians and at that time protomandator¹³²⁸ of the theme of Anatolikon, is said to have lost his father on the aforementioned Byzantine raid¹³²⁹. Thinking of his own life, he decided, along with five thousand Paulicians to cross the Byzantine-Arab frontier and seek refuge at Amer¹³³⁰, the emir of Melitene¹³³¹.

Theophanes Continuatus describes that Amer took on the fleeing Paulicians and helped them to found the cities of Amara¹³³², Argaun¹³³³ and, subsequently, Tephrike¹³³⁴, which served as their capital. From that moment onwards –i.e. since 843– they assisted the Arabs in raiding the Byzantine lands in Asia Minor. This had as a result the remnant of the Paulician forces to basically switch sides, a fact that had immediate repercussions for the Byzantine-Arab conflicts¹³³⁵.

Roughly one year later, in 844, Amer was in a prominent position and began raiding the Byzantine lands in Asia Minor¹³³⁶; Karbeas and the remaining Paulician forces had joined him¹³³⁷. At the same time, Alī ibn Yaḥyā¹³³⁸, the emir

¹³²⁵ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 236, 3-7.

¹³²⁶ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 236, 7-10.

¹³²⁷ PmbZ #3625.

¹³²⁸ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 330.

¹³²⁹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 236, 13-15.

¹³³⁰ PmbZ #8552.

¹³³¹ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 233-237 (Melitēnē).

¹³³² HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 139 (Amara).

¹³³³ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 150 (Argaun).

¹³³⁴ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 204-205 (Tephrikē).

¹³³⁵ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 231-232.

¹³³⁶ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 195-196.

¹³³⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 238, 32-36.

¹³³⁸ PmbZ #200.

of Tarsos¹³³⁹, joined Amer. In fact, this is the first time Alī ibn Yahyā took action against the Byzantines. Since then, he would conduct yearly expeditions against Byzantium, mainly during the summer. His campaigns are well documented by Al-Ṭabarī¹³⁴⁰. The Byzantine government immediately took action; an army, led by Theoktistos and Bardas¹³⁴¹, was mustered to confront the emir and the Paulicians. However, the outcome of the battle did not favor the Byzantines. The combined Arab and Paulician forces met the Byzantine army in Maupotamos¹³⁴² and defeated them¹³⁴³. Symeon Magister records that during the conflict, a number of Byzantine officials defected to the Arabs¹³⁴⁴; one of them was Theophanes Pharganos¹³⁴⁵.

Having been defeated, Theoktistos and Bardas managed to return to Constantinople; the former blamed Bardas for the defeat and persuaded Theodora to expel him from the Byzantine capital¹³⁴⁶. However, according to the thorough entry of the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, the duration of Bardas' exile is not clear¹³⁴⁷.

Generally speaking –and as Tsougarakis notes¹³⁴⁸– the Byzantine chronicles were rather hostile to Theoktistos and criticized him harshly. Yet it still remains a fact that within the course of one year, Theoktistos was defeated twice – the

¹³³⁹ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, Kilikien und Isaurien I, 428-439 (Tarsos).

¹³⁴⁰ On the yearly expeditions of Alī ibn Yahyā against Byzantium, see also: HILD – HELLENKEMPER, Kilikien und Isaurien I, 429-430 (Tarsos); VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 442-444.

¹³⁴¹ Theophanes Continuatus relates that, although Bardas was initially supposed to join the expedition, he did not do so; it was Petronas (PmbZ #5929) who joined it. THEOPH. CONT., IV, 238, 37-40.

¹³⁴² On Maupotamos see: HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 79; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 196 (and cit. n. 2).

¹³⁴³ VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 196.

¹³⁴⁴ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 421, §6; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 4, 15-21; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 233, 20-28.

¹³⁴⁵ PmbZ #8150; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 197 (cit. n. 1).

¹³⁴⁶ FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 421, §6; ISTRIN, Georgija Amartola, 4, 20-24; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 233, 30-35.

¹³⁴⁷ PmbZ #791.

¹³⁴⁸ TSUGARAKIS, Crete, 48.

first one being the failed expedition to retake Crete, dated in 843. The Arab sources do not make explicit mention of this raid; however, Vasiliev has identified the Arab raid of 844 in the poems of Abu Tammam and Buhturi¹³⁴⁹.

The defeat on the Mauropotamos river naturally had negative consequences for Byzantium, but its impact was confined to no more than a military defeat. Internal strifes in the Abbasid Caliphate during the reign of al-Wāthiq (842-847)¹³⁵⁰ did not allow the Arabs to pursue the war against the Byzantine empire. Although the Arab forces managed to reach Bosporos and ravage Dorylaion¹³⁵¹, they eventually withdrew¹³⁵². The next year, i.e. in 845, a peace treaty was signed between the two sides and in September 16¹³⁵³ a prisoner exchange took place¹³⁵⁴ on the river Lamos¹³⁵⁵, in Cilicia. Al-Ṭabarī's thorough description of the event records that c. 4000 prisoners were exchanged on an one-to-one basis¹³⁵⁶. As for the peace treaty, it seems to have lasted six years and no military operations took place during the interval period (845-851). During this period conflicts between the two sides were taking place only in Sicily.

However, during 845 and prior to the aforementioned prisoner exchange, another important event took place in Samarra, then the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate; namely, the execution of the forty-two martyrs of Amorium¹³⁵⁷. Following the sack of Amorium by the Arabs in 838, the majority of its population was either executed or sold to slave markets¹³⁵⁸, which were

¹³⁴⁹ VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 196 (cit. n. 1), and 400, 404.

¹³⁵⁰ EI², XI, 178 (al-Wāthiq bi 'llāh); PmbZ #8593.

¹³⁵¹ BELKE – MERSICH, *Phrygien und Pisidien*, 238-242 (Dorylaion).

¹³⁵² VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 196 (cit. n. 1).

¹³⁵³ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 39 (1352).

¹³⁵⁴ DÖLGER, *Regesten*, 54 (448); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 201, 442; VENNING, *Chronology*, 254.

¹³⁵⁵ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien* I, 330 (Lamos).

¹³⁵⁶ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 40-41 (1353-1354).

¹³⁵⁷ On the forty-two martyrs of Amorium, their imprisonment and execution, see: KOLIA – DERMITZAKI, *Execution*, 1ff (with further bibliography); PmbZ #10542.

¹³⁵⁸ PmbZ #10540.

organized *in situ*¹³⁵⁹. However, the officials of the city and its eminent citizens were kept alive, either to be ransomed or to deny their faith and convert to Islam.

Despite the repeated efforts of Theophilos and, subsequently, of Theodora to ransom them, they could not be recovered¹³⁶⁰. Only a few of them are known by name; among them were: Theodoros Krateros¹³⁶¹, who is regarded as their leader; Aetios¹³⁶², who at that time was patrikios¹³⁶³ and strategos¹³⁶⁴ of the theme of Anatolikon; Theophilos¹³⁶⁵ and Konstantinos Babutzikos¹³⁶⁶, Bassoes¹³⁶⁷, Kallistos¹³⁶⁸, and Konstantinos¹³⁶⁹. Having been kept imprisoned for a period of six and a half years, the forty-two martyrs of Amorium were eventually publicly executed on 6 March 845¹³⁷⁰.

Shortly after their execution, the monk Euodios¹³⁷¹ wrote their *martyrion*, an hagiographical text which was widely disseminated and is considered to be the last example of the genre of collective martyrdom. The author claims that the Iconoclastic beliefs of Theophilos were the cause of the military defeats and of the capture of Amorium. The work of Euodios also contains theological discussions between the martyrs and various people who tried to convince them to convert to Islam; however, during their imprisonment, they remained adamant and defended the Christian Orthodox faith. In total, several versions

¹³⁵⁹ KOLIA – DERMITZAKI, Execution, 2.

¹³⁶⁰ KOLIA – DERMITZAKI, Execution, 6.

¹³⁶¹ PmbZ #7679.

¹³⁶² PmbZ #108. Some Byzantine sources, like Skylitzes, do not regard Aetios as one of the captured army leaders and do not place him on the forty-two martyrs. On the matter see: KOLIA – DERMITZAKI, Execution, 26.

¹³⁶³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 76, 294-295.

¹³⁶⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹³⁶⁵ PmbZ #8211.

¹³⁶⁶ PmbZ #3932.

¹³⁶⁷ PmbZ #982.

¹³⁶⁸ PmbZ #3606.

¹³⁶⁹ PmbZ #3933.

¹³⁷⁰ PmbZ #10542.

¹³⁷¹ PmbZ #1682.

of their martyrion have been produced and one of them is ascribed to Michael Synkellos¹³⁷².

In the meanwhile, al-Wāṭiq¹³⁷³ died in 847, and he was succeeded by his brother, al-Mutawakkil (847-861)¹³⁷⁴. In 851, Alī ibn Yaḥyā¹³⁷⁵ began three years of summer raids on the Byzantine lands in Asia minor; however, he does not appear to have done much damage¹³⁷⁶. The regency of Theodora, despite its recent military defeats, stroke back. On 22 May 853, a Byzantine fleet, consisting of two hundred ships, commanded by someone, who the Arabs called Ibn Qaṭūnā¹³⁷⁷, raided Damietta¹³⁷⁸. It appears that the city's garrison was absent at a feast for the day of Arafah, which was organized in Fustat¹³⁷⁹ by Anbasah ibn Ishāq al-Ḍabbi, the governor of Egypt¹³⁸⁰. Anbasah had apparently ordered the local troops in Fustat to celebrate.

Al-Ṭabarī's account on the Byzantine raid is very thorough. He informs us that the Byzantine troops arrived from the West; they attacked the city and destroyed everything on their path. They further destroyed a large quantity of weapons that were destined to be shipped to Crete and aid Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar to

¹³⁷² On the hagiographical text and its different versions, see: EFTHYMIADIS, Hagiography, 113-114; A. P. KAZHDAN, Hagiographical Notes. *BYZ* 56 (1986) 150-160; S. KOTZAMBASSI, The martyrdom of the forty-two martyrs of Amorium. *Epistemonike Epeteris Philosophikes Scholes Aristoteleiou Panepistemiou Thessalonikes, periodos B', Tmema Philologias*, vol. II. Thessaloniki 1992, 109-153; KOLIA – DERMITZAKI, Execution, 1 (cit n. 2, with further bibliography); S. SHOEMAKER, Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine: Passion of Peter of Capitolias, Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, Passion of Romanos the New Martyr. Provo UT 2016, 46-49; V. VASILIEVSKIJ - P. NIKITIN, Skazania o 42 amoriiskich mučenikach, St. Petersburg, 1905.

¹³⁷³ PmbZ #8593.

¹³⁷⁴ EI², VII, 777-778 (al-Mutawakkil 'alā 'llāh); KENNEDY, Prophet, 166-169; PmbZ #5206.

¹³⁷⁵ PmbZ #200.

¹³⁷⁶ TREADGOLD, History, 449.

¹³⁷⁷ PmbZ #2651.

¹³⁷⁸ On the Byzantine raid on Damietta, see: CHRISTIDES, Conquest, 52ff; EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 201-202, 281-286; KUBIAK, Damietta, 46-66; LEVI DELLA VIDA, A papyrus reference, 212-221; PRYOR – JEFFREYS, Δρόμων, 46-49, 61-64, 71-72; RÉMONDON, Damiette, 245-250; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 214-217, 315-317. On the city of Damietta, see: EI², II, 292 (Dimyāt).

¹³⁷⁹ EI², II, 957-959 (al-Fustāt).

¹³⁸⁰ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 125 (1417).

make further progress on the island.¹³⁸¹ The Arab historian also narrates that the Byzantines took the furnishings, the sugar, and flax, which were destined to be shipped to Iraq and captivated about six hundred Muslim and Copt women¹³⁸².

Following their raid on Damietta, the Byzantine fleet proceeded to raid Ustūm¹³⁸³, which is near Tinnīs¹³⁸⁴. According to al-Ṭabarī, Ustūm has two iron gates, which the caliph al-Mutasim had ordered to be built. The Byzantines destroyed all of the cities' defences and plundered the two iron gates. Afterwards, they returned to their own territory¹³⁸⁵. The Byzantine raids seem to have caught the Arabs by surprise. More than that, it showed that the Egyptian shores were not safe and the existing defensive forces and coastal fortifications were insufficient. This was probably the reason that made al-Mutawakkil to order the strengthening of the coastal defences and the building of ships in all coastal towns of the Caliphate¹³⁸⁶.

Taking that into consideration, it must be pointed out that although the Byzantines managed to score a number of important strategic naval victories against the Arabs, on the whole, during the concerned period Byzantium suffered at the hands of Islam in naval warfare. This becomes apparent if we consider the outcome of the naval warfare in Sicily and Southern Italy. Yet this does not mean that Byzantium did not try to better its navy. It was during the reign of Theophilos or Michael III, that a second shipyard was constructed in Constantinople, in the port of Neōrion¹³⁸⁷, on the left of the bank of the Golden

¹³⁸¹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 125-126 (1417-1418).

¹³⁸² AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 126 (1418).

¹³⁸³ Ustūm is a fortified town situated between Tinnīs and Faramā, on a branch of the river Nile. J. MASPÉRO – G. WIET. *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte*. Paris 1919, 17.

¹³⁸⁴ EI², X, 531-532 (Tinnīs).

¹³⁸⁵ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 126-127 (1418); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 217.

¹³⁸⁶ KUBIAK, *Damietta*, 54-59 (with annotations on the primary sources); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 217-218.

¹³⁸⁷ JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 225.

Horn¹³⁸⁸. It seems that till that time, only one shipyard was in use, which was dated back to the fourth or fifth century¹³⁸⁹.

It should be noted that the Byzantine sources have totally suppressed the Byzantine raid of 853 on Damietta; they do not make any mention of it at all. Probably in an effort –one of the many- to present Michael III in an unfavorable manner. The raid is also not included in any version of Symeon Magister's work; we are informed of the attack on Damietta only from the account of Al-Ṭabarī and Ya 'qubi (briefly)¹³⁹⁰.

Nearly one year later, in 853-854, the Byzantines returned to raid Damietta for a second time. Like the first time, they appeared on the Egyptian coast with two hundred ships and raided the city for a month. This raid is also not mentioned by any Byzantine source¹³⁹¹. In 855, the year that the Arabs began ravaging the suburbs of Enna (Castrogiovanni), in Sicily, the Byzantines launched a military operation in Asia Minor and raided Anazarbos¹³⁹², in Kilikia. There, they captivated the Zutt tribe, who, according to Al-Ṭabarī, were of Indian origin and were raising buffaloes¹³⁹³. It must be pointed out that Al-Ṭabarī¹³⁹⁴ is once again the only historian who narrates the Byzantine raid on Anazarbos; the Byzantine sources are silent of the event.

In the same year, after the raid on Anazarbos, talks began between the two sides for another prisoner exchange. As Al-Ṭabarī¹³⁹⁵ and Ya 'qubi¹³⁹⁶ record,

¹³⁸⁸ AHRWEILER, *Mer*, 432.

¹³⁸⁹ On the matter see: COSENTINO, *Naval Warfare*, 335 (with further bibliography).

¹³⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, XXXIV, 126-127 (1418); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 276.

¹³⁹¹ On the raid of 854, which has been disputed by some modern scholars, see: EICKHOFF, *Seekrieg*, 203; KUBIAK, *Damietta*, 58-59; RÉMONDON, *Damiette*, 248; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 387 (with quotations on the primary sources).

¹³⁹² HILD – HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien*, 178-185 (Anazarbos).

¹³⁹³ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 137 (1426, cit. n. 454); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 222-223, 317-318.

¹³⁹⁴ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 137-140 (1426-1428).

¹³⁹⁵ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 137'-140 (1426-1428); DÖLGER, *Regesten*, 54 (451); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 222-223, 317-318.

¹³⁹⁶ VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 276-277.

the prisoner exchange eventually took place on the river Lamos¹³⁹⁷, either on 12th or 23rd February 856. The Byzantine empress reportedly sent Georgios¹³⁹⁸ to deal with the negotiations, while Al-Mutawakkil sent Nasr b. al-Azhar b. Faraj¹³⁹⁹. Theodora –or Theoktistos- appear to have attempted to convert the Muslim prisoners to Christianity, before releasing them¹⁴⁰⁰.

This prisoner exchange was actually the last act that was conducted under the regency of Theodora. Since then, the subsequent military operations and prisoner exchanges between the Byzantines and the Arabs took place under the sole rule of Michael III. During the next seven years (856-863) one of the most glorious eras of Byzantine military history takes place. Not only was the Eastern frontier strengthened and its fortifications reinforced, but the Arab raids were also held under control.

Michael III became the sole ruler of the Byzantine Empire on 15 March 856¹⁴⁰¹; shortly after, Petronas¹⁴⁰² became strategos¹⁴⁰³ of the Thracesian theme¹⁴⁰⁴ and was in charge of the Byzantine army that campaigned against the Arabs in Asia Minor. During the summer of 856, Alī ibn Yaḥyā, the emir of Tarsos, along with Karbas and his army crossed the Byzantine – Arab frontier in the Southern Asia Minor and raided the Byzantine lands¹⁴⁰⁵; the Byzantines responded by sending Petronas against him. Regarding this event, Theophanes Continuatus merely narrates that ἀντεστρατεύετο δὲ αὐτοῖς Πετρωνᾶς, τὴν τοῦ

¹³⁹⁷ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, Kilikien und Isaurien I, 330 (Lamos).

¹³⁹⁸ PmbZ 2258.

¹³⁹⁹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 138 (and cit. 457).

¹⁴⁰⁰ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 138 (1427).

¹⁴⁰¹ PmbZ #4991.

¹⁴⁰² PmbZ #5929.

¹⁴⁰³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹⁴⁰⁴ VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 210-211.

¹⁴⁰⁵ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 146–147 (1434).

δομεστίκου τότε ἀρχὴν διοικῶν (against them [the emperor] sent Petronas, who at that time hold the rank of *domestikos ton scholon*¹⁴⁰⁶)¹⁴⁰⁷.

It is remarkable that Theophanes Continuatus does not mention the outcome of the expedition. This is yet another example of how the Byzantine Historians, who were writing under the directions of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, suppressed the victorious campaigns that took place under Michael III. But Al-Ṭabarī, who is not politically biased and whose account is fuller and more accurate, narrates that the Arabs and their Paulician allies were heavily defeated. Al-Ṭabarī describes that, following the summer expedition of Alī ibn Yaḥyā, the Byzantines advanced from the area of Samosata¹⁴⁰⁸ they crossed the Euphrates river and they reached as far as Amida¹⁴⁰⁹; they also raided Tephrike¹⁴¹⁰, and captivated about ten thousand men. Alī ibn Yaḥyā and Karbeas pursued them, but did not manage to catch anyone¹⁴¹¹.

In 858, al-Mutawakkil dispatched Bughā¹⁴¹² to raid the Byzantine lands. According to Al-Ṭabarī¹⁴¹³, Bughā undertook the expedition and, beginning from Damascos, between July 17 and August 14, he conquered the fortress of Samāluh¹⁴¹⁴, which is located near Tarsos¹⁴¹⁵ and Mopsuestia¹⁴¹⁶.

One year later, in 859, another expedition against the Arabs was launched by the Byzantines; this time against Samosata. We are informed from the Byzantine sources that on this occasion Michael III was in command of the

¹⁴⁰⁶ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 329-330.

¹⁴⁰⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 238, 37-38.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Samosata was on the banks of the Euphrates river and was the target of many Byzantine raids. On Samosata, see: HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 79–80; HONIGMANN, *Ostgrenze*, 58, 62, 71-73; TODT – VEST, *Syria*, 1682-1696.

¹⁴⁰⁹ HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 79

¹⁴¹⁰ HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 204-205 (Tephrikē).

¹⁴¹¹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 146-147 (1434).

¹⁴¹² EI², I, 1287 (Bughā Al-Kabir).

¹⁴¹³ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 151 (1436).

¹⁴¹⁴ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 151 (1436) (cit. n. 500); VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 234.

¹⁴¹⁵ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien I*, 428-439 (Tarsos).

¹⁴¹⁶ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien I*, 351-359 (Mopsuestia).

army¹⁴¹⁷. The inscriptions of Ankara, which are also dated in 859, testify not only that Michael III was leading the 859 expedition, but also that he attended to the defences of the fortresses, which could afford protection to the army in case of a defeat¹⁴¹⁸.

This time the biased Byzantine historians did not limit their selves in hiding information; instead, they describe a defeat of the Byzantine campaign, which is a sheer fabrication. It is worthwhile delving into the narratives of the sources to fully comprehend the patterns they used in order to smear Michael III's image.

More precisely, Genesios relates that Michael III gathered an army, mainly from the themes of Thrace and Macedonia, and marched out against Amer and camped in the kellarion valley; the emir of Melitene misguided the Byzantine troops by pretending to march towards Zelisa, but then changed direction towards Chonarion and attacked the Byzantine army. The Byzantines were defeated and had to retreat and camp to a mountain called Anzes. Amer managed to surround the imperial troops and annihilated them. Michael III appeared to be in fatal danger, but Manuel¹⁴¹⁹, the *magistros* and *domestikos ton scholon* urged him to take of his imperial garments and flee for his life, while a section of the army would remain to fight the Arabs. Thus, the emperor managed to escape¹⁴²⁰. Genesios' account is very vocal regarding the circumstances upon which Michael III fled: ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς δειλία κατασχεθεὶς ὑπεστράφη (the emperor, seized with cowardice, turned back)¹⁴²¹.

Similarly, Theophanes Continuatus records a fictional outcome of the Byzantine campaign: Michael III assembled an army of forty thousand men from the themes of Thrace and Macedonia and marched against Amer. The

¹⁴¹⁷ GENESIOS, IV, 22-26; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 252, 1-4.

¹⁴¹⁸ Below, pp. 378-392.

¹⁴¹⁹ PmbZ #4707.

¹⁴²⁰ GENESIOS, IV, 65, 22-66, 65.

¹⁴²¹ GENESIOS, IV, 66, 55-56.

Byzantine army camped near the Kellarion valley, but Amer managed to draw them near Chonarion; there, the emir of Melitene attacked them and forced them to flee towards a mountainous place called Anzes. Amer followed them there, surrounded them and would have certainly captivated the Byzantine emperor, if it wasn't for Manuel¹⁴²². Realizing the imminent danger, it appears that Manuel advised the emperor to remove the garments that gave away his imperial lineage, wear common clothes and flee¹⁴²³. Once again, Michael III is recorded to cowardly fleeing the ongoing battle: ὅτε καὶ τυχῶν ἀδείας ὁ Μιχαὴλ μόλις που ἐκεῖθεν διεσέσωστο ἀδεῶς, καὶ πρὸς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν ἐπανήρχετο (Having secured his position, Michael III managed to escape there with impunity, and returned to the capital)¹⁴²⁴.

In fact, this fictional defeat of Michael III's campaign of 859 in the narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and of Genesios is described in terms identical with the genuine defeat of the battle of Dazimon, which took place during his father's reign, on 22 July 838¹⁴²⁵. As Eirene Christou has rightfully pointed out, there are two keypoints that give away the Byzantine historians' pattern to slander Michael III's image.

Firstly, when they describe Michael III's campaign of 859, they narrate that it happened on the exact same location, i.e. on the Anzes mountain¹⁴²⁶. They also describe that Michael III's army was forced to retreat there, after initially being misguided by Amer. Secondly, they both narrate that it was Magister Manuel¹⁴²⁷, who got involved in the emperor's escape; he told Michael III to

¹⁴²² PmbZ #4707.

¹⁴²³ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 252, 1-254, 36.

¹⁴²⁴ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 254, 36-38.

¹⁴²⁵ On the narrations of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus regarding the actual battle of Dazimon, see: GENESIOS, III, 65, 22-66, 65; THEOPH. CONT., III, 180, 1-184, 38. On the Dazimon battle, see: CODONER, Theophilos, 279-312 (with further bibliography); HALDON, Byzantine Wars, 80-82; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 144-177.

¹⁴²⁶ CHRISTOU, Όψη, 38-39. GENESIOS, IV, 65, 26-66, 40 cf. GENESIOS, III, 48, 30-35, and THEOPH. CONT IV, 252, 4-254, 13 cf. THEOPH. CONT., III, 182, 12-14.

¹⁴²⁷ PmbZ #4707.

remove the imperial garments to hide his identity and thus flee from the ongoing battle, while his troops were still fighting for him¹⁴²⁸.

However, in Michael III's case, it would not have been possible for Manuel to participate in the campaign of 859 in the first place. As Christou meticulously remarks, Manuel's age rendered him incapable of participating in the expedition¹⁴²⁹. More precisely, considering that Manuel was about 20 years old, when Michael I promoted him to protostrator¹⁴³⁰, that would make him about 69 years old, when the campaign of 859 was launched. As a result, he would have been undoubtedly too old to participate in the aforementioned campaign and take the initiative to help the emperor escape¹⁴³¹.

From the aforementioned campaigns in Eastern Mediterranean and in Asia Minor, it becomes evident that the biased Byzantine historians have used two kinds of patterns to slander the image of the last member of the Amorian Dynasty: they not only concealed the outcome of the Byzantine expeditions, but they also deliberately falsified them. Henri Grégoire was the first scholar to trace the narrative techniques used by the Byzantine historians and condemn them for purposely ignoring the Byzantine victorious expeditions¹⁴³².

As for the campaign of 859 against Samosata, the actual outcome of it is narrated by al-Tabarī: The Byzantines raided Samosata, killed and captivated about five hundred persons¹⁴³³. And, simultaneously with this campaign, the Byzantine fleet raided for the third time Damietta¹⁴³⁴.

¹⁴²⁸ GENESIOS, IV, 66, 42-45; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 254, 20-23.

¹⁴²⁹ CHRISTOU, Όψη, 40.

¹⁴³⁰ PmbZ #4707.

¹⁴³¹ On the old age in Byzantium see: A. M. TALBOT, Old Age in Byzantium. *BZ* 77 (1984) 267-278.

¹⁴³² GRÉGOIRE, Épopée byzantine, 36ff.

¹⁴³³ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 164-165 (448).

¹⁴³⁴ BROOKS, Relations, 391; EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 203, KUBIAK, Damietta, 59; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 236, 389.

In the course of the same year, a prisoner exchange was arranged between the Byzantines and the Arabs. According to Al-Ṭabarī¹⁴³⁵, Konstantinos Triphyllios¹⁴³⁶ visited al-Mutawakkil in Bagdad as an emissary on behalf of the Byzantine sovereign. With him were seventy-seven Muslim prisoners, whom Konstantinos Triphyllios presented to the caliph¹⁴³⁷. Al-Ṭabarī relates that during his stay in Bagdad, the Byzantine emissary resided with Shunayf al-Khādim¹⁴³⁸. Afterwards, when the prisoner exchange was settled, Konstantinos Triphyllios returned to Constantinople along with Nasr-ibn-al-Azhar al-shī`ī, who was to negotiate with the Byzantine emperor on behalf of Al-Mutawakkil¹⁴³⁹.

The description of Nasr-ibn-al-Azhar al-shī`ī concerning his meetings with Michael III also sheds light upon the manner the emperor treated the Arab emissaries. These meetings probably kept on going for a couple of months. Admittedly, he narrates that Bardas was in charge of the affairs of the empire. Throughout the negotiations the Arab emissary brought a number of gifts to Michael III, which he gratefully accepted. The Byzantine emperor is in turn reported being congenial to him, honoring him, and arranging for him to reside nearby.

However, in the interval period, Nasr-ibn-al-Azhar al-shī`ī relates that Michael III neglected him for about four months. But, taking into consideration the date of the negotiations –c. 860– it could be that Michael III had either left the capital to campaign in Asia Minor, or that he was busy combatting the Rhos. The prisoner exchange eventually took place between March 28, 860 and

¹⁴³⁵ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 156 (1439).

¹⁴³⁶ PmbZ #3950.

¹⁴³⁷ DÖLGER, Regesten, 55 (454)

¹⁴³⁸ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 156 (1439).

¹⁴³⁹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 156 (1439).

January 16, 861¹⁴⁴⁰ on the river Lamos¹⁴⁴¹. Another prisoner exchange¹⁴⁴² took place the same period in Lulon, which is located in Cappadocia¹⁴⁴³.

The summer of 860 was a dreadful one for the Byzantine population of the Southeastern Asia Minor. Amer¹⁴⁴⁴, the emir of Melitene joined forces with Karbeas¹⁴⁴⁵, and raided the Byzantine lands. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that they brought back over twelve thousand livestock¹⁴⁴⁶. In the meanwhile, an Arab naval fleet sacked the Byzantine naval base of Attaleia¹⁴⁴⁷.

In December 9-10, 861, Al-Mutawakkil¹⁴⁴⁸ was assassinated by Turkish military leaders, and the Abbasid Caliphate would enter a political crisis, from which it was never fully to recover¹⁴⁴⁹. The assassination of Al-Mutawakil made his son, al-Muntasir (861-862), the successor to the throne. However, his reign was not meant to last; he died probably of natural causes in the summer of 862¹⁴⁵⁰. After his death, al-Musta 'īn (862-866)¹⁴⁵¹ was elected to rule the Caliphate. The period he reigned was militarywise an ill-fated one, as in 863 Byzantium established its military superiority in Asia Minor. The year of 863 was, in fact, a year of two victorious battles: the battle of Lalakaon (also known as battle of Poson or Porson) and the battle in Mayyāfāriqīn¹⁴⁵². The first one took place on 3 September, and the second one between 18 October and 16 November¹⁴⁵³.

¹⁴⁴⁰ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 156 (1439); DÖLGER, Regesten, 55 (856).

¹⁴⁴¹ HILD – HELLENKEMPER, Kilikien und Isaurien I, 330 (Lamos).

¹⁴⁴² DÖLGER, Regesten, 55 (455).

¹⁴⁴³ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 233-234 (Lulon).

¹⁴⁴⁴ PmbZ #8552.

¹⁴⁴⁵ PmbZ #3625.

¹⁴⁴⁶ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 167 (1449).

¹⁴⁴⁷ HELLENKEMPER – HILD, Lykien und Pamphylien, 297-341 (Attaleia).

¹⁴⁴⁸ EI², VII, 777-778 (al-Mutawakkil 'alā 'llāh); PmbZ #5206.

¹⁴⁴⁹ KENNEDY, Prophet, 168ff.

¹⁴⁵⁰ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 218-219 (1495-1496); EI², VII, 583 (al-Muntaşir); KENNEDY, Prophet, 171.

¹⁴⁵¹ EI², VII, 722-723 (al-Musta 'īn).

¹⁴⁵² G. Huxley has already thoroughly studied the battles of 863; I simply describe the events in a chronological order and refer to their impact. See: HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 443-450 (with annotations on the primary sources).

¹⁴⁵³ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXV, 9-10 (1509-1510).

More specifically, in the summer of 863, Ga 'far al Khayyāt¹⁴⁵⁴ and Amer joined forces to raid the Byzantine lands¹⁴⁵⁵. They formed together a large army, which left Tarsos, passed through the Cilician Gates, entered Cappadocia, and made camp at al-Matamir¹⁴⁵⁶, located near Tyana¹⁴⁵⁷. Michael III was alerted of Amer's progress, gathered a large army and campaigned in Asia Minor to check his advance¹⁴⁵⁸. At the same time, Petronas¹⁴⁵⁹ was also instructed by the emperor to gather a large army and campaign to Asia Minor and eliminate the Arab threat from the territories of the empire. According to Theophanes Continuatus, the Byzantine strategos had mobilized the armies of the themes of Armenia, Bucelarii, Koloneia, Paphlagonia, Anatolia, Opsikion, Cappadokia, Thrace and Macedonia, and the kleisourarchs of Seleykeia and Charsianon¹⁴⁶⁰.

Having heard about the incoming Byzantine armies, Ga 'far al Khayyāt retreated to Tarsos, but Amer decided to move independently; he advanced with his army towards Marğ-al-Usquf¹⁴⁶¹ (Bishop's Meadow), a highland which is located near Malakopea¹⁴⁶² and Nazianzos¹⁴⁶³. Once there, on September 3, 863¹⁴⁶⁴ Amer was intercepted by the Byzantine emperor, who, according to the Arab historian, was in command of the army¹⁴⁶⁵. Both armies suffered heavy losses, and Michael III was not able to stop Amer's progress.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Ga 'far al Khayyāt was probably the governor of Tarsos. See: BELKE, Paphlagonien und Honōrias, 77; BURY, ERE, 283; HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 448.

¹⁴⁵⁵ HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 448-449; VASILIEV, Byzance et les Arabes I, 277.

¹⁴⁵⁶ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 230 (al-Maṭāmīr, Maṭmūra).

¹⁴⁵⁷ HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 448. On Tyana, see: HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 298-299 (Tyana).

¹⁴⁵⁸ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXV, 9 (1509).

¹⁴⁵⁹ PmbZ #5929.

¹⁴⁶⁰ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 258, 38-44.

¹⁴⁶¹ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 229 (Marğ-al-Usquf).

¹⁴⁶² HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 227 (Malakopea).

¹⁴⁶³ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 227 (Nazianzos).

¹⁴⁶⁴ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXV, 9 (1509).

¹⁴⁶⁵ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXV, 9 (1509).

The emir of Melitene managed to reach Amisos¹⁴⁶⁶ and, despite the advice of his officers to retreat, he turned Westwards, and confronted the army of Petronas at Porson¹⁴⁶⁷, a mountainous region near the Lalakaon river¹⁴⁶⁸ and between the borders of the Paphlagonian and Armeniak themes. Eventually, the emir was surrounded by the Byzantine forces and killed. His son initially managed to flee homewards, but Machairas¹⁴⁶⁹, the kleisourarches¹⁴⁷⁰ of the Charsianon theme¹⁴⁷¹, which had joined Petronas' army, intercepted him across the Halys¹⁴⁷² river and killed him. According to Genesios, the Byzantine victory was so overwhelming, that no Arab survived to bring the news to Melitene¹⁴⁷³.

Subsequently, Al-Ṭabarī¹⁴⁷⁴ narrates that the Byzantine armies moved Northeast, towards Armenia, and between 18 October and 16 November intercepted and killed Alī ibn Yaḥyā, along with four hundred of his men in Mayyāfāriqīn¹⁴⁷⁵.

It should be stressed out that Al-Ṭabarī is the only historian who records the battle of Mayyāfāriqīn; his narrative is also the only one that records the battle that took place in Marḡ-al-Usquf (Bishop's Meadow) between Michael III and Amer. At the same time, it is notable that Karbeas, the leader of the Paulician remnant and ally of Amer, is absent from the Byzantine and Arab accounts that narrate the events of 863. According to P. Lemerle, he might have been already dead¹⁴⁷⁶.

¹⁴⁶⁶ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 80.

¹⁴⁶⁷ BELKE, Paphlagonien und Honōrias, 262-263 (Posōn).

¹⁴⁶⁸ BELKE, Paphlagonien und Honōrias, 247 (Lalakaōn).

¹⁴⁶⁹ PmbZ #4656.

¹⁴⁷⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 342.

¹⁴⁷¹ VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 473.

¹⁴⁷² Halys is a tributary of the Lalakaon river. See: HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 186-187 (Halys).

¹⁴⁷³ GENESIOS, IV, 69, 35-37.

¹⁴⁷⁴ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXV, 10 (1509).

¹⁴⁷⁵ Mayyāfāriqīn is located on the upper side of Mesopotamia. See: AL-ṬABARĪ, XXV, 10 (cit. n. 29).

¹⁴⁷⁶ LEMERLE, Paulicians, 93 (cit. n. 19), 95-96.

Taking the victorious campaigns of 863 into consideration, it can be concluded that in the course of one year, the Byzantines managed to eliminate the most dangerous opponents in Asia Minor: Amer, the emir of Melitene and Alī ibn Yahyā had been slain on the battlefield, whereas Karbeas no longer posed a threat. Their death not only strengthened the Byzantine morale, but it also proved to be a turning point regarding the history of the Arab-Byzantine conflicts. Before the campaigns of 863, Byzantium was mainly focused in defending the Byzantine frontier against the Arab raids.

From now on, however, the Byzantine empire begins its counteroffensive, which gradually becomes more energetic and reaches its peak during the tenth century, with the campaigns of Nikephoros II Phokas¹⁴⁷⁷ and Ioannes Tzimiskes¹⁴⁷⁸. R. J. H. Jenkins describes that the victories of 863 had the same significance and impact as the two repulses of the Arabs from the walls of Constantinople had had in 678 and 718¹⁴⁷⁹. Subsequently, having secured their position in Asia Minor, Michael III's government was able to turn its attention to the Balkans and focus on defending Constantinople's jurisdiction over Illyricum against the aspirations of pope Nicholas, and expanding the influence of the Byzantine church¹⁴⁸⁰.

Au contraire, the events of 863 had a destructive effect on the Abbasid Caliphate. Al-Ṭabarī records that the news of the deaths of Amer and Alī ibn Yahyā caused great grief and riots in Samarra, Baghdad and the nearby cities¹⁴⁸¹. Afterwards, the Arab historian records that the wealthy people of Baghdad and Samarra attempted to fund and organize a vindictive military

¹⁴⁷⁷ PmbZ #25535.

¹⁴⁷⁸ PmbZ #22778.

¹⁴⁷⁹ JENKINS, Byzantium, 163.

¹⁴⁸⁰ See above, Chapter III.

¹⁴⁸¹ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXV, 10 (1510).

expedition against the Byzantines, but, due to internal turmoil, the central authorities were not able to take action¹⁴⁸².

Once more, the biased Byzantine historians appear to be determined to suppress Michael III's victorious campaigns and further smear his image. They do not record that the emperor personally commanded an army in Asia Minor and completely ignore his conflict with Amer in Marğ-al-Usquf (Bishop's Meadow). As a result, the credit of the success of 863 is given to Petronas alone. More specifically, according to Genesios, Michael III was greatly saddened when he heard about Amer's raid and that he had managed to take a great number of prisoners¹⁴⁸³. For that reason, he appointed Petronas to command the tagma of the schools and attack the enemy¹⁴⁸⁴. As I have already said, the battle of Marğ-al-Usquf (Bishop's Meadow) is omitted, and Genesios indirectly implies that Michael III remains idle in Constantinople.

Like Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus also ommits the battle of Marğ-al-Usquf, in which the Byzantine army was personally commanded by Michael III. He does, however, combine his narrative with hagiographical legend, derived from the vita of St. Antonios the Younger¹⁴⁸⁵, who was Petronas' spiritual father and whose baptismal name was John¹⁴⁸⁶. According to Theophanes Continuatus, when Petronas was at Ephesos as a strategos¹⁴⁸⁷ of the Thracesian theme¹⁴⁸⁸, he was visited by Ioannes, who was a monk at mount Latros¹⁴⁸⁹. The latter appears to have advised Petronas to secure divine assistance by painting the image of the apostle John on his soldiers' shields and was foretold of his forthcoming victory¹⁴⁹⁰.

¹⁴⁸² AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXV, 11 (1511).

¹⁴⁸³ GENESIOS, IV, 67, 75-77.

¹⁴⁸⁴ GENESIOS, IV, 67, 87-93.

¹⁴⁸⁵ HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 444-445.

¹⁴⁸⁶ PmbZ #534.

¹⁴⁸⁷ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 341.

¹⁴⁸⁸ VLYSIDOU et al., Asia Minor, 210-211.

¹⁴⁸⁹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 256, 21-24.

¹⁴⁹⁰ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 256, 31-32.



Battle at Lalakaon and death of Amer. Skylitzes Matritensis, fol. 73v top.

It is remarkable that, according to the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, Antonios meets Petronas for the first time at Ephesos, shortly before his battle with Amer. However, as G. Huxley demonstrates, Antonios had already been the spiritual father of Petronas for quite some¹⁴⁹¹. Apparently, Antonios advised Petronas to march in the name of Christ and sing the fourth canon of St. Nicholas¹⁴⁹². In addition to that, Antonios was not only Petronas' godfather, he was also ὁ ἐκ προσώπου (deputy governor)¹⁴⁹³ of the naval theme of Kibyrrhaiotai¹⁴⁹⁴. It is therefore probable that he had given to Petronas military advice as well¹⁴⁹⁵.

It must also be noted that in the vita of St. Antony the Younger, the author mentions that there were two expeditionary forces that marched against the godless Ishmaelites (συνέβη κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ δύο φοσσᾶτα εἰ τῶν ἀθέων Ἰσμαηλιτῶν καθ' ἡμῶν ἐξορμησai)¹⁴⁹⁶. Taking into account that one of these

¹⁴⁹¹ HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 444 (cit. n. 6). "Τοῦτο γοῦν μεμαθηκῶς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν Ἀντώνιος, δῆθεν εὐχῆς τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἀπόστολον Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεολόγον Ἰωάννην τὴν ἐπὶ Ἐφεσον ὁδὸν στειλάμενος, συνήφθη τῷ ἐν πνεύματι υἱῷ αὐτοῦ", ST. ANTONY THE YOUNGER, 218, 16-19.

¹⁴⁹² HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 445 (cit. n. 6).

¹⁴⁹³ OIKONOMIDÈS, Les listes, 342.

¹⁴⁹⁴ PmbZ #534.

¹⁴⁹⁵ HUXLEY, Bishop's Meadow, 445 (cit. n. 6).

¹⁴⁹⁶ ST. ANTONY THE YOUNGER, 218, 9-10.

forces was commanded by Petronas, the author of the *vita* also acknowledges a second expeditionary force; this could imply that the second army was commanded by Michael III, whose very participation on the campaign Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus suppress.

There is yet another hagiographical legend that refers to Petronas' win against the Arabs. This time it is from St Georgios of Mytilene; when he was in Constantinople he foretold to Petronas that he would be victorious over the Assyrian Amer¹⁴⁹⁷. The narrative of Symeon Magister does not add anything more than that of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus; in his narration it is plainly recorded that Michael III sent Petronas against Amer, and that it was Machairas¹⁴⁹⁸ who eventually killed the emir's fleeing son¹⁴⁹⁹. According to Theophanes Continuatus, although Petronas was ordered by Michael III to initially maintain a defensive stance¹⁵⁰⁰, he was convinced by Ioannes that he would be victorious and eventually marched against Amer¹⁵⁰¹.

The *damnatio memoriae* of Michael III perpetuated by Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus on behalf of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos required that the credit of the success of 863 to be given to Petronas alone¹⁵⁰². But Michael III's glory was not forgotten in Byzantium, especially among his contemporaries.

Having slain Amer and Alī ibn Yaḥyā, Michael III and Petronas returned in triumph to the capital, where a celebration took place and a special hymn of gratitude was sung in honor of the Lord and Michael III. Paradoxically, despite of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos' efforts to suppress Michael III's

¹⁴⁹⁷ SS. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in Insula Lesbo (ed. H. DELEHAYE – A. PONCELET). *AB* 18 (1899) 252, 15-22.

¹⁴⁹⁸ PmbZ #4656.

¹⁴⁹⁹ FEATHERSTONE, *Logothete Chronicle*, 426, §20; ISTRIN, *Georgija Amartola*, 9, 16-30; WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 243, 224-244, 231.

¹⁵⁰⁰ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 256, 7-11.

¹⁵⁰¹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 256, 28-35.

¹⁵⁰² HUXLEY, *Bishop's Meadow*, 450; KARPOZILOS, *Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι* II, 370; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes* I, 251.

military achievements, the very hymn that exalts Michael III is saved in the *De Cerimoniis* –a work of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos himself. More specifically, the hymn praises the Lord, Michael III, his mother, Theodora, and his legitimate wife, Eudocia Dekapolitisa¹⁵⁰³:

Ἄκτα ἐπὶ μεγιστάνῳ ἀμειρᾷ ἐν πολέμῳ ἡττηθέντι καὶ ἀναιρεθέντι.
 “Δόξα Θεῷ τῷ συντριβόντι πολεμίους. δόξα Θεῷ τῷ καθελόντι τοὺς
 ἀθέους. δόξα Θεῷ τῷ αἰτίῳ τῆς νίκης. δόξα Θεῷ τῷ στέψαντί σε, γεοῦχε·
 χαίροις ἄναξ, Ῥωμαίων ἡ εὐτυχία· χαίροις ἄναξ, τοῦ στατοῦ σου ἡ ἀνδρεία·
 χαίροις ἄναξ, δι’ οὗ ὁ δεῖνα κατεπτώθη· χαίροις ἄναξ ὁ δεῖνα καθαιρέτα· ὁ
 Θεός σε φυλάξει ἐν τῇ πορφύρᾳ εἰς τιμὴν καὶ ἀνέγερσιν τῶν Ῥωμαίων σὺν
 ταῖς τιμίαις αὐγούσαις ἐν τῇ πορφύρᾳ· εἰσακούσει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν
 ”¹⁵⁰⁴.

So far, only the narrative of Al-Ṭabarī clearly attests that Michael III was personally commanding an army in Asia Minor. This hymn not only confirms the Arab historian, it also bears witness to the deliberate suppression of historical events on behalf of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus in order to smear Michael III’s image. Moreover, it also reveals that the Byzantine emperor was highly regarded by his contemporary subjects and that he was not considered only as an indifferent ruler.

H. Grégoire believed that the Byzantine successes of 863 against the Arabs inspired one of the oldest surviving acritic poems¹⁵⁰⁵, the Song of Armouris (τὸ Ἄσμα τοῦ Ἀρμούρη)¹⁵⁰⁶. The poem describes the campaign of a strong young man, named Arestis or Armouris Armouropoulos¹⁵⁰⁷; his mission is to cross the Euphrates¹⁵⁰⁸ and rescue his father, who has been captured by the Saracen emir

¹⁵⁰³ PmbZ #1631.

¹⁵⁰⁴ DE CERIMONIIS, 332, 20-333, 6.

¹⁵⁰⁵ BECK, Geschichte, 54-55; GRÉGOIRE, Épopée byzantine, 33-36.

¹⁵⁰⁶ On the different versions of the poem and its text, see: EIDENEIER, Ἄσμα, 82ff (with further bibliography).

¹⁵⁰⁷ EIDENEIER, Ἄσμα, 88-89.

¹⁵⁰⁸ TODT – VEST, Syria, 1145-1148 (Eurphatēs).

(although it is not stated clearly, the hero of the poem must have resided in the Southern part of Asia Minor, near the Euphrates river). Armouris appears to be slaughtering every Saracen on his way to rescue his father; the emir, alarmed of the young warrior's arrival, agreed to eventually let his father go.

Grégoire dated the poem to the ninth century and proposed that it interprets the aftermath of the sack of Amorium. He identified Arestis Armouris with Michael III and proposed that the poem reflects his victorious campaigns in Asia Minor against the Arabs. Amer was subsequently identified as the Saracen emir of the poem, who is eventually forced to capitulate and free Arestis' father¹⁵⁰⁹. However, more recently, Hans Eideneier argued that the poem is dated in the tenth century¹⁵¹⁰ and that although the senior name of the hero – Armouris or Armouropoulos- could indicate his place of origin, the hero's first name is undoubtedly Arestis¹⁵¹¹. As a result, the hero of the Song of Armouris has nothing to do with Michael III.

It has been suggested that the battle at Lalakaon also influenced the epic circle of Digenes Akrites¹⁵¹². Grégoire argued that, just as the Byzantines had encircled the Arabs on the tide-turning battle of 863, so did the hero of the Byzantine epic near Malakopea¹⁵¹³. However, this argument has also been more recently played down by Huxley as a mere hypothesis which cannot be proven¹⁵¹⁴.

Overall, during the reign of Michael III, Byzantium had been in a constant state of conflict and warfare from all directions. Sicily was always viewed as a

¹⁵⁰⁹ BECK, *Geschichte*, 55; GRÉGOIRE, *Épopée byzantine*, 33-36.

¹⁵¹⁰ EIDENEIER, *Ἀσµα*, 85.

¹⁵¹¹ EIDENEIER, *Ἀσµα*, 88-89.

¹⁵¹² On the Digenes Akrites indicatively see: R. BEATON – D. RICKS, *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry (Variorum)*. London 1993; E. JEFFREYS, *Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*. London 1998; E. TRAPP, *Digenes Akrites: Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen (Wiener Byzantinistische Studien 8)*. Vienna 1971.

¹⁵¹³ GRÉGOIRE, *Michel III et Basile*, 338-340; GRÉGOIRE, *Études*, 538-539; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 252. On Malakopea see: HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 227 (Malakopea).

¹⁵¹⁴ HUXLEY, *Bishop's Meadow*, 447-448 (also cit. n. 16).

part of the empire for the Amorian Dynasty and, despite the advance of the Aghlabid Arabs, it did not lose its strategic importance. This is testified by the major naval operations that took place during Theodora's regency and Michael III's sole reign; namely, the battle of Charzanites (845) and the naval battle near Syracuse, in 858. As regards the latter, although Byzantium was victorious, the biased Byzantine historiographers, i.e. Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus, do not record them.

Similarly, they also do not record any of the victorious naval campaigns that took place during his sole reign against Damietta. Be that as it may, the operations in Sicily were not terminated due to the lack of strength of the Byzantine fleet. Subsequent naval campaigns in the Southeastern Mediterranean testify that Byzantium's sea power was formidable.

As I have already described –by quoting Vlysidou's remarks– the naval operations in Southern Sicily were put to an end only after pope Nicholas I's political aspirations. His endeavors to regain the jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria along with the fact that he fought with Constantinople over the religious missions in the Balkans and the conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity, had as a result the deterioration of his affiliation with Constantinople. The political rivalry between the Old and New Rome was, in fact, the most substantial obstacle in stopping the Aghlabid Arabs from making further advances in Southern Italy¹⁵¹⁵.

As regards the Byzantine government, however, it must also be noted that during the concerned period, i.e. during Michael III's sole reign, it was also confronting the Abbasid Caliphate in Asia Minor. Taking that into consideration, it becomes apparent that assisting Nicholas I, who was conflicting with their political and religious affairs, was no longer seen as a matter of primary importance. At the same time, it also testifies that

¹⁵¹⁵ VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 296.

strengthening the Eastern frontier and reinforcing its fortifications¹⁵¹⁶ was regarded as more crucial for the Byzantine government.

Similarly, the reconquest of Crete was also of great strategic importance for the Amorian Dynasty, as it would contribute to Byzantium strengthening its control over the Aegean coast and thus limiting the Arab naval raids in the area. This strategic importance is also testified by the fact that the expeditions to regain control over the island were commanded by very important figures of the Byzantine court; namely by Theoktistos and Sergios Niketiates, and Bardas, whose expeditions took place on 18 March 843 and 7 April 866 respectively. However, false rumors during Theoktistos' expedition had as a result the logothete of the drome to abandon the expedition, along with a part of the Byzantine forces –and thus significantly weaken the strength of the Byzantine army, whereas in Bardas' case, after his death at Kepoi, at the Meander river on the coast of the Thracesion theme, the expedition was completely abandoned.

The raid of the Rhos, which began at 18 June 860, has already been adequately studied by A. Vasiliev, S. Franklin and J. Shepard. It is, however, noteworthy, to highlight the readiness of the Byzantine government to repel the invading Rhos. When the raid began, Michael III and Bardas were absent, as they were at Maupotamos river, in Cappadocia¹⁵¹⁷, and the capital was lacking any substantial land defence. The defence of the capital was entrusted to Ooryphas¹⁵¹⁸, eparchos of Constantinople¹⁵¹⁹. When Ooryphas informed the emperor of the Russian raid, the emperor rushed to return to the capital.

One has to ask himself, if Michael III was indeed so ignorant of state affairs and interested only in drinking bouts and horse races, as Genesios and

¹⁵¹⁶ See below, pp. 372-392.

¹⁵¹⁷ HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 233 (Melas).

¹⁵¹⁸ PmbZ #25696.

¹⁵¹⁹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 319-320.

Theophanes Continuatus would have us believe¹⁵²⁰, then why did he rush to return and see to the defences of Constantinople? More than that, why would such an indifferent emperor even care to join the military campaigns and put himself to unnecessary danger in the first place? He could have freely stayed in the palace and engage in drinking bouts with his companions.

On the contrary, Michael III's swift decision to return to Constantinople testifies that, when Ooryphas informed him, he realized the menace that the raid of the Rhos posed to the empire. The fact that Michael III returned to Constantinople when the Rhos were sieging the Byzantine capital must have, without doubt, positively affected and encouraged the defending troops. Similarly, the personal presence of Michael III in the Byzantine military campaigns in Asia Minor against the Arabs must have also positively affected the morale of the Byzantine forces and indirectly pressured them to function more properly.

As for the narrative of the Byzantine sources concerning Michael III's military campaigns, two remarks are worth mentioning: not recording a military campaign at all can be plainly explained; maybe the Byzantine historiographers never got informed about the event in the first place –or maybe the original sources, from which they drew upon, did not record the event(s). As a result, the description of certain campaigns, such as the naval battles in Southern Italy are not included in their narratives.

However, having knowledge of the military campaigns and deliberately suppressing them or falsifying the events is something completely different. It testifies their political purpose to blacken Michael III's image. The fact that they have suppressed the naval raids on Damietta, as well as that Michael III personally commanded the Byzantine army, which confronted Amer on Marğ-

¹⁵²⁰ Indicatively: GENESIOS, IV, 72, 47-51; THEOPH. CONT., IV, 280, 1-286, 9; THEOPH. CONT., V, 100, 1-102, 39.

al-Usquf¹⁵²¹ demonstrate their method. The fictional defeat of the Byzantine campaign of 859 in Samosata, recorded by Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus is yet another example of how the biased Byzantine historiographers sought to falsify Michael III's achievements.

Nonetheless, Michael III's military achievements have been rescued not only in the narratives of non-Byzantine sources, i.e. in the *History of the Prophets and Kings*, written by Al-Tabarī, but also in the *De Cerimoniis*, a work of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos himself. In fact, the hymn in the *De Cerimoniis* exalts Michael III for his participation in the military campaigns of 863 in Asia Minor, the very participation that the Byzantine historiographers tried to suppress.

As W. Kaegi notes, the approximate limits of Byzantine control to the Southeastern Asia Minor in the mid-ninth century were not radically different from those which had emerged about two centuries earlier¹⁵²². On the other hand, the strategic balance between Byzantium and the Arabs had changed dramatically; especially during the seven years between 856 and 863. The reign of the last member of the Amorian Dynasty marks the beginning of Byzantium's century long offensive in the East.

¹⁵²¹ HILD – RESTLE, *Kappadokien*, 229 (Marğ-al-Usquf).

¹⁵²² KAEGLI, *Contronting Islam*, 394.

Chapter V: The economy during Michael III's reign

The reign of Michael III chronologically concurs with what is considered to be a recovery and monetary expansion of the Byzantine economy¹⁵²³. The growth in population, which gradually started to appear in the eighth century, and more systematically in the ninth and tenth centuries, was important for the growth of provincial cities of the empire. The expansion of the system of themes also provided a greater sense of security for the rural communities.

The Byzantine state became an essential factor in stimulating the economy. It attempted to monetize the economy by putting into circulation considerable sums of money in the distant parts of the empire, thus strengthening the monetary sector of the provincial administration¹⁵²⁴. However, this does not mean that the payment in kind ceased to exist; the monetization of the economy varied over the years, and also varied from one region to another¹⁵²⁵. The state solely withheld the right to tax any commercial transactions. In fact, it drew most of its revenues from the taxation¹⁵²⁶. The tax was called *Kommerkion*, was 10% based on the value of the transaction or property, and was collected in nomismata by civil fiscal officials called *Kommerkiarioi*¹⁵²⁷. At the same time, it

¹⁵²³ On the matter, see: M. ANGOLD, The Shaping of the Medieval Byzantine "City". *ByzF* 10 (1985) 7–8; J. BAKER, Coinage and Money in Medieval Greece 1200-1430. Volume 1 (*The Medieval Mediterranean. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453*, 124/1). Leiden – Boston 2020, 1-72 (with further bibliography); A. HARVEY, Expansion, 31ff; M. HENDY, Studies 424ff; METCALF, South-Eastern Europe, 18–49; MORRISSON, Money, 909-966; LAIOU – MORRISSON, Economy, 43-89.

¹⁵²⁴ OIKONOMIDÈS, Role, 978ff. (with further bibliography).

¹⁵²⁵ GEROLYMATOU, Εμπορική δραστηριότητα, 346–348; METCALF, South-Eastern Europe, 18; LAIOU, Exchange and Trade, 713-759.

¹⁵²⁶ LAIOU – MORRISSON, Βυζαντινή Οικονομία, 49.

¹⁵²⁷ On the kommerkion and kommerkiarioi, among the ample bibliography, see: BRANDES, Finanzverwaltung, 239ff; BRUBAKER –HALDON, Iconoclast era, 682–705; A. DUNN, The kommerkiarios, the apotheke, the dromos, the vardarios and the West. *BMGS* 17 (1993) 3–24; HENDY, Studies, 626ff; OIKONOMIDÈS, Fiscalité, 42ff; OIKONOMIDÈS, Kommerkiarios, 235–244; OIKONOMIDÈS, Role, 979-988; OIKONOMIDÈS, Trade and Production, 33–53; Ch. STAVRAKOS, The Basilika Kommerkia of the Islands of the Southern Aegean Sea, in: *Epeironde*, 265ff (with further bibliography).

redistributed its revenues to its subjects in the form of salaries, in financing military campaigns, and investing in infrastructural works. As a result, not only was the Byzantine state able to concentrate surplus, but was also the driving force behind the circulation of money¹⁵²⁸.

Michael III's father, Theophilos, managed to enrich the treasury of the empire with his fiscal. Part of his success was due to the sound administration of the empire by Theoktistos¹⁵²⁹, who was *chartoularios tou kanikleiou*¹⁵³⁰ and *logothetes tou dromou*¹⁵³¹. The flourishing economy of Byzantium can be witnessed in various building projects that took place during his reign.

For example, among other things, Theophilos financed the restoration of the walls of the Byzantine capital¹⁵³². He is reported to have cleared up a suburb, where he built a hospice¹⁵³³, and to have built a building for his daughters in the quarter of Karianos¹⁵³⁴. In 837, when Ioannes VII Grammatikos returned from his embassy in Baghdad, he recounted to Theophilos what he had witnessed there. Afterwards, Theophilos ordered a palace to be built in Bryas¹⁵³⁵, an Asiatic suburb in Constantinople, that would resemble the Arab palaces as were described to him by his patriarch Ioannes VII¹⁵³⁶.

Regarding the Great Palace, Theophilos is also reported to have commissioned the construction of various ceremonial ornaments¹⁵³⁷. According to George the Monk, who was almost contemporary with Theophilos, the

¹⁵²⁸ LAIOU – MORRISSON, *Economy*, 49-50.

¹⁵²⁹ PmbZ #8050.

¹⁵³⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 311.

¹⁵³¹ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 311-312.

¹⁵³² GENESIOS, III, 136, 1-5.

¹⁵³³ THEOPH. CONT., III, 138, 6-10; JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 434.

¹⁵³⁴ WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 230, 299-231, 314; THEOPH. CONT., III, 138, 17-20; On the Karianos, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 132.

¹⁵³⁵ On the palace in Bryas, see: JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 145-147.

¹⁵³⁶ WAHLGREN, *Symeon Magister*, 223, 159-162; THEOPH. CONT., III, 142, 56-61.

¹⁵³⁷ On the ornaments see the detailed analysis of A. Iafate: IAFRATE, *Throne of Solomon*, 55-105 (with older bibliography).

Byzantine emperor employed an excellent goldsmith¹⁵³⁸, who was also a relative of the patriarch Antonios Kassymatas¹⁵³⁹. The goldsmith was commissioned to create in the Pentapyrgion¹⁵⁴⁰, which is located in the Chrysotriklinos, in the south side of the Great Palace, two enormous organs in solid gold, adorned with precious gems and stones, and a golden tree, on which birds with some kind of machinery would sing¹⁵⁴¹. A reference of the same ornaments is recorded in the narratives of Symeon Magister¹⁵⁴² and Pseudo-Symeon¹⁵⁴³. These ornaments were meant to be used in special occasions, as well as to impress foreign envoys that would request audience with the emperor, and their function would prove to be vital in combating the propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty. However, in the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, none of these ornaments are mentioned; the narrative focuses mainly on the building activities that take place during Theophilos' reign¹⁵⁴⁴.

In addition, Theophilos founded regional mints¹⁵⁴⁵ that further bolstered and monetized the provincial economy¹⁵⁴⁶. To quote P. Grierson, his reign marked a "landmark in the history of byzantine coinage"¹⁵⁴⁷. In the copper coins Theophilos abolished the old follis type with the "M" mark, which had by that time lost its meaning, and replaced it with an inscription in several lines that would occupy the entire reverse side of the coin. He thus created a new copper

¹⁵³⁸ PmbZ #550B.

¹⁵³⁹ PmbZ #550.

¹⁵⁴⁰ The Pentapyrgion was a piece of furniture that was kept in the Chrysotriklinos and that was used for exhibiting various precious objects. On the Pentapyrgion, see: ANGAR, Pentapyrgion, 184–188; MANGO, 160–161.

¹⁵⁴¹ GEORGE THE MONK, 793, 7–14.

¹⁵⁴² WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 228, 261–267.

¹⁵⁴³ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 627, 10–14.

¹⁵⁴⁴ THEOPH. CONT., III, 200, 12–210, 21.

¹⁵⁴⁵ On the regional mints, see: METCALF, South-Eastern Europe, 30ff.

¹⁵⁴⁶ METCALF, Coinage, 25ff.; METCALF, South-Eastern Europe, 29–33.

¹⁵⁴⁷ DOC III/1, 406.

coin type, which was to set the pattern for the next 150 years¹⁵⁴⁸. During his reign, the weight of the miliaresion was temporarily increased, while they were also struck more regularly and became more common¹⁵⁴⁹. Yet the only direct report we have about the money amassed at the imperial treasury during the reign of Theophilos is in the narrative of *Vita Basilii*, according to which Theophilos had accumulated 970 kentenaria of gold (6.984.000 nomismata)¹⁵⁵⁰.

The sources that inform us about the economy during Michael III's reign are Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and *Vita Basilii*. The picture they paint is that Michael III's vulgarity, reckless activities, lavish expenditures and extortionate christening gifts to the children of the men who competed with him in chariot races had led to the imperial treasury running out of cash¹⁵⁵¹. However, a critical study on these sources that attest Michael III's prodigality reveals that their narrative contains inconsistencies. In fact, in some cases, the biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty historiographers (Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and *Vita Basilii*) even contradict each other, thus arousing suspicion and implying that nothing needs to be taken face value just because it is on record.

The account of Genesios

In his narrative, Genesios describes that Theodora, not long before her son assumed sole power of the empire, and realizing in advance what was going to happen, assembled the senate and revealed to them the amount of money in the treasury, which was 1.090 kentenaria¹⁵⁵² of gold and about 3 kentenaria of silver. Of this, some had been left as her husband's testament, while the rest

¹⁵⁴⁸ On the new bronze coinage of Theophilos, see: BELLINGER, Notes, 136–141; DOC III/1, 406ff; LIGHTFOOT, Coinage, 503–512 (with further bibliography); METCALF, Coinage of Theophilos, 81–98; METCALF, Coinage, 25ff; METCALF, South-Eastern Europe, 28ff; METCALF, Reformed Folles, 121–153; MORRISSON, Monais, 511–517, 523–532; PENNA, Coinage, 20–21.

¹⁵⁴⁹ DOC III/1, 406, 430–433.

¹⁵⁵⁰ THEOPH. CONT., V, 104, 5–8.

¹⁵⁵¹ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 5.

¹⁵⁵² Kentenarion stands for “hundredweight”. One kentenarion is equal to 100 litrai (1 litra is equivalent to 72 solidi) MORRISSON, Money, 920.

was added by herself¹⁵⁵³. It is notable that in Genesios' narrative, Theodora predicts that Michael III's prodigality would be the cause of his inevitable demise¹⁵⁵⁴. Therefore, if we are to take Genesios' narration seriously, i.e., an author who claims in his *prooimion* to have gathered his material by listening to men who had lived at that time as well as from oral traditions that have passed down from that time¹⁵⁵⁵, the lavish expenditures of Michael III are crucial for his undoing.

The very next mention on the financial affairs of the empire made by Genesios does not concern the reign of Michael III, but that of Basil I. On the closing chapters of his work, Genesios quite briefly records that Basil I was very attentive in all of his activities that concerned the public good. Even during the weeks of fasting and long after the senators had left the palace, he would enter the *sekreton*¹⁵⁵⁶, where the public accounts were held, and there he would efficiently deal with any difficulties that emerged¹⁵⁵⁷. The reference on Basil I's fiscal activities is placed after the death of Chrysocheir¹⁵⁵⁸, which is dated at 872¹⁵⁵⁹.

It is remarkable that Genesios does not make any reference about the status of the imperial treasury, as it was found when the founder of the Macedonian dynasty assumed control of the empire. We have to turn to Theophanes Continuatus for a more voluminous description on how Michael III's disgraceful expenditures have emptied the imperial treasury, as well as for the situation it was found when Basil I became the emperor.

¹⁵⁵³ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 87–93.

¹⁵⁵⁴ ἐπὶ τῇ καταβάσει δὲ δυσχεραίνουσα τῷ υἱῷ προσενείρει τὸ ἐξ ἀπαιδευσίας πολυανάλωτον, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐκ τοῦτου τὸν ἄφυκτον ὀλεθρον. See: GENESIOS, IV, 64, 93–95.

¹⁵⁵⁵ GENESIOS, 3, 10–12.

¹⁵⁵⁶ The *sekreton* is actually the *genikon sekreton*. It is the bureau in charge of the tax registers and the collection of the state revenues. See: GUILLAND, *Les logothètes*, 11–24; HENDY, *Studies*, 410 (and cit. n. 163); OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 313–314.

¹⁵⁵⁷ GENESIOS, IV, 88, 66–89, 11.

¹⁵⁵⁸ PmbZ #21340.

¹⁵⁵⁹ GENESIOS, IV, 86, 85.

The account of the Theophanes Continuatus

Theophanes Continuatus describes that Theodora, on yielding power in 856 and in order to prove her own virtue and expose her son's vices, decided to make known to the senate that more than 1.090 kentenaria in gold and 3 in silver were accumulated. According to Theodora, her husband had been the collector and provider of one part of that amount, and herself of the other, for she did not like meaningless spending¹⁵⁶⁰.

Next, Theophanes Continuatus claims that it was at the reveling in horse races and the excessive christening presents made to the children of his playfellows and fellow charioteers that all the money was spent on. He points out that Michael III was acting like a godfather and bestowing 50, 40 or at least 30 pounds of gold to each one of them¹⁵⁶¹. Such were the turpitudes of Michael III that one time he bestowed to patrikios Himerios¹⁵⁶², who the emperor called Pig, the amount of 100 pounds of gold, just because during a dinner he burped so loud that even the candlelight, which was giving light to the room, was extinguished¹⁵⁶³. On another occasion¹⁵⁶⁴, Michael III bestowed 100 pounds of gold to Cheilas¹⁵⁶⁵, because he stood godfather to his son¹⁵⁶⁶.

Theophanes Continuatus also claims that it was due to such unreasonable expenditures that the wealth of the imperial treasury was soon depleted. In fact, it was because of them that there was no money for the army to be paid. Consequently, Michael III ordered the golden ornaments of the emperor's throne room, i.e. the famous golden plane tree, two golden griffins, two golden lions, an organ of pure gold, and other artifacts of imperial exhibition to be

¹⁵⁶⁰ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 244, 19–24.

¹⁵⁶¹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 244, 1–246, 8.

¹⁵⁶² PmbZ #2591.

¹⁵⁶³ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 8–14.

¹⁵⁶⁴ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 14–16.

¹⁵⁶⁵ PmbZ #1069.

¹⁵⁶⁶ PmbZ #1069A.

melted and be struck as coins, for the army's payroll to be dealt with. He even ordered some imperial vestments that the emperor and empress were wearing, and which were kept in the *Eidikon*¹⁵⁶⁷, to be melted and minted into coins as well¹⁵⁶⁸.

But none of these items were eventually melted down, as Michael III's reign was cut short and when Basil I became emperor, he found them still intact. Unlike Genesios' narrative, Theophanes Continuatus describes that when Basil I assumed the imperial office, he found nothing else remaining from the great wealth except 3 kentenaria of gold and 9 bags of miliaresia. Basil I was therefore forced to melt down the aforementioned ornaments in order to mint coins. And then he summoned the senate and displayed the coins as evidence, expressing his despair as to how he was supposed to govern the empire with these means¹⁵⁶⁹.

Such is the account given in the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus regarding Michael III's expenditures and the condition on which the imperial treasury was found when Basil I assumed the imperial throne. Michael III's lavish expenditures and the condition of the imperial treasury, as was found when Basil I became the emperor, are narrated in the *Vita Basilii*. And, although the same episodes are attested and the narratives are very close to each other, contradictions and inconsistencies do exist.

The account of the *Vita Basilii*

According to the account of *Vita Basilii*, when Basil I was in the service of the imperial official, Theophilos (Theophilitzes)¹⁵⁷⁰, he accompanied him to

¹⁵⁶⁷ The *Eidikon* stands for special treasury. It is disputed over whether it stands for the emperor's special treasury or a special warehouse. See: GUILLAND, *Les logothètes*, 85–95; cf. HENDY, *Studies*, 410 (and cit. n. 163); OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 316–318.

¹⁵⁶⁸ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 17–28.

¹⁵⁶⁹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 28–35.

¹⁵⁷⁰ PmbZ #8221.

Patra on business having to do with the imperial treasury. There, Danielis¹⁵⁷¹, who was a rich widow and a big landowner in Patra, was informed by a monk¹⁵⁷² that Basil I would obtain imperial power. The prophetic words of the monk managed to catch the widow's attention and she eventually summoned Basil I, greeted him in a wise manner, and made him godfather to her son, John¹⁵⁷³. In the end, when Basil I was about to leave for Constantinople, she bestowed to him gold, thirty slaves to serve him, as well as a variety of other goods¹⁵⁷⁴.

This episode attests Basil I obtaining money for the first time. Then, having returned to Constantinople, Basil I bought large estates in Macedonia and gave them to his relatives so that they could live with amenities. However, although he reportedly became rich with the help of Danielis, as a feature of his kindness he remained in the service of Theophilos¹⁵⁷⁵.

Afterwards, similarly to the account of Theophanes Continuatus, the narrative of *Vita Basilii* states that it was Michael III's extravagant lifestyle and favors upon charioteers that had almost entirely expended the reserve funds. The narrative then goes on to say that Theophilos had accumulated 970 kentenaria struck gold and that Theodora had added a further 30 kentenaria¹⁵⁷⁶, making up a figure of 1000 kentenaria of gold.

After that, the narrative mentions the same two episodes, according to which Michael III bestows excessive amounts to Himerios¹⁵⁷⁷ and Cheilas¹⁵⁷⁸. In the next lines, Michael III's ending is related to the imperial funds having been almost depleted. In fact, according to the narrative, the condition was such, that

¹⁵⁷¹ PmbZ #21390.

¹⁵⁷² PmbZ #30626.

¹⁵⁷³ PmbZ #3328.

¹⁵⁷⁴ *VITA BASILII*, 40,1-44,56.

¹⁵⁷⁵ *VITA BASILII*, 44,58-46,64.

¹⁵⁷⁶ *VITA BASILII*, 104, 5-10.

¹⁵⁷⁷ PmbZ #2591.

¹⁵⁷⁸ PmbZ #1069.

in order for the payrolls to be dealt with, churches and pious foundations had to be despoiled, and wealthy taxpayers to be stripped of their belongings and put to death. It was then that the worthiest of the *magistroi* and of the members of the senate decided to cooperate and slay Michael III¹⁵⁷⁹. It is notable that according to the narrative of the *Vita*, Basil I is not mentioned participating in the murder of Michael III at all.

The next event on the economy of the empire takes place after the crowning of Basil I. The founder of the Macedonian dynasty appears to have immediately summoned the most important members of the senate and the most prominent dignitaries, and together with them, entered the imperial treasury. Of the 1000 *kentenaria* that Theodora had amassed with Theophilos, only 3 *kentenaria* were found¹⁵⁸⁰. Basil I then searched for the register of disbursements and discovered that it was in the possession of the *protospatharios* Basil¹⁵⁸¹, an elder eunuch who had kept record of Michael III's expenditure during the years of his sole reign¹⁵⁸².

He then requested from the people on whom the public funds had been squandered to return 50% of what had been bestowed upon them and thus he managed to recover 300 *kentenaria* of gold¹⁵⁸³. Quite oddly, on the next paragraph, on the day that Basil I assumed supreme power, he is said to have made a display of consular largesse by distributing vast sums of money to his subjects¹⁵⁸⁴. But it is clarified by the unknown author that the money did not come from public funds (for there were none) but from his private means that he had acquired earlier. The reference to Basil I's private money hints at the money that Danielis had bestowed to him when he went to Patra. His wife,

¹⁵⁷⁹ *VITA BASILII*, 106, 38–108, 43.

¹⁵⁸⁰ *VITA BASILII*, 110, 9–14.

¹⁵⁸¹ *PmbZ* #970.

¹⁵⁸² *VITA BASILII*, 110, 14–16.

¹⁵⁸³ *VITA BASILII*, 112, 19–24.

¹⁵⁸⁴ *VITA BASILII*, 112, 1–10.

Eudocia Ingerina¹⁵⁸⁵ is also reported to have displayed a largesse, together with her sons Konstantinos¹⁵⁸⁶ and Leo¹⁵⁸⁷ that also derived from her private funds¹⁵⁸⁸.

Although there is no clue about the sums of money involved, they must have been fairly considerable; Hendy's meticulous analysis suggests that over the course of time such kind of distributions tended not only to increase, but also to become increasingly formalized¹⁵⁸⁹. The narrative then describes that if Basil I was short of funds at that point, he soon had plenty; for the charity and justice that the emperor had shown towards the poor pleased God¹⁵⁹⁰. To quote P. Karlin-Hayter, "there seems to be something disingenuous in all this losing and finding"¹⁵⁹¹.

Then, it is described that Basil I also discovered in the *Eidikon*, the ornaments that Michael III had ordered to be melted down. That is to say, the golden plane tree, the two golden griffins, the two golden lions, a golden organ, as well as other precious objects. While Michael III would have squandered them for his pleasures, Basil I is said to have minted them into coins to use them for all kinds of purposes¹⁵⁹².

Conclusion

I have so far provided the way Michael III's unreasonable expenditures are presented, which had as a result the funds of the imperial treasury to be depleted. A critical review on their inconsistencies not only highlights them, but also reveals the suppressed historical accuracy from their sheer fabrications.

¹⁵⁸⁵ PmbZ #21754.

¹⁵⁸⁶ PmbZ #23742.

¹⁵⁸⁷ PmbZ #24311.

¹⁵⁸⁸ VITA BASILII, 112, 6–114, 13.

¹⁵⁸⁹ HENDY, *Studies*, 196; MORRISSON, *Imperial Generosity*, 38.

¹⁵⁹⁰ VITA BASILII, 114, 13–17.

¹⁵⁹¹ KARLIN-HAYTER, *Money*, 6.

¹⁵⁹² VITA BASILII, 114, 17–29.

Genesios mentions Michael III's prodigality for the first time when Theodora was about to yield her power in 856¹⁵⁹³. Until that point, no reference about the expenditures of the about 15-year-old Michael III was made. In fact, prior to the narration of Theodora giving up her power, Genesios reports that the state was well governed by Michael III and his mother Theodora with the help of Theoktistos and Manuel¹⁵⁹⁴. However, the smooth chronological flow of the narrative is interrupted for Michael III's turpitudes to be recorded - of whom none had till that point been mentioned, a fact also attested by P. Karlin-Hayter¹⁵⁹⁵. It is as if just out of nowhere that Michael III's mother predicts her son's unreasonable expenditures will be the cause of his downfall¹⁵⁹⁶.

Regarding the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, it is reported that when Theodora's regency ended, she made known to the senate that 1.090 kentenaria in gold and 3 in silver were stored in the imperial treasury. So far Genesios and the Theophanes Continuatus agree on the accumulated sum of money in the imperial treasury -1090 kentenaria. According to Hendy, the aforementioned sum in gold would have amounted to 7.848.000 nomismata¹⁵⁹⁷. However, the amount given in the narrative of the *Vita Basilii* is 1000 kentenaria and it actually contradicts the amount given at the narratives of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus (1090 kentenaria)¹⁵⁹⁸ –the amount of 1000 kentenaria is equivalent to 7.200.000 nomismata. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted¹⁵⁹⁹ that the amount of 1000 kentenaria is a rounded-out figure by the author and thus, to the detriment of Theodora, it reduces her savings to

¹⁵⁹³ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 84–95.

¹⁵⁹⁴ GENESIOS, IV, 61, 89–91.

¹⁵⁹⁵ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 2.

¹⁵⁹⁶ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 93–95.

¹⁵⁹⁷ HENDY, Studies, 224 (also cit. n. 23).

¹⁵⁹⁸ VITA BASILII, 104, 5–10; cf. GENESIOS, IV, 64, 90–92; and THEOPH. CONT., IV, 244, 21–23.

¹⁵⁹⁹ HENDY, Studies, 224–225; TREADGOLD, Finances, 11.

the amount of just 30 kentenaria.

| Source | 856 | 867 |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Genesios, IV | 1.090 kentenaria of gold and 3 of silver | No account is given |
| Theophanes Continuatus, IV | 1090 kentenaria of gold and 3 of silver | 3 kentenaria of gold and 9 bags of miliaresia |
| Vita Basilii | 1.000 kentenaria of gold (apart from the silver, both coined and uncoined) | 3 kentenaria of gold |

At this point however, I would like to stress out that, according to Karlin-Hayter, even Theodora's summoning of the senate in order to reveal the amount of wealth that had been amassed during her regency has been questioned if it ever took place¹⁶⁰⁰. Her role could have also been used as a medium in order to besmear Michael III's expenditures. That is to say, this particular event is attested in the narratives of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus¹⁶⁰¹ –the Vita Basilii does not record the summoning of the senate, it just records the amount that Theophilos had accumulated and what Theodora added.

Quite remarkably, the summoning of the senate is also not recorded in her vita; it only records that she ruled appropriately and efficiently for fourteen years, before she was dethroned by her son and left the palace along with her daughters¹⁶⁰². The laudatory information that derives from her vita has already been described as modest by A. Markopoulos¹⁶⁰³. However, on this particular occasion, emphasis should be given on the fact that the summoning of the senate is only attested by the biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty historiographers. Thus, it can be doubted if the episode ever occurred in the first place; it could have been used by the Macedonian propaganda to make

¹⁶⁰⁰ KARLIN-HAYTER, *Deux histoires*, 495–496; KARLIN-HAYTER, *rumeur*, 106; KARLIN-HAYTER, *Money*, 8.

¹⁶⁰¹ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 84–95; THEOPH. CONT. IV, 244, 18–25.

¹⁶⁰² MARKOPOULOS, BΘ, 267, 80–268, 8.

¹⁶⁰³ MARKOPOULOS, BΘ, 251; On her Vita, see also: KOTSIS, *Empress Theodora*, 20–27.

Michael III's prodigality and the fiscal decline of the empire during his reign credible.

The accounts of Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus, prior to Theodora's yielding power, do not bring up any of Michael III's turpitudes to have drained public funds; only the narrative of the *Vita Basilii* does. In the account of *Vita Basilii*, Michael III is reported to be squandering the public funds in drinking and wanton living, as well as with his charioteer friends in horses and chariots¹⁶⁰⁴. Whereas both Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii* record the irrational christening gifts Michael III bestowed to his charioteer friends, they appear to be priced differently; in the narrative of the Theophanes Continuatus Cheilas receives 100 pounds, but in *Vita Basilii* the tariff is lower; Cheilas does not receive 100 pounds, but 50¹⁶⁰⁵. In any case, it is notable that all the sources refer to Michael III's entourage by their nicknames, which are of despicable nature. This technique actually served two purposes; it highlighted the corruptness of Michael III's social circle, and underlined that the public money was squandered for no good reason to disreputable men¹⁶⁰⁶.

Yet as R. J. H. Jenkins has demonstrated, Michael III's donations and gifts to his infamous group of friends are a crudity incorporated from the description of Plutarch on Antony¹⁶⁰⁷. In particular, according to Theophanes Continuatus and of *Vita Basilii*, Michael III bestows a fortune to Cheilas, and another one to Himerios as a reward for his disrespectful jest¹⁶⁰⁸. Similarly, Plutarch narrates that Antony's extravagance is such, that at some time he gives a fortune to a friend and then, without further concern, ostentatiously doubles it¹⁶⁰⁹. At some other time, Antony bestows a house to a cook, who had served him a pleasant

¹⁶⁰⁴ VITA BASILII, 14–24.

¹⁶⁰⁵ THEOPH. CONT. IV, 246, 14; cf. VITA BASILII, 106, 25.

¹⁶⁰⁶ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 4.

¹⁶⁰⁷ JENKINS, Portrait, 73–74.

¹⁶⁰⁸ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 8–16; VITA BASILII, 104, 16–106, 26.

¹⁶⁰⁹ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 147, 4.

dinner¹⁶¹⁰. At the end, both Antony and Michael III become bankrupt and are forced to pillage the savings of pious people to make up for their lavish expenditures¹⁶¹¹. Jenkins rightfully comes to the conclusion that Michael III's reckless extravagance is actually a fabrication based on the worst features of Plutarch's Antony¹⁶¹².

Overall, there appear to be rather slight differences between the accounts of Michael III's expenditures in the narratives of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii, whereas more differences are evident comparing the two aforementioned accounts with the account of Genesios. According to P. Karlin-Hayter, the accounts of Theophanes Continuatus and of Vita Basilii are so close to each other that they could have based their narrative on a specific document¹⁶¹³. This document could be the source, from which all financial information about Michael III originates.

As Karlin-Hayter points out, the considerable differences between the account of Genesios with the ones of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii could be due to the fact that Genesios had used an earlier version of the document. The content of the document, in its original form, was perhaps not satisfactory for the Macedonian propaganda¹⁶¹⁴. So, what Konstantinos VII did was consult this particular document –or a successive edition of it, edit it, and apply to it a biased narrative in the accounts of Theophanes Continuatus and Vita Basilii to highlight Michael III's lavish expenditures¹⁶¹⁵.

¹⁶¹⁰ PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 4.

¹⁶¹¹ “ἀφηρεῖτο γὰρ εὐγενεῖς ἀνθρώπους τὰ ὄντα μαστιγίαις καὶ κόλαζι χαρίζομενος. πολλῶν δὲ καὶ ζώντων ὡς τεθνηκότων αἰτησάμενοί τινες οὐσίας ἔλαβον”. PLUTARCH'S LIVES IX, 188, 4. “ἀνάγκη ἐπὶ ῥητο τοὺς ἐν τέλει πάντας φανερώς ἀποσφάττεσθαι καὶ δημεύεσθαι τὰς οὐσίας αὐτῶν, ἵν' ἔχοι πόρον ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡνιόχοις καὶ πόρναις καὶ ἀσελγέσιν ἀνθρώποις χαρίζεσθαι...”. THEOPH. CONT., V, 104, 2-5.

¹⁶¹² JENKINS, Portrait, 73.

¹⁶¹³ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 2.

¹⁶¹⁴ KARLIN-HAYTER, Deux histoires, 490 (also cit. n. 2), 496; KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 2-3.

¹⁶¹⁵ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 3.

I share the same opinion and I would like to add that this particular document could very well have been the register of disbursements that the protospatharios Basil¹⁶¹⁶ had in his possession¹⁶¹⁷. Still, in spite of the inconsistencies, all the aforementioned sources (Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii) conclude that it was Michael III's excessive expenditures and unreasonable christening gifts to the men that the emperor competed, as well their children, that resulted in the imperial reserve being depleted. Therefore, his removal from the imperial throne was crucial for the survival of the empire¹⁶¹⁸.

However, even if we are to accept the accusations of the Macedonian propaganda and consent to the fact that Michael III's christening gifts and wanton living were the principal reasons that depleted the imperial funds, it is still highly unlikely that the treasury was emptied for these reasons only. In any case, as Karlin-Hayter rightfully indicates, the purpose of such kind of accusations was twofold. For even if the treasury was not empty, these accusations were used not only to persuade the public that the treasury was empty, but also to highlight that the hard earned money of the empire's subjects was squandered senselessly¹⁶¹⁹.

Nevertheless, despite all their inconsistencies and contradictions, the Macedonian propaganda has been successful. The lavish expenditures of Michael III and his christening gifts are recorded both by contemporary and later authors and are regarded as the reasons that the imperial reserve was emptied. Pseudo-symeon records that Michael III squandered all the money that his mother had accumulated on the children of his fellow charioteers and on christening gifts. He then brings up the event of Michael III bestowing to

¹⁶¹⁶ PmbZ #970.

¹⁶¹⁷ VITA BASILII, 110, 14–16.

¹⁶¹⁸ GENESIOS, IV, 64, 84–95; THEOPH. CONT. IV, 246, 16–21; VITA BASILII, 106, 35–108, 43.

¹⁶¹⁹ KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 5.

Himerios, (i.e. to Piggy) the amount of 100 nomismata. When Basil I assumed the reigns of the empire, he found merely 13 kentenaria of gold and 9 bags of miliaresia¹⁶²⁰. It is notable that in the account of Pseudo-Symeon, the amount of gold that Basil I found in the treasury differs from the one in the accounts of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii¹⁶²¹. However, it is believed that the whole episode was copied from Pseudo-Symeon by the Theophanes Continuatus¹⁶²².

The same episodes and turpitudes are recorded in the *Synopsis Historion* of Ioannes Skylitzes. In his work, which was composed in late eleventh century, Skylitzes claims that when Basil I became the emperor, he found in the imperial treasury only 3 kentenaria and 9 bags of miliaresia, and that he had to melt the aforementioned gold ornaments in order to properly govern the empire¹⁶²³. Unsurprisingly, the “prodigal emperor” is presented in the same manner by Georgios Kedrenos¹⁶²⁴, because for the years 811-1057 Kedrenos copied the work of Skylitzes¹⁶²⁵. Next, Ioannes Zonaras, the high-ranking official, historian, and canonist of the twelfth century, who encompasses in his *Epitome Historion* the history of the creation of the world till the death of Alexios Komnenos in 1118, records the same episodes and turpitudes of Michael III¹⁶²⁶.

Konstantinos Manassis also records in his *Synopsis Chronike* that Michael III spent the money like water in his fellow charioteers and drinking with friends¹⁶²⁷; Michael Glykas, having also copied Skylitzes¹⁶²⁸, who for Michael III copied the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus, reproduced the accusations

¹⁶²⁰ GEORGE THE MONK, 659, 1–660, 3.

¹⁶²¹ PSEUDO-SYMEON, 660, 3; Cf. THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 32–33; VITA BASILII., 104, 5–13.

¹⁶²² KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1.

¹⁶²³ SKYLITZES, 96, 29–97, 58.

¹⁶²⁴ KEDRENOS, 158, 7–160, 17.

¹⁶²⁵ KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι II, 331, 334; NEVILLE, Historical Writing, 162; TREADGOLD, Historians, 339–342.

¹⁶²⁶ ZONARAS, XVI, 393, 6–394, 3.

¹⁶²⁷ MANASSIS, 281, 5178–5193.

¹⁶²⁸ KARPOZILOS, Ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι III, 587.

of the Macedonian propaganda as well¹⁶²⁹. Ephraem also shares the same views on Michael III's turpitudes¹⁶³⁰. The aforementioned authors and the fact that they reproduced the prodigality of Michael III in their works can serve as a means to realize the extent of how successful the Macedonian propaganda was. Yet, there is one question to be answered: did Michael III really empty the imperial treasury? Or is it just a fabrication meant to further besmear Michael III, promote Basil I's virtues, and emphasize the necessity of Michael III's removal from the throne?

The key elements in sorting out the situation and distinguishing between historical truth and propaganda lie not only in the aforementioned inconsistent allegations of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and *Vita Basilii*, but, more specifically, on the private funds of Basil I, which derived from Danielis, and on the golden ornaments of the throne room, which were supposedly melted to cover the army's payroll. The episode of Danielis befriending Basil I is recorded only in the account of *Vita Basilii*.

According to the narrative, her enormous wealth is said to have assisted Basil I in his subsequent ascension to the throne. It was Danielis' wealth that enabled Basil I both to claim that the imperial treasury was empty and to justify possession of wealth¹⁶³¹. However, as E. Anagnostakes has convincingly pointed out in his comparative and detailed analysis, the narrative of Danielis is not only exaggerated but largely fictional. The relationship of Danielis with Basil I is modeled on that between King Solomon and the queen of Sheba and on Alexander the Great's visit to Kandake¹⁶³².

Regarding the financial material of the narrative, just like Kandake bestows gifts, precious urns and gold to Alexander the Great, so does Danielis to Basil

¹⁶²⁹ MICHAEL GLYKAS, 543, 10–5.

¹⁶³⁰ EPHRAEM, 94, 2505–2513.

¹⁶³¹ VITA BASILII, 110, 12–14, 112, 8–10.

¹⁶³² ANAGNOSTAKES, *Δανιηλίδας*, 375–390; also: KALDELLIS, *Study*, 63ff.

I¹⁶³³. Therefore, leaving aside the historical accuracy of Danielis as a whole, Basil I's so-called private funds isn't but a fiction derived from the narrative of Alexander the Great and Kandake so that Basil I's distribution of largesse on the day of his coronation could be justified.

Next, we have the golden ornaments of the throne room. According to Theophanes Continuatus, when Basil I became the emperor, he found only 3 kentenaria of gold remaining in the imperial treasury (and 9 bags of miliaresia according to the *Vita Basilii*). As a result, he had to melt down the golden ornaments of the throne room, which were equivalent to 200 kentenaria of gold, in order to govern properly the empire. This event took place in 867. A detailed and comparative analysis on the ornaments that each byzantine source attests, also sheds light to even more inconsistencies between them.

As I have already mentioned, the narrative of George the Monk describes that during the reign of Theophilos two enormous organs in solid gold, adorned with precious gems and stones, and a golden tree, on which birds with some kind of machinery would sing, were constructed¹⁶³⁴. Theophanes Continuatus does not mention the creation of any of these ornaments during Theophilos' reign. On the contrary, in this case Michael III appears to have directly ordered the famous golden plane tree, two golden griffins, two golden lions, an organ of pure gold, and other artifacts of imperial exhibition to be melted and struck as coins¹⁶³⁵.

The aforementioned ornaments also appear in the *De Cerimoniis*. More specifically, chapter 15 of the second book of the *De Cerimoniis* describes the ceremony that takes place, when a foreign legate visits the Great Palace, and requests audience with the emperor¹⁶³⁶. The chapter describes that the audience

¹⁶³³ ANAGNOSTAKES, Δανιηλίδας, 384 (also cit. n. 20).

¹⁶³⁴ GEORGE THE MONK, 793, 7–14.

¹⁶³⁵ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 17–28.

¹⁶³⁶ On the receptions that take place in the Great Palace, according to the *De Cerimoniis* 2.15, see: ANGELIDE, *Designing Receptions*, 465ff.

will take place in the throne room in Magnaura¹⁶³⁷, which is located in the north side of the Great Palace. The emperor is presented seated on the “throne of Solomon”¹⁶³⁸. After the customary procedures are done, and when the foreign ambassador approaches and kneels before the emperor, musical organs begin to sound. When the organs stop, lions begin to roar, birds on the throne and on trees sing, and the animals on the throne stand upright on their bases¹⁶³⁹.

This part of the *De Cerimoniis* describes a set of ornaments (or mechanical devices) that were placed in the emperor’s throne room. The whole set is also confirmed by an almost contemporary and independent account described by Liudprand of Cremona¹⁶⁴⁰, who witnessed the throne in action when he came to the court in 949 as an envoy of Berengar II of Italy.

Liudprand narrates that “in front of the emperor’s throne there stood a certain tree of gilt bronze, whose branches, similarly gilt bronze, were filled with birds of different sizes, which emitted the songs of the different birds corresponding to their species. The throne of the emperor was built with skill in such a way that at one instant it was low, then higher, and quickly it appeared most lofty; and lions of immense size (though it was unclear if they were of wood or brass, they certainly were coated with gold) seemed to guard him, and, striking the ground with their tails, they emitted a roar with mouths open and tongues flickering. Leaning on the shoulders of two eunuchs, I was led into this space, before the emperor’s presence. And then, upon my entry, the lions emitted their roar and the birds called out, each according to its species, I was not filled with special fear or admiration, since I had been told about all these things by one of those who knew them well...”¹⁶⁴¹.

¹⁶³⁷ On the Magnaura, see: MANGO, Brazen House, 57 (and cit n. 136, with older bibliography).

¹⁶³⁸ On the “throne of Solomon”, see: IAFRATE, Throne of Solomon, 60ff. (with older bibliography).

¹⁶³⁹ DE CERIMONIIS, 566, 12ff.

¹⁶⁴⁰ On Liudprand of Cremona, see: KODER, Liudprand, 127–140 (with further bibliography); SCHUMMER, Liudprand, 197–201. Also, PmbZ #21147.

¹⁶⁴¹ SQUATRITI, Liudprand, 197–198.

Regarding the Byzantine sources, it is notable that George the Monk does not mention any lions or griffins; neither do the accounts of Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon. These animals appear for the first time in Theophanes Continuatus and in the *De Cerimoniis*, which were composed under Konstantinos VII. In fact, the only connection that can be established between the narratives of George the Monk and Theophanes Continuatus is the golden tree¹⁶⁴² and one of the two golden organs –which was ordered to be melted according to the latter source. One would think that since George the Monk describes the set of ornaments that were created under Theophilos, he would have probably mentioned the lions and griffins, if he had seen them –but he does not mention them.

Nevertheless, even based on the inconsistencies of the accounts on the ornaments, several facts can be established with a high degree of certainty: the original set of ornaments made under Theophilos (two organs and a tree with singing birds on it) was placed in the Chrysotriklinos, in the South side of the Great Palace. According to Theophanes Continuatus, at some time between the reign of Theophilos and Konstantinos VII the ornaments were moved to be melted¹⁶⁴³. Whether they were melted or not, a similar set of ornaments is later described in the *De Cerimoniis* and in Liudprand's description decorating the throne room of the Magnaura, in the North side of the Great Palace, with the addition of other ornaments, such as the roaring lions, griffins, and birds.

From my point of view, none of these golden ornaments was ever melted down¹⁶⁴⁴; they were only used from the Macedonian propaganda in order to besmear Michael III's turpitudes and highlight the fiscal decline of the empire

¹⁶⁴² On the golden plane tree, see: IAFRATE, *Throne of Solomon*, 78–84.

¹⁶⁴³ It has tentatively been proposed that the ornaments were moved during the reign of Leo VI. See: IAFRATE, *Throne of Solomon*, 73 (and cit. n. 35, 36, 37).

¹⁶⁴⁴ The ornaments and their melting have already been questioned by recent scholarship, but no comparative study has been conducted on how that could reflect on Michael III's economy. See: KARLIN-HAYTER, *Money*, 7; WILSON, *Scholars*, 81–82.

so as to necessitate and justify Basil I's accession to the throne. What is more, the fact that Theophanes Continuatus refers to even more ornaments than George the Monk does, not only exposes his propaganda, but also attests that he was aware of the setting of ornaments in the throne room in the Magnaura, which is also described by Liudprand after his visit in 949.

The case becomes clearer if we reverse the situation. That is to say, if the ornaments of the throne room were indeed melted by Basil I, why is their recreation not recorded? This argument is also reinforced by the narrative of *Vita Basilii*, where some twenty pages are devoted to the restoration of buildings, mosaics, and other works of art commissioned by Basil I¹⁶⁴⁵, but no recreation of these ornaments is reported. One should also keep in mind that this does not concern just any building on the outer edges of the empire, but the very Great Palace of the Byzantine capital. So, if the ornaments were indeed remade, it would definitely be favorable for Basil I –or even for another emperor of the Macedonian dynasty- to mention it. Nevertheless, on no account is there any kind of reproduction of the ornaments mentioned.

The long digression I have made regarding the case with the ornaments of the throne room is essential, for it reflects on the economy during Michael III's last part of his reign. It serves as evidence that when Basil I became the emperor, at least 203 –and not 3– kentenaria of gold were still intact in the imperial treasury, and –above all– that this was not empty. Eventually it all comes down to this. Also, if we are to believe that Basil I managed to recover 300 kentenaria from the beneficiaries of Michael III, that makes it a total of 503 kentenaria. The 503 kentenaria is equivalent to 3.621.600 nomismata. More precisely, when Michael III became sovereign in 856, 7.848.000 nomismata were amassed in the imperial treasury; when Basil I became the emperor, 1.461.600 nomismata (or 203 kentenaria) were still intact from Michael III's reign.

¹⁶⁴⁵ *VITA BASILII*, 264, 12-308, 29.

That indicates that during Michael III's reign the expenses of the empire outweighed its annual income. More precisely, his expenditures amounted to 6.686.400 nomismata or to 887 kentenaria. From my point of view, some of it were spent on the frequent naval and military campaigns against the Arabs, some of it on the restoration of the fortifications of the cities in Asia Minor –a fact that is also suggested by E. Kislinger¹⁶⁴⁶, some on the redecoration of churches, and some of it on prisoner exchange.

At this point, I would like to emphasize the number of nomismata that the imperial treasury had, when Michael III became sole emperor, which is 7.848.000. However, there seems to be an inconsistency in the modern scholarship about this particular amount. A simple miscalculation lies at the bottom of the inconsistency. In 1982 W. Treadgold writes that a total of 190.000 pounds of gold and 300 pounds of silver were found in the imperial reserve and that the gold was equivalent to 13.680.000 nomismata¹⁶⁴⁷. This is by all means a miscalculation.

1 kentenarion is equivalent to 100 pounds; so, 1090 kentenaria are 109.000 pounds. Apparently, when Treadgold attempted to convert into pounds the 1090 kentenaria, that are recorded in the accounts of Genesios and in Theophanes Continuatus, he miscalculated the amount to 190.000 pounds. In 1998, A. Kaldellis notes that “on p. 10 in Treadgold a typo makes it 190.000 Byzantine pounds instead of 109.000”¹⁶⁴⁸. But if it started as a “typo” mistake, it did not end up like a “typo” one. Afterwards, Treadgold goes on to miscalculate the 190.000 pounds to nomismata (1 pound is equal to 72 nomismata), and erroneously comes up with the excessive amount of 13.860.000 nomismata¹⁶⁴⁹. His initial miscalculation of kentenaria to pounds had

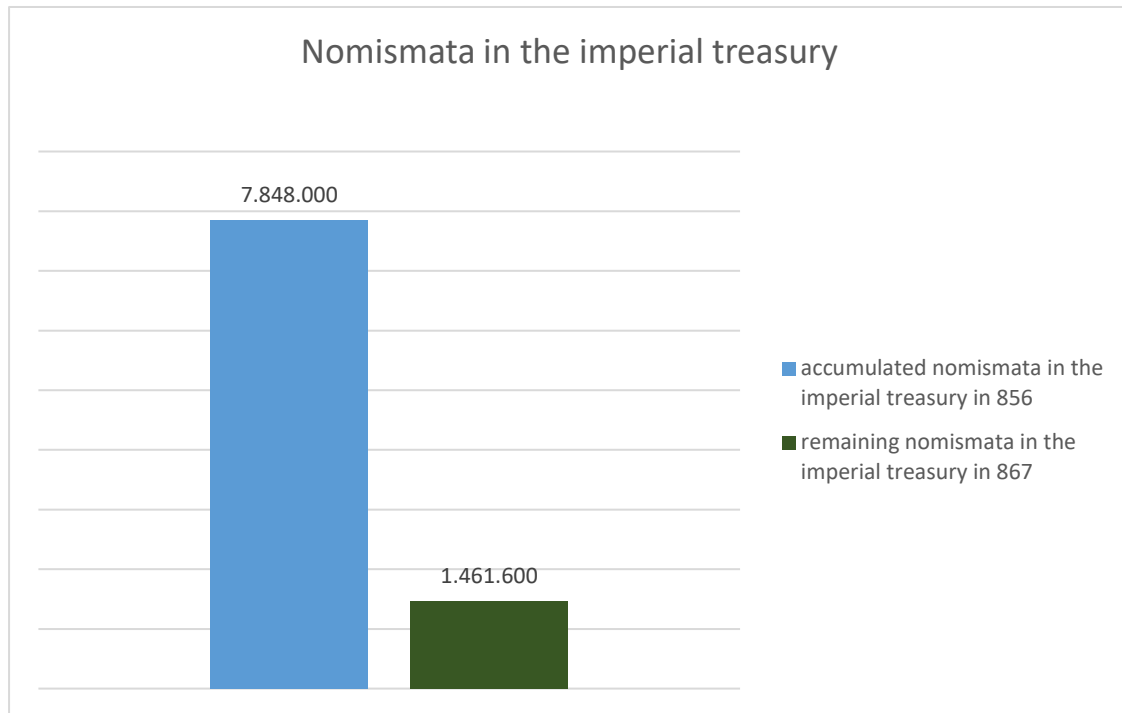
¹⁶⁴⁶ KISLINGER, *Image und Realität*, 392–393.

¹⁶⁴⁷ TREADGOLD, *Finances*, 10.

¹⁶⁴⁸ KALDELLIS, *Genesios*, 81 (cit. n. 359).

¹⁶⁴⁹ The same mistake is reproduced by L. Garland and P. Karlin-Hayter. See: GARLAND, *empresses*, 104; KARLIN-HAYTER, *Money*, 1–7.

led him to a total misinterpretation of the accumulated nomismata that Theodora had left in the imperial treasury in 856, when she has deposed of her regency. Thus, 1090 kentenaria, or 109.000 pounds, were accumulated in the imperial treasury. Hence, as 1 pound is equivalent to 72 nomismata, that makes it a total of 7.848.000 nomismata.



To sum up, from my point of view the aforementioned estimate about the accumulated amount of money that the imperial treasury contained in 856 and 867 is very plausible. First of all, it certifies that R. J.H. Jenkins is correct in stating that Michael III's reckless extravagance is a fabrication borrowed from the description that Plutarch gives on Antony, only to besmear Michael III and justify Basil I's murder and consequent elevation to the imperial throne¹⁶⁵⁰. It complies with Kislinger's suggestion that some of the money was spent on the restoration of the fortifications in cities of Asia Minor¹⁶⁵¹. It also justifies the distribution of largesse on the day of Basil I's coronation by Basil I himself,

¹⁶⁵⁰ JENKINS, Portrait, 73.

¹⁶⁵¹ KISLINGER, Image und Realität, 392–393.

Eudocia Ingerina, and their two sons, Konstantinos and Leo VI, as attested in the account of *Vita Basilii*¹⁶⁵². For even if we accept that the money the newly crowned emperor distributed were from his private funds –which is obviously a fabrication– it is only logical to assume that no reasonable emperor would distribute any kind of largesse, especially if the imperial treasury was empty.

Lastly, I believe that the biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty writers examined the register of disbursements that protospatharios Basil¹⁶⁵³ had in his possession closely. Having studied the register and having witnessed that there was indeed a decline in the amassed nomismata in the imperial reserve during the reign of Michael III, they purposely tried to further emphasize the empire's fiscal decline. For this reason, they borrowed Plutarch's narrative about Antony's extravagance and similarly portrayed Michael III as a rather reckless emperor, who squandered the imperial treasury through his extravagant prodigality. They even used the golden ornaments of the throne room in order to discredit him.

However, the misrepresentations and contradictions of their narratives, Basil I's distribution of largesse on the day of his coronation along with Liudprand's description of the supposedly melted down ornaments of the throne room expose their propaganda and slanders. The imperial treasury was not empty when Basil I became emperor; it contained 1.461.600 nomismata. And if we add to that amount the 2.160.000 (or 300 kentenaria) that he managed to recover from Michael III's beneficiaries, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty started his reign with at least 3.621.600 nomismata –an amount which was enough for his government to function properly from the very beginning.

¹⁶⁵² THEOPH. CONT., V., 112, 6–114, 17.

¹⁶⁵³ PmbZ #970.

Chapter VI: Coinage

The reign of Michael III constitutes a turning point in the history of Byzantine coinage. The historical events that transpired during his reign, along with his personal predilections affected not only the iconography of the coinage, but its epigraphy also. To begin with, it is during Michael III's reign that, after the dissolution of the iconoclastic controversy, we have the revival of the representation of Christ on the coins –a fact that altered the whole appearance of the Byzantine coins for the future. Regarding the silver coinage, there is the use of the title *μέγας βασιλεύς*, whereas in the copper, there is, initially, an extreme rarity of any kind of issue for the majority of his reign, followed by a brief issue of folles, on which the Latin titles of *imperator* and *rex* accompany Michael III and Basil I alike.

I shall begin the presentation of coins with the Constantinopolitan solidi of class V¹⁶⁵⁴ of Theophilos and of the class V of his miliaresia¹⁶⁵⁵, as they are the first types of coinage on which Michael III is depicted. The solidi of class V (fig. 1) is the last type of solidi that was struck during the reign of Theophilos and is the only one portraying Theophilos on the obverse, and Michael III on the reverse. The fact that Theophilos' only son is depicted on the coinage can serve as a means to date the issue of the class after the birth and coronation of Michael III as co-emperor, i.e. towards the end of 840.

The solidi of class V have on the obverse the facing bust of Theophilos. He is depicted with a medium-size beard, wearing a chlamys and a crown with cross. In his right hand he is holding a patriarchal cross, and in his left an akakia. The inscription reads: *•ΘΕΟΦΙΛΟΣΒΑΣΙΛΕΙ Θ'.*

¹⁶⁵⁴ I maintain the classification of Theophilos and Michael III's coinage, as presented in the fundamental study of Philip Grierson: DOC III/1, 406-470.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Miliaresia was a silver coin that was introduced by Leo III in 720; it lasted, with a few changes in its external appearance, down to 1092. On the matter, see: DOC III/1, 16.

The reverse of the solidi (fig. 1) is occupied by the facing bust of Michael III. He is depicted beardless, wearing loros and crown with a cross on it. In his right hand he is holding a globus cruciger, and in his left a cross scepter. Similar to the obverse, a cross accompanies the circular inscription. We read: +MIXAHL ΘΕΣΠΟΖΙΣ Α¹⁶⁵⁶.

The title δεσπότης¹⁶⁵⁷, attributed to Michael III, comes to certify what we already know with certainty, that Michael III was the heir to the throne. It has to be pointed out, however, that the title δεσπότης has also been used during this period to describe a powerful ruler. Yet, since the same title has been used from Michael II¹⁶⁵⁸, Theophilos' predecessor, in order to describe the heir to the throne in the coinage, it is only logical to assume that Theophilos would keep the custom of his father, and do the same for his son; namely, to use the title δεσπότης to describe the heir to the throne.

That leaves us with only one unresolved detail: the letter Α, that comes after MIXAHL. Naturally, one would assume that it is a control mark, but, as it was already suggested¹⁶⁵⁹, the letter Θ already fulfils that role. As stated by P. Grierson¹⁶⁶⁰, it could be a misunderstanding as the letter Α served as a control mark for the coinage of Theophilos and his early deceased son¹⁶⁶¹, Konstantinos¹⁶⁶². Adding to the perplexity of the matter, the letter Α is in use in the solidi of class I of Michael III's reign¹⁶⁶³.

¹⁶⁵⁶ There is also a semissis in Turin, which is identical with the solidi of class V. See: DOC III/1, 430; MORRISSON, Monnaies, 525.

¹⁶⁵⁷ For the title "δεσπότης", see: GRIERSON, Coinage, 55; GUILLAND, despote, 52–89; G. OSTROGORSKY, Urum-Despotes. Die Anfänge der Despotenwürde in Byzanz. *BZ* 44 (1951) 448–460; PENNA – MORRISSON, Usurpers and rebels, 30; RÖSCH, ONOMA, 39; GEORGIU, Παρατηρήσεις, 154–164; STAVRIDOU-ZAFRAKA, Δεσπότης, 74.

¹⁶⁵⁸ DOC III/1, 393; cf. FÜEG, Corpus, 24–25.

¹⁶⁵⁹ DOC III/1, 416.

¹⁶⁶⁰ DOC III/1, 416.

¹⁶⁶¹ "ἕτερον λαρνάκιον πράσινον ἐν ᾧ ἀπόκειται Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ υἱὸς Θεοφίλου". DE CERIMONIS, 645, 21–23; DIKIGOROPOULOS, Solidi, 353; TREADGOLD, Revival, 286–287; For the dating of the coinage of Theophilos and Konstantinos see: FÜEG, Corpus, 26ff.

¹⁶⁶² PmbZ #3931.

¹⁶⁶³ DOC III/1, 457, 461–462.

Similar to the solidi of class V, the fact that miliaresia of class V mention Michael III means that his birth and coronation can serve as a *terminus post quem* to date the issue of this coinage. The reverse of the coin (fig. 2) is occupied by a cross potent on base and three steps, surrounded by a triple circle of dots. The circular inscription on the reverse of the coinage reads: $\text{I}\eta\text{S}\chi\text{S}\ \text{X}\rho\text{I}\varsigma\chi\text{S}\ \text{NICA}$ ¹⁶⁶⁴. This particular acclamation to the divine was firstly introduced on the miliaresion by Leo III, and remained in use, with a few modifications, till the eleventh century¹⁶⁶⁵. It is notable that the reverse of Theophilos' miliaresia is the same in all five classes¹⁶⁶⁶.

The obverse (fig. 2) of the coin is occupied by an inscription, comprised of five verses and written in capital letters: $\text{+}\ \Theta\epsilon\text{O}\ //\ \text{FILOSSMI}\ //\ \text{XAHLEC}\ \Theta\epsilon,\ //\ \text{BASIAISRO}\ //\ \text{MAION}$. The design of the coin has been copied from miliaresia of class IV, with the difference that the word PISZOS is dropped to make room for Michael III's name¹⁶⁶⁷. The letters $\text{EC}\ \Theta\epsilon$ are an abbreviation for $\epsilon\kappa\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ –the abbreviation can also be found as EC' and was first inserted to silver coins by Leo III (720)¹⁶⁶⁸, and can be interpreted as “by the grace of god”¹⁶⁶⁹.

The phrase $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma\ \text{P}\omega\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$ appears for the first time on Byzantine coinage on the miliaresion of Michael I (811-813), and is applied to himself and his son Theophylaktos¹⁶⁷⁰ alike. Previously, the emperor was described as $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$ -or as $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ if the coin depicted the emperor and his successor. The epithet $\text{P}\omega\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$ was added to make it clear that, unlike Charlemagne, who was also recognized as $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$ by Byzantium in 812, only the Byzantine

¹⁶⁶⁴ DOC III/1, 182; KANTOROWICZ, *Laudes Regiae*, 8; FROLOW, *Christus* 98–113.

¹⁶⁶⁵ DOC III/1, 182.

¹⁶⁶⁶ DOC III/1, 430–433.

¹⁶⁶⁷ DOC III/1, 416.

¹⁶⁶⁸ On Leo III's coinage, see DOC III/1, 284–285 and descriptive lists at 286–289; BRUBAKER–HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 226; BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Sources*, 122; FÜEG, *Corpus*, 14–46.

¹⁶⁶⁹ DOC III/1, 179; RÖSCH, *ONOMA*, 63–65.

¹⁶⁷⁰ *PmbZ* #8336.

emperor could claim to be the βασιλεύς Ῥωμαίων¹⁶⁷¹. According to P. Grierson, taking into consideration the issue of these last issues of Theophilos (840-842), and the absence of any die-links means that the coin was minted in large quantities and was very common¹⁶⁷².

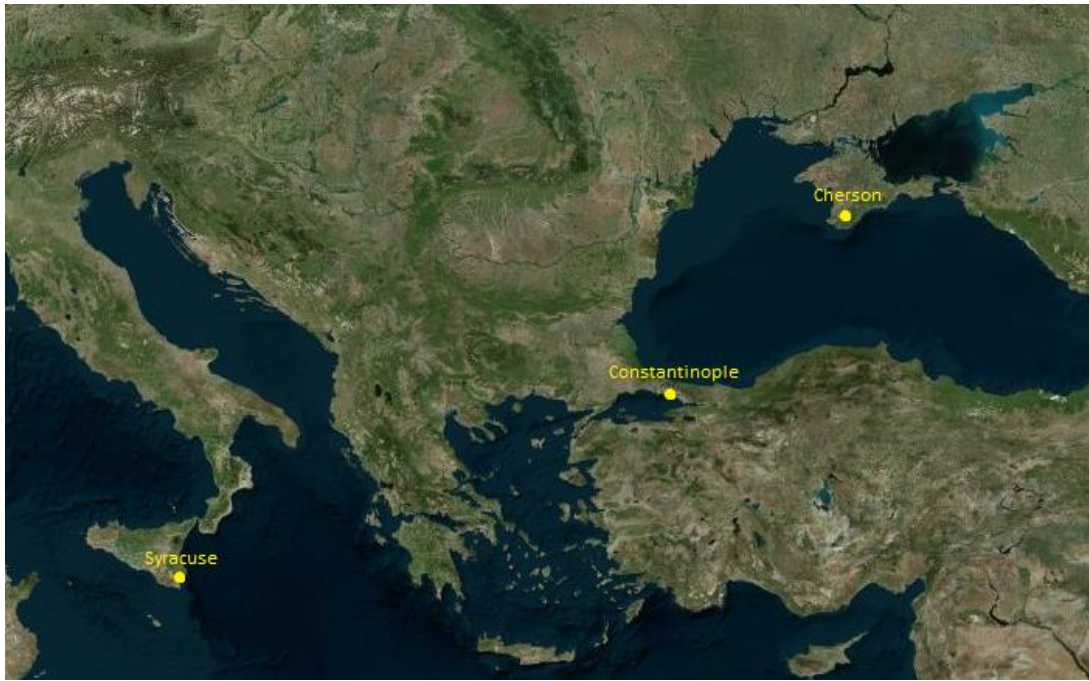
Michael III's coinage was struck at three mints: Constantinople, Syracuse, and Cherson. The majority of the coinage was minted in Constantinople. Part of Sicily had by that time been occupied by the Arabs –hence the need for coinage was arguably less. According to Grierson, the coinage issued in Cherson, whose mint was inactive since the seventh century, was a local initiative¹⁶⁷³.

The Constantinopolitan solidi of Michael III are categorized in three different classes. Class I has the busts of empress Theodora, Michael III, and his sister Thecla; class II the busts of Christ, Michael III and Theodora, and class III the busts of Christ and Michael III alone. The solidi of class I (fig. 3) have on the one side the facing bust of Theodora. She is wearing a loros and crown with pendilia and three pinnacles with a central cross. In her right hand she is holding a globus, surmounted by a patriarchal cross, and in her left hand a cross scepter. The circular inscription, written with capital letters, reads: +ΘΕΟΔΟΡΑ ΔΕΣΠΥΝΑ. The title *δέσποινα* is actually the feminine type of the title *δεσπότης*, and is, to my knowledge, the first time being used on coinage –on

¹⁶⁷¹ DOC III/1, 177-178, 364.

¹⁶⁷² DOC III/1, 416.

¹⁶⁷³ DOC III/1, 454.



Mints during Michael III's reign (Bing maps).

the previous joint coinage of Eirene and Konstantinos VI, Eirene used the titles αὐγοῦστα and βασίλισσα (βασιλίσση)¹⁶⁷⁴.

The other side of the coin is occupied by the facing busts of Michael III and his sister, Thecla (fig. 3). Michael III is on the left side in smaller scale than Thecla. He is wearing loros and crown with cross and in his right hand he is holding a globus cruciger. Thecla is depicted on the right side of the coin, on a larger scale, wearing loros and crown with pendilia, pinnacles and cross, and holding in her right hand a long patriarchal cross. On some dies, an akakia is engraved on her left hand. The circular inscription reads: • MIXAHLΣΘ ΕCΛΑ. Interestingly, no titles are given to either Michael III or Thecla at this time.

It has been generally accepted that Theodora's bust occupies the obverse of the coin, whereas Michael III and Thecla's the reverse side¹⁶⁷⁵. In his recent die-study, however, F. Füeg, shows that it is the bust of Michael III and Thecla that should be considered as the obverse. According to Füeg, the fact that Thecla

¹⁶⁷⁴ DOC III/1, 181, 336–351; FÜEG, *Corpus*, 20–23; KOTSIS, Irene, 185–215 (with further bibliography); RÖSCH, *ONOMA*, 110–111.

¹⁶⁷⁵ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, 'Αντιβασιλεία, 32; DOC III/1, 461; MORRISON, *Monnaies*, 533; WROTH, *BNC*, 429.

holds the patriarchal cross along with the *akakia* best suits the way the senior emperors were represented on the obverse of the coinage since Nikephoros I (802-811)¹⁶⁷⁶. But that is not to imply that Thecla prevails over Michael III; she only holds the insignia for her infant brother, whereas Michael III holds the *globus cruciger* for his sister. Besides, as Grierson remarks, groups of co-emperors were arranged on the coins according to a strict protocol. When there were two figures, the senior was placed on the left side of the coin (from the spectator's point of view), which in this case is, as already mentioned, occupied by Michael III¹⁶⁷⁷.

Moreover, the insignia that Theodora is holding are the same with the ones co-emperors are holding on the reverse of the coinage, since the reign of Nikephoros I¹⁶⁷⁸. The *globus cruciger* is placed in her right hand and the cross scepter in her left hand, as was the case with co-emperors under Michael I, Michael II and Theophilos¹⁶⁷⁹. And her title, *δέσποινα*, the feminine form of *δεσπότης*, is used on the reverse from the reign of Nikephoros I until the reign of Theophilos¹⁶⁸⁰. F. Füg also notes the cross (+) that precedes Theodora's name is of the same type that is found on the names of co-emperors placed on the reverse, once again since the reign of Nikephoros I¹⁶⁸¹.

Theodora's public projection in the *solidi* of class I is characteristic for the legal status she enjoys as head of the regency. Taking into account the portraiture of the coinage, however, one should be careful not to conjecture that Theodora's intention was to undermine her son and eventually rule the empire by herself –this is not to be regarded as a sequel to the reign of Eirene – Konstantinos VI.

¹⁶⁷⁶ FÜEG, Corpus, 28.

¹⁶⁷⁷ GRIERSON, Coinage, 26.

¹⁶⁷⁸ FÜEG, Corpus, 29.

¹⁶⁷⁹ FÜEG, Corpus, 29.

¹⁶⁸⁰ FÜEG, Corpus, 29.

¹⁶⁸¹ FÜEG, Corpus, 28.

As for Thecla, the very fact that she is depicted on the coinage, as stated above, can only mean that she was also a co-emperor, second to Michael III, regardless of the activity she had. Although the busts of class I are very meticulously designed, the striking is often careless and hasty. The majority of the solidi of class I is often overstruck on solidi of the reigns of Theophilos, Michael II, and even Leo V¹⁶⁸². Such overstriking of gold is very unusual and, most likely, unwelcome, since the coins become worn and are not suitable¹⁶⁸³.

The busts of Theodora, Michael III and Thecla vary greatly in their relative sizes; the same applies for Theodora's garments. Additionally, the inscription on the reverse of the coin appears in a few dissimilar ways: in some dies Thecla's name appears unbroken (MIXAHLS - ΘΕCLA), whereas in others, divided (MIXAHLS Θ-ΕCLA, MIXAHLSΘΕ-CLA)¹⁶⁸⁴.

The aforementioned divergences in the coinage have caused a series of conjectures and interpretations since the beginning of the 20th century. In 1908 W. Wroth had suggested that class I (fig. 1) could be in issue till c. 852¹⁶⁸⁵. His main argument was that Michael III is not depicted as a small child, but as an adolescent. Grierson had, on the contrary –and quite rightly, suggested that age indications in byzantine coinage cannot be a reliable dating guide and implied that the issue of class I did not go beyond 843¹⁶⁸⁶. His main argument was that it would be unlikely that the authorities would have waited nine years after the restoration of the images (11 March 843) to place the bust of Christ on the coins¹⁶⁸⁷. He also added that, when studying such kind of detailed divergences among the dies, the most one can hope for is to be able to divide the dies in

¹⁶⁸² DOC III/1, 457.

¹⁶⁸³ DOC III/1, 457.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Taking into consideration the divergences in the inscription, F. Füg has subcategorized the solidi of class I into six categories. See: FÜEG, Corpus, 29.

¹⁶⁸⁵ WROTH, BNC, 430.

¹⁶⁸⁶ DOC III/1, 456.

¹⁶⁸⁷ DOC III/1, 456.

particular groups, distinguishing them as between early and late ones¹⁶⁸⁸. Besides, as he accurately remarks, when there is no close control of the details, a die-sinker will tend to vary his work and may at any moment revert to a pattern he used some weeks ago. So the divergences in class I can be interpreted as an issue being made in great haste.

In 2007 however, F. Füeg argued that the solidi of class I are much more plentiful and varied than the *Pantokrator* issue (class II) and cannot be chronologically compressed in the first year of Michael III's reign, and that class I was in issue till c. 850¹⁶⁸⁹. If this is the case, then one cannot help but wonder why the authorities would have waited so long to introduce the image of Christ on the coinage, and, thus, propagate the fact that the iconoclastic controversy is finally over.

One explanation would be that the imperial authorities would not want to provoke the public opinion directly¹⁶⁹⁰. Patriarch Methodios had to deal with the iconoclast clergy till the very end of his patriarchate (843-847)¹⁶⁹¹. Whereas all the redecorations on ecclesiastical and secular buildings that were being made after the official restoration of the icons were in close vicinity of the Great Palace. It may be that the strength of the remaining iconoclasts was considerable, and the Byzantine government decided not to provoke it by redecorating the rest of the city.

The date of introduction of the class II solidi (fig. 4) can be debated, but fact remains that it is the first time that the bust of Christ is placed on the coinage of the post-iconoclastic period. From that time onwards, a sacred image is almost invariably shown in gold coinage. The obverse of class II is occupied by

¹⁶⁸⁸ DOC III/1, 457. See also: M. D. O'HARA, An unpublished and Rare Variety of a Solidus of Michael III, and a Suggested Sequence for his First Issue. In: D. J. Crowther Coin List, No. 1, 1969.

¹⁶⁸⁹ FÜEG, Corpus, 29–30.

¹⁶⁹⁰ MORRISSON, Authority and Kharaktèr, 75.

¹⁶⁹¹ DARROUZÉS, Méthode, 16.

the bust of Christ, and the reverse of class II of the busts of Michael III and Theodora. On the obverse, Christ is depicted bearded, with cross behind his head without nimbus. He is wearing tunic and himation. His right hand, raised in blessing, appears to be in front of his body, and a closed gospel is held in his left. The circular inscription above His head reads: $\text{I}\eta\text{S}\chi\text{S}\ \text{X}\text{R}\text{I}\text{S}\text{Z}\text{O}\text{S}^*$.

Solidi of class II have on the reverse the facing busts of Michael III and Theodora. Michael III occupies the left side of the coinage. He is depicted beardless, wearing chlamys and crown with cross. Theodora, on the right side of the coinage, is depicted in a slightly larger scale, wearing loros and crown with pendilia, two pinnacles, and a cross. There is also an additional cross in the middle of the coin between the two figures (fig. 4). The circular inscription (fig. 4) above their names reads: $+\text{M}\text{I}\text{X}\text{A}\eta\text{L}\text{S}\Theta\text{E}\ \text{O}\Delta\text{R}\text{A}$. Compared with the solidi of class I, the minting of class II appears to have been more carefully designed.

Although divergences in the sizes of the busts still exist, they are only minor, and the design is consistent and homogeneous¹⁶⁹². Unlike Ioustinianos II's case, class II of Michael III and Theodora is simpler and the design of the bust of Christ is more simplified. Also, whereas in Ioustinianos II's coinage the inscription that accompanies the bust of Christ reads " $\text{I}\eta\text{S}\ \text{C}\text{R}\text{I}\text{S}\text{Z}\text{O}\text{S}\ \text{R}\text{E}\text{X}\ \text{R}\text{E}\varsigma\text{N}\text{A}\text{N}\text{Z}\text{I}\chi\text{M}$ ", in Michael III's case, the Latin words are omitted and we simply read: $\text{I}\eta\text{S}\chi\text{S}\ \text{X}\text{R}\text{I}\text{S}\text{Z}\text{O}\text{S}$ ¹⁶⁹³.

It is already known that the image of the bust of Christ has been copied from Ioustinianos II's reign¹⁶⁹⁴. That is to say, during his first reign (685-695), Ioustinianos II introduced on his solidi the bust of Christ *Pantokrator*, whereas on his second reign (705-711) he introduced on his solidi the bust of Christ

¹⁶⁹² DOC III/1, 548.

¹⁶⁹³ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 22–24; cf. DOC III/1, 458, 464.

¹⁶⁹⁴ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 47ff.; COTSONIS, Images, 5–7; DOC III/1, 454; MORRISON, Authority and Kharaktèr, 73; PENNA, Εικονογραφικά βυζαντινών μολυβδοβούλλων, 263.

Emmanuel¹⁶⁹⁵. The *Pantokrator* type is the one that depicts Christ as a majestic and venerable figure, with bearded face and long hair; the Emmanuel type depicts Christ young and slightly bearded -this type is also known as the Syrian type of Christ¹⁶⁹⁶. Of these two types of Christ that exist, only the Christ *Pantokrator* was copied by Theodora and Michael III, and, just like in Ioustinianus II's case, it was limited only to the gold coinage.



Gold solidus of Justinian II with Christ Emmanuel. Constantinople. Second reign (705-711).

A number of theories also exist about why this particular type of Christ came to be chosen. According to P. Grierson, it could have been that the Christ Emmanuel type was not known on coins. Alternatively, it could have been a matter of personal predilection, especially if it was that type of Christ that was used for the icon of the Christ on the Chalké gate¹⁶⁹⁷, painted by the monk Lazaros¹⁶⁹⁸. A.



Gold solidus of Justinian II with Christ Pantokrator. Constantinople. First reign (685-695).

Walker and J. Breckenridge suggest that this particular type of Christ was used by Michael III because it was considered by the artists and designers of his reign to be a faithful copy of the image of Christ in the Chrysotriklinos, as it had existed when the coin was struck¹⁶⁹⁹. C. Morrisson, citing G. Dagron, argues that it could have to do with the canon 83 of the 692 Council, recommending that Christ should be shown in his human form¹⁷⁰⁰.

In any case, the sacred image of Christ in the coinage is used here to make a statement: the long iconoclastic struggle is over. There is no doubt that the

¹⁶⁹⁵ For a discussion on the matter and the meaning of Justinian II's coin types, see: BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 91ff.

¹⁶⁹⁶ DOC III/1, 146.

¹⁶⁹⁷ DOC III/1, 454; for the icon of Christ on the Chalké Gate, indicatevely see: FROLOW, Chalcé, 107-120; DOC III/1, 160-161; MANGO, Brazen House, 108-142, 170-174.

¹⁶⁹⁸ PmbZ #4234.

¹⁶⁹⁹ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 56; WALKER, Emperor, 47.

¹⁷⁰⁰ MORRISSON, Authority and Kharaktèr, 73; DAGRON, Décrire et peindre, 184-194.

religious image was used in order for the iconoclastic prejudices to be dealt with. That is to say, regardless of the date the coin was issued, here we have a case where coinage is used as a contribution to the official program of the restoration of the images¹⁷⁰¹. The minting of class II lasted till 856, as on that year Theodora's power was diminished and Michael III went on to strike the third class of his coinage depicting him as a sole emperor.

Class III is similar to class II. The main difference being the removal of Theodora's bust. This class has on the obverse the facing bust of Christ (fig. 5), which is similar with the one from class II. The reverse of the coin is occupied by the facing bust of Michael III. Unlike in the previous type and quite expected, in class III Michael is depicted older in age and bearded. On this class, Michael III is holding a labarum with cross in his right hand, and an akakia in the left. The circular inscription above his head reads: +MIXAHL bASILEI. It is notable that the cross (+) is placed on the left side below the labarum (from the spectator's point of view). The title βασιλεὺς, used in Michael III's coinage for the first time, was without a doubt used to emphasize that Michael III was henceforth ruling as sole emperor¹⁷⁰².

Solidi of Class III were the last being struck under Michael III's reign. It is remarkable that no gold coinage is struck in the mint of the Byzantine capital displaying the joint reign of Michael III and Basil I; the only known coinage depicting them both together comes from semisses and copper coins from the provincial mints of the empire.

However, that does not necessarily mean that there were no such coins struck in Constantinople. They may appear at any time. Since coinage of Michael III and Basil was minted in provincial mints, it could well be that it was, at some time, minted in Constantinople as well¹⁷⁰³. And, since the joint

¹⁷⁰¹ BELLINGER, *Coins and Policy*, 72–73.

¹⁷⁰² RÖSCH, *ONOMA*, 37–39; See also: ZUCKERMAN, *Βασιλεὺς*, 865–878.

¹⁷⁰³ FÜEG, *Corpus*, 30.

reign of Michael III with Basil I did not last much longer than a year, their rarity would have probably been extreme.

Only one type of semissis was minted in Constantinople and is almost identical to the solidi of class III. The facing bust of Christ is depicted on the obverse (fig. 6), in an identical manner with the way it is depicted in the solidi of class III, and the inscription is also the same. The reverse of the type is also almost identical to the solidi of class III; Michael III is depicted alone, a fact that enables us to date the coinage from 856 onwards. Unlike in the solidi, however, Michael III's left hand is not shown, whereas in his right hand he is holding labarum with pellet, instead of a cross. The circular inscription reads: +MIXAHL bA. Similar with the solidi of class III, a cross (+) is placed on the left side below the labarum (from the spectator's point of view). The word bASILEI, however, is abbreviated as "bA".

On the contrary, Syracuse¹⁷⁰⁴ was the only place to issue semisses, on which Basil I was associated with Michael III. The semisses minted there, just as the solidi minted in Constantinople, can be categorized in three different classes, and, placed in the correct chronological order, they represent the turn of events, as occur in the imperial court.

Semisses of class I (fig. 7) have on the obverse the bearded facing bust of Michael III wearing loros and crown with cross on small triangle. In his left hand he is holding a globe, surmounted by patriarchal cross. The reverse is the same as the obverse, the difference being Michael III wearing chlamys instead of loros. On both sides of the coin, the circular inscription reads: MIXAHLΘ. The letter Θ stands for Theodora and serves as a means to date the minting of the coin between 842-856, the years that Theodora was the regent in command.

¹⁷⁰⁴ For the gold fineness of the coins minted in Sicily see: LAIOU - MORRISON, *Βυζαντινή Οικονομία*, 129.

The removal of the letter Θ helps us date the semisses of class II (fig. 8), which are similar to class I. The only noticeable distinctions are Michael III holding in his left hand globus cruciger instead of globe, surmounted by patriarchal cross, the removal of the letter Θ, as well as the use of the letter Λ instead of L in Michael III's name. We read: MIXAHΛ. The fact that Theodora is not mentioned on the second class, suggests that class II was minted between 856-866, when Michael III was reigning as a sole ruler.

As already mentioned, the only gold coinage depicting both Michael III and Basil I does not come from Constantinople, but from Syracuse, and that is the semissis of class III. The issue (fig. 9) has on the obverse the crowned facing bust of Michael III. He is depicted bearded with mustache, wearing loros and crown with cross on triangle. In his left hand he is holding a globe, surmounted by patriarchal cross. It is notable that Syracuse issues are the only ones that display Michael III with short mustache and long beard; issues struck in the capital (solidi and semisses alike) portray him short bearded.

Generally, speaking the mustache and the long beard signify the manhood and are connected with the portraiture of a senior emperor¹⁷⁰⁵. This characteristic can prove to be valuable when two or more emperors are portrayed; the senior emperor may be portrayed bearded and with mustache, whereas the junior one without mustache and beardless¹⁷⁰⁶. On this occasion, however, both Michael III and Basil are depicted with mustache and bearded. I reckon that this characteristic has to do with the personal predilections of the die-sinker. Besides, as has been remarked, coins minted in Italy and Sicily occasionally had a distinctive style of their own¹⁷⁰⁷. The circular inscription above Michael III's head reads: +MI XAHΛ. On the reverse of the coin Basil I is

¹⁷⁰⁵ DOC III/1, 143; GITTINGS, *Women*, 96-97.

¹⁷⁰⁶ DOC III/1, 143.

¹⁷⁰⁷ DOC III/1, 143.

depicted in an identical manner. The circular inscription above his head reads: **+bAC ILEIOC**.

Similar to the solidi of Michael III, three classes of miliaresia were struck during his reign, and they all come from Constantinople. Class I (fig. 10) was struck in three names: Michael III, Theodora, and Thecla. The coin has on the reverse a cross potent on three steps, within a triple circle of dots. The obverse of the class I is occupied by an inscription, comprised of five verses and written in capital letters, and, similar to the obverse, is within a triple circle of dots. We read: **+MIXA // HLΘEOJORA // SΘECLAECΘI // bASILISRO // MAION**. Class I was minted between 842-856¹⁷⁰⁸.

Miliaresia of class II (fig. 11) were minted in the name of Michael III alone from 856 onwards. The reverse of class II is identical to the one of class I. Similar to class I, the obverse of the coin is occupied by an inscription written in capital letters. The text of the inscription is composed in five verses, the main difference being the names of Theodora and Thecla replaced by the epithets **EC ΘEY ΠISZOS**. We read: **+MIXA // HLECΘEY // PISZOSbA // SILEYsRO // MAION**.

The most interesting class of Michael III's miliaresia is the third and last one; it was introduced at some uncertain date between 856-867. Firstly, from a technical point of view, the coinage witnessed two alterations. The first one was the placing of four tiny pellets on the obverse of the coin, on the innermost circle of dots, which are barely visible. According to P. Grierson¹⁷⁰⁹, they probably had some kind of technical function –perhaps to assist the die-sinker to align the inscription correctly. The second alteration was the addition of a globule beneath the steps of the cross on the reverse. In fact, this tiny little droplet on the reverse and the four pellets on the obverse assist us in dating the coinage.

¹⁷⁰⁸ DOC III/1, 464–465.

¹⁷⁰⁹ DOC III/1, 459.

That is to say, these technical alterations can also be found in the silver coinage of Basil I¹⁷¹⁰.

The text of the inscription on the obverse, which is comprised of five verses written in capital letters and within a triple circle of dots, is the most intriguing part of the coin. The text goes as follows: +ΜΙΧΑ // ΗΛΠΙΣΖΟΣ // ΜΕΓΑΣΒΑ // ΣΙΛΕΥΣΡΟ // ΜΑΙΟΝ. The title ΜΕΓΑΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ (μέγας βασιλεὺς) actually replaces the phrase ΕC ΘΕΥ. This particular title seems to have been very appealing to Michael III. The emperor is addressed as πιστὸς καὶ μέγας βασιλεὺς by Photios in his tenth homily¹⁷¹¹, and the title μέγας βασιλεὺς is also used to describe him in inscriptions in Smyrna, Nicaea, and Ankara¹⁷¹². Through this title, Michael III intended to convey to his subjects that the regency of Theodora was over and that he was now ruling on his own, as the only βασιλεὺς.

Grierson claims that miliaresia with the title μέγας βασιλεὺς belong to the last years of Michael III's reign. He argued that the coin was introduced in 866, after Basil was crowned co-emperor and that the title μέγας βασιλεὺς was used to distinguish Michael III as the senior emperor from Basil, the co-emperor¹⁷¹³. If that is the case, then the date 26 May 866, the day Basil became co-emperor can serve as a *terminus ante quem* for the issue of the coin. However, this argument cannot be sustained, as the title μέγας βασιλεὺς was already in use since 856/857 (on an inscription in Smyrna), and at that time Basil was not co-emperor; instead, the future founder of the Macedonian dynasty had just got acquainted with Michael III. From my perspective, the title μέγας βασιλεὺς was used by Michael III so that he could convey to his subjects that the regency of Theodora was over and he was the sole ruler. Yet, the exact date that class

¹⁷¹⁰ For Basil's miliaresia, see: DOC III/2, 482-485, 491-492. For an overview of the coinage struck during Basil's reign see: DOC III/2, 473-506; FÜEG, Corpus, 30-32, 135; PENNA, Basil, 649-662.

¹⁷¹¹ MANGO, Homilies, 184.

¹⁷¹² See below, pp. 372-392.

¹⁷¹³ DOC III/1, 455.

III miliaresia were introduced still remains uncertain. The coin's comparative rarity may date its introduction during the last years of Michael III's reign¹⁷¹⁴.

As far as the copper coinage of Michael III's reign is concerned, Ph. Grierson suggested that there was a total absence of any kind of issue for the majority of his reign¹⁷¹⁵. However, V.A. Anokhin argues that the mint in Cherson¹⁷¹⁶ was active and was issuing coins during the whole sole reign of Michael III¹⁷¹⁷. What is more, recent excavations in Luni in Liguria (Italy) have brought up a follis of Michael III and Theodora, which was minted in Syracuse¹⁷¹⁸, and thus hinting for a re-examination at previous conclusions. The remaining already known specimens come from the later part of his reign (860-867), and were minted in Constantinople and Cherson. The rarity of copper coinage, assignable either to the regency or to Michael III as a sole emperor, is difficult to explain, as the minting of copper coinage during the seventh and early eighth centuries seems to have been customary and that it was only the quantity that varied¹⁷¹⁹. In Michael III's case, it could have been because the issues of the reformed follis of Theophilos were minted in very large quantities and were still in use, no new ones were necessary during his reign¹⁷²⁰.

The Constantinopolitan folles (fig. 13) have on the obverse the facing bust of Michael III. He is depicted bearded, wearing loros and crown with cross. In his right hand he is holding globe surmounted by patriarchal cross, and in his left hand an akakia. The circular inscription above Michael III's head reads:

¹⁷¹⁴ DOC III/1, 455.

¹⁷¹⁵ DOC III/1, 455–456.

¹⁷¹⁶ For an overview of the mint in Cherson during the ninth century, see: PAPADOPOULOU, Cherson, 3.0-3.1.

¹⁷¹⁷ Anokhin argues that the mint in Cherson started reissuing coins already during Theophilos' reign. See: ANOKHIN, Coinage, 105-107.

¹⁷¹⁸ ROVELLI, 284 (I did not have the chance to personally examine the coin, but I will -rather tentatively- accept that the reading is correct).

¹⁷¹⁹ DOC III/1, 456.

¹⁷²⁰ JAMES, Identity, 197. It is generally accepted that Michael III struck very little bronze. See: DOC III/1, 456; METCALF, Coinage, 27.

+MihAEL IMPERAT/. The reverse of the follis is occupied by the facing bust of Basil I, who is dressed identical to Michael III. The circular inscription above his name reads: +bASIL IYSREX. Both figures are depicted bearded. Also, it is notable that, though bronze, the coin is as carefully designed as gold and silver.

Dating this particular follis is not a difficult task. Since Basil I is depicted, the striking of the follis must have taken place after 26 May 866, and it continued being struck until Michael III's death. It is remarkable that the Latin titles of *imperator* and *rex* accompany Michael III and Basil I. Grierson and Morrisson believe that the use of these Latin terms was meant to demonstrate to pope Nicolas that the Latin language was still in use at the Byzantine court, which, according to the papal letter of 865, was cast in doubt¹⁷²¹.

On the contrary, Sp. Troianos argued that the use of these Latin terms should be attributed either to Michael III's personal preferences or to his immediate environment¹⁷²². From my perspective, Troianos' argument is reasonable, though rather vague; the use of the title *imperator romanorum* in Michael III's Constantinopolitan folles is closely connected with the ongoing personal rivalry between Michael III and pope Nicholas I.

It seems that in the lost imperial letter of 865 (which Michael III wrote to put an end to the appeasing attitude that the Byzantine court had till that point adopted towards Nicholas I's persistence regarding Photios' election), the Byzantine emperor used some insulting expressions for the Latin language by calling it "barbaric and Scythian". In his response, dated on 28 September 865¹⁷²³, Nicholas I defiantly dictated to the emperor to stop calling himself *imperator romanorum*, as, according to Michael III, those who speak Latin are barbarians¹⁷²⁴.

¹⁷²¹ DOC III/1, 456, 459, 466; MORRISON, *Authority and Kharaktèr*, 75.

¹⁷²² TROIANOS, Παράμετροι, 207.

¹⁷²³ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 454, 25-27.

¹⁷²⁴ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 459, 30-32.

From my point of view, the defiant tone of the papal response provoked Michael III not only to keep using the title *imperator romanorum*, but also to mint coins and seals, on which he is referred to as +MlhAEL IMPERAT¹⁷²⁵. Through this action Michael III intended to demonstrate that the pope was under no circumstances in the position to dictate what a Byzantine emperor may or may not do.

Two classes of folles were minted in Cherson during Michael III's reign. Class I (fig. 15) is an unadorned one and, presumably, a municipal issue¹⁷²⁶. On the obverse there is a Π and on the reverse an X. According to Grierson, the letter Π stands for πόλις, whereas the letter X for Χερσῶνος¹⁷²⁷. It is with the introduction of class II that the folles become imperial. Folles of class II have on the obverse the letters MB and on the reverse the letters ΠX. Grierson argues that the letters MB are the initial letters of the two emperors (M[ιχαήλ] B[ασίλειος]), and on the obverse the letters ΠX, stand for πόλις Χερσῶνος. Therefore, he suggests that the dating of the two classes is possible only with resemblance with each other; the first one was issued between 860 and 866, and the second one, from 866 till 867¹⁷²⁸. However, Grierson's argument has been questioned by Anokhin. The latter interprets the letters MB as MIXAHA BACIAEQC and suggest that the coin was issued during the whole sole reign of Michael III (856-866)¹⁷²⁹. Anokhin has also attributed to Michael III's reign a series of small copper coins, which on the obverse bear the letters M, A, and Π, and a cross on the reverse¹⁷³⁰.

If we are to accept Grierson's argument, then the beginning of class I marks the re-opening of the mint in Cherson; Cherson did not produce any kind of

¹⁷²⁵ For the relevant seals, see below, Chapter VII.

¹⁷²⁶ DOC III/1, 460.

¹⁷²⁷ DOC III/1, 460, 469.

¹⁷²⁸ DOC III/1, 460; HENDY, *Studies*, 426.

¹⁷²⁹ ANOKHIN, *Coinage*, 105.

¹⁷³⁰ ANOKHIN, *Coinage*, 106-107.

coins since the early seventh century¹⁷³¹. The coinage produced there between 860-866 is considered to be municipal, addressed to deal with any kind of coin shortage¹⁷³². At the same time, however, the re-opening of the mint in Cherson since the seventh century coincides with the first Russian attack on Constantinople. It could be that the Russian attack brought into the surface new needs that Byzantium had to face¹⁷³³. It is not unlikely that the re-opening of the mint in Cherson was intended to promote the imperial ideology on the Northeastern borders of the empire.

Besides, it should be recalled that during Theophilos' reign, Petronas Kamateros¹⁷³⁴ warned Theophilos about Cherson slipping out of the emperor's authority. Cherson was at that time in the hands of the so-called primates (πατέρες τῆς πόλεως)¹⁷³⁵, who were not to be trusted¹⁷³⁶. Michael III's predecessor then decided to send Petronas Kamateros in Cherson as his own military commander (strategos), thus incorporating Cherson shortly after 833 into the organization of Byzantine themes¹⁷³⁷.

The dependence of the general public on the coinage, an object of "wide consumption", is a well-established medium of communication between the emperor and his subjects, and reaches every part of the empire. Coinage is also a medium that expresses and promotes the imperial ideology and propaganda to the people; a medium that, when studied correctly, can not only let its users know who the ruling emperor is, but also unveil the events that take place in his public and private life, his character, present a successor to the throne, or a

¹⁷³¹ DOC III/1, 91, 460. BORTOLI - KAZANSKI, Kherson, 662; MORRISSON, Money, 914 (with further bibliography).

¹⁷³² DOC III/1, 460.

¹⁷³³ DOC III/1, 91-92, 460.

¹⁷³⁴ PmbZ #5927.

¹⁷³⁵ PmbZ #10522.

¹⁷³⁶ DAI, 184, 41-44; THEOPH. CONT., III, 176, 16-178, 22.

¹⁷³⁷ DAI, ch. XLII, 184, 44-54; THEOPH. CONT., III, 178, 27-33.

crowned co-emperor, display some kind of anniversary or imperial image etc¹⁷³⁸.

Michael III's coinage could not have been different. A simple look at the three classes of solidi minted in Constantinople is enough to tell the turn of events that take place in the imperial court. However, Michael III's coinage as a whole can tell more than that. Taking into consideration the sources that attest Michael III's reign as a whole, the coinage of his reign is one of the very few primary sources that provide impartial information about the last member of the Amorian dynasty.

It has already been discussed that on the side of the coin where Michael III and Thecla are depicted, Michael III occupies the left side of the coin (from a spectator's point of view), i.e. the side on which the most important figures are placed, when two figures are depicted¹⁷³⁹. However, the fact that Thecla is depicted on the coinage¹⁷⁴⁰ can only mean that she was also crowned co-emperor, second to Michael III. And, considering that the majority of the historians of the Macedonian dynasty have in general neglected her presence, the evidence that derives from the coinage is of exceptional importance.

The introduction of class II, whose issue the recent research dates at c. 850¹⁷⁴¹, shows that the imperial authorities had taken care not to provoke the public opinion. This does not dismiss the dynamic role of Theodora but puts it in a different perspective. C. Morrisson, citing J. Herrin, suggests that Theodora wanted to make absolutely sure that her son was accepted, and so insisted on the wide circulation of the first type, which also had her own image on the reverse to show that she was his guardian¹⁷⁴². And, taking into consideration

¹⁷³⁸ PAPADOPOULOU – MORRISSON, *Symbols*, 75-98; PENNA, *Εικονογραφικά βυζαντινών μολυβδοβούλλων*, 262.

¹⁷³⁹ GRIERSON, *Coinage*, 77.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Thecla is also depicted on the coinage of Theophilos. See: DOC III/1, 415–416, 428; FÜEG, *Corpus*, 28; GITTINGS, *Women*, 95 (cat. 35a, 35b); MORRISSON, *Monnaies*, 524.

¹⁷⁴¹ FÜEG, *Corpus*, 29–30; MORRISSON, *Authority and Kharaktèr*, 75.

¹⁷⁴² MORRISSON, *Authority and Kharaktèr*, 75.

the way Theodora stepped in Michael III's private life, characterizing her as a guardian is well-founded. Besides, Michael III was Theodora's and Theophilos' only surviving son.

The re-introduction of the bust of Christ on the coinage after the dissolution of the iconoclastic controversy marks a landmark in the history of the Byzantine coinage. It serves as a confirmation of the restoration of Orthodoxy. From Michael III's reign onwards either a bust or a seated figure of Christ became a regular feature of the Byzantine solidus¹⁷⁴³.

To realize the overwhelming importance of the coinage in promoting the imperial ideology and propaganda, it is worthwhile to observe that the first concern of the emperor or a usurper who ascended to the throne, was to issue coins in his name as an act of consolidating his authority¹⁷⁴⁴. Moreover, in cases of usurpation, iconographic and epigraphic innovations are to be expected, as the usurper would probably want to disassociate himself from models used on the coinage by the previous regime¹⁷⁴⁵.

When Basil I ascended to the throne, he minted coins the sacred image of Christ, but, unlike, Michael III, he opted to add the imagery of the enthroned Christ on his coins. He also opted to revert the legend of the obverse of the coin to *IhS XPS REX REGNANTIUM*, also copied from Ioustinianos II¹⁷⁴⁶, instead of the *IhSXS XRISZOS*, that Michael III had used. Theophanes Continuatus makes a special reference to this coin, which he calls *σενζάτον*¹⁷⁴⁷.

However, before conducting his modifications on the coinage, it seems that for a while Basil I considered retaining the Christ *Pantokrator* type along with the inscription *IhSXS XRISZOS**. The Greek Welfare Foundation for Social and

¹⁷⁴³ GRIERSON, *Coinage*, 9; ZHEKOVA, *Empress*, 63.

¹⁷⁴⁴ PENNA, *Coinage*, 51, 127.

¹⁷⁴⁵ PENNA - MORRISSON, *Usurpers and rebels*, 22.

¹⁷⁴⁶ FÜEG, *Corpus*, 138.

¹⁷⁴⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 246, 31. The word *σενζάτον* derives from *σένζος*, a loan word from the Latin *sessus*, which is frequently used in the Book of Ceremonies for the imperial throne and refers to the seated Christ. DOC III/1, 46.

Culture Affairs at Athens hosts today a copper coin, which belongs to the reign of Basil I (867-886). On the obverse of the coin there is a frontal bust of Christ, with a cross behind his head, raising his right hand in benediction and holding in his left a Gospel, adorned with precious stones¹⁷⁴⁸. The circular inscription, above the head of Christ reads: *Ih̅S̅Y̅S̅ XRISZOS**. On the reverse of the coin there are the busts of Basil I and his son and co-emperor Konstantinos¹⁷⁴⁹. Basil I occupies the left side of the coin (from a spectator's point of view). He is wearing a bust with diadem, surmounted by cross, and loros. To his right, Konstantinos is depicted in a smaller scale and beardless, wearing chlamys. They both hold a labarum with four pellets in cross shape and streamers, which occupies the center of the coinage. The accompanying inscription is only partially preserved and reads: *[+bASI]LIOEΤCONSTANΤ 'AΥCϞ'*¹⁷⁵⁰.

Although the coin was undoubtedly minted during Basil I's reign, it does not correspond to any of his known gold or copper coin types. For that reason, V. Penna has described the coin as a "pattern" mint¹⁷⁵¹ for a proposed solidus of Basil I¹⁷⁵². The iconographic type of the bust of Christ on the obverse of the coin and its inscription *Ih̅S̅Y̅S̅ XRISZOS** are the same ones that Michael III had used on his class II solidi. The "pattern" coin was eventually not approved for release and was rejected¹⁷⁵³.

In the case of the aforementioned "pattern" coin of Basil I, however, emphasis should be put on the fact that even such a successful usurper as the founder of the Macedonian dynasty found it very hard to disassociate himself from the significant changes in the coinage that occurred during Michael III's

¹⁷⁴⁸ For images of the coin see: PENNA, Basil I, 665 (fig. 1).

¹⁷⁴⁹ PmbZ #4005.

¹⁷⁵⁰ I copy the transcription of the inscription from V. Penna. See: PENNA, Basil I, 663 (and cit. n.4).

¹⁷⁵¹ A "pattern" coin is a coin produced for the purpose of evaluating a specific coin design. See: PENNA, Basil I, 664 (also cit. n. 7).

¹⁷⁵² PENNA, Coinage, 663–664.

¹⁷⁵³ PENNA, Basil I, 664.

reign. In fact, the impact and propaganda of Michael III's alterations on the coinage were so large, that they exceeded the imperial frontiers. In 1957 a solidus of Michael III's class III was found in the mouth of a skeleton from the cemetery of the church at Mikulčice, in Greater Moravia. According to Grierson, it represents the success of the Byzantine religious mission of Konstantinos and Methodios that took place during Michael III's reign¹⁷⁵⁴.

Although there are no texts that describe explicitly the part taken by the emperor in the choice of the design¹⁷⁵⁵, there are a few theories around it. I indicatively quote M. Crawford: "at one extreme there is the view that the emperor himself paid particular attention to the choice of types for his coinage...at the other extreme the view that only a minor department of government was involved and that the pictorial types of the imperial coinage was little noticed and often misunderstood"¹⁷⁵⁶. In addition, C. Morrisson stressed the fact that "one can attempt, starting from the coins themselves, to examine the function and concept of the imperial *kharaktèr* in the dual perspective of the context of its production and of its reception and understanding by the public". Considering the latter argument, Michael III's coinage becomes an even more intriguing case study to examine.

In miliaresia of class III, Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεύς. The same title is used in the tenth homily of Photios¹⁷⁵⁷ and in inscriptions of his reign¹⁷⁵⁸. In the course of time, the title μέγας βασιλεύς had a variant meaning. In Michael III's case however, it was used to stress out that Theodora's regency was over and that he was now ruling as the only βασιλεύς.

Lastly, the same conclusion can be drawn by studying the copper coinage of his reign. After pope Nicolas I's defiant reply in 865, Michael III did not hesitate

¹⁷⁵⁴ DOC III/1, 455.

¹⁷⁵⁵ MORRISSON, Authority and Kharaktèr, 68.

¹⁷⁵⁶ CRAWFORD, Coin types, 47.

¹⁷⁵⁷ MANGO, Homilies, 188, 311.

¹⁷⁵⁸ See below, Chapter VIII.

to add on the copper coinage minted in Constantinople the Latin title *imperator*. Its use on the coinage was designed to prove to Nicholas I that under no circumstances was the pope in the position to dictate what a Byzantine emperor was allowed or not allowed to do.



Fig. 1: Gold solidus of Theophilos.
Class V. Constantinople mint. 840-842.



Fig. 2: Miliareion of Theophilos.
Class V. Constantinople mint. 840-842.



Fig. 3: Gold solidus of Michael III.
Class I. Constantinople mint. 842-850
(?).



Fig. 4: Gold solidus of Michael III.
Class II. Constantinople mint. 850 (?)
– 856.



Fig. 5: Gold solidus of Michael III.
Class III. Constantinople mint. 856-
867.



Fig. 6: Semissis with Christ and
Michael III. Constantinople mint. 856-
867 (black and white picture).



Fig. 7: Semissis of Michael and
Theodora. Class I. Syracuse mint.
842-856.



Fig. 8: Semissis of Michael. Class II
Syracuse mint. 856-866



Fig. 9: Semissis with Michael III and
Basil. Class III. Syracuse mint. 866-
867.



Fig. 10: Miliareion of Michael III.
Class I. Cites Michael III, Theodora,
and Thecla. Constantinople mint. 842-
856.

¹⁷⁵⁹ Fig. 6 is copied from the DOC III/1, Plate XXVIII (n. 4). All the other pictures I have used are available online at: <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/byz/i.html>.



Fig. 11: Miliarion of Michael III.
Class II. Constantinople mint. 856-866
(?).



Fig. 12: Miliarion of Michael III.
Class III. Constantinople mint. 866
(?)-867.



Fig. 13: Copper follis of Michael III.
Constantinople mint. 866-867.



Fig. 14: Copper follis of Michael III.
Class I. Cherson mint. 860-866.



Fig. 15: Copper Follis of Michael
III. Class II. Cherson mint. 866-867.

Chapter VII: Seals

Similarly to the coinage minted during Michael III's reign, the seals of the last member of the Amorion dynasty reveal not only the turn of events that take place in the imperial court, but also the imperial ideology and propaganda. In this chapter I present all the seals that refer to Michael III. The first seal that mentions Michael III dates back to the reign of Theophilos. The seal is not included in any major publications, and, may be unique specimen found only in an article of B. Callegher¹⁷⁶⁰. The obverse of the seal is occupied by a cross potent and a circular inscription, whose transcription reads:

Iesus Christus Nica

The reverse is also occupied by an inscription, reading:

+Θεόφιλος καὶ Μιχαήλ ἐκ Θεοῦ βασιλεῖς Ρωμαίων.

The possibility that the seal refers to Michael II should be omitted. The seals that refer to Michael II and Theophilos start with the name of Michael II, as it was he who was reigning and Theophilos was the successor to the throne¹⁷⁶¹. Thus, it becomes evident that the seal refers to Michael III. The seal can be dated between 9/10 January 840, the date he was born, and 20 January 842, the date Theophilos died¹⁷⁶².

¹⁷⁶⁰ CALLEGHER, *Sigilli bizantini*, 391–402.

¹⁷⁶¹ For examples of such imperial seals, see: DO Seals VI, 75–76 (n. 44.1-44.3); ZACOS–VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 46 (n. 51).

¹⁷⁶² See above, pp. 86.

As for the seals of Michael III's reign, I follow the model supplied by the Dumbarton Oaks Catalogue¹⁷⁶³; I divide his seals into three different classes.

The first class is the one that bears the names of Michael III, Theodora and Thecla¹⁷⁶⁴. The obverse of this class is occupied by a cross potent on four steps¹⁷⁶⁵. The circular inscription around the cross reads:

ΕΝΟΝ.ΜΑΤ.ΤΥΡΑΤ.Σ

En on[o]mat[i] tu pat(ros) (kai) [tu y(io)u (kai) tu ag(iu) pne(umatos)]¹⁷⁶⁶.

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

The reverse of the seal is occupied by an inscription of five lines, which mentions the emperor, his mother, and his sister:

ΧΑ// ΕΟΔΟ// ΘΕCΛΑ// ΘΕΥbΑ// ΙΣΡΟΜ

[Mi]χα[ηl], [Θ]eodo[ra, (kai) Θεcλα [ec] Θεu ba[sil]is Rom(aion)¹⁷⁶⁷.

The fact that Thecla is mentioned, just as she is depicted on the coinage¹⁷⁶⁸, can only mean that she was also a co-emperor, second to Michael III, regardless of the activity she had.

It is notable that both inscriptions on the obverse and the reverse are surrounded by a triple border of dots, just like the aniconic miliaresia of class I¹⁷⁶⁹. The dating of this seal has generally been problematic.

¹⁷⁶³ DO Seals VI, 78–82.

¹⁷⁶⁴ On the first class of Michael III's seals, see: DO Seals VI, 78–79 (n. 47.1, 47.2); SOKOLOVA, Seals, 49–50 (n. 73); ZACOS - VEGLERY, Seals I, 48 (n. 54a and 54b).

¹⁷⁶⁵ On the cross on Byzantine lead seals, see: KOLTSIDA – MAKRE, Representation of the Cross, 43–52 (with further bibliography).

¹⁷⁶⁶ Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 78 (n. 47.1).

¹⁷⁶⁷ Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 78 (n. 47.1).

¹⁷⁶⁸ Above, chapter "Numismatics".

¹⁷⁶⁹ DOC III/1, 458.

According to G. Zacos and A. Veglery, the aniconic seals of Michael III's reign are dated between 842 and 843. They argue that such seals had been issued before the restoration of the icons on 11 March 843¹⁷⁷⁰. On the other hand, J. Nesbitt and C. Morrisson have suggested that these seals were in issue between 842 and 856; their main argument was that this class imitated the class I aniconic miliaresion of Michael III, which was also in use between 842 and 856¹⁷⁷¹.

The second class¹⁷⁷² of Michael III's seals has been tentatively dated between 843 and 856 by Z. Zhekova¹⁷⁷³, G. Zacos and A. Veglery¹⁷⁷⁴, and J. Nesbitt and C. Morrisson¹⁷⁷⁵. However, that would imply that the issuing of these two types would chronologically coincide. From my point of view, a more precise date could be given by taking into consideration F. Füg's remarks on the issue dates of the first and second class of Michael III's solidi. That is to say, according to Füg, the first class of Michael III's solidi was issued till c. 850, whereas the second one till 856¹⁷⁷⁶. It could be that the second class of Michael III's seals was issued simultaneously with the second class of his solidi. That would chronologically place the issue of the first class of his seals between 842 and c. 850, and the second class between c. 850 and 856.

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Aniconic seals of Michael III, Theodora and Thecla (class I) | 842- c.850 |
| Seals of Michael III and Theodora (class II) | c. 850- 856 |

On the obverse, the second class of Michael III's seals depicts the emperor wearing a crown, surmounted by a cross and a chlamys, which is pinned with a fibula on the right shoulder. In the right hand, Michael III holds a

¹⁷⁷⁰ ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 48 (n. 54).

¹⁷⁷¹ DO *Seals VI*, 78–79 (n. 47.1 and 47.2).

¹⁷⁷² On the second class of Michael III's seals, see: CHEYNET at al., *Sceaux byzantins*, 52 (n. 1.20); DO *Seals VI*, 79–80 (n. 48.1, 48.2, 48.3); ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 49 (n. 55).

¹⁷⁷³ ZHEKOVA, *Empress*, 87.

¹⁷⁷⁴ ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 49 (n. 55).

¹⁷⁷⁵ DO *Seals VI*, 79–80 (n. 48.1, 48.2, 48.3).

¹⁷⁷⁶ FÜG, *Corpus*, 28–30.

labarum. On a well preserved specimen in Dumbarton Oaks, Nesbitt and Morisson have read on the obverse the partially preserved circular inscription:

ΗΛ - ΔΕΣΠΟ
[Μιχα]ηλ – despo[tis].

The reverse of the seal depicts Theodora and is also inscribed:

ΟΔΟ - ΔΕΣ
[Θε]οδο[ra] – des[pyna]¹⁷⁷⁷.

The rest of the reverse of the seal is occupied by the head of Theodora, wearing a crown surmounted by two triangular projections. Both the obverse and reverse are surrounded by a border of dots.

The third class of Michael III's seals dates from 856 till 867 and can be classified into two subcategories: (i) the one that incorporates the image of Christ, and (ii) the one with the image of Christ and the Latin title accompanying Michael III. After Theodora's fall from power in 856, Michael III issued seals on which he was depicted alone as a sole ruler –just as he did with his coinage¹⁷⁷⁸.

The introduction of the image of Christ by Michael III in 856 opens a new chapter regarding the history of the iconography of the Byzantine seals. Prior to Michael III and Iconoclasm, emperors placed on their seals classical personifications, such as a winged Victory¹⁷⁷⁹; from the reign of Ioustinos II (565-578) -if not from the reign of Ioustinianos I (527-565) emperors placed some type of image of Theotokos¹⁷⁸⁰, whereas during Iconoclasm, beginning

¹⁷⁷⁷ Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 80 (n. 48.3) (the orthography of the transcription reflects the inscription found of Theophilos' class V solidi, and Michael III's class I solidi); See also: CHEYNET et al., *Sceaux byzantins*, 52 (n. 1.20); and ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 49 (n.55) (different readings).

¹⁷⁷⁸ On a general discussion comparing the imperial effigy on coins and seals, see: C. MORRISSON– G. ZACOS, *L'image de l'empereur sur les sceaux et les monnaies*, in: *La monnaie-miroir de rois* (ed. Y. GOLDENBERG). Paris 1978, 52–72.

¹⁷⁷⁹ For examples of such imperial seals, see: DO Seals VI, 9 (n. 4.1); ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Seals I*, 5–7, 9 (n. 1-3, 5); Also: STAVRAKOS, *Seals and the Divine*, 150.

¹⁷⁸⁰ COTSONIS, *Methodios I's Lead Seals*, 371–372 (and cit. n. 18, with older bibliography on the matter).

with Leo III (717-730), the image of the Mother of God was replaced with the image of the cross and a prayer to the Trinity (Ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος [In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit])¹⁷⁸¹. During the Iconophile interlude (787-815), only two emperors placed the image of Theotokos on their seals, Nikephoros I and Leo V¹⁷⁸².

It is well known that the image of Christ was firstly introduced on the coinage by Ioustinianos II¹⁷⁸³, but the *rhinotmetos* emperor did not employ this practice on his seals. The practice of employing the image of Christ on seals was introduced by Michael III, and, subsequently, all Byzantine emperors placed some image of Christ on the obverse of their seals till the end of the empire¹⁷⁸⁴.

Thus, with the Triumph of Orthodoxy a new iconographical pattern appears in Byzantine coins and seals. After Iconoclasm, the image of Christ is associated with the Byzantine emperor, for it is He who invests them with power¹⁷⁸⁵. This association meant that the image of Christ was a rare iconographical sphragistic theme on non-imperial seals, as it was mainly used by the emperor to signify his divine sovereignty. On the other hand, the patriarchs, beginning with Methodios, place an image of the Virgin on their seals¹⁷⁸⁶ (except for patriarch Ignatios¹⁷⁸⁷).

¹⁷⁸¹ For examples of such imperial seals, see: DO Seals VI, 14–60 (n. 6.1-31); ZACOS - VEGLERY, Seals I, 31–37, 43–48 (n. 34-39 and n. 49-54).

¹⁷⁸² For the imperial seals of Nikephoros I and Leo V, see: DO Seals VI, 68 (n. 38.1); ZACOS - VEGLERY, Seals I, 43 (n. 48).

¹⁷⁸³ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 46ff.

¹⁷⁸⁴ For examples of such seals, see: DO Seals VI, 80–200 (n. 49-109); SOKOLOVA, Seals, 50–107 (n. 74-210); ZACOS - VEGLERY, Seals I, 50–126 (n. 56-128); for studies devoted to the study of the image of Christ on seals, see: COTSONIS, Methodios I's Lead Seals, 366–387; COTSONIS, Ignatios' Lead Seals, 52–98; COTSONIS, To Invoke or Not to Invoke, 550ff; COTSONIS, Images, 5ff; PENNA, Εικονογραφικά βυζαντινών μολυβδοβούλλων, 263–265.

¹⁷⁸⁵ On the matter, see: BRUBAKER, Vision and Meaning, 147–159; COTSONIS, Methodios I's Lead Seals, 381–382 (with further bibliography); KALAVREZOU, Images of the Mother, 171.

¹⁷⁸⁶ COTSONIS, Methodios I's Lead Seals, 366ff (with further bibliography); GALAVARIS, Thokos, 154–181.

¹⁷⁸⁷ COTSONIS, Ignatios' Lead Seals, 52ff.

The seals of Michael III portray a half-length representation of Christ on the obverse¹⁷⁸⁸. Christ is depicted bearded, with flowing hair, wearing tunic and himation, and with a cross behind His head without a nimbus. His right hand is depicted in front of His chest in the act of blessing. On well preserved specimens, one can see Christ holding in his left hand an ornamented book of Gospels and read the circular inscription:

ΙΗΣΥΣΧΡΙ - ΣΤΟΣΝΙΚΑ

İhsus Xristos nica¹⁷⁸⁹.

The reverse is occupied by a half-length representation of Michael III; he is depicted bearded, wearing crown and chlamys, which is pinned with a fibula on the right shoulder. The circular inscription around Michael III reads:

ΜΙΧΑΗΛΒΑ - ΣΙΛΕΥΡΟΜ

Miḫanl basileu(s) Rom(aion)¹⁷⁹⁰.

The second subcategory of Michael III's third class seals resembles the ones portraying him as a sole ruler; as described above, a half representation of Christ occupies the obverse, whereas the Byzantine emperor is depicted on the reverse, wearing a loros and a crown surmounted by a cross, and holding a labarum in his right hand. The most important change concerns the inscription on the reverse, which refers to the emperor and reflects on the Byzantine diplomacy and ideology –hence my option to list it as a separate subcategory¹⁷⁹¹. The circular inscription on the reverse reads:

ΜΙΧΑ-Η. – .ΜΡΕΒΑΣΙΛ

Miḫan[l] – [i]mper(ator) basil(eus)¹⁷⁹².

The most distinguishable word of the inscription is the Latin title *imperator*, accompanying the Byzantine emperor. According to J. Nesbitt and C. Morrisson, seals bearing the *imperator* title belong to the last years of Michael

¹⁷⁸⁸ For examples of such seals, see: DO Seals VI, 81 (n. 49.1-3).

¹⁷⁸⁹ Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 81 (n. 49.1).

¹⁷⁹⁰ Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 81 (n. 49.1).

¹⁷⁹¹ On the seal, see also: DO Seals VI, 82 (n. 49.3); ZACOS - VEGLERY, Seals I, 50 (n. 56).

¹⁷⁹² Transcription of the inscription from: DO Seals VI, 82 (n. 49.3).

III's reign; they are dated between 866 and 867¹⁷⁹³. To comprehend its importance and meaning, one has to delve into how the Byzantine-papal controversy developed during Michael III's reign¹⁷⁹⁴.

For the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that at the beginning of 867, Photios, having heard of Boris' defection, wrote a letter in the name of the emperor to the Bulgarian ruler; this letter addressed the false doctrines of the Latin Church and his subsequent condemnation, if Boris continued to practice them¹⁷⁹⁵. It could have been that the letter was sealed with the above mentioned seal, which mentioned Michael III as *imperator basileus*.

During the ongoing rivalry between Rome and New Rome, in 865 Nicholas forbade Michael III from using the Latin title *imperator*¹⁷⁹⁶; it is possible that the defiant tone of the papal response may have provoked Michael III not only to keep using it, but also to mint coins and seals, on which he is referred to as +MihAEL IMPERAT¹⁷⁹⁷. Through this action Michael III may have personally intended to demonstrate that the pope was under no circumstances in the position to dictate what a Byzantine emperor may or may not do. Yet, when Boris received the letter, he handed it over to the papal delegates, who, in turn, delivered the letter to pope Nicholas I¹⁷⁹⁸ (the fact that the letter of Photios eventually ended up in Rome is confirmed by Nicholas' letter to Hincmar, the archbishop of Rheims¹⁷⁹⁹).

During the same year, Zacharias Kophos¹⁸⁰⁰, the metropolitans of Chalkedon, and Theodoros¹⁸⁰¹, the metropolitans of Laodikeia, were sent to Lombardy, in

¹⁷⁹³ DO Seals VI, 82 (n. 49.3).

¹⁷⁹⁴ Above, Chapter III.

¹⁷⁹⁵ DÖLGER, *Regesten*, 57 (469); SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 193.

¹⁷⁹⁶ Nicolaus I, ep. 88 (MGH VI), 459, 30-32.

¹⁷⁹⁷ See above, pp. 332-333.

¹⁷⁹⁸ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 118; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 193-194.

¹⁷⁹⁹ Nicolaus I, ep. 100 (MGH VI), 601-609.

¹⁸⁰⁰ PmbZ #8635.

¹⁸⁰¹ PmbZ #7726.

northern Italy. They were to deliver a letter from Photios to Engelberga¹⁸⁰², Louis II's wife, and a letter from Michael III to Louis II¹⁸⁰³. It could have been that the aforementioned seal was also used to stamp and authenticate Michael III's letter to the Frankish emperor in order to inform him about the acts of the Synod. However, Zacharias and Theodoros never reached their destination; not long after Michael III's assassination, a messenger sent from Basil reached the diplomatic mission and called it back¹⁸⁰⁴.

The introduction of the Latin title was not –only– used to demonstrate that the imperial court was acquainted with the Latin language, as was previously suggested¹⁸⁰⁵. From my point of view, it also had ideological and diplomatic purpose; it was used to highlight the authority of the Byzantine emperor as the ultimate judge on political and ecclesiastical affairs both in the East and West.

The final seal I wish to present is not one of Michael III's, but Boris'. This seal¹⁸⁰⁶ is representative not only of the influence the conversion of Boris to Christianity had on the Bulgarian court, but also indicative for the religious and political ambitions of Boris.

The seal was found in 1919 in a vineyard near Varna, on a site called Teke Karaaç¹⁸⁰⁷. On the obverse, the seal is occupied by the bust of Christ. He is depicted bearded with eyes wide open and long hair. He is wearing a tunic and an himation, and a cross behind his head without a nimbus. On his left hand He appears to be holding a closed book of Gospels, whereas His right hand is depicted in front of His chest in the act of blessing. The bust of Christ is

¹⁸⁰² PmbZ #438.

¹⁸⁰³ PmbZ #24755.

¹⁸⁰⁴ DVORNIK, Photian schism, 124.

¹⁸⁰⁵ DO Seals VI, 82 (n. 49.3); DOC III/1, 456.

¹⁸⁰⁶ On the seal, see also: FEIND, Byzantinische Siegelkunde, 184–186 (n. 33, with further bibliography and a colorful picture of the seal); JORDANOV, Molybdobulles, 89–91; PETKOV, Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 33 (n. 34).

¹⁸⁰⁷ JORDANOV, Molybdobulles, 89.

surrounded by two borderlines, among which one reads the following circular inscription:

✠KE BOHΘH MHXAHΛ APXONTA BOYΛΓAPIAC

✠κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη Μηχαήλ ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας¹⁸⁰⁸

“Lord help Michael ruler of Bulgaria”.

Regarding the obverse of the seal, it is remarkable that Boris imitates Byzantine imperial seals; he puts the efigy of Christ on his seals, just as the Byzantine emperors did after Iconoclasm. However, the inscription is different; on the Byzantine imperial seals that bear the bust of Christ on the obverse, the inscription simply reads *Ih̄C̄ȲSX - RISTOS* or *Ih̄C̄ȲS XRISTOS REX REGNANT**Ih̄M*¹⁸⁰⁹. According to J. Cotsonis, Byzantine emperors were considered to be close to Christ –for it was through Him that they assumed the power to rule the empire– in order to invoke for aid on their official seals¹⁸¹⁰. Yet on Boris’ case, there is an additional invocation: κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη (Lord help). As a result, the invocative inscription differentiates Boris from other Byzantine emperors. It is also notable that Boris is mentioned only as Μιχαήλ (Michael), the name he took after his godfather, Michael III. The same applies to the letter Photios sent to him in 865; the Byzantine patriarch refers to him as “Τῷ περιφανεστάτῳ καὶ περιβλέπτῳ ἡγαπημένῳ ἐν κυρίῳ πνευματικῷ υἱῷ Μιχαήλ τῷ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχοντι Βουλγαρίας”¹⁸¹¹. A further remark on the epigraphic text is that Boris is referred to as ἄρχοντας Βουλγαρίας. The title was applicable on Bulgarian rulers since the reign of Tervel¹⁸¹², and Boris is also referred to as ἄρχον in the inscription in Ballsh (Glavinica) that I present on the following chapter¹⁸¹³.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Transcription of the inscription from: JORDANOV, *Molybdobulles*, 89.

¹⁸⁰⁹ DO Seals VI, 3.

¹⁸¹⁰ COTSONIS, *To Invoke or Not to Invoke*, 554.

¹⁸¹¹ Phot. Epist. 1 (LAOURDAS – WESTERINK I), 2, 1-2.

¹⁸¹² NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Ιδέα και επιδράσεις*, 1359–1362.

¹⁸¹³ See below, pp. 368-372.

The reverse of the seal is even more distinctive. Unlike the Byzantine imperial seals, where on the reverse one expects to find an inscription referring to the reigning Byzantine emperor, on Boris' seal the reverse is occupied by the Bust of Theotokos. The mother of God is depicted surrounded by a halo, wearing himation and maphorion; her hands appear to be placed in front of her. Similar to the obverse with the bust of Christ, the bust of Theotokos is surrounded by two borderlines, among which one reads the following circular inscription:

+ΘΚΕ ΒΟΗΘΗ ΜΗΧΑΗΛ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΑ ΒΟΥΛΓΑΡΙΑC

+Θ(εοτό)κε βοήθη Μηχαήλ ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας¹⁸¹⁴

"Theotoke help Michael ruler of Bulgaria".

After the end of Iconoclasm, all Byzantine patriarchs (except for Ignatios, as already noted) placed an image of the Virgion on their seals¹⁸¹⁵. From my point of view, Boris' option to place the bust of Theotokos on the reverse of his seals was not an attempt to differentiate his seals from Byzantine imperial ones, nor was it connected with the cult of Theotokos on the newly-Christianized Bulgarian state. In my judgement, it is associated with Boris' political intention, which was to ultimately establish an independent Bulgarian patriarchate¹⁸¹⁶. That is to say, the effigy of Theotokos might have been used as a medium for Boris to further publicize his ambitions.

Besides, Boris does not place just some random imagery on his seals; imitating Byzantine religious iconography, he chose to place the imagery of Theotokos, which the Byzantine patriarch, the highest individual of the Byzantine clergy, placed on his seal. Further proof of this can be found on his coinage, which imitate the iconography of his seals; they depict on the obverse

¹⁸¹⁴ Transcription of the inscription from: JORDANOV, *Molybdoebulles*, 89.

¹⁸¹⁵ COTSONIS, *Methodios I's Lead Seals*, 380.

¹⁸¹⁶ DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 112–113; FEIND, *Byzantinische Siegelkunde*, 185–186; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 110.

the bust of Christ, and on the reverse the bust of Theotokos¹⁸¹⁷. One should also keep in mind that, unlike seals, which had a more narrow audience, coins produced under the control of imperial mints, were able to reach every part of the empire, and also be used as a medium that expressed and promoted the imperial ideology and propaganda¹⁸¹⁸. The seal has so far been dated between 864-865 and 889-890¹⁸¹⁹. That is to say, from the year he was baptized, till the year he retired to his monastic foundation of St. Panteleemon at Preslav¹⁸²⁰.

A closer study at the seals produced during Michael III's reign reveals that their iconography and evolution are greatly linked with his coinage. The first class of his seals resembles the first class of his solidi. They both mention not only Michael III, but also Theodora, who served as regent for Michael III, and his sister Thecla, who was also co-emperor, second to Michael III. The same applies for the second and third class of his seals as well. The second class of Michael III's seals depict him on the obverse and Theodora on the reverse; the biggest difference is the removal of any reference to Thecla –just like with the class II solidi of his reign. Finally, it is only on the third and final class of his seals that the effigy of Christ is introduced. The bust of Christ is not only a visual reinforcement of the triumph of Orthodoxy, but also highlights that Byzantine emperors assumed power from God to rule the empire.

Although seals are objects of a more personal use and had a narrow audience, imperial seals could also be used to promote imperial ideology and propaganda. That is to say, by my reckoning, the seal incorporating the Latin title *imperator* had solely diplomatic purpose; it was used to highlight the

¹⁸¹⁷ Indicatively, see: J. YOUROUKOVA – V. PENCHEV, *Bulgarian Medieval Coins and Seals*, Sofia 2000, 4.

¹⁸¹⁸ COTSONIS, *To Invoke or Not to Invoke*, 560; PENNA, *Εικονογραφικά βυζαντινών μολυβδοβούλλων*, 262.

¹⁸¹⁹ FEIND, *Byzantinische Siegelkunde*, 184 (n. 33); JORDANOV, *Molybdoebulles*, 89; PETKOV, *Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, 33 (n. 34).

¹⁸²⁰ PmbZ #21197.

emperor's superiority over the pope on political and ecclesiastical affairs both in the East and West.

Finally, similar practice seems to have been followed for the seals of Boris. By immitating the Byzantine sigillographic trends of the ninth century, Boris used his seals in an effort to further publicize his own political ambitions; i.e. the establishment of an independent Bulgarian patriarchate.

Chapter VIII: Inscriptions

Inscriptions are also one of the very few primary sources that provide impartial and unaltered information about Michael III. And, just like with numismatics, Michael III's name comes up for the first time during the reign of his father, Theophilos. In this chapter, I present all the inscriptions that refer to Michael III. Most of them cannot be precisely dated, either because the inscription is partially damaged, or because the only dating reference that is provided is the name of the emperor, and the inscription can therefore be roughly dated. For this reason, and taking into consideration the location of the inscriptions, I have opted to divide and present the inscriptions in two different groups: (1) Constantinople and Balkans, and (2) Asia Minor.

However, despite my theoretical division, with regard to their position and script, the inscriptions that refer to Michael III comply with the general features of Epigraphy after the "Dark Ages". That is to say, most of them are placed on public buildings and refer to building fortifications or in churches, whereas their script is in capital letters, and the use of abbreviations and ligatures is limited¹⁸²¹.

Constantinople and Balkans

The first inscription sheds light on the date of coronation of Michael III and is located on the bronze door of the southwest vestibule of Hagia Sophia. The door is also known as the "Beautiful Door" and leads to the inner narthex of the church.

The first time this particular door is mentioned is in the *De Cerimoniis*¹⁸²², according to which the emperor removed his crown there, met the patriarch,

¹⁸²¹ On the general features of Epigraphy after the "Dark Ages", see: MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy*, 238–247; MANGO, *Lessons*, 34–45; RHOBY, *Meaning*, 731–753.

¹⁸²² DE CERIMONIIS, 14, 14–20.

and proceeded with him down the narthex and into the church. Although it is not clear whether the door was created or simply redecorated during the reign of Theophilos, its embellishment, full of decorative frames, indicates that the “Beautiful Door” was already of great importance before the end of Iconoclasm¹⁸²³. In addition, the fact that the “Beautiful Door” was at a highly frequented area of the church, i.e. an entrance leading to the inner narthex, meant that the inscription was visible to the public.

The inscription is divided into eight cruciform monograms, which are laid out in four pairs across the two door leaves. Their cruciform shape recalls the cruciform monograms of Ioustinianos I and Theodora, which are in the very same church¹⁸²⁴. In this way, the inscription on the “Beautiful Door” is linked with the imperial ideology¹⁸²⁵, as was first expressed in the sixth century. Added to that, C. Mango notes that some letter forms also recall Late Antiquity scripts; the letter *beta* does not have a horizontal bar (β), whereas the letter *omega* is shaped like a modern W. Their form can be interpreted as a sign of deliberate antiquarianism¹⁸²⁶. The inscription was also most accurately read by Mango in 1967¹⁸²⁷, and is as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. κύριε βοήθει | 2. Θεόφιλω δεσπότη |
| 3. Θεοτόκε βοήθει | 4. Θεοδώρα αὐγούστη |
| 5. Χριστὲ βοήθει | 6. Μιχαήλ δεσπότη |
| 7. ἔτους ἀπὸ κτίσεως | 8. κόσμου ἑτμθ' ἰνδ. δ' |
| 1. lord help | 2. Theophilos despot |
| 3. Mother of God help | 4. Theodora augousta |

¹⁸²³ For a discussion on the “Beautiful Door”, see: BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 435–439 (with older bibliography); KOTSIS, *Empress Theodora*, 15–18; TREADGOLD, *Revival*, 322–323.

¹⁸²⁴ On Theodora’s monograms, see: W. SEIBT, “Monogramm”, *RbK* 6, 589–614, (esp. 593).

¹⁸²⁵ KOTSIS, *Empress Theodora*, 17.

¹⁸²⁶ MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy*, 245.

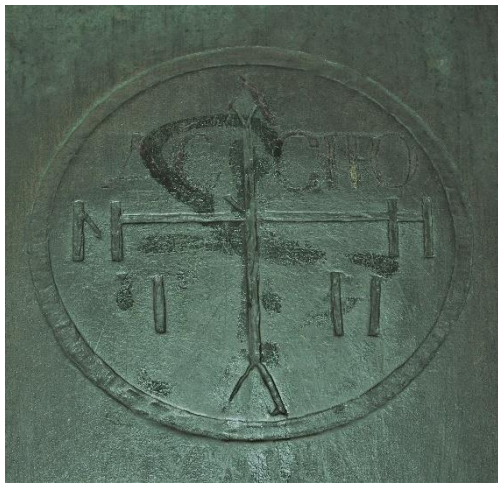
¹⁸²⁷ MANGO, *Michael III*, 253–254.

5. Christ help

6. Michael Despot

7. year from the creation

8. of the world ςτμθ' ind. δ'.



Istanbul, Hagia Sophia. South Vestibule, Bronze Doors. Monogram n. 6. (Personal archive).



Istanbul, Hagia Sophia. South Vestibule, Bronze Doors. Monogram n. 8. (Personal Archive).

The inscription commemorates the imperial couple and Michael III as heir to the throne. A further inscription “[Θεοφίλου καὶ] Μιχαήλ νικητῶν”¹⁸²⁸ was also added on top of the doors, but is now completely lost. According to the 8th monogram on the lower right leaf of the door, the inscription is dated in 6349 indiction 4 from the creation of the world, which corresponds to the year 840-841. In its original form, the inscription didn’t mention Michael III, but the patriarch Ioannes VII Grammatikos. Evidence of this argument¹⁸²⁹ is still extant in the monograms 6 and 8. That is to say, due to the fact that the inscription was engraved on bronze plates and inlaid with silver, all the corrector could do was to try to remove the silver filling from the letters he wished to erase and rub down their outlines; but he did not succeed in erasing

¹⁸²⁸ BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 435; BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Sources*, 110; MANGO, *Michael III*, 254; E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 30; TREADGOLD, *Revival*, 322–323 (the inscription “[Θεοφίλου καὶ] Μιχαήλ νικητῶν” is neglected).

¹⁸²⁹ BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 435–439; KOTSIS, *Empress Theodora*, 15–18; BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Sources*, 109–111; MAINSTONE, *Hagia Sophia*, 29 (fig. 28); MANGO, *Michael III*, 253–254 (with older bibliography).

them completely. The text of these monograms, as was first engraved, was the following¹⁸³⁰:

6. Ἰωάννη πατριάρχῃ

8. κόσμου ἑταμζ' ινδ. β'

6. Ioannes patriarch

8. of the world ἑταμθ' ind. β'.

In its original form, the inscription was corroborating the cordial relations between the emperor and the patriarch. As was first engraved and according to the fourth pair of monograms, the inscription gave the date from the creation of the world ἑταμθ' indiction β' (=6347 indiction 2), which corresponded to the year 838/839.

As Mango points out, the only plausible explanation that could cause a change in the inscription is the coronation of Michael III¹⁸³¹, which took place in Hagia Sophia¹⁸³². On the 6th monogram, the name and title of Ioannes VII Grammatikos were replaced with the words “Μιχαήλ δεσπότη”, and in the 8th monogram the original date was changed from “ἑταμζ' ινδ. β'” to “ἑταμθ' ινδ. δ'” (838-839 to 840-841). That is to say, the son of Theophilos and heir to the throne naturally took precedence over the patriarch. It is in any case remarkable, that the readjustment of the monograms has created a dynastic inscription, openly designating the successor to the throne. Mango concludes that Michael III's coronation took place towards September 840, and that the inscription on the bronze doors of Hagia Sophia was immediately altered to commemorate the event¹⁸³³.

Yet in 2016, K. Kotsis argued that there is another possibility; that the monograms were changed in 843, after the restoration of the icons and the removal of the patriarch Ioannes VII Grammatikos from office. This thesis

¹⁸³⁰ On the letters and their still visible outlines, see: MANGO, Michael III, 254.

¹⁸³¹ MANGO, Michael III, 254.

¹⁸³² FEATHERSTONE, Logothete Chronicle, 420, §2; WAHLGREN, Symeon Magister, 230, 297–299.

¹⁸³³ MANGO, Michael III, 258.

would certainly give credit to Theodora's efforts to try to rehabilitate the memory of her iconoclast husband. The removal of the iconoclast Ioannes VII Grammatikos would further suppress Theophilos' iconoclastic beliefs.

Although this is a very tempting possibility, I am inclined to agree with Mango and argue that the monograms were changed almost immediately after Michael III's coronation, i.e. in 840. The cruciform monogram inscription in Hagia Sophia that associates Theophilos with Michael III as heir to the throne is not a *hapax*. Theophilos is also mentioned along with Michael III on inscriptions on the walls of Constantinople¹⁸³⁴.

Theophilos also portrays Michael III as a co-emperor on his class V solidi and miliaresia¹⁸³⁵. In fact, the epithet "δεσπότης" in the cruciform monogram n. 6, which accompanies Michael III, is also found on the solidi of class V, which was issued between 840-842. It is only logical to assume that since Theophilos issued coins and added Michael III's name on inscriptions on the walls along the Golden Horn immediately after Michael III's coronation, he would probably also have commissioned the text of the cruciform inscription to be changed similarly.

Besides, prior to the birth of Michael III, Theophilos did not have any male offspring to crown successor to the throne. Konstantinos¹⁸³⁶, his firstborn son, had already died in childhood. The birth of a second male child that could succeed him would be of primary importance to publicize -especially for dynastic reasons. It can therefore be concluded that dynastic reasons, as well as both the textual evidence on the inscription (the epithet "δεσπότης") and its date (840/841) place the readjustment of the monograms during Theophilos' reign. As a result, although we can be reasonably certain that Michael III was born in

¹⁸³⁴ MANGO, *Inscriptions of Constantinople*, 57 (n. 8-24).

¹⁸³⁵ See above, pp. 316-319.

¹⁸³⁶ PmbZ #3931.

9/10 January 840¹⁸³⁷, the date of his coronation cannot be established with equal accuracy. We can, therefore, with a high degree of certainty, place his coronation in 840.

The next inscriptions that bear Michael III's name were placed on the land and sea walls of the Byzantine Capital. Generally speaking, the ninth century is considered to be one of the most active periods regarding the reconstruction and reinforcement of the walls of Constantinople¹⁸³⁸. This wide scale reconstruction was tentatively initiated by Leo V, carried on by Michael II, Theophilos, and Michael III and eventually completed by Basil I; it incorporated the construction and restoration of the walls from the gate of Adrianople to the sea walls of the Golden Horn and the sea of Marmara, where numerous additional towers were built¹⁸³⁹. In fact, it appears that after the siege of Thomas the Slav¹⁸⁴⁰ against Constantinople in 821-823, Michael II started reconstructing the fortifications of the Byzantine capital on a more rapid scale due to an imminent Arab attack¹⁸⁴¹. The renovation of the walls of the Byzantine capital is attested not only in the Byzantine sources¹⁸⁴², but also by the inscriptions that were carved *in situ*.

Although outdated, the most complete list of inscriptions was composed by C. Curtis and S. Aristarchis¹⁸⁴³, whose readings have been endorsed by all subsequent scholars who studied the inscriptions. For the purpose of my study, I maintain their classification. To begin with, on inscriptions of the sea walls of the Golden Horn Michael III's name appeared five times:

¹⁸³⁷ See above, pp. 84.

¹⁸³⁸ FOSS – WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 74.

¹⁸³⁹ FOSS – WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 74.

¹⁸⁴⁰ PmbZ #8459.

¹⁸⁴¹ MÜLLER – WIENER, *Bildlexikon*, 313; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 627; RHOBY, *Meaning*, 742.

¹⁸⁴² GENESIOS, III, 53, 83–87; THEOPH. CONT., III, 136, 1–5.

¹⁸⁴³ E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 30ff.

1. on the tower n.1, right of the Phanarion gate, towards north:

[† Πύργος] Θεοφίλου κὲ Μηχαήλ ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ ἀ[υ]τοκρατόρ[ων †]¹⁸⁴⁴

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, in Christ emperors †.

2. on the inner left side of the walls, as one enters the city from through the Balat gate:

† Πύργος Θεοφίλου κ[αὶ Μιχαήλ ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτοκρατόρων †]¹⁸⁴⁵

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, in Christ emperors †.

3. on the tower n.3:

ΡΓΟC...ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΝ †

[† Πύ]ργος [Θεοφίλου καὶ Μιχαήλ ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ] αὐτοκρατόρων †¹⁸⁴⁶

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, in Christ emperors †.

4. on the tower n.12:

ΕΟΦΙ...ΑΗΛΕΝ

[† Πύργος Θ]εοφί[λου καὶ Μιχ]αήλ ἐν [Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτοκρατόρων †]¹⁸⁴⁷

Tower of Theophilos and Michael, in Christ emperors †.

5. on the marble tower near the Phanarion gate, fragment reading:

ΤΩΡΟΝ

[† Πύργος Θεοφίλου καὶ Μιχαήλ ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτοκρα]τόρων †]¹⁸⁴⁸

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, in Christ emperors †.

¹⁸⁴⁴ ÖZTÜRK, *Inscriptions*, 18 (n. 14); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 30 (Inscription n. 128).

¹⁸⁴⁵ ÖZTÜRK, *Inscriptions*, 19 (n. 16); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 30–31 (inscription n. 129).

¹⁸⁴⁶ ÖZTÜRK, *Inscriptions*, 19 (n. 15); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (inscription n. 130).

¹⁸⁴⁷ E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (inscription n. 131).

¹⁸⁴⁸ ASUTAY-EFFENBERGER, *Landmauer*, 200 (fragment I-4); MANGO, *Inscriptions of Constantinople*, 26 (n. 26); ÖZTÜRK, *Inscriptions*, 18 (n. 13); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (inscription n. 132).

In addition to the aforementioned inscriptions, there are also two inscriptions along the Sea of Marmara, and one on the land walls, on which Michael III is associated with Theophilos.

1. On inner side of the land walls, near the gate of Edirne Kapi:

[† Πύργος Θεοφίλου καὶ Μιχαήλ πιστῶ ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτο]κρατῶρω[ν †]¹⁸⁴⁹.

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, faithful in Christ emperors †.

2. On the first tower to the east of the gate of St Barbara:

ΠΥΡΓΟΣΘΕΟΦΙΛΟΥ.....ΑΗΛΠΙΣΤΩΝ

IC XC NI KA

[†] Πύργος Θεοφίλου [καὶ Μιχ]αήλ πιστῶν [ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτοκρατόρων †]

Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστὸ)ς Νικᾷ¹⁸⁵⁰.

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, faithful in Christ emperors †.

Jesus Christ Conquers

3. From the Seraglio Point, fragment reading:

ΑΗΛΠΙΣΤΩΝ

[† Πύργος Θεοφίλου καὶ Μιχ]αήλ πιστῶν [ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐτοκρατόρων †]¹⁸⁵¹.

† Tower of Theophilos and Michael, faithful in Christ emperors †.

In total, eight inscriptions are recorded on which Michael III is associated with Theophilos as a successor to the throne. It is remarkable that the same pattern is found on every inscription along the sea walls of the Golden Horn. Theophilos' name precedes that of Michael III, indicating that Theophilos is the

¹⁸⁴⁹ ÖZTÜRK,, *Inscriptions*, 20 (n. 17); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31–32 (inscription n. 135).

¹⁸⁵⁰ MANGO, *Inscriptions of Constantinople*, 57 (n. 34); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (inscription n. 133).

¹⁸⁵¹ MANGO, *Inscriptions of Constantinople*, 56 (n. 33); MENTZOU – MEIMARI, 92 (n. 73); E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (inscription n. 134).

one who rules, whereas Michael III is the successor to the throne. The only difference is that in the inscriptions in the land walls and the walls of the Sea of Marmara, the epithet *πιστῶν* (faithful) accompanies the names of Theophilos and Michael III alike, whereas in the inscriptions of the Golden Horn, it is absent. In fact, the same pattern can be observed on inscriptions that were engraved during the reign of Michael II; it commemorated the reconstruction of the walls of the Byzantine capital that took place during his reign. In the case of Michael II, his name preceded that of Theophilos because Michael II was the ruling emperor and Theophilos the successor to the throne¹⁸⁵².

Generally speaking, this kind of short inscriptions on fortifications, on which only the name of the emperor(s) is mentioned, were also produced repeatedly on the walls of Constantinople. According to Rhoby, it could be that they functioned as seals and owner's marks, indicating the ruler's charities¹⁸⁵³.

In Theophilos' case, he not only keeps to the custom of his father, but also publicizes in various areas of Constantinople that Michael III is the successor to the throne. It is notable that none of the inscriptions bears any date, but they can be approximately dated between 840, the year of birth and coronation of Michael III, and 20 January 842, the day Theophilos passed away.

The next inscription¹⁸⁵⁴ that bears Michael III's name was engraved during the regency of Theodora and resided on the walls of the city of Silymbria¹⁸⁵⁵. It consisted of one line, and was engraved on a marble plaque placed above the arch of the door, which is nowadays called in Turkish Kir-Kale-Kapusi¹⁸⁵⁶. Nowadays, the inscription has completely disappeared from Silymbria.

¹⁸⁵² VAN MILLINGEN, *Byzantine Constantinople*, 185; E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 31 (see the description of the inscription n. 134).

¹⁸⁵³ RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 350.

¹⁸⁵⁴ On the inscription, see: ASDRACHA, 264–266 (n. 65) (with older bibliography); CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, *Ἀντιβασιλεία*, 33; COVEL, *Voyages*, 362–363 (n. 4); IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 6; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 633.

¹⁸⁵⁵ KÜLZER, *Ostthrakien*, 635–643 (esp. p. 636).

¹⁸⁵⁶ ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 264 (n. 65); RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 633.

However, part of its text has been identified with the four fragments n. 321-324, which are now stored in Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya Muzesi)¹⁸⁵⁷. According to C. Asdracha, the inscription was engraved in one line, and was as follows¹⁸⁵⁸:

“Ἀνενεώθη¹⁸⁵⁹ ἡ θεόσωστος πόλις ταύτη ἐπὶ Μηχαήλ, Θεοδόρας καὶ Θεκλῆς οὗς ἐδικαίωσεν [ὁ] Κ(ύριος) βασιλεύ<ι>ην ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς”.

This saved-by-god city was restored by Michael, Theodora, and Thecla, who God appointed to rule the earth.

If we are to believe that the text of the inscription was copied accurately as was found *in situ*, it is evident that it was full of spelling mistakes. The inscription describes that Silymbria was reconstructed during the reign of Michael III, Theodora, and Thecla¹⁸⁶⁰. In fact, the verb Ἀνενεώθη implies that the reconstruction that took place was extended. E. Ivison also notes that the word Ἀνενεώθη (restored) is very common during the ninth and eleventh centuries and is used in inscriptions to testify imperial building activity¹⁸⁶¹.

Silymbria was one of the cities that were sacked by the Bulgarian troops in 813¹⁸⁶². The inscription describes Silymbria as θεόσωστος πόλις (the correct orthography is θεόσωστος πόλις), which means the city who is saved by God¹⁸⁶³. According to the recent study of Ch. Tsatsoulis, it is the first time that

¹⁸⁵⁷ ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 264 (n. 65); RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 633.

¹⁸⁵⁸ I reproduce the transcription of the inscription from C. Asdracha. See: ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 264–265 (n. 65).

¹⁸⁵⁹ Aik. Christophilopoulou adds “Ἀνενεώθη [ἐκ βάθρ]ω[ν]”. See: CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, *Ἀντιβασιλεία*, 33 (cit n. 5).

¹⁸⁶⁰ KÜLZER, *Ostthrakien*, 636 (Sēlymbria).

¹⁸⁶¹ IVison, *Renewal and revival*, 19.

¹⁸⁶² ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 266 (n. 65); DE BOOR, *Theophanes*, 500, 2–503, 25.

¹⁸⁶³ DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 3329.

the adjective θεόσωστος is used on an inscription¹⁸⁶⁴. The inscription bears no date. However, since the names of Michael III, Theodora and Thecla are mentioned, it can approximately be dated between 842-856.

The phrase ἐδικαίωσεν [ὁ] Κ(ύριος) βασιλεύ<ι>ην ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is of particular importance. According to Asdracha the aforementioned phrase served as a demonstration of the revival of Byzantine universalism, which would have been strengthened after the triumph of Orthodoxy. The text implies that none other than the Byzantine emperors have the right to reign on earth, and that this right was given to them by God. The phrase was meant in all probability to assert the right of the Byzantine court in the use of the titlature against Charlemagne and his successors¹⁸⁶⁵.

Returning to Constantinople, the next inscription commemorated the repairs of a portion of the sea walls by Michael III and his uncle Bardas. The inscription¹⁸⁶⁶ was originally north of İncili Köşk (southeast of the Top Kapi Sarayı), engraved on three slabs, which were built into the walls at the Sea of Marmara. Nowadays, the three engraved slabs are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul (Inv. Nr. 1654 T, 2363 T, 2476 T)¹⁸⁶⁷.

Combined together, the inscribed slabs form a six-verse metrical epigram, with two verses per slab, arranged on two lines each. According to Rhoby, originally it was a continuous volume, with three verses per slab. However, due to the damage that the slabs have sustained on both the right and left side,

¹⁸⁶⁴ CH. TSATSOUΛIS, The use of the terms θεόσωστος and Θεοφύλακτος in the Byzantine epigraphic and sigillographic tradition, in: *Inscriptions*, 160.

¹⁸⁶⁵ ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 266 (n.65).

¹⁸⁶⁶ On the inscription, see: IVANOVA, Bardas, 73-75; JANIN, Constantinople byzantine, 296; LAUXTERMANN, Byzantine Poetry, 341 (n. 29); MANGO, *Inscriptions of Constantinople*, 56 (n. 27). MENDEL, *Catalogue II*, 572-574; MENTZOU - MEIMARI, Ἐπιγραφαὶ, 93 (n. 75); ÖZTÜRK, *Inscriptions*, 21-22 (n. 19); RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 626-627 (Nr. TR61, with further bibliography); RHONY, Meaning, 741-742; VAN MILLINGEN, Byzantine Constantinople, 185; E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 32 (inscription n. 136).

¹⁸⁶⁷ RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 626.

part of its text has now been lost¹⁸⁶⁸. In addition to that, according to Mango, on the reverse side of the 3rd slab there is also a monogram of Christ, and on a circular medallion the words Κύριε βοήθι τῷ κόμη[τι]¹⁸⁶⁹. According to Rhoby, the text of the inscription is as follows¹⁸⁷⁰:

1. [Πολλ]ῶν κραταιῶς δ[ε]σποσάντων τοῦ σ[.....
2. ... οὐ]δενὸς πρὸς ἧ εὐκοσ[μίαν
3. τὸ βλ]ηθὲν εἰς γῆν τεῖχος ἐξηγεργότο[ς
4.]ντως Μιχαήλ [ό] δεσπότης
5. διὰ Βά[ρδα τοῦ τ]ῶν σχολῶν δομεστίκου
6. ἡγείρε τερ[π]νὸν ὠράϊσμα τῇ πόλει.

1. After many powerful who ruled over ...
2. (and)... no one erected to or to well-being
3. the fallen-to-the-ground wall
4. (this) erected the despot Michael
5. through Bardas, the domestic of the schools
6. a lovely adornment for the city.

The inscription relates that of the many powerful rulers who had ruled prior to Michael III, no one had taken care to re-erect the walls that had fallen to the ground (τὸ βληθὲν εἰς γῆν τεῖχος). The walls have eventually been re-erected by Michael III and his uncle Bardas, and, thus an adornment (ὠράϊσμα) for the city is constructed. The epigram presents Michael III in a very favorable and propagandistic manner. On the first two verses, it is emphatically stressed that the emperors prior to Michael III had failed to renew the city's fortifications. As a result, in the middle of the text (verses 3-4), having re-erected the walls,

¹⁸⁶⁸ RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 626.

¹⁸⁶⁹ MANGO, Inscriptions of Constantinople, 56 (n. 27).

¹⁸⁷⁰ RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 626–627.

Michael III is presented as a benefactor of the city and enjoys prominence against the preceding emperors¹⁸⁷¹.

But, as Rhoby rightfully points out, propaganda and truth tend to differ. In this case, it is well known that Theophilos and Michael II also strengthened the Marmara sea walls¹⁸⁷². The inscription bears no date –or at least it does not give any date in its current form. However, a hint to date the inscription is given in the fifth verse, where Bardas is mentioned as *domestikos ton scholon*; Bardas was promoted to *domestikos ton scholon* in 858¹⁸⁷³ and he held that rank until 22 April 862, when he was appointed *caesar*¹⁸⁷⁴. Consequently, since Bardas is mentioned as such, the repairs on the walls and the subsequent engraving of the inscription can be dated between 858 and 22 April 862¹⁸⁷⁵.

An even more accurate date can, with some certainty, be established. The need for repairs on the walls could have also been triggered by natural disasters. During the concerned period (858-862), two earthquakes have been recorded in Constantinople. The first one occurred in 860¹⁸⁷⁶, and the second one on May 861¹⁸⁷⁷. If taken literally, the phrase “τὸ βληθὲν εἰς γῆν τεῖχος” on the third verse means the wall that had fallen to the ground –probably from an earthquake. As a result, if it was an earthquake that triggered the repairs on the walls, that would place the repairs on the walls and the engraving of the inscription between May 861 and 862. This also suggests that the state

¹⁸⁷¹ In fact, according to the transcription of the inscription that Curtis and S. Aristarchis give, the height of the re-erected walls reached [εἴκο]σι[ν ποδῶ]ν (the height of 20 feet). See: E. Φ. Σ. 16 (1885), 32 (inscription n. 136, 2nd verse).

¹⁸⁷² On the fortifications conducted by Michael II and Theophilos, see: ASUTAY-EFFENBERGER, *Landmauer*, 6ff.; FOSS – WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 54–55, 74, 162; JANIN, *Constantinople byzantine*, 290ff; Meyer-Plath – SCHREINER, *Landmauer*, 118ff; MÜLLER - WIENER, *Bildlexikon*, 313.

¹⁸⁷³ PmbZ #791 (p. 263, Anm. 8).

¹⁸⁷⁴ PmbZ #791 (p. 263).

¹⁸⁷⁵ RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 627.

¹⁸⁷⁶ AMBRASEYS, *Earthquakes*, 244.

¹⁸⁷⁷ AMBRASEYS, *Earthquakes*, 244.

mechanism during Michael III's reign and Bardas' administration was diligent and ready to meet with any complications that could occur.

In addition to the aforementioned inscription, there is one more that mentions Bardas. The inscription is now lost, but, according to L. A. Muratori, who first described the inscription in the middle of the eighteenth century, it was once bricked in a tower of the Great Palace¹⁸⁷⁸. The text of the inscription, according to A. Rhoby, who reproduces the transcription of Muratori, is as follows¹⁸⁷⁹:

.....
[ύπ]ηρετοῦντος ἀνδρὸς εὐνομοτάτου
Βάρδα μαγίστρου [καὶ σχολῶν δομεστίκου]
.....

.....
of the most law-abiding man
Bardas magister [and domestic of the schools]
.....

The text of the inscription is only partially documented, indicating that it was already damaged in the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was first recorded. The text of the inscription speaks of a construction, which was either financed or supervised by Bardas. According to Rhoby, the completion of the second verse with the phrase [καὶ σχολῶν δομεστίκου] (= and domestikos ton scholon) is plausible because Bardas had been promoted to magister and domestic of the schools on the same year, namely 858, and he is also mentioned as domestic of the schools on the aforementioned three-slab inscription¹⁸⁸⁰.

¹⁸⁷⁸ On the inscription, see: RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 641 (with older bibliography).

¹⁸⁷⁹ RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 641.

¹⁸⁸⁰ RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 641.

In the last two inscriptions, on which Bardas is mentioned, it is remarkable that attention has been given to the text. Regarding the six verse prosodic dodecasyllable epigram, through a means of *synkrisis* with the preceding emperors, Michael III's deeds are proclaimed in a metaphorical and subtle way¹⁸⁸¹. As for the second epigram, although the majority of its text is damaged and no complete sequence can be established, it is evident from the documented verses that it was also a subtle, meticulous, and prosodic dodecasyllable epigram¹⁸⁸². In addition, both epigrams are without any orthographical mistakes, implying that the craftsman was very well educated.

The next inscription mentioning Michael III was discovered during the First World War in Ballsh (Glavinica)¹⁸⁸³, in Albania. However, its exact location is nowadays unknown¹⁸⁸⁴. The inscription¹⁸⁸⁵ is engraved on a marble pillar, and its text is written in large capital letters. According to V. Beševliev, the transcription of the inscription is as follows¹⁸⁸⁶:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. [+ Ἐβαπτίσθη | 1. baptized |
| 2. ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων | 2. was the ruler by God |
| 3. Βουλγ]αρίας ¹⁸⁸⁷ | 3. of Bulgaria |
| 4. Βορῆς ὁ μετο | 4. Boris, who |
| 5. νομασθεῖς | 5. was renamed to |
| 6. Μιχαήλ σὺν | 6. Michael |

¹⁸⁸¹ RHOBY, Meaning, 742; RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 627–628.

¹⁸⁸² RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 641.

¹⁸⁸³ On Ballsh (Glavinica), see: HOTI - KOMATAS, Byzantine Epigraphs, 184; MUÇAJ, St Mary's church, 279; SOUSTAL – KODER, Nikopolis und Kephallenia, 175–177 (Kephallenia).

¹⁸⁸⁴ POPA, Kishtare, 79 (n. 82).

¹⁸⁸⁵ On the inscription, see: BEŠEVLIEV, Protobulg. Inschriften, 175 (n. 15); HOTI - KOMATAS, Byzantine Epigraphs, 184–185; PETKOV, Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 36 (n. 43); POPA, Kishtare, 79 (n. 82); SOPHOULIS, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 45; ZIEMANN, Wandervolk, 362–363 (with further bibliography).

¹⁸⁸⁶ Transcription of the inscription from: BEŠEVLIEV, Protobulg. Inschriften, 175 (n. 15).

¹⁸⁸⁷ On the damaged first three verses of the inscription, A. Hoti and D. Komatas suggest “Μαρίας Βόρης ὁ μετονομασθεῖς...” whereas Th. Popa suggests “ἐβαπτίστη ὁ ἀρχων Βουλγαρείας Βορης...”. See: HOTI - KOMATAS, Byzantine Epigraphs, 184–185; cf. POPA, Kishtare, 79 (n. 82).

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 7. τῷ ἐκ Θεοῦ δε- | 7. together with |
| 8. δομένῳ αὐ | 8. his people |
| 9. τῷ ἔθνει ἔ | 9. given from God |
| 10. τοὺς σποδ (6374 = 866). | 10. in the year 6374 (=866) |

The inscription refers to the Bulgarian Khan Boris, who was baptized together with his people, accepted the Christian Orthodox faith, and took the additional name of Michael. It consists of ten lines. The fact that a Bulgarian inscription is written using Greek letters should not come as a surprise. From 681, the year the first Bulgarian state was established¹⁸⁸⁸ by Asparuch¹⁸⁸⁹, until 885, the year of the introduction of the Slavic alphabet, the majority of the Bulgarian inscriptions, i. e. the Proto-Bulgarian inscriptions, were written in Greek¹⁸⁹⁰. The text of the inscription resembles Byzantine Epigraphy. On the second line Boris is referred to as ὁ ἐκ Θεοῦ ἄρχων (ruler by God). Since the reign of Tervel¹⁸⁹¹ and the death of Krum¹⁸⁹² (705-814), the Bulgarian rulers were always referred to as ἄρχοντες¹⁸⁹³ on epigraphical texts. In Byzantium, during that period the term had various meanings; among others, it was used to denote high-ranking officials who possessed power and governed a Byzantine province (e.g. strategoi), or to signify leaders, who were in charge of foreign tribes installed within the Byzantine empire¹⁸⁹⁴.

¹⁸⁸⁸ ZIEMANN, Wandervolk, 162, 417.

¹⁸⁸⁹ PmbZ #654.

¹⁸⁹⁰ On the matter, see: NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Ιδέα και επιδράσεις*, 1357–1359 (with further bibliography).

¹⁸⁹¹ PmbZ #7250.

¹⁸⁹² PmbZ #4164.

¹⁸⁹³ NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Ιδέα και επιδράσεις*, 1359.

¹⁸⁹⁴ AHRWEILER, *Administration*, 72; OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 342–343; for the imperial use of the term ἐκ Θεοῦ see also: RÖSCH, *ONOMA*, 63–65.

During the reign of Omurtag (815-831)¹⁸⁹⁵ the phrase ἐκ θεοῦ (by God) appears to precede the word ἄρχον (ruler). Thus, after the reign of Omurtag, the Bulgarian rulers would henceforward inherit the title ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων on epigraphical text¹⁸⁹⁶. It must be noted that the term ἐκ θεοῦ did not have religious meaning, as Bulgarians had not yet been converted to Christianity¹⁸⁹⁷. Its use was purely political.

During that period, the Byzantine emperors were referred to as ἐκ θεοῦ βασιλεύς (emperor [chosen] by God) on Byzantine imperial inscriptions¹⁸⁹⁸. This title is representative of Byzantine imperial ideology, according to which the emperor's assumption of power derived from God and he was chosen by God to rule the empire. According to Byzantine perception, all other rulers were subordinate and subject to the Byzantine emperor and drew their powers from him¹⁸⁹⁹.

V. Beševliev notes that the use of the title ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων on Proto-Bulgarian inscriptions was meant to contradict the aforementioned Byzantine perception. It was meant to demonstrate that Bulgarian rulers were also chosen by God and, subsequently, that they were not subject to the Byzantine emperor¹⁹⁰⁰. Taking into consideration the title ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων and its use, the Bulgarian historian also notes that in an effort to gain state autonomy and recognition Bulgarian rulers have been influenced by the Byzantine imperial ideology¹⁹⁰¹.

The message of the inscription concerns Boris' conversion to the Christian Orthodox faith. I would like to emphasize that the first pagan rulers who were

¹⁸⁹⁵ PmbZ #5651.

¹⁸⁹⁶ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Πολίτευμα και οι θεσμοί, 193–194; NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, Ιδέα και επιδράσεις, 1362–1363.

¹⁸⁹⁷ On the religious beliefs of the Bulgarians before their Christianization, see: SOPHOULIS, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 79–89.

¹⁸⁹⁸ NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, Ιδέα και επιδράσεις, 1363.

¹⁸⁹⁹ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, Πολίτευμα και θεσμοί, 192; DÖLGER, Byzanz, 37–69, 159–182.

¹⁹⁰⁰ BEŠEVLIEV, Souveränitätsansprüche, 14–15.

¹⁹⁰¹ BEŠEVLIEV, Souveränitätsansprüche, 12; BEŠEVLIEV, Kaiseridee, 89; SIMEONOVA, Diplomacy, 178–179.

baptized were given the names of the ruling Byzantine emperors, who acted as godfathers to them¹⁹⁰². Thus, when Boris was baptized, he was given the additional name Michael, after Michael III, who acted as a godfather to the newly-baptized Bulgarian ruler. The christening of Boris by Michael III, in particular, greatly influenced the Bulgarian apocalyptic literature of the eleventh century. The historical events that transpired during Michael III's reign along with aspects of his personality as the ideal king-savior before the End of Times were widely spread in Bulgaria and were applied to the historical figure of the baptized Khan Boris-Michael¹⁹⁰³. The fact that the baptism of Boris is attested on an inscription is also representative of the influence it had on the Bulgarian tradition¹⁹⁰⁴.

Although the majority of the historical sources date Bulgarians' conversion to the Christian Orthodox faith in 864/865¹⁹⁰⁵, the inscription on the last verse gives the date 866. There are a number of explanations regarding this date. Firstly, it could be a spelling mistake made by the craftsman¹⁹⁰⁶. Secondly, if the date is to be taken seriously, that will place Boris's conversion to Christianity in 866¹⁹⁰⁷. Lastly, the year 866 could simply represent the date that the inscription was engraved¹⁹⁰⁸; the last case is the most likely one because it also corresponds with the reconstructions that are placed between 866 and 919¹⁹⁰⁹. Besides, Boris was officially permitted to annex the Northwestern part of Albania already since 864¹⁹¹⁰, which is generally accepted by modern

¹⁹⁰² ISOAHO, *Last Emperor*, 47.

¹⁹⁰³ See above, pp. 193-194.

¹⁹⁰⁴ I am aware of one more inscription in Cherven, in Bulgaria, dated in 870, on which Boris is referred only as Michael. See: BEŠEVĽIEV, *Inscripfen*, 35–36 (inscription n. 51) (with further bibliography).

¹⁹⁰⁵ On the matter, see: ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 361–364.

¹⁹⁰⁶ ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 363–364 (cit n. 1787).

¹⁹⁰⁷ ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 363.

¹⁹⁰⁸ ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 363.

¹⁹⁰⁹ MUÇAJ, *St. Mary's church*, 281.

¹⁹¹⁰ HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 136.

scholarship as the year that Boris capitulated and was baptized by the Byzantines¹⁹¹¹.

Additionally, it is of great importance that during the concerned period, Ballsh (Glavinica) was under Bulgarian rule¹⁹¹², and was also part of Illyricum, the political jurisdiction of which pope Nicholas I and Photios battled for¹⁹¹³. In fact, taking into consideration the geographical location of Ballsh (on the Southwestern part of Illyricum), and that the only information that the inscription provides is Boris' conversion to the Christian Orthodox faith, it becomes apparent that the inscription had diplomatic purpose; it was used to further demonstrate that Ballsh was under Bulgarian rule.

Asia Minor

The inscriptions in the cities of Asia Minor that refer to Michael III testify the extensive renovation of the fortifications that took place during his reign. Since 853, the Byzantine Empire had begun its victorious campaign against the Arabs. The renovation of the fortifications in the cities of Asia Minor would afford protection to the Byzantine army in case of retreat¹⁹¹⁴. These renovations would also prove valuable in organizing and coordinating the campaigns against the Arabs during the Macedonian dynasty. I shall start with Smyrna (Izmir).

¹⁹¹¹ For Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity, see: BROWNING, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 55-56, 145-169; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 103-131; FINE, *Balkans*, 117-130; GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria*, 115ff; HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 135-143; IVANOV, *Missions*, 318-320; PHEIDAS, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β'*, 110-124; SIMEONOVA, *Diplomacy*, 77-81; VLASTO, *Entry*, 58-165; ZIEMANN, *Wandervolk*, 345-412.

¹⁹¹² HUPCHICK, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 135; MUÇAJ, *St. Mary's church*, 261, 279.

¹⁹¹³ GANTNER, *Ludwig II*, 107-108; F. DVORNIK, *Les légendes*, 248-283; DVORNIK, *Photian schism*, 91-132; VLYSIDOU, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, 127-129.

¹⁹¹⁴ The inscriptions of Asia Minor that mention Michael III are also briefly mentioned by N. Melvani (but without transcription of their texts). See: MELVANI, *State*, 164, 169, 176.

Smyrna was one of the most important cities of the Thracesion theme¹⁹¹⁵, and the capital of the naval theme of Samos¹⁹¹⁶. The only evidence that relates to fortifications prior to Michael III's reign is dated during the reign of Arcadios and the reign of Heraclios. Arcadios is commemorated on a verse inscription near Basmane Station consisting of two lines; the inscription probably refers to a new fortification, or to a renovation of an old one¹⁹¹⁷. In Heraclios' case, two inscriptions mentioning his name were found on a city gate also near the Basmane Station¹⁹¹⁸. According to C. Foss, they show that the walls or a section of them was renovated and still functioning during the seventh century¹⁹¹⁹. Smyrna was devastated by the Arabs in 654 and 672¹⁹²⁰. The city afterwards expanded¹⁹²¹ and its walls were renovated during the reign of Michael III in order to withstand the Arab and Paulician invasions¹⁹²². This renovation is attested by an inscription¹⁹²³ which celebrates the construction of a tower on the city walls. The inscription is nowadays missing¹⁹²⁴, but according to previous readings, it was engraved on a marble block and its text was as follows:

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| † Πύργος Μιχαήλ | † Tower of Michael |
| μεγάλου βασι- | the great emperor |
| λέως ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ αὐ- | in Christ autokrator |

¹⁹¹⁵ On the history of Smyrna, See: BRANDES, *Städte*, 127ff; CHEYNET, *Smyrne*, 89ff; FOSS, *Cities*, 481–482; VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 201–234.

¹⁹¹⁶ AHRWEILER, *Mer*, 108.

¹⁹¹⁷ On the inscription, see: FOSS, *Cities*, 482; GRÉGOIRE, *Recueil*, 65 (n. 16); MÜLLER – WIENER, *Stadtbevestigungen*, 106–114; PETZL, *Inchriften von Smyrna*, II, 1, 316–317 (n. 845) (with older bibliography).

¹⁹¹⁸ On these inscriptions, see: GRÉGOIRE, *Recueil*, 21–22 (n. 79–80).

¹⁹¹⁹ FOSS, *Cities*, 482; VLYSIDOU et al., *Asia Minor*, 225.

¹⁹²⁰ DE BOOR, *Theophanes*, 353, 14–16.; FOSS, *Cities*, 482.

¹⁹²¹ BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 520.

¹⁹²² CHEYNET, *Smyrne*, 91; MÜLLER – WIENER, *Stadtbevestigungen*, 63; PETZL, *Inchriften von Smyrna*, II, 1, 318 (n. 846).

¹⁹²³ On the inscription, see: CHEYNET, *Smyrne*, 91; FOSS, *Cities*, 482; GRÉGOIRE, *Recueil*, 24 (n. 82); MÜLLER – WIENER, *Stadtbevestigungen*, 63; PETZL, *Inchriften von Smyrna*, II, 1, 317–318 (n. 846) (with older bibliography).

¹⁹²⁴ PETZL, *Inchriften von Smyrna*, II, 1, 317 (n. 846).

τοκράτορος ἔτ(ει) ,Cτξε'¹⁹²⁵.

in the year 6365 (856-857).

It is notable that on the inscription, Michael III is referred as μέγας βασιλεὺς (μεγάλου βασιλέως). The phrase is also found at the inscriptions of Nicaea and Ankara, on his class III miliaresia, and he is also mentioned as πιστὸς and μέγας βασιλεὺς in the tenth homily of Photios. Michael III used the title μέγας βασιλεὺς to convey to his subjects that his mother's regency was over and he was now ruling as the only βασιλεύς. According to the inscription, the renovation of the fortifications in Smyrna is dated in 856-857.

Smyrna was considerably more important during the late Byzantine Period¹⁹²⁶; in the thirteenth century, Ioannes III Vatatzes built a fortress there, which is still preserved today. On the North gate of the fortress a twenty-verse epigram was attached –now lost– commemorating the emperor of Nicaea on renovating Smyrna's fortifications¹⁹²⁷. This epigram is of particular importance, as on its second verse it mentions the existence of marble towers (τείχεσι μαρμαίρουσιν ἐϋστεφάνοις τ' ἐνὶ πύργοις,)¹⁹²⁸. According to A. Rhoby, this verse may refer to the towers that were added during Michael III's reign¹⁹²⁹. Nowadays these walls do not survive. However, according to C. Foss, they can probably be identified with a line of walls in the Southwestern part of the city, which appear on a nineteenth-century map¹⁹³⁰.

Next, I turn to Nicaea¹⁹³¹. Before Michael III's renovations, the defensive walls of Nicaea were badly damaged. In 727, the Arabs, in an effort to seize the

¹⁹²⁵ Transcription of the inscription from G. Petzl. See: PETZL, *Inschriften von Smyrna*, II, 1, 317–318 (n. 846).

¹⁹²⁶ On Smyrna during the late Byzantine period, see: AHRWEILER, *Smyrne*, 1–204.

¹⁹²⁷ On the epigram, see: RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 693–699 (with commentary and further bibliography).

¹⁹²⁸ RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 694.

¹⁹²⁹ RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 697.

¹⁹³⁰ FOSS, *Cities*, 482; MÜLLER – WIENER, *Stadtbefestigungen*, 63.

¹⁹³¹ For the history of the city and its monuments, see: FOSS, *Nicaea*, 25ff; PESCHLOW, *Nicaea*, 203–216 (with further bibliography).

city, levelled a part of the walls¹⁹³². A few years later, in 740, due to an earthquake in the eastern part of the Sea of Marmara, the walls of Nicaea were seriously damaged and required immediate restoration. According to Theophanes the confessor, the damage that the earthquake inflicted was so severe that only a church was left standing¹⁹³³. In all probability this church was the Hagia Sophia, which in 787 served as the venue for the Seventh Ecumenical Council¹⁹³⁴. This church survives to this day, but functions as a mosque since 2011.

Although it does not survive to this day, another church worth mentioning is the Koimisis of Theotokos. According to modern scholarship, the church was built by the abbot Hyakinthos as part of his monastery shortly before the first iconoclast period; it was a domed basilica that was supported by four piers and barrel vaults, and it also had a narthex with three doors¹⁹³⁵. Shortly after the restoration of the icons, the mosaics of the church were –at least partially– renovated. A certain Naukratios¹⁹³⁶ added four angels that were apparently meant to replace the pre-iconoclast angels that would have been erased during the iconoclasm¹⁹³⁷. The renovation chronologically coincides with Theodora's regency. Yet it is unlikely that the renovation of the church was an initiative of her government; in all probability it was a personal initiative of the aforementioned Naukratios.

¹⁹³² DE BOOR, Theophanes, 405, 25–406, 2; FOSS - WINFIELD, Fortifications, 80; SCHNEIDER – KARNAPP, Die Stadtmauer, 4.

¹⁹³³ AMBRASEYS, Earthquakes, 227; Theophanes, 412, 6–14; FOSS - WINFIELD, Fortifications, 80; SCHNEIDER – KARNAPP, Die Stadtmauer, 4.

¹⁹³⁴ PESCHLOW, Nicaea, 209.

¹⁹³⁵ On the Dormition of the Virgin Mary of Nicaea, see: PESCHLOW, Nicaea, 210; RHOBY, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, 403–406 (with further bibliography).

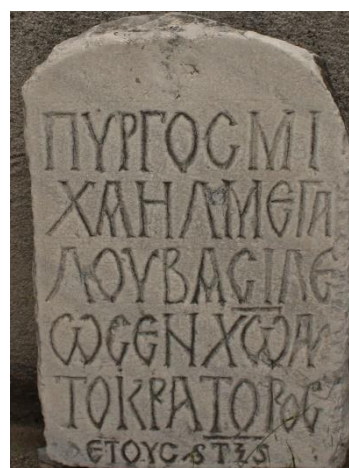
¹⁹³⁶ PmbZ #5230, 1.

¹⁹³⁷ PESCHLOW, Nicaea, 211. There is an inscription near the angels that refers to Naukratios as the donor of the renovation (Στηλοῖ Ναυκράτιος τὰς θείας εἰκόνας). On the matter see: RHOBY, Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken, 403–405.

During the reign of Michael III, an extensive rebuilding of the walls took place¹⁹³⁸. The number of the defensive towers was doubled and between two old towers a new one was added. As a result, the length of the curtain walls was reduced by half¹⁹³⁹. The majority of these new towers were placed on the Eastern and Southeastern side of the wall, between the Yenisehir and Lefke gates, and they were equipped with openings for missiles¹⁹⁴⁰.

The extensive rebuilding of the walls that was carried out during Michael III's reign is attested by the eight inscriptions that refer to his name. The inscriptions were engraved in marble blocks, which were built in the towers that were added under Michael III and they were meant to represent each tower as the work of the emperor¹⁹⁴¹. Nowadays none of the inscriptions is found *in situ*; all eight of them are in the garden of the Iznik Museum and some are only preserved as fragments¹⁹⁴². The engraved text is the same in all eight inscriptions and is as follows:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| † | † |
| ΠΥΡΓΟCMI | Tower of |
| ΧΑΗΛΜΕΓΑ | Michael the great |
| ΛΟΥ ΒΑCΙΑΕ | emperor |
| ΩC ΕΝΧΩΑ' | in Christ |
| ΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡοC | autokrator |
| ΕΤΟΥC ,CΤΖC' | in the year 6366 (857/858) |



Iznik Museum, Nicaea.
Inscription of Michael III.
(Personal archive)

¹⁹³⁸ On the rebuilding of the walls under Michael III see: FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 82ff; PESCHLOW, *Nicaea*, 207; RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 352–353; SCHNEIDER – KARNAPP, *Die Stadtmauer*, 4, 51.

¹⁹³⁹ PESCHLOW, *Nicaea*, 207.

¹⁹⁴⁰ FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 81, 91–92; RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 353; on the Yenisehir and Lefke gates see: SCHNEIDER – KARNAPP, *Die Stadtmauer*, 22–36.

¹⁹⁴¹ FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 101; IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 6, 10–11.

¹⁹⁴² ŞAHİN, *Katalog*, 237a–244b (n. 460–467).

According to the inscription, the restorations took place in 857/878. Due to their large number (eight in total), A. Rhoby has classified these inscriptions under the term *mass merchandise* and implied that it was a medium of self-representation for the emperor¹⁹⁴³. It is notable that all these inscriptions, as well as the one in Smyrna begin with the holy symbol of the cross (†). According to G. Jerphanion, it could have been used in an effort to repel evil¹⁹⁴⁴. C. Mango also adds that the forms of the letters *beta* (β), without a horizontal bar, and *omega*, shaped like a modern W recall Late antiquity epigraphic scripts. Their appearance can be interpreted as a sign of deliberate antiquarianism¹⁹⁴⁵.

In all eight inscriptions, Michael III is referred as “μεγάλου βασιλέως” (genitive of the title “μέγας βασιλεύς”). This phrase is also found at the inscriptions of Smyrna and Ankara, on his class III *miliaresia*, and he is also mentioned as πιστός and μέγας βασιλεύς in the tenth homily of Photios¹⁹⁴⁶. The title μέγας βασιλεύς was used by Michael III to convey to his subjects that the regency of Theodora was over and he was now the sovereign, the only βασιλεύς.

One should take into consideration that the text of these inscriptions is very simple and could easily be understood from his subjects –even the illiterate ones. What is more, the fact that the inscription bears the emperor’s name could also be regarded as a guarantee for the stability and durability of the fortification¹⁹⁴⁷. And stable and durable they were indeed. The strengthening of the fortifications under Michael III’s reign was so solid, that the next recorded repair of the walls took place after 400 years, when Nicaea was the capital of the Byzantine Empire¹⁹⁴⁸.

¹⁹⁴³ RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 352–353.

¹⁹⁴⁴ JERPHANION, *Melanges*, 284–285.

¹⁹⁴⁵ MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy*, 245.

¹⁹⁴⁶ JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 129; MANGO, *Homilies*, 184.

¹⁹⁴⁷ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 747.

¹⁹⁴⁸ FOSS, *Nicaea*, 26; FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 82.

Lastly, I turn to Ankara¹⁹⁴⁹. In the seventh century Ankara became the administrative center of the Opsikian theme and later of the Bucelarian theme¹⁹⁵⁰. The geographical location of the city as well as its strategic importance - capital of one of the four original themes into which Asia Minor was divided- made Ankara a frequent goal of Arab attacks¹⁹⁵¹. One of these attacks was so devastating that, according to Theophanes, in 804/5 Nikephoros had to rebuilt the city¹⁹⁵². In fact, according to recent scholarship, the rebuilding of the city under Nikephoros included the construction of a fortress located on a hill in the Northern part of the city (in the Altındağ district of modern Ankara); this fortress is one of the best preserved monuments of Byzantine Ankara¹⁹⁵³.

In 838, however, under the campaign of al-Mutasim to conquer Amorium, Ankara was once more sacked by the Arabs¹⁹⁵⁴. The city's walls were demolished and its population was led into captivity¹⁹⁵⁵. The capture and destruction of Ankara and Amorium was recognized from the Arabic sources as one of the most glorious victories in Asia Minor against the Byzantines¹⁹⁵⁶. The extensive reconstruction of the fortifications of the city undertaken under Michael III's reign repaired the damage inflicted by the Arabs in 838.

¹⁹⁴⁹ For the history of the city and its monuments, see: FOSS, *Ankara*, 27–87; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 15ff; PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 349–360 (with further bibliography); SERIN, *Ankara*, 1257–1280; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 235–236.

¹⁹⁵⁰ BELKE, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, 59, 62, 126–127.

¹⁹⁵¹ BELKE, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, 127; BRANDES, *Städte*, 105; FOSS, *Ankara*, 29ff; FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 143; HILD, *Straßensystem*, 33–35; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 259.

¹⁹⁵² DE BOOR, *Theophanes*, 481, 6–9.

¹⁹⁵³ On the Byzantine fortress of Ankara, see: FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 136–137, 143–145; FOSS, *Ankara*, 77ff; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 139–186; PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 356–360 (with further bibliography); SERIN, *Ankara*, 1271–1278 (with older bibliography).

¹⁹⁵⁴ BRUBAKER - HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 409; CODOÑER, *Theophilos and the East*, 283ff; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 262ff.

¹⁹⁵⁵ VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 159.

¹⁹⁵⁶ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIII, 99 (1237); FOSS, *Ankara*, 78; KHORDĀDHBEH, *Kitāb*, 74; SERIN, *Ankara*, 1273.

The renovation of the fortifications and the rebuilding of the walls is attested by five inscriptions datable to 859, some of which are still *in situ*. The first three and lengthiest inscriptions were fixed very close to each other, in the Southern façade of the citadel. Two of these inscriptions are metrical, consisting of ten and fifteen verses, whereas the third one is composed in simple prose¹⁹⁵⁷. The first¹⁹⁵⁸ of these three inscriptions is partially preserved *in situ* and its text is as follows:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. "[Δόξαν μεγίστην τοῦ Θεοῦ δεδοκότες | "You, who have contemplated the greatest glory of God |
| 2. ἔχοντες ὄμμα καὶ χέρας ἐπηρμένους | with your eyes and your hands raised up |
| 3. ἅπαντες εὐλογεῖτε τὸν παντε]ργάτην | praise him singing who accomplishes everything |
| 4. τὸν ἰσχὺν ἐνδύοντα καὶ κράτος μέγα | and invests with power and might |
| 5. τῷ εὐσεβουργ[ῶ καὶ πολιστῇ δεσπότη | the pious ruler Michael |
| 6. ἀνάκτι πιστῷ Μιχαήλ εὐεργέτῃ | the benefactor, the faithful creator and founder of cities! |
| 7. οἱ εἰσιόντες τὴν πύλην καὶ τὴν πόλιν | You, who behold the gate and the city |
| 8. λαλεῖτε πάντα θεῖα δεδοξασ]μένα | chant all the divine glories; |
| 9. πόλις Κυρίου χαῖρε Σιών ἡ νέα | Rejoice, city of the Lord, the new Zion |
| 10. θεογραφοῖς πίναξιν ἐγ[γεγραμμένη]" ¹⁹⁵⁹ | which is inscribed on a tablet written by God!" ¹⁹⁶⁰ |

In the opening four verses, the prosodic dodecasyllable epigram is addressed to the citizens or visitors of Ankara who enter through the gate. According to the epigram, they are invited to participate in the performance between God, the emperor, and the city, by raising their hands up and chanting¹⁹⁶¹. In the beginning of the fifth verse we read "τῷ εὐσεβουργ[ῶ". According to C. Mango, the form of the letters *sigma* (Σ) and *omega* (Ω) recalls Late Antique epigraphic scripts. This form had generally been abandoned by the third century, but made an unexpected re-appearance in the inscription.

¹⁹⁵⁷ RHOBY, Meaning, 744.

¹⁹⁵⁸ On this inscription, see: FOSS, Ankara, 79; FRENCH, Inscriptions of Ankara, 196–197; FOSS - WINFIELD, Fortifications, 143; GRÉGOIRE, Ancyre et les Arabes, 438–439; JERPHANION, Melanges, 282–284; PAPALEXANDROU, Echoes of Orality, 178–179; PESCHLOW, Ankara, 159–160, 263; PESCHLOW, Ancyra, 359; RHOBY, Meaning, 744; RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 77, 537–540 (with German translation of the inscription and older bibliography); RHOBY, Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications, 352–353.

¹⁹⁵⁹ I cite the original text of the inscription from A. Rhoby. See: RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 538.

¹⁹⁶⁰ English translation after A. Papalexandrou and A. Rhoby. PAPALEXANDROU, Echoes of Orality, 178; RHOBY, Meaning, 744.

¹⁹⁶¹ RHOBY, Meaning, 744–745; RHOBY, Epigramme auf Stein, 539.

Their use could be yet another sign of deliberate antiquarianism¹⁹⁶². On the same verse, Michael III is addressed as *πολιστής* (founder of cities)¹⁹⁶³. It could imply that the destruction caused by the Arabs in 838 was so devastating for Ankara that Michael III had to raise the city from the ground again¹⁹⁶⁴.

The epigram presents Michael III's deeds in a metaphorical and embellished manner; praise God and you praise Michael, and vice versa¹⁹⁶⁵. In addition, on the sixth verse, Michael III is celebrated as *εὐεργέτης* (benefactor)¹⁹⁶⁶ of the city. It is worth mentioning that the epithet *εὐεργέτης* serves to display Michael III as a ruler who cares for the needs and safety of his subjects and constructs fortifications to protect them.

For the ruling emperor such virtues were not only expected by his subjects, but they were also considered imperative regarding the well-being of the empire. During the 6th century, the deacon Agapetos¹⁹⁶⁷ advised Ioustinianos I that “εἰ τὴν ἐκ πάντων βούλει καρποῦσθαι τιμὴν, γίνου τοῖς ἅπασιν εὐεργέτης κοινός” (if you want to reap the benefits of being honored by all men, become the common benefactor to all)¹⁹⁶⁸. According to E. Ivison, Michael III follows the tradition of Ioustinianos I and similarly uses the epithet *εὐεργέτης* to be portrayed as a diligent emperor¹⁹⁶⁹. Be that as it may, this kind of traditional virtues were not unknown in medieval Byzantium. Theophanes Continuatus narrates that Theophilos displayed *ἐπιμέλεια* (diligence) in

¹⁹⁶² MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy*, 243–244; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 538; for a picture of the inscription, see: FRENCH, *Inscriptions of Ankara*, 196.

¹⁹⁶³ DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 5943.

¹⁹⁶⁴ SERIN, *Ankara*, 1273 (also cit. n. 63).

¹⁹⁶⁵ PAPALEXANDROU, *Echoes of Orality*, 179.

¹⁹⁶⁶ DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 3039.

¹⁹⁶⁷ ODB, 34 (Agapetos).

¹⁹⁶⁸ AGAPETUS, *Expositio Capitum Admonitoriorum*. PG 86, 1169A. English translation after: D. GENEAKOPOLOS, *Byzantium*, 19.

¹⁹⁶⁹ IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 22.

reconstructing the lower walls of Constantinople, thus making them inaccessible to enemies¹⁹⁷⁰.

On the ninth verse Ankara is also referred as Πόλις κυρίου (city of the Lord) and Σιών ἡ νέα (the new Sion); both these epithets are normally used to praise Constantinople¹⁹⁷¹. According to Rhoby, they were used to further highlight Michael III's deeds¹⁹⁷².

At the end of the epigram the participant is invited to chant πόλις Κυρίου χαῖρε Σιών ἡ νέα (Hail, city of the Lord, the new Sion). The verb χαῖρε (hail) that is used on the ninth verse has its origins in Zach. 9, 9. However, it was familiar to the average Byzantine for it was used 144 times in the Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος¹⁹⁷³.

The poetic tone of the epigram naturally begs the question of whether its content could be understood by the majority of its readers. Without disregarding the matter at issue it could be that the beholder of the epigram was not able to read it in the first place. According to W. Hamilton, who visited Ankara and studied the inscription in the first half of the nineteenth century, the epigram was placed at such a great height that he was only able to read its text with the help of a telescope¹⁹⁷⁴. It remains therefore in question if the inscription was placed in the wrong place or if it was originally planned to be placed at such a height and be read only by those capable¹⁹⁷⁵. I shall leave this matter aside for the moment. As I have already mentioned, of the three inscriptions in the southern façade of the citadel two are metrical, whereas the third one is composed in simple prose. The second of these two metrical

¹⁹⁷⁰ THEOPH. CONT., III, 136, 1–4.

¹⁹⁷¹ RHOBY, *Stadtlob und Stadtkritik*, 286–287.

¹⁹⁷² RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 353.

¹⁹⁷³ PELTOMAA, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 36–39; RHOBY, *Inscriptions on Byzantine Fortifications*, 353 (cit. n. 61).

¹⁹⁷⁴ HAMILTON, *Researches*, 427 (n. 136).

¹⁹⁷⁵ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 745.

inscriptions is now completely lost, but earlier scholars have recorded its text¹⁹⁷⁶.

This prosodic epigram was very close to the first one –which means that it was also placed at such a height that it could not be deciphered or even read, it consisted of fifteen verses, and its text was as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. "[Π]έν[θει] φθαρεῖσα κ(αὶ) κλιθεῖσα πρὸς γ[όνυ] | "Having been worn from grief a long time ago |
| 2. χερσὶν Περσικαῖς μαιφόνος<ι>ς ἐκπάλαι | and kneeled by the Persian cruel hands, |
| 3. νῦν ἐξεγείρου τῶν κακῶν ἀνειμένη, | now rise, leaving the misfortunes behind, |
| 4. ἀπαμφιάζου πενθικὴν ἀμορφίαν, | take off your mournful ugliness, |
| 5. δέχου στολισμὸν νυμφικ[ῆς ἀγλαΐας] | accept the adornment of the bridal delight |
| 6. θεοστίβοις λίθαξιν ἐστηριγμένη | based upon stones carved by God; |
| 7. Θ(εο)ῦ [γ]ὰρ οὕτως εὐνοεῖται τὸ κράτος | thus the empire has God's mercy; |
| 8. δίδου δὲ χέραν τῷ καλοῦντι προθύμως | give your hand to him who eagerly calls you |
| 9. ἵνα πρὸς ὕψος ἐμφανῶς ἀναστήσῃ | to restore very highly |
| 10. σε τὴν πεσοῦσαν ἐν βαρά[θρ]ω κινδύνων | you, who have fallen in a dangerous chasm |
| 11. [χειρὶ] κραταιᾷ Μιχαὴλ ὁ δεσπότης, | with his mighty hand, the sovereign Michael |
| 12. [μέγ]ας βασιλεὺς, ν[ικητ]ῆς στεφανόροος, | the great emperor, wreathed in victory |
| 13. τὴν σὴν [ν]εουγῶν ἀσφαλὴ κατοικίαν, | making you a safe new residence |
| 14. Ἄγκυρα τερπνὴ, παμφαιστάτῃ πόλιν, | charming Ankara, the brightest of cities |
| 15. πάσας Γαλατῶν πατρίδος [σὺ] λαμπρότης. ¹⁹⁷⁷ | glorious homeland of all the Galatians ¹⁹⁷⁸ . |

Similar to the first one, this epigram is also full of metaphorical vocabulary. However, this time the epigram is addressed to the city, not the beholder. On the opening two verses the bad condition of the city is metaphorically described; Ankara is personified as a mourning woman, who has been knocked to her knees by the Persian attacks. The phrase χερσὶν Περσικαῖς μαιφόνος<ι>ς (Persian cruel hands) on the second verse probably refers to the Arab attack of

¹⁹⁷⁶ On the inscription, see: FOSS, *Ankara*, 79; GRÉGOIRE, *Michel III et Basile*, 439–440; HAMILTON, *Researches*, 427 (n. 136); LAUXTERMANN, *Byz. Epigram*, 29; LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry*, 161, 340 (n. 21); MENTZOU-MEIMARI, *Ἐπιγραφαὶ*, 108 (n. 152); PAPALEXANDROU, *Echoes of Orality*, 178; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 160–161, 263–265; PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 359; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, 383; RHOBY, *Meaning*, 745; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 540–543 (with older bibliography); IIVSON, *Renewal and revival*, 20, 39 (cit. n. 138).

¹⁹⁷⁷ I cite the original text of the inscription from A. Rhoby. See: RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 541.

¹⁹⁷⁸ The English translation of the original text is my own; any errors or misinterpretations in the translation of the inscription are therefore my own.

838¹⁹⁷⁹, especially taking into consideration that it took place some twenty years ago and was still fresh in its memory.

In verses 3-5, Ankara is urged to leave these misfortunes behind and accept the adornment that is being offered to her. On the one hand, she is asked to remove the *πενθικὴν ἀμορφίαν*, i.e. to leave behind the bad condition that she was in after the Arab attacks. In the very next verse she is asked to accept the *στολισμὸν νυμφικ[ῆς ἀγλαΐας]*, i.e. to accept, as if she was a living entity, the bridal delight. The phrases *πενθικὴν ἀμορφίαν* used in the fourth and *νυμφικ[ῆς ἀγλαΐας]* in the fifth verse serve as a means of comparison and seem to have been picked very carefully by the author in order to highlight the renovation of the fortifications undertaken under Michael III's reign. According to Dimitrakos' lexicon of the whole Greek language, the word "*πενθικὴν*" means mournful, whereas "*νυμφικῆς*" means bridal and has a very hopeful and festive meaning¹⁹⁸⁰.

In verses 6-7, the beholder is informed that the city is *θεοστίβοις λίθαξιιν ἐστηρικμένη* (constructed with stones carved by God) and that it has his mercy. According to Rhoby, it probably means that precious stones from the Holy Land were also bricked in the walls of Ankara¹⁹⁸¹. On the contrary, E. Ivison argues that the phrase could imply that God gave the power to Michael III to restore Ankara¹⁹⁸².

The verses 8-13 are linking Ankara's restoration with Michael III's deeds. Again portrayed as an entity Ankara is invited to take the hand of Michael III. Unlike the Persian cruel hands, which have knocked Ankara down to her

¹⁹⁷⁹ GRÉGOIRE, *Ancyre et les Arabes*, 442; IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 20; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 542.

¹⁹⁸⁰ DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 4945 (*πενθικός*), 5634 (*νυμφικός*).

¹⁹⁸¹ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 745.

¹⁹⁸² IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 23.

knees, Michael III's hand is emphatically described as *χειρὶ κραταιᾷ*, namely mighty hand¹⁹⁸³.

On the twelfth verse, Michael III is described as *μέγας βασιλεύς* (great emperor). The same phrase is found in the inscriptions of Smyrna, Ankara, in the class III of his *miliaresia*, and he is also described as *πιστὸς καὶ μέγας βασιλεύς* by Photios' tenth homily, which took place in 864 in Constantinople. The title *μέγας βασιλεύς* was used by Michael III to declare to the subjects of the empire that Theodora's regency was over and he was now ruling as the only *βασιλεύς*.

It is noteworthy, however, that the epithet *πιστὸς* is not present. Michael III is referred only as *μέγας βασιλεύς*, just like in the inscription of Smyrna and the eight inscriptions of Ankara, which were engraved in marble blocks built in the towers that were added under Michael III. In the same verse, we also read *ν[ικητ]ῆς στεφηνφόρος* (wreathed in victory). The phrase cites Michael III's victorious campaigns. Taking into consideration that the inscription is dated on 858 it probably refers to the campaigns against the Arabs, since they began at 853 with the Byzantine naval fleet sacking Damietta¹⁹⁸⁴.

On the thirteenth verse, the phrase *τὴν σὴν [ν]εουγῶν ἀσφαλῆ κατοικίαν* (making you a safe new residence) refers to the renovations of the city. The fact that they are described as providing a safe new residence to the personified Ankara does not necessary have to be considered as an exaggeration by the author to point out Michael III's deeds. They could also imply that since the damage inflicted by the Arabs in 838 was devastating for the city¹⁹⁸⁵, its renovations had to be equally large.

¹⁹⁸³ DIMITRAKOS, *Μέγα Λεξικόν*, 4108.

¹⁹⁸⁴ AHRWEILER, *Mer*, 47 (cit. n. 1), 104 (cit. n. 2); GRÉGOIRE, *Études*, 515–550; AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 124 (1417); RÉMONDON, *Damiette*, 245–250; VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 212–218, 443.

¹⁹⁸⁵ FOSS, *Ankara*, 78; FOSS - WINFIELD, *Fortifications*, 143; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 262–265; PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 359–360.

The last two verses are an *encomium* to the city. In the fourteenth verse, Ankara is described as *τερπνή* (charming) and *παμφαεστάτη* (the brightest of cities). Ankara is once more addressed directly; in the very last verse, we read [σὺ] *λαμπρότης* ([you] glorious)¹⁹⁸⁶. I would also like to point out that, by directly addressing the city, Ankara is vivified from an inanimate object to a living being –an effort that is evident throughout the whole epigram.

A. Papalexandrou argues that such kind of inscriptions on public buildings and their periodic reading served not only to perpetuate and embellish the memory of their patrons, but they could also prove useful in describing the importance and strength of the concerned monument (or city), its structural stability in a potentially dangerous region, and the ability of its state to execute an impressive building program¹⁹⁸⁷. This particular theory, which I also endorse, seems to fit well with Ankara's case. For Ankara was sacked by the Arabs in 838 and during Michael III's reign was a frontier of the empire against its most threatening enemy.

Regarding the author of both epigrams: as far as the first one is concerned – which is still partially preserved *in situ*, A. Rhoby rightfully points out that the author was probably residing in Constantinople and never went to Ankara¹⁹⁸⁸. It could be that he was simply asked to compose an epigram commemorating the rebuilding of Ankara's city walls. As a result, he was perhaps not aware that it was going to be placed at such a height. Taking into consideration the poetic tone of the epigram, its syntax, and that its text is spelled correctly, it becomes apparent that the author was very well educated. In fact, the majority of recent scholarship attributes the first of the two epigrams either to patriarch Photios, or to one of his well-educated students¹⁹⁸⁹. Further proof of this is

¹⁹⁸⁶ According to M. Grünbart, the epithet *λαμπρότης* is mainly used to address to a person in Byzantine letters. See: GRÜNBART, *Formen der Anrede*, 293.

¹⁹⁸⁷ PAPALEXANDROU, *Echoes of Orality*, 177.

¹⁹⁸⁸ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 745.

¹⁹⁸⁹ On the matter see: RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 540 (cit. n. 176).

provided in the fifth verse: τῷ εὐσεβουργῷ καὶ πολιστῇ δεσπότῃ (the pious ruler Michael).

Interestingly enough, the epithet “τῷ εὐσεβουργῷ” is attested one more time in the “anonymous” laudatory poem composed in honor of Basil I¹⁹⁹⁰, whose author is with some certainty considered to be Photios¹⁹⁹¹. The date that the inscription was engraved also coincides with Photios’ first patriarchate (858-867)¹⁹⁹². Besides, Photios might have also been the composer of the letter of 865 that was sent to pope Nicholas on Michael III’s behalf¹⁹⁹³. Personally, I share the same opinion and I believe that Photios was indeed the author of the first epigram that is addressed to the beholder of Ankara.

As for the second epigram, remarkably, modern scholarship has, remarkably, not attempted to attribute it to anyone. From my point of view, it is only logical to assume that if Photios was the composer of the first one, he would have probably composed the second one as well. In all probability, both the epigrams were created and placed at Ankara’s city walls at the same time. Aside from that, their text is similarly spelled correctly and full of metaphorical vocabulary, implying that they were composed from the same person. C. Foss also argues that there could have been a picture between these two epigrams, associating Michael III with Ankara¹⁹⁹⁴.

Because these two epigrams were placed at such a great height it is very doubtful if they were ever read by anyone. However, as A. Rhoby points out, their existence must have been taken into consideration and their text must have been recited at the inauguration ceremony of the completion of Ankara’s restorations¹⁹⁹⁵. In fact, this inauguration ceremony could have taken place in

¹⁹⁹⁰ Verse 165: τῆς εὐσεβουργοῦ παντελοῦς εὐποιίας. See: MARKOPOULOS, Anonymous, 231.

¹⁹⁹¹ MARKOPOULOS, Anonymous, 226–228.

¹⁹⁹² PmbZ #6253.

¹⁹⁹³ PHEIDAS, Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Β', 109.

¹⁹⁹⁴ FOSS, Ankara, 79.

¹⁹⁹⁵ RHOBY, Meaning, 745.

the presence of the emperor himself, with Michael III being the recipient of praise. In 859, the Byzantines raided Samosata¹⁹⁹⁶ and captured and killed about five hundred people¹⁹⁹⁷. We do know from the narratives of Genesios¹⁹⁹⁸ and Theophanes Continuatus¹⁹⁹⁹ that Michael III himself was in command of the army. So it could very well be that both these epigrams were recited in 859 with the emperor attending the ceremony. And after attending the inauguration ceremony, Michael III resumed marching towards Samosata²⁰⁰⁰.

Be that as it may, even if they were not read on an everyday basis, their silhouettes could not have gone unnoticed. Their lengthy texts must have formed an agglomeration of letters, visible to those entering the city²⁰⁰¹. That would imply that these two epigrams were not only considered as transmitters of information, but also as works of art²⁰⁰² whose silhouettes greatly enhanced the importance of the renovations.

Furthermore, even if the beholder was able to read their text, that does not necessary imply that he was able to decipher it and comprehend its meaning. The language used in both these epigrams is so sophisticated that it would require a well-educated reader to fully comprehend their meaning. Without crossing out the possibility that such readers could exist in Ankara, one has to consider the possibility that the complete comprehension of these epigrams might not have been the primary goal. As a result, the impact they had could have been twofold²⁰⁰³: for the illiterate ones, their appearance could simply symbolize the importance of the fortifications; for the literate ones, the poetic

¹⁹⁹⁶ See above, pp. 277.

¹⁹⁹⁷ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIV, 164–165 (1447).

¹⁹⁹⁸ GENESIOS, IV, 65, 22–26.

¹⁹⁹⁹ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 252, 1–4.

²⁰⁰⁰ HILD – RESTLE, Kappadokien, 79–80.

²⁰⁰¹ RHOBY, Meaning, 746.

²⁰⁰² There are numerous occasions on which inscriptions are regarded not only as transmitters of information, but also as works of art and transmitters of encoded messages. On the matter see: MELVANI, State, 169; RHOBY, Beholder, 108; RHOBY, Text as Art, 266ff.

²⁰⁰³ On the twofold meaning of verse inscriptions, see RHOBY, Text as Art, 266ff.

language of the epigrams could have further highlighted the impact Michael III's renovations had on Ankara's well-being and security against the Arabs.

In any case, if the majority of the population was not able to comprehend the epigrams, it was, with some degree of certainty, able to read the next, non metrical inscription²⁰⁰⁴, which was also in the southern façade of the citadel, above the two aforementioned epigrams²⁰⁰⁵. Nowadays, the inscription is completely lost²⁰⁰⁶. However, due to previous readings, we can reconstruct its structure and text. The inscription had two lines, was stretched on two blocks, one above the other, and its text was as follows:

+ Εἰς δόξαν τοῦ φιλοχ(ρίστου) βασιλ(έως) ἡμ(ῶν) Μιχαήλ ΗΚΚ //
ὑπουργήσαντ(ος) Βασιλίο(υ) σπαθ(αρο)καν(ιδιάτου) μ(ηνὸς) Ἰουνίου ι'
(ι)ν(δυκτιῶνος) ζ' ἔ(τους) ,ςτξζζ'²⁰⁰⁷

For the glory of our Christ-loving ruler, Michael ΗΚΚ // assisted by spatharokandidatos Basilios, on June 10th, 7th indiction, year, ςτξζζ' (6367-5508=859).

In the first line of the inscription, Michael III is once again honored (εἰς δόξαν) for renovating Ankara. In the second line, the inscription attests that Michael III was assisted by the spatharokandidatos²⁰⁰⁸ Basileios. In 1927/8, H.

²⁰⁰⁴ On this inscription, see: BELKE, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, 128; FOSS, *Ankara*, 79; FRENCH, *Inscriptions of Ankara*, 197 (with older bibliography); GRÉGOIRE, *Ancyre et les Arabes*, 444–445; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 161 (n. 3), 263–265; PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 359; RHOBY, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 538; SERIN, *Ankara*, 1272–1273.

²⁰⁰⁵ PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 359.

²⁰⁰⁶ PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 161 (n. 3).

²⁰⁰⁷ Transcription of the inscription after U. Peschlow, who cites H. Grégoire's transcription, with slight alterations. See: GRÉGOIRE, *Ancyre et les Arabes*, 444–445; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 263 (cit. n. 51).

²⁰⁰⁸ For the rank of spatharokandidatos, indicatively see: WINKELMANN, *Rang und Ämtstruktur*, 39.

Grégoire identified the spatharokandidatos Basileios as Basil the Macedonian, the future Byzantine emperor²⁰⁰⁹. The same argument had been reproduced by A. Vasiliev in 1935²⁰¹⁰ and in 1946, and by U. Serin in 2011²⁰¹¹. However, as U. Peschlow and E. Ivison's meticulous studies have shown²⁰¹², the aforementioned Basileios is not Basil the Macedonian; in all probability, the inscription refers to Basileios²⁰¹³ the strategos and spatharokandidatos of the Bucellarian theme.

On the other hand, not once is Basil I the Macedonian mentioned holding the rank of spatharokandidatos in any of the Byzantine sources²⁰¹⁴. The possibility that the inscription refers to the founder of the Macedonian dynasty should therefore be excluded; for if he did hold that rank, the biased in favor of the Macedonian dynasty historiographers would have mentioned it.

On the other hand and to the best of my knowledge, there are two seals mentioning a Basileios, who was strategos and spatharokandidatos of the Bucellarian theme –whose capital was Ankara²⁰¹⁵. The first one is in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul²⁰¹⁶, whereas the second one is in Dumbarton Oaks²⁰¹⁷; they are both dated on the ninth century and serve as evidence that regarding the concerned period there existed a Basileios, strategos and spatharokandidatos of the Bucellarian theme. As Peschlow and Ivison remark, it is probable this strategos, commissioned by the emperor, would also organize and oversee the renovation projects²⁰¹⁸.

²⁰⁰⁹ GRÉGOIRE, *Ancyre et les Arabes*, 444–447.

²⁰¹⁰ VASILIEV, *Byzance et les Arabes I*, 235–236; VASILIEV, *Russian Attack*, 152.

²⁰¹¹ SERIN, *Ankara*, 1272–1273.

²⁰¹² IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 12–13; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 161 (n. 3), 263–265.

²⁰¹³ PmbZ #907.

²⁰¹⁴ PmbZ #832.

²⁰¹⁵ BELKE, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, 127.

²⁰¹⁶ “Βασ[ιλ]ήω βασιλικῶ σπα[θ]ροκανδ(ιδάτω) (καὶ) στ[ρα]τα(η)γῶ Β[ου]κελ(λ)αρίων”. See: CHEYNET et al., *Sceaux byzantins*, 274ff (n. 3.33).

²⁰¹⁷ “Βασ[ιλ]ήω βασιλικῶ σ[πα]θαροκ[αν]διδ(άτω) καὶ στ[ρα]τα[τη]γῶ Βου[κελ(λ)αρίων]”. See: DO Seals VI, 10 (n. 1.26).

²⁰¹⁸ PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 264; IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 12–13.

Such kind of inscriptions are also attested elsewhere. As I have already mentioned above, on the Silymbria walls there resided an inscription that commemorated the renovations that took place during Theodora's regency. In Silymbria, there also existed three more inscriptions that are reflective on our case. One of these inscriptions commemorates Theoktistos²⁰¹⁹, *logothetes tou dromou*²⁰²⁰. The second one refers to a *spatharokandidatos* Theophanes²⁰²¹, whereas the third one to a *spatharokandidatos* Sergios²⁰²². As E. Ivison rightfully suggests, the commemoration of the *logothete* Theoktistos may suggest that it was he who ordered these *spatharokandidatoi* to renovate the city's fortifications²⁰²³.

At the end of the second line, the inscription bears the date 859 (6367-5508=859). In fact, this is the only inscription that mentions the date that the renovations took place. This enables us to confirm that since Ankara was sacked by the Arabs in 838, more than twenty years had passed before the fortifications of the city were repaired. In any case, it can be concluded that even if the majority of the population was not able to read the two nearby epigrams, it would learn the basic information about the renovation from the non-metrical simple inscription.

The last two inscriptions are also non-metrical and stand on an embrasure of the southwestern corner tower²⁰²⁴. The first²⁰²⁵ of them is engraved on both sides of a cross, commemorates Michael III, and its text is as follows:

ΜΙΧ // Αἰλ // μεγ // ἄλου // βασ // ιλέ // ως πολὰ τὰ ἔτι²⁰²⁶.

²⁰¹⁹ ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 266-268 (n. 66, and comments on page 283); COVEL, *Voyages*, 362 (n. 3).

²⁰²⁰ OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 311-312.

²⁰²¹ ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 280-283 (n. 75).

²⁰²² ASDRACHA, *Inscriptions*, II, 279-280, 283 (n. 74); COVEL, *Voyages*, 361 (n. 2); PmbZ #6684.

²⁰²³ IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 12.

²⁰²⁴ PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 359-360; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 162.

²⁰²⁵ On this inscription, see: GRÉGOIRE, *Michel III et Basile*, 340-343; PESCHLOW, *Ankara*, 162 (n. 4) (with older bibliography); PESCHLOW, *Ancyra*, 360.

²⁰²⁶ Transcription of the inscription from H. Grégoire. See: GRÉGOIRE, *Michel III et Basile*, 341.

Michael, the great emperor, many years.

The main message of the inscription is transmitted through the title μέγας βασιλεύς. So, even if the illiterate population of Ankara could not read or comprehend the meaning of the two aforementioned epigrams, they could be informed from this non mentrical, simple epigraphical text that Michael III was ruling as a sovereign.

The second inscription commemorates Basileios, the aforementioned strategos and spatharokandidatos of the Bucclarian theme, and its text is as follows:

Κ(ύρι)ε βο // ήθη τ // ò σò // δού // λο / Β // αση // λήο // σπα // θαρ // οκα // νδι
// δά // το —²⁰²⁷

Lord help your servant Basileios, spatharokandidatos

The fact that Basileios is attested in two inscriptions reflects not only his important role in carrying out the imperial project, but also that provincial administrators and commanders were responsible for the defenses in their area of jurisdiction. That is to say, just like the spatharokandidatoi Theophanes and Sergios were responsible for the renovations on the city walls of Silymbria²⁰²⁸, so was Basileios for the fortifications on Ankara.

The diligence of the provincial administrators and commanders was a decisive factor in repairing and reinforcing the city's defenses. It is also very probable that the collaboration between the Byzantine court and the provincial administrators acted as a means of connectivity between Constantinople and the Eastern provinces. The close connection the Byzantine capital enjoyed with the Eastern provinces is observable only via the epigraphical texts; no Byzantine historiographer makes any mention regarding the reinforcement of

²⁰²⁷ Transcription of the inscription from H. Grégoire. See: GRÉGOIRE, Michel III et Basile, 341.

²⁰²⁸ IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 12–13.

fortifications during Michael III's reign –whether in the Byzantine capital or in the provinces.

On the contrary, neglecting a city's fortifications could result in the city being captured by the enemy. Al-Tabarī narrates that in 838, before the Arabs sacked Amorium, the patrikios and strategos Aetios²⁰²⁹, despite imperial commands, neglected the reconstruction of a section of the city walls which had been knocked down due to heavy rainstorms. The latter commanded the walls to be rebuilt at the very last minute because he feared that Theophilos might visit the city. This delay proved fatal; al-Mu'tasim was informed that this portion of the walls was very hastily reconstructed and merely filled with rubble, and ordered his mangonels to strike at that section. The Arab mangonels then rapidly stroke and split open the wall²⁰³⁰, gaining a huge advantage over the Byzantines.

Yet Michael III's project to renovate Ankara was not limited to the city's fortifications. The church of St Clement, the most popular saint of the city²⁰³¹, was in all probability also renovated during Michael III's sole reign. Today, only the walls of the bema survive, but, according to recent scholarship, the main building was once a basilica with a square nave, a narthex, and a dome; the latter resembled the one at the church of the Lady of the Pharos, which was inaugurated between 12 April and the end of the year 864²⁰³².

As I have already stated at the beginning of the chapter, inscriptions are one of the very few primary sources that provide impartial and unaltered information about Michael III. To begin with, apart from narrating lavishing expenditures, exorbitant christening gifts, and imaginary defeats against the Arabs, the biased Byzantine historiographers make no mention of any of the

²⁰²⁹ PmbZ #108.

²⁰³⁰ AL-ṬABARĪ, XXXIII, 108–109 (1245–1246).

²⁰³¹ FOSS, Ankara, 34.

²⁰³² JENKINS - MANGO, Date, 130. On the church of St Clement, see: FOSS, Ankara, 83–84; PESCHLOW, Ancyra, 354–356, 360.

reconstructive projects that took place during Michael III's reign and strengthened the defenses of the Byzantine capital and the Byzantine frontier in Asia Minor²⁰³³. It is only through the inscriptions that we learn of his renovative projects.

More particularly, the "case studies" of Smyrna, Nicaea, and Ankara clearly demonstrate the effort and care that was provided during Michael III's reign in order to strengthen the Byzantine frontier against the Arabs. These renovations on fortresses, walls, and bastions would also provide the necessary military bases for the future Macedonian emperors. In fact, by carrying out his imperial renovative project, along with his decisive victories on the eastern front, Michael III laid the groundwork for the future successful campaigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John I Tzimiskes against the Arabs.

The preserved inscriptions –both in the Byzantine capital and in the Byzantine provinces– testify the extensive reconstruction projects that took place during his reign. These inscriptions also enable us to –at least partially– contradict the argument of the Byzantine historians that Michael III wasted the imperial money on reckless activities. For in order to carry out such a major reconstructive project, considerable sums of money would apparently have been invested²⁰³⁴.

H. Grégoire was the first who meticulously studied the inscriptions of Michael III's reign, in an effort to critically review his image. In order to counterweight the accusations of the Byzantine writers, who portray him as an incompetent ruler, he turned to the inscriptions of Ankara who mention him as μέγας βασιλεύς. However, taking into consideration only epigraphic evidence to critically review one's image would seem to me rather unreliable.

²⁰³³ FOSS, Ankara, 74–75, 79; FOSS - WINFIELD, Fortifications, 143–145; IVISON, Renewal and revival, 6.

²⁰³⁴ IVANOVA, Bardas, 73–74.

Inscriptions that refer to the emperor can be very panegyric in tone; they can often be used as a means of propaganda in order for the emperor to display his power. This also applies to the inscriptions of Michael III. For example, all the inscriptions in Asia Minor bear his name and they are dated between 856 and 859 respectively (Smyrna in 856/857, Nicaea in 857/858, and Ankara in 859).

Despite the fact that these inscriptions bear the date on which the reconstruction projects were completed, taking into consideration the scale of the imperial project it is not unlikely that the reconstruction activities started during the regency of Theodora. However, Theodora is not mentioned on the inscriptions, for by the time the imperial project was finished, Michael III was the sole ruler. In addition to this, E. Ivison argues that it was Bardas who probably ordered the rebuilding projects in the eastern frontier²⁰³⁵. Although this is a very reasonable argument, Michael III's uncle is once again not mentioned. And one should also keep in mind that in Constantinople there exist two verse inscriptions that bear both the names of Michael III and Bardas, indicating their participation. As a result, although Bardas' involvement is very likely, Michael III takes the whole credit for the renovations of the fortifications.

On the other hand, the fact that the inscriptions that refer to the fortifications bear the emperor's name can be regarded not only as state property, but also as a guarantee for stability and durability²⁰³⁶. At the same time, the major rebuilding project, as attested through the inscriptions, enabled Michael III not only to represent himself the way he wanted, but also to appear to his subjects as a humane emperor. The inscriptions that were produced during his sovereignty were also used as a means to convey imperial ideology, which in the ninth century aimed at displaying the concept of imperial renewal from the Late Antiquity. As C. Mango and P. Magdalino have shown, this concept did

²⁰³⁵ IVison, *Renewal and revival*, 26.

²⁰³⁶ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 747.

not imply the creation of something new, but the regaining of what had been lost²⁰³⁷.

The context of this concept is applied on building inscriptions and is noticeable in four ways. Firstly, through the cruciform shape of the monograms on the “Beautiful door” in Hagia Sophia. Their shape recalls the cruciform monograms of Ioustinianos I and Theodora. Secondly, through the re-appearance of letter forms that recall Late Antiquity epigraphic scripts; *beta* (β) and *omega* (Ω) in Constantinople, Smyrna and Nicaea, and *sigma* (Σ) and *omega* (Ω) in Ankara.

Thirdly, through the notable revival of verse inscriptions. Regarding Byzantine epigraphy, epigrams, whose practice was more common during Late Antiquity²⁰³⁸, make a re-appearance during the reigns of Theophilos and Michael III. However, on a cultural level this revival is marked by the use of dodecasyllables, instead of hexameter or elegiacs²⁰³⁹. Lastly, through describing Michael III in the ten-verse epigram in Ankara as εὐεργέτης (benefactor) in an effort to display him as a diligent ruler who cares for his subjects. Such a virtue was also considered to be essential for Ioustinianos I²⁰⁴⁰.

The attempts to connect Michael III’s building project with Ioustinianos I, as expressed in inscriptions on public buildings, were of particular importance for promoting imperial ideology. For, regarding imperial reconstruction projects and building of fortifications, Anastasios I and especially Ioustinianos I set the example²⁰⁴¹ which the succeeding emperors tried to imitate²⁰⁴². Michael III may have accordingly tried to imitate Ioustinianos I. In addition to that, it should be

²⁰³⁷ On the matter, see: IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 19; MAGDALINO, *Introduction*, 5-9; MAGDALINO, *Nea Ekklesia*, 52–54; MANGO, *Art*, 181–182.

²⁰³⁸ RHOBY, *Meaning*, 734ff.

²⁰³⁹ MANGO, *Lessons*, 34; RHOBY, *Meaning*, 734–737.

²⁰⁴⁰ IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 22.

²⁰⁴¹ On Justinian’s building program, indicatively see: BROWNING, *Justinian*, 117ff; EVANS, *Justinian*, 49–58.

²⁰⁴² IVISON, *Renewal and revival*, 18–19.

noted that for Michael III, Late Antique emperors have also served as imitation models on other occasions as well; Ioustinianos II's coins of the Christ *Pantokrator* had been the models for the second class of Michael III's coins²⁰⁴³.

Moreover, all the inscriptions in Asia Minor (Smyrna, Nicaea, and Ankara) refer to Michael III as μέγας βασιλεύς. As I have already mentioned, the same phrase is also found on his class III miliaresia, and he is also mentioned as πιστός and μέγας βασιλεύς in the tenth homily of Photios. The emperor used the title μέγας βασιλεύς to convey to his subjects that his mother's regency was over and that he was now ruling on his own.

To conclude, like so many of Michael III's other achievements, so has his rebuilding activity been deliberately suppressed by the biased historians of the Macedonian dynasty. Were it not for the inscriptions we would not be able to evaluate his imperial reconstruction project, contradict the accusations of him being only a reckless ruler, and take a glimpse into his personality.

²⁰⁴³ BRECKENRIDGE, Justinian II, 47, 56; WALKER, Emperor, 47.



Locations of the aforementioned inscriptions (Bing maps):

1. Constantinople. Inscriptions in Hagia Sophia, land walls, and sea walls (840-862).
2. Silymbria. Inscription on the city walls mentioning Theodora, Michael III, and Thecla (842-856).
3. Glavinica (Ballsh). Inscription mentioning the Christianization of Boris (866).
4. Smyrna. Inscription on the fortifications commemorating Michael III (856/857).
5. Nicaea. Inscriptions on the city's fortifications commemorating Michael III (857/858).
6. Ankara. Inscriptions on the city's fortifications commemorating Michael III (859).

Conclusion: an assessment on Michael III and his reign

The aim of this study is to evaluate Michael III's reign and character. This evaluation is based on several factors: (i) critical examination of the biased Byzantine sources (Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii*) commissioned and supervised by Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, who sought to assassinate the character of Michael III to justify Basil's murder; (ii) the manner the Byzantine court approached and reacted to pope Nicholas' aspirations on the Roman Primacy and his claims over the direct jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria; (iii) a detailed analysis of the campaigns that took place during his reign. This analysis was based not only on the narratives of the Byzantine sources, but also on how Michael III's campaigns are recorded by non-Byzantine contemporary and subsequent sources. An in-depth analysis (iv) of the restoration works that took place during his reign, as recorded in the contemporary epigraphical material; (v) an examination on how Michael III is portrayed on the epigraphical material and on the legends of his coins and seals.

Michael III has been characterized by Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and *Vita Basilii* as an indifferent, disrespectful, prodigal, and drunkard emperor. Yet none of these accusations derive from historical facts; they are based on negative traits culled from Plutarch's *vitae* on Nero and Mark Antony and were subsequently enriched with fictional episodes. Michael III was not at all indifferent and disrespectful. On the contrary, he was a very popular ruler among his subjects, and his government cared for the well-being of the empire and paid special attention to its defences.

This conclusion derives from the fact that, as I have already described²⁰⁴⁴, the Byzantine government sought to renovate the secular and ecclesiastical buildings –not only the ones in the capital, but also the ones in the provinces. Of course, none of these renovations are attested in the narratives of Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and the *Vita Basilii*. Their specific purpose to blacken Michael III's image is truly remarkable, and it becomes more evident if we consider the following: Theophanes Continuatus refers extensively to the building projects of Theophilos; similarly, the *Vita Basilii* also provides a lengthy description of the restoration works on buildings, mosaics, and other works of art commissioned by Basil I²⁰⁴⁵.

This extended description does not indicate that the author of *Vita Basilii* was interested in art and architecture; it is politically motivated. Building was one of the most essential activities of the ideal monarch, who in this way demonstrated to his subjects the power of creation and of general benevolence²⁰⁴⁶. Taking that into consideration, it becomes apparent that Konstantinos VII intended to display his grandfather as an ideal emperor.

However, regarding Michael III's (re)building activities, the only Byzantine sources that refer to them are Symeon Magister and Pseudo-Symeon²⁰⁴⁷. Yet, even these sources do not offer a complete account of his renovative activities –for example, the renovation of the walls of the Byzantine capital is not attested. Under this prism, it becomes apparent that it is only through the archaeological and epigraphical material that we can comprehend the size and importance of Michael III's renovative projects.

More specifically, the epigraphical material that has been documented by modern scholarship has shown the actual size and importance of Michael III's

²⁰⁴⁴ See above, Chapter I.

²⁰⁴⁵ *VITA BASILII*, 264, 12-308,29.

²⁰⁴⁶ G. DOWNEY, *Imperial Building Records in Malalas*. *BZ* 38 (1938) 10 (and cit. n. 2); JENKINS, *Classical Background*, 29; LILIE, *Reality and Invention*, 164.

²⁰⁴⁷ JENKINS - MANGO, *Date*, 135.

restoration activities; it was not limited to the Byzantine capital, but it also expanded in the empire's provinces. The "case studies" of the restoration works in Smyrna, Nicaea and Ankara demonstrate that these cities, once restored, functioned as military bases and were of particular importance for the victorious campaigns against the Abbasid Caliphate. At the same time, they testify that Michael III's government was interested in the general well-being of each city. Along with Ankara's fortifications, the church of St Clement, the most popular saint of the city, was redecorated; Amorion, the birthplace of Michael III's dynasty was also renovated from its destruction in the August of 838 by the armies of al-Mutassim²⁰⁴⁸.

The studied epigraphical material, coins and seals, along with Photios' tenth homily also enable us to examine the manner he wanted to be portrayed to his subjects. In his tenth homily, dated between 12 April and the end of the year 864²⁰⁴⁹ and given at the inauguration of the church of the Lady of the Pharos, Photios refers to Michael III as "πιστῶ καὶ μεγάλῳ βασιλεῖ"²⁰⁵⁰. The same phrase accompanies the emperor's name on the reverse of his class III miliaresia, whereas inscriptions in Smyrna, Nicaea and Ankara describe Michael III as μέγας βασιλεύς. It has to be remarked that Michael III is mentioned as such only after he started reigning on his own; through this title he wanted to demonstrate to his subjects that he was now the only βασιλεύς.

Michael III's victorious campaigns also deserve a thorough analysis²⁰⁵¹. During his reign, the Byzantine empire had been in a constant state of conflict and warfare both in the East and West. In southern Italy, despite the fact that the Aghlabid Arabs could not be checked, it did not lose its strategic importance. Two major military operations testify this: the first one is the battle

²⁰⁴⁸ TSIVIKIS, Amorion, 113-115.

²⁰⁴⁹ JENKINS - MANGO, Date, 130.

²⁰⁵⁰ MANGO, Homilies, 184.

²⁰⁵¹ See above, pp. 220-291.

of Charzanites, which took place in 845 and ended with the heavy defeat of the Byzantine forces. The second one took place near Syracuse in 858, i.e during Michael III's sole reign; the defeated Aghlabid Arabs subsequently retreated to Palermo.

Similarly, although the outcome was not favorable for the Byzantines, it is apparent that the empire truly sought to recover Crete from the Andalusian Arabs. Two major campaigns took place during the concerned period. The first one was launched in 843, during the regency of Theodora; although it started rather promisingly, shortly after the expedition had landed on the island, Theoktistos departed for Constantinople and the expedition failed. The second one took place in 866; this time the expedition did not even reach its destination. When the Byzantine force camped in Kepoi on April 21, Bardas, with Michael III's consent, was assassinated by Basil and his conspirators –the same group of people participated in his murder as well. The expedition of 866 was subsequently called off. Crete was eventually recovered in 960/961, with the campaign being led by the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas.

The attack of the Rhos on the Byzantine capital, which started on 18 June 860, was also successfully repelled. Although the emperor was not in Constantinople, nor was the city adequately defended, when he heard the news of the attack, he rushed back to the capital to see the defence of the city. The Rhos eventually withdrew some time in April or May in 861. In fact, the reason that Michael III was not in Constantinople when the Rhos appeared is that he was in Maupotamos, near the Sangarios river, marching against the Abbasid Caliphate.

Michael III's victorious campaigns between 856 and 863 against the Abbasid Caliphate mark one of the most glorious eras of Byzantine military history. Before this period Byzantium was mainly focused on defending the Byzantine frontier against the Arab raids. But, the aforementioned victorious campaigns turned the tide against the Abbasid Caliphate and enabled the Byzantines to

gain the offensive. These victorious campaigns, along with the renovated fortifications on major cities of Asia Minor, greatly contributed to the future military victories of Nikephoros II Phokas²⁰⁵² and Ioannes Tzimiskes in Asia Minor.

Regarding Michael III's reign, among many noteworthy victories, the ones that stand out the most are the battles of Lalakaon and of Mayyāfāriqīn, which took place in 863. During this year the Byzantines managed to eliminate their most threatening opponents, i.e. Amer, and Alī ibn Yaḥyā, whereas Karbeas no longer posed a threat. It must be highlighted that during the concerned victorious era (856-863) Michael III was personally in command of the Byzantine army on at least two campaigns. The first one is the campaign of 859 against Samosata; the second one takes place in 863, at which on September 3 the Byzantine emperor intercepted Amer at Marḡ-al-Usquf (Bishop's Meadow).

Of course, none of these campaigns are mentioned by Genesios, Theophanes Continuatus, and Vita Basilii; Symeon Magister, although not negatively biased towards Michael III, does not also mention them. The political intentions of the former historiographers to denigrate Michael III's image leave no room for the narration of victorious campaigns. This is apparent from the narrative they provide regarding a number of victorious military operations.

More precisely, the Byzantine naval operation of 853 on Damietta is not mentioned, nor is the one of 858 near Syracuse, which I have already mentioned. The outcome of Petronas' campaign in 856 against the Arabs and their Paulicians allies is also not recorded. The manner the biased Byzantine historiographers have dealt with Michael III's victorious campaign in Samosata is even more remarkable of their political intentions. This time they did not simply suppress the campaign or its outcome, they completely falsify it. They describe a fictional defeat of the Byzantine campaign, which is identical with

²⁰⁵² PmbZ #25535.

the battle of Dazimon dated 22 July, 838. As for the extraordinary military victories of 863, they also suppress the battle of Bishop's Meadow dated on September 3, on which Amer was intercepted by the Byzantine emperor.

We learn of the actual outcome of these campaigns from the narratives of the Arab sources. As I have already mentioned, their account on the events is not only fuller and more accurate but they also serve as a medium of *synkrisis* in order to extract historical truth from propaganda. The reason is, of course, that they are not politically driven to suppress or distort the events of Michael III's campaigns.

Once more, it becomes apparent that Michael III was neither indifferent nor unworthy as an emperor. He was an energetic ruler, who personally participated not only in military campaigns, but also in ecclesiastical synods, such as the one of the summer of 867, at which Photios excommunicated Boris, Nicholas, and the false doctrines that the papal missionaries were preaching in Bulgaria.

Taking into consideration the military operations and the renovative projects across the empire, it becomes evident that they must have cost a considerable amount of money. This proves that Michael III was not a prodigal ruler, and, mainly, that he did not empty the imperial treasury on lavish expenditures, such as to extortionate christening gifts to the children of the men who competed with him in chariot races; nor was it emptied because the emperor was bestowing extravagant sums of money to his detestable companions, because they performed unspeakable things.

As I have already demonstrated, the fiscal decline during Michael III's reign, was, in all probability, because of his aforementioned large-scale renovation projects and his numerous military operations that took place both in East and West. Of course, one does not need to agree with my calculations, according to which I made evident that there were at least 1.461.600 nomismata in the

imperial treasury when Basil assumed the Byzantine throne²⁰⁵³; modern scholarship has also argued that Michael III spent a considerable amount of money on his aforementioned reconstructive projects and campaigns and that the accusations that Theophanes Continuatus and *Vita Basilii* record are fictional²⁰⁵⁴.

Besides, when Basil assumed the throne, the empire was perfectly functional from an economic perspective. This becomes apparent from the operations that Basil undertook during the first years of his reign. That is to say, if the imperial treasury was indeed empty, then in 868 Basil would not be able to finance the large naval operation of Niketas Ooryphas²⁰⁵⁵ to break the Arab siege of Ragusa in the Dalmatian coast and regain control of the region²⁰⁵⁶. Additionally, in 869 he would not be able to fund a second naval expedition in Southern Italy, at which Niketas Ooryphas attempted, along with the allied forces of Louis II, to regain control of Bari. It is common knowledge that the expedition was not successful and the Byzantine fleet returned to Corinth²⁰⁵⁷. Nor would the founder of the Macedonian dynasty be able to commission during his reign the (re)construction and redecoration of secular and ecclesiastical buildings, which are in *Vita Basilii*'s narrative in length described²⁰⁵⁸.

Yet, these facts do not necessarily prove that Michael III was a magnificent and a well-balanced ruler. As historical facts demonstrate, he was negatively influenced by some of his courtiers, who exploited him for their personal

²⁰⁵³ See above, pp. 292-315.

²⁰⁵⁴ CODESO, Miguel III, 120; DAPERGOLAS, Michael III, 211-216; KARLIN-HAYTER, Money, 1-10.

²⁰⁵⁵ PmbZ #25696.

²⁰⁵⁶ ²⁰⁵⁶ The Arabs began raiding Ragusa during the last year of Michael III's reign. Basil subsequently sent Niketas Ooryphas, along with one hundred ships to break off the Arab siege. When the raiding Arab fleet was informed of the approach of the Byzantines, it swiftly abandoned the siege and returned to Southern Italy. The Byzantines subsequently regained control of the region and founded the Dalmatian theme. On the matter, see: TOBIAS, Basil I, 156-157; VLYSIDOU, Πολιτική, 303-304; VLYSIDOU et al., Στρατεύματα, 297-298.

²⁰⁵⁷ EICKHOFF, Seekrieg, 213-218; TOBIAS, Basil I, 158-161; VLYSIDOU, Πολιτική, 303-308; VLYSIDOU et al., Στρατεύματα, 299-302.

²⁰⁵⁸ VITA BASILII, 264, 12-308, 29.

ambitions. Although at his time boys from the age of fifteen thereafter were considered mature enough to make their own decisions, Michael III's judgement was at times not mature and insightful enough. More specifically, Bardas managed to convince Michael III that Theoktistos was holding the young emperor up and that he would not be able to truly rule for himself unless Theodora's most trusted adviser is to be removed. Basil, along with the help of Symbatios²⁰⁵⁹, Bardas' son-in-law, also managed to delude the emperor that his uncle was plotting against him. The result was, of course, Bardas' slaughter in front of his nephew at Kepoi, during the campaign to retake Crete.

Yet, although Bardas' removal from the political scene must have certainly impaired the effectiveness of Michael III's government, that does not mean that it was not able to function properly. For example, we know for a fact that Michael III personally presided over the synod that took place in the summer of 867²⁰⁶⁰. An emperor that was so much into his personal entertainment and incapable of ruling would have certainly ignored such kind of matters.

As far as other aspects of Michael III's character are concerned, I find it very likely that some of his predecessors served to him as models of ideal emperors. I refer mainly to Ioustinianos II and Theophilos. As regards the former, it is known that Michael III copied his iconography and re-introduced the bust of Christ on his coinage. Yet, it is also likely that Michael III imitated Ioustinianos II's vigor towards the papacy. Just as the *rhinotmitos* emperor threatened with military intervention pope Sergios, unless he signs the tomes of the Quinisext council, so had Michael III threatened pope Nicholas, unless he would repatriate to Constantinople Theognostos and the rest of the pro-Ignatian delegation that was residing in Rome²⁰⁶¹. Similarly, it could be that Michael III tried to imitate his father by walking in the streets of the Byzantine capital and

²⁰⁵⁹ PmbZ #7169.

²⁰⁶⁰ GEMEINHARDT, Filioque-Kontroverse, 198.

²⁰⁶¹ See above, pp. 199.

making contact with his subjects or by personally participating in military expeditions, just as his father campaign against the Abbasid Caliphate in Asia Minor²⁰⁶².

All the concerned aspects of Michael III's reign that I have separately presented point to the fact that the last member of the Amorian dynasty was an energetic and popular emperor, who, regardless of his personal ruler-models or flaws of his character, cared for the well-being of the empire and its subjects. An emperor who was personally participating in the campaigns of the empire against its most formidable enemies; his presence had certainly increased the morale of the Byzantine armies, whereas the empire's formidable military strength quickly became known beyond its borders. It has to be stated that in 864, when the Byzantines unexpectedly invaded Bulgaria from its Southeastern borders and simultaneously their fleet raided Mesembria, Boris immediately capitulated²⁰⁶³.

It is during Michael III's sole reign that secular education in the Byzantine capital was revitalized with the founding of a school in Magnaura. As P. Magdalino rightfully points out, the re-codification of law and the promotion of the education would have happened regardless of the dynastic change²⁰⁶⁴. At the same time, despite the unprecedented challenge from the Papacy, the jurisdiction of Illyricum and of the patrimonies of Sicily and Calabria were retained by the patriarchate of Constantinople. Regarding the latter, its ecclesiastical sphere was also expanded during the concerned period. In 864, the Christianization of Bulgaria took place. Despite Boris' turn to Rome in 866, the matter was eventually settled in the last session of the synod of 870, where it was decided that Bulgaria would henceforward be under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. Taking the aforementioned historical framework into

²⁰⁶² On the matter see: CODONER, *Theophilos and the East*, 215-312.

²⁰⁶³ See above, pp. 190.

²⁰⁶⁴ MAGDALINO, *Knowledge*, 195.

consideration, it becomes apparent that Michael III's reign opened up entirely new perspectives for Byzantium –evidence of revival and prosperity could be witnessed everywhere. Thus, it might be reasonable to consider redating the so called “Macedonian Renaissance” from Basil's reign to the last member of the Amorian dynasty.

Michael III was in any case not indifferent or disrespectful; nor was he a debauched drunkard. As I have already demonstrated²⁰⁶⁵, Michael III was drinking, just as his predecessors and successors were. His excessive drinking is a paraphrase from the way Antony is described in Plutarch's lives and does not correspond to his true character. It is a negative trait culled from the past and was attributed to him to politically make him appear as an incompetent emperor, whose sole interest was his personal interest and drinking bouts with his detestable companions.

All the aforementioned characterizations that Michael III was a drunkard, impious, indifferent, unworthy and prodigal emperor were used by the Macedonian propaganda to justify Basil's murder. Michael III's image had to be distorted and blackened by any means possible, so that when Basil assumed the throne “...τὰ κρείττω τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν πραγμάτων μεταβολήν...²⁰⁶⁶”. As N. Iorga highlights, no Byzantine emperor has been treated so badly, both in Byzantine and later literature, as Michael III the “drunkard”, a Byzantine Caligula²⁰⁶⁷. His remark is truly accurate, considering that, as I have shown, the disparaging epithet “drunkard” was also adopted by later Byzantine historiographers and became part of Michael III's legacy, as have the rest of the fictional traits of his character.

Yet despite Konstantinos VII's effort to suppress his accomplishments and blacken his image, Michael III's achievements have lived on in unbiased

²⁰⁶⁵ See above, pp. 154-167.

²⁰⁶⁶ VITA BASILII, 112, 2-3.

²⁰⁶⁷ IORGA, Essai, 143.

Byzantine sources, in Arab sources, in epigraphical material, as well as in the *De Cerimoniis* –a work of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos himself, where the special hymn that was sung in honor of Petronas and Michael III's victories of 863 are preserved. And, although later Byzantine historiography has treated Michael III unjustly, Michael III's legacy has been indirectly preserved by the later Bulgarian and Slavonic apocryphal literature. His features and achievements were transferred over to Bulgarian historical personalities (Boris), whereas the Slavonic apocryphal literature, based on his victorious campaigns, has considered him as the ideal king-savior.

By way of epilogue, the present study has contributed to the critical review and eventual rehabilitation of Michael III's image in modern scholarship. Taking into consideration the deliberate modification of Michael III's image by the biased Byzantine historiography, the study demonstrates that seldom was the latter interested in narrating history impartially. Pleasing its audience by serving certain objectives and political intentions was more important –hence its deliberate falsification of events to exalt their heroes and besmear their enemies. In this respect, Michael III's blackened image serves as a fine example and simultaneously as a warning for modern Byzantinists not to uncritically adopt the narratives of the Byzantine historiography without assessing its ultimate or hidden intentions.

Concise index of chronological events prior to, during and shortly after the reign of Michael III

| | |
|---------|--|
| 831-836 | Birth of Basil. |
| 838 | Sack of Amorium by the Abbasid Caliphate. |
| 840 | Michael III is born on January 9/10. |
| 842 | Theophilos dies on January 20. Michael III succeeds Theophilos on January 20. |
| 843 | Ioannes VII Grammatikos is removed from the patriarchal throne on March 4. Methodios becomes patriarch on the same day. The holy icons are officially restored on 11 March. Theoktistos fails to retake Crete. |
| 843-844 | Theodora's regency conducts raids in Asia Minor against the Paulicians. |
| 844 | Under Theoktistos and Bardas' commands, the Byzantine army is defeated by the Paulicians in Maupotamos. |
| 847 | Patriarch Methodios passes away on June 14. Ignatios becomes patriarch on July 3. |
| 854-855 | Basil arrives in Constantinople. |
| 853 | The Byzantine fleet raids Damietta on May 22. An Arab weaponry is destroyed and the Byzantines sail off with Arab prisoners. None of the Byzantine sources record the attack. |
| 854 | A second expedition of two hundred Byzantine ships raids Damietta once more. |

- 855 Theodora forces Michael III to break his liason with Eudocia Ingerina and marry Eudocia Dekapolitissa. With Michael III's consent, Theoktistos is murdered on November 20. His murder signifies the end of Theodora's regency. Michael III's mother remains in the palace at least till 15 March 856.
- 856 Basil goes to Patras with Theophilitzes; he meets Danielis.
Michael III officially becomes sole ruler on March 15.
Basil meets Michael III.
- 857-858 Theodora is ousted from the palace and forced to become a nun.
- 858 Ignatios is deposed and exiled to the island of Terebinthos on 23 October.
- 859 The Byzantine fleet raids Damietta for the third time.
The Byzantines launch a campaign against Samosata and Michael III is personally in command of the army. Although the campaign is successful, Theophanes Continuatus and Genesios describe a fictional defeat of the Byzantines, which is in terms identical to the genuine defeat of the battle of Dazimon (838).
Photios becomes patriarch on December 25.
- 860 Rhos begin raiding Constantinople on June 18; they fail to breach the walls.

- 861 Konstantinos (Cyril) is sent to the Khazars in order to convert them to Christianity but the mission is unsuccessful. Soon thereafter Judaism is established as the national religion.
- The fleet of the Rhos retreats from Bosporos.
- The πρωτοδευτέρα synod at Constantinople, with the presence of the papal legates, condemns Ignatios.
- 862 Bardas is elevated to the rank of Caesar on April 22.
- 863 A synod is convoked in Rome; pope Nicholas reconfirms his decision against Photios and in favor of Ignatios.
- The battle of Porson takes place on September 3.
- The Byzantine army slays Amer and his son on the battlefield.
- Between 18 October and 16 November the Byzantines intercept and kill Alī ibn Yaḥyā and his army in Mayyāfāriqīn. With Karbas no longer posing a threat, the Byzantines manage in the course of one year to eliminate their most dangerous opponents in Asia Minor.
- Rastislav turns to Byzantium and asks from Michael III Orthodox missionaries.
- 864 Christianization of Bulgaria.
- Patriarch Photios delivers his tenth homily at the inauguration by the emperor Michael III of the palatine church of Our Lady of the Pharos.
- 866 Bardas is assassinated on 21 April. The murder takes place Michael III's tent at Kepoi. With the

emperor's consent, Basil I stabs him. The expedition is subsequently called off.

Boris renounces the Christian Orthodox faith and turns to Rome.

Basil becomes co-emperor on May 26.

867

With the attendance of the Eastern patriarchs a synod is convoked in Constantinople. Photios excommunicates Boris, Nicholas, and the false doctrines that the papal missionaries are preaching in Bulgaria. Michael III personally presides over the synod.

Leo VI is born on September 1.

Basil and his conspirators murder Michael III on September 23/24. He has no proper obsequies; he is buried at the monastery of Philippikos at Chrysopolis, at the Asian shore of Bosphorus.

Photios is deposed and Ignatios is reinstated.

Pope Nicholas dies; Hadrian II succeeds him.

869-870

The synod summoned in Constantinople excommunicates Photios (the Roman church considers this synod as the eight ecumenical council). At the closing stages of the synod, a Bulgarian embassy appears and asks for a decision upon which patriarchate their country belongs to. The synod rules that Bulgaria will subsequently be placed under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople.

877

Ignatios dies on October 23; Photios succeeds him three days later.

- 879-880 The synod summoned in Constantinople annuls the decisions of the anti-Photian council of 869-870; Photios is solemnly recognized as patriarch.
- 886 Leo VI collects the remains of Michael III from Chrysopolis and transfers them with full imperial honors to the church of the H. Apostles. There he delivers a funeral oration mentioning both Michael III and Basil.

Περίληψη

Η εποχή του αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ (842-867) αποτελεί μια λαμπρή ιστορική περίοδο για το βυζαντινό κράτος με εντυπωσιακά επιτεύγματα σε όλους τους τομείς. Η έριδα της εικονομαχίας αποτελεί πλέον παρελθόν και το Βυζάντιο, μετά από μια ανορθωτική πορεία πνευματικής και πολιτιστικής αναγέννησης, βρίσκεται πλέον σε θέση να επεκτείνει τη σφαίρα επιρροής του όχι μόνο σε γειτονικούς, αλλά και σε πιο μακρινούς λαούς. Παράλληλα, ιδιαίτερη αναφορά αξίζουν οι επιτυχίες στον στρατιωτικό τομέα. Η αυτοκρατορία, η οποία αντιμετωπίζει στη Μ. Ασία τον αραβικό κίνδυνο για περίπου δύο αιώνες, βρίσκεται πλέον σε θέση να περάσει στην αντεπίθεση· οι αξιοσημείωτες στρατιωτικές επιτυχίες κατά του Χαλιφάτου των Αββασιδών, οι οποίες λαμβάνουν χώρα κατά τη διάρκεια της μονοκρατορίας του Μιχαήλ Γ' (856-867), σε συνδυασμό με το μεγάλης έκτασης ανορθωτικό του πρόγραμμα στις οχυρώσεις πόλεων της Μ. Ασίας θέτουν τις βάσεις για τις μετέπειτα στρατιωτικές επιτυχίες του Νικηφόρου Φωκά (963-969) και Ιωάννη Τζιμισκή (969-976).

Παρά τις επιφανείς αυτές επιτυχίες, η εικόνα του αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Γ' αποτελεί ένα γεγονός οξύμωρο σε σχέση με τις παραπάνω εξελίξεις της περιόδου. Ο τελευταίος αυτοκράτορας της δυναστείας του Αμορίου περιγράφεται από τους φίλα προσκείμενους στη Μακεδονική δυναστεία ιστορικούς του δέκατου αιώνα ως ακόλαστος, σπάταλος, ασεβής προς τα θεία, καθώς και ως ανίκανος και αδιάφορος ηγεμόνας, ο οποίος ενδιαφερόταν μόνο για αρματοδρομίες στον ιππόδρομο και για υπερβολική κατανάλωση αλκοόλ σε συναθροίσεις με τους κατώτερων λαϊκών στρωμάτων συντρόφους του. Σ' αυτή ακριβώς τη μεταχείριση οφείλεται και το γεγονός ότι ο Μιχαήλ Γ' έμεινε γνωστός τόσο στους μεταγενέστερους

ιστοριογράφους, αλλά και στη σύγχρονη έρευνα με το προσωνύμιο «μέθυσος».

Σε αντιδιαστολή με τα ελαττώματα του Μιχαήλ Γ', ο δολοφόνος του, Βασίλειος, πρόσωπο του άμεσου περιβάλλοντος του Μιχαήλ Γ', μετέπειτα αυτοκράτορας και ιδρυτής της Μακεδονικής δυναστείας σκιαγραφείται από τις ίδιες πηγές ως γενναιόδωρος, ευσεβής, καθοδηγούμενος από τη θεία πρόνοια και προορισμένος να καταλάβει τον αυτοκρατορικό θρόνο. Ουσιαστικά, τα μειονεκτήματα του Μιχαήλ Γ' αντιπαραβάλλονται έντεχνα ένα προς ένα με τις αρετές του διαδόχου του. Η περιγραφή των προσωπικοτήτων προφανώς δεν είναι τυχαία· μέσα από τη συστηματική υποτίμηση και απαξίωση του Μιχαήλ Γ', ο Βασίλειος προβάλλεται ως σωτήρας της αυτοκρατορίας και όχι ως δολοφόνος του ευεργέτη του. Ωστόσο, σύγχρονες αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες καθώς και ιστοριογραφικές πηγές που δεν διάκινται εχθρικά απέναντι του Μιχαήλ Γ' χρησιμεύουν ως μέτρο σύγκρισης προκειμένου να εξαχθεί και να επισημανθεί η ιστορική πραγματικότητα από την αυτοκρατορική προπαγάνδα.

Στόχος της παρούσας έρευνας είναι να αποτελέσει (1) μια εμπεριστατωμένη και αντικειμενική παρουσίαση της εικόνας και του έργου του Μιχαήλ Γ' βασισμένη σε επιστημονικά κριτήρια και έρευνα, (2) μια κριτική παρουσίαση και αξιολόγηση των πηγών που σχετίζονται με την εικόνα του και τους λόγους που οδήγησαν σ' αυτή την παρουσίαση, (3) μια λεπτομερή παρουσίαση των στρατιωτικών επιτυχιών και του ανορθωτικού έργου του Μιχαήλ Γ', (4) μια κριτική παρουσίαση και προσέγγιση της προσωπικότητας και του ιδιωτικού βίου του αυτοκράτορα, βασισμένη σε γραπτές πηγές και αρχαιολογικά τεκμήρια και (5) τοποθέτηση της γενικότερης εικόνας του Μιχαήλ Γ' στο ευρύτερο κοινωνικό, θρησκευτικό και πολιτικό πλαίσιο της εποχής, εντός και εκτός συνόρων του Βυζαντίου.

Αν και η επιστημονική έρευνα πάντα επιφυλάσσει εκπλήξεις, μπορούμε να ισχυριστούμε ότι η παρούσα μελέτη αποτελεί για πρώτη φορά μια

πολύπλευρη και εις βάθος μελέτη της βασιλείας του Μιχαήλ Γ', τόσο κατά τη διάρκεια της δικής του διακυβέρνησης όσο και αυτής της μητέρας του, επιτρόπου Θεοδώρας. Παράλληλα, η ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στη βιογραφία του αυτοκράτορα αποκαλύπτει και προεκτάσεις που δεν έχουν ως σήμερα επαρκώς μελετηθεί, συνεισφέροντας στη συζήτηση για τη σχέση του ιδιωτικού με τον δημόσιο βίο και την πρόσληψη αυτής της σχέσης από τους συγχρόνους του, αλλά και από την πρόσφατη ιστοριογραφική παραγωγή. Επισημαίνονται, τέλος, πολιτικά κίνητρα και παράμετροι που μπορούν στοχευμένα να συσκοτίσουν ή να εξάρουν ηγεμόνες.