Ivana Dobcheva

CONSTRUCTING IMPERIAL HONOUR IN THE *HISTORY* OF LEO THE DEACON

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

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May 2009

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by

Ivana Dobcheva

(Bulgaria)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

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I, the undersigned, **Ivana Dobcheva**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2009

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Signature

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I would also like to thank a couple of alumnae from the department who wisely convinced me to apply for a MA degree here. Finally I must acknowledge the support and aid offered by my current fellow-students.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSl *Byzantinoslavica* (Prague)

CFHB Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae

CSHB Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae

De Cerimoniis *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae libri duo*, ed. I. I. Reiske, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1829, vol. I.

DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers (Washington)

GRBS *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*

Leo *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem*, ed. C. B. Hase, CSHB, Bonn, 1828.

MPG Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857-66.

ODB Alexander Kazhdan, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

Skyl.Nik. Ioannis Skylitzae, "Nikephoros Phokas," In *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, CFHB 5, Berlin, 1973, 260-283. (followed by chapter No.)

Skyl.Jh. Ioannis Skylitzae, "Ioannes Tzimiskes," In *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, CFHB 5, Berlin, 1973, 284-313. (followed by chapter No.)

INTRODUCTION

Historical background

At the very beginning I have to clarify the object of this study. Namely, the aim of the research is not to make anthropological analysis of the Byzantine perception of imperial honour, or to investigate the "true" history hidden behind the text. On the contrary, focusing its attention on one particular historiographical writing, that of Leo the Deacon (fl. tenth century), this thesis will analyze the literary style of the author and his work in order to examine the discursive construction of concepts of honour (and dishonour) that are dispersed throughout the ten books of his history.

In order to have an objective understanding of the *History* of Leo, one must first place the author in the context of tenth-century historical and political events and, second, situate the work within the tradition of its genre. Thus it is necessary to position the text examined in the terms of its own time and subsequently to look at the specific stylistic and structural elements that Leo the Deacon employed when portraying the figure of the Byzantine emperor. After analyzing the particular techniques and their place within the economy of the text I plan to examine the means by which his vision of imperial honour was constructed.

The story behind the narrative is connected with events in the second half of the tenth century, more particularly, with the coming to power and reign of two Byzantine emperors – Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) and John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976). As indicated by Rosemary Morris, these were clear cases of usurpation,[1] since neither of the two was a member of the Macedonian dynasty ruling at that time. Nikephoros was proclaimed emperor by his troops after the death of Emperor Romanos II (r. 959–963), whose children Basil and Constantine (both to be future emperors Basil II and

Constantine VIII), were not old enough to be allowed to rule on their own as *autokratores*. John Tzimiskes took power by murdering Nikephoros and assuming the imperial insignia. Usurpations like these were not unusual in Byzantium, but it is interesting to study how Leo the Deacon managed to rehabilitate the usurpers, so to speak, and not only to legitimize their reign but also to present them as worthy and befitting the "imperial canon." In order to do this, one should first examine the writings of history during this period.

The place of Leo the Deacon as a major source for this period. Specifics of the genre

The period from the ninth century throughout the beginning of the eleventh was marked by the systematization and re-organization of administrative and cultural structure. The spirit of renewal was related also to the educational system and the recollection of ancient knowledge connected with it. Under the supervision and initiative of Emperor Constantine VII (r. 945-959) a series of treatises on the governing of the empire and on imperial ceremonial was composed. It is implied that the emperor himself compiled *De administrando imperio* and *De ceremoniis*, and wrote a history of the reign of Basil I, *Vita Basilii*.[2] Apart from these treatises, the historiographical writings of Joseph Genesios describing the reign of four emperors (from Leo V to

[1] Rosemary Morris, "Succession and Usurpation: Politics and Rhetoric in the Late Tenth Century", *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), (hereafter: Morris, "Succession and Usurpation"), 203.

[2] *De administrando imperio,* commissioned by Constantine VII, is a compilation of previous work about relations and diplomatics of Byzantium with its neighbors. It was intended to serve as a guidebook for the future Emperor Romanos II. See Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, tr. R.J.H. Jenkins, rev. ed. (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967). *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, is a treatise on court ceremonial in the spirit of encyclopedism. As the *De admnistrando imperio* it was also produced during the reign of Constantine VII (r. 945-959), but revised probably by the court administration of Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963-969). See Constantine Porpyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, 2 vols, ed. I. I. Reiske (Bonn, 1829-30) with commentary by A. Vogt, *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies*, 4 vol. (Paris: Les Belles letters, 1967). The *Vita Basilii* is a history describing the reign of emperor Basil I (r. 867-886), the founder of the Macedonian dynasty. See *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I Bekker (Bonn, 1838)

Michael III, 813–867),[3] or the so-called *Scriptores post Theophanem* or Theophanes Continuatus (continuing the work of Theophanes Confessor and covering events from 813 until 961)[4], and the work of Symeon the *logothetēs* (describing the events from 842 until 948)[5] were also written at court. It is important to underline that these works were composed at the request and at the court of Constantine VII as to serve the imperial propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty. Without calling into question their objectivity, it is worth drawing attention to their common characteristic.

A. Markopoulos has studied this aspect and given a clear example using the *Vita Basilii*, a history designed to present Basil I (867-886), the murderer of Michael III (842-867) and usurper of the throne, as the perfect ruler, drawing a parallel between him and Constantine I.[6] This, of course, served as a justification of the Macedonian dynasty, founded by Basil I. The same tendency can be detected in the work of Leo the Deacon, which can also be attested as political propaganda, but in this case the propaganda was serving two emperors who had usurped power from the Macedonians. Markopoulos mentions three common characteristics of history writings in the period that were products of both propagandas: first, the narrative is centered upon individuals; second, as a consequence of the biographical structure the works became closely related

[3] An anonymous work that is believed to be written by certain Joseph Genesios (name written on a folio of the manuscript and mentioned by Skylitzes in his preface of the *Synopsis*). See Joseph Genesios, *Regum libri quattuor*, eds. A. Lesmuller-Werner and H. Thurn (Berlin: Gruyer, 1978) and the English translation Joseph Genesius, *Genesios on the Reign of Emperors*, tr. Anthony Kaldellis (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1998).

[4] A conventional title for a group of four chronicles. The author of the first one (describing the period from the reign of Leo V till that of Michael III i.e. 813-867) called himself the continuator of Theophanes Confessor. The second part is the so-called *Vita Basilii* (see n.2), followed by a work similar in chronological scope to that of Symeon the *logothetēs*. The last one was probably written by Theodore Daphnopates, a high-ranking official at the court of Romanos I Lekapenos and appointed eparch of Constantinople by Romanos II. See *Theophanes Continuatus*, *Ioannes Cameniata*... ed. I Bekker. CSHB (Bonn, 1838).

[5] Symeon the *logothetēs* wrote a chronicle published under various names. See Leo Grammaticus, *Chronographia,* ed. I. Bekker CSHB (Bonn, 1842).

[6] Athanasios Markopoulos, "Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography: Models and Approaches," *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994) (hereafter: Markopoulos, "Constantine in Macedonian Historiography"), 160.

to the genre of *speculum principis*; this, third, led to the use of a new compositional approach, namely, to defining the features, symbols, and examples of the ideal image of the *basileus* that had to be emulated.[7] But despite this common trend, the way different historians constructed this model and its place in the narrative was not unified.

In his handbook on Byzantine literature Herbert Hunger defined the *History* of Leo the Deacon as "die Brücke zwischen der Chronik Symeons des Logotheten und dem Geschichtswerk des Michael Psellos,"[8] emphasizing in this way the role of the text in the transition from the chronicle type of historical account to the more novelistic style of the later histories composed in the Komnenian period such as Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*.[9] The differences between the two methods, in which the first is distinguished by strict chronology (as presented by Malalas, George Synkellos and Theophanes Confessor) and the second by biographical description by reigns (found in the *Scriptores post Theophanem*) were also emphasized by Ljubarskij.[10] Taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that Leo's audience was being introduced to a relatively new form of history writing. The fact that histories written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries followed this new trend in structuring the narrative around the alleged deeds, virtues and vices of particular emperors may allow the conclusion that it suited the taste of the audience.

In marked contrast to the histories written in the previous decades, the *History* of Leo the Deacon does not seem to be a product of the imperial court. From the few

[7] See Athanasios. Markopoulos, "Byzantine History Writing at the End of the First Millenium", *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 183-197.
[8] Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (München: Beck, 1978), vol. 1, 367.
[9] For the novelization as characteristic of the *Alexiad* see Margaret Mullett, "Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction," *Byzantine Narrative*, ed. John Burke (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 1-28.
[10] About the organizing principle in Byzantine history writings, Jakov N. Ljubarskij states that "almost all historiographers after Theophanes rejected his annalistic way of arranging material and returned to the principle of *Kaisergeschichte.*" Jakov N. Ljubarskij, "Man in Byzantine Historiography from John Malalas to Michael Psellos", *DOP* 46 (1992): 177-186. See also ODB 2: 938.

self-references in his work it is known that Leo was a deacon from the clergy at the court of Emperor Basil II (r. 976-1025).[11] It is unlikely that the same emperor who belonged to the Macedonian dynasty commissioned the writing of a history favorable to the reign of the two emperors, since they had temporarily deprived him of his right to rule, John had banished his mother from Constantinople, and on top of that the Phokades family had contributed to the troubles he experienced over the first decade of his sole rule.[12] Another piece of evidence for this is the account of the rule of Basil II, which is far from favorable and includes the disastrous campaign against Bulgaria and the long-lasting revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, besides natural calamities (Leo X 7-10). This defines Leo as a writer influenced by and perhaps part of the literate circle around the emperor in respect to his literary taste, but also independent enough to criticize members of the imperial court.

As noted by Talbot and Sullivan,[13] the personality of the author is often revealed by small comments he makes in the framework of the narrative like "should" (Leo IX,16), "as he ought not" (Leo I,2), "But I say this" (Leo V,3) and so on, giving the impression of an independent historian standing behind the text. Of course, this independence is rather vague, since Leo composed his work on the basis of other sources rather than on personal observation[14] and these sources left their marks on the text. The overall impression of the history is that he used a now-lost work favorable to

[11] Leo, X,8: "τότε δὴ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ταῦτα ἐκτραγῳδῶν ἐκεῖσε παρήμην, τῷ κρατοῦντι δυστυχῶς συνεπόμενος καὶ τῇ διακόνου λειτουργίᾳ ὑπηρετούμενος." ("I myself, who tell this sad tale, was present at that time [986] to my misfortune, attending the emperor [Basil II] and performing the services of deacon." For the English translation if not indicated otherwise I cite *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, tr. Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2005) (hereafter: Talbot - Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*).

[12] See Catherine Holms, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 448-461.

[13] Talbot – Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon,* 29.

[14] Leo, as one knows from himself, came to Constantinople as a youth to pursue his general education (Leo IV,7,11) in 968, and was ordained deacon sometime after 970 (Talbot - Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*, 9). This all leads to the conclusion that Leo could have been an eyewitness only of the events that happened outside the palace and were open to the general public or those that were natural phenomenon

Nikephoros Phokas and perhaps a family chronicle of the Phokades.[15] Even if this is true, it could not have been the only reason for the way he portrays the rulers; an answer has to be sought in the technicalities of becoming and ruling as emperor, as implied by Leo. In this respect the questions to be answered are: What qualities are consistent and necessary for imperial honour? How is honour manifested, asserted, or lost? and Which is the social group that the image addresses?

The thesis can roughly be divided into two parts. The first one is devoted to the author's style and his audience's aesthetic criteria. Thus the aim here will be by means of analyzing Leo's use of quotation and various types of references to classical texts, to come up with an understanding of the literary taste of the reader and of the reader himself.

In the second part the study will deal with the narrative of the *History*, focusing on the representation of Nikephoros II Phokas in the second chapter, and John I Tzimiskes in the third chapter. The elements of the emperors' image will bring in evidence the main principles of emperor's code of honour as perceived by Leo and the social group which he addressed. Thus the research will try on the one hand to contextualize the work within the framework of political, social and cultural interactions, and on the other, to shed light upon the literary production of the period.

as earthquakes, shooting stars, or eclipses. Therefore, for writing such a detailed history of the imperial affairs Leo must have used written sources.

[15] Rosemary Morris, "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas," *BMGS* 12 (1998), 85-6.

Chapter 1

Context and Audience

In an article inspired by a relatively recent conference on Byzantine literature held in Nicosia, Ingela Nilsson and Roger Scott made an overview of the trends in the "old" and "new" history of Byzantine historiography. One of the key points of their analysis is the notion of "the subtlety of much of Byzantine literature and the tacit assumption of Byzantine writers of history that their audience knows its history and its literature."[16] They further give a warning of the danger of misunderstanding the meaning of the text examined, if one underestimates the sophistication of the literature and its audience. This presupposition should be set out as a basic principle for evaluating the works of Byzantine historians instead of a simple criticism of their tendency to modulate events in the narrative. More than thirty years ago Cyril Mango characterized Byzantine literature as a distorting mirror.[17] Such a negative estimation of historical accounts had been given long before, in the late eleventh century, by John Skylitzes when he wrote:

> … each has had his own agenda, the one proclaiming praise of the emperor, the other a *psogos* of the patriarch, another an encomium of a friend... For they wrote histories at length of the things which happened during their times and shortly before: one sympathetically, another with hostility, another in search of approval, another as he had been ordered. Each one composing his own history, and differing from one another in their narrations, they have filled the listeners with dizziness and confusion.[18]

[16] Ingela Nilsson and Roger Scott, "Towards a New History of Byzantine Literature: The Case of Historiography," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 58 (2007): 319-332 (hereafter: Nilsson, Scott, "New History of Byzantine Literature").

[17] Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 21 May 1974* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[18] Οἰκείαν ἕκαστος ὑπόθεσιν προστησάμενοι, ὁ μὲν ἔπαινον φέρε εἰπεῖν βασιλέως, ὁ δὲ ψόγον πατριάρχου, ἄτερος δὲ φίλου ἐγκώμιον… ἀποτάδην γὰρ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς αὐτῶν χρόνους συνενεχθέντα, καὶ μικρὸν ἄνωθεν, ἱστορικῶς συγγραψάμενοι, καὶ ὁ μὲν συμπαθῶς, ὁ δ᾽ἀντιπαθῶς, ὁ δὲ καὶ κατὰ χάριν, ἄλλος δὲ καὶ ὡς προσετέτακτο, τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συνθεῖς ἱστορίαν καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀφηγήσει διαφερόμενοι ἰλιγγου καὶ ταραχῆς τοὺς ἀκροατὰς ἐμπεπλήκασιν. John Skylitzes, *Sinopsis Historion*, ed. I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum.* CFHB V (Berlin: De Gruyer, 1973), 4; tr. Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford: OUP 2005) (hereafter: Holmes, *Basil II*), 549-550.

Recently, however, following Margaret Mullett's groundbreaking work in the 1990s, interest has been growing in literary analysis in the field of Byzantine studies.[19] The new approach of analyzing Byzantine literature has opened a new perspective on reading Byzantine chronicles and histories, not as "an endless series of unoriginal compilations which either 'lie' or tell the 'truth'… [but rather] as consciously devised compositions that may be read both as sources of historical information and as textual products of their time."[20] In other words, the fact that Byzantine history writers were reshaping their account of history is not a shortcoming but an advantage that enables Byzantinists to examine these works, if not as evidence for historical events, then as evidence for the writing and reading practices of the milieu where they were produced. A good example is Skylitzes himself, who as *a reader* of the historians he quoted based on *his* knowledge of Byzantine history, came to conclusions about the quality of the histories and used them to compile his own *Synopsis*.

An analysis of the structure of Leo the Deacon's *History* will reveal the *instrumentarium* he used in connection with his own agenda and hence to modulate, reshape or even (using Mango's terminology) to distort the account of events that had happened just a few decades before he finished his *History*. In this chapter I will analyze Leo's working methods (quotations and allusions to and similes from pre-existing literature) that can be characterized as part of specific literary taste of a specific audience and hence explain his particular way of representing imperial honour.

[19] See Margaret Mullett, "New Literary History and the History of Byzantine Literature: A Worthwhile endeavour," *Pour une «nouvelle» histoire de la littérature byzantine*, ed. P. Odorico and P. A. Agapitos (Paris: Boccard, 2002), 37-60. (hereafter: Mullett, "New Literary History") In 2004 two major conferences were held – in Nicosia the Troisième colloque international sur la littérature byzantine devoted to Byzantine historiography ("L'écriture da le mémoire: la littérarité de l'historiographie") and the XIV Conference of the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies in Melbourne, which concentrated on Byzantine narrative (see *Byzantine Narrative*, ed. John Burke (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006).

[20] Ingela Nilsson, "To Narrate the Events of the Past: On Byzantine Historians and Historians on Byzantium," in *Byzantine Narrative*, ed. John Burke (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006) (hereafter: Nilsson, "To Narrate the Events of the Past"), 48.

In this respect one should take into consideration, first, Leo's intention to (presumably) change his audience's perception of events, persons or beliefs; second, the very perception of his audience and its knowledge and reading; and third, the author's awareness of his audience's sophistication. Looking for a proper theoretical approach to connect all three units – author, audience and text – one can use Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, which examines literature as a mirror of the cultural code that conditions the judgments, attitudes, and norms of the public towards a text. In this respect, Leo the Deacon owed his particular way of writing to the pre-existing literature and his own expectation of his contemporary readers' taste for literature. The choice of form, register, and the structure and quality of the narrative is, therefore, driven by the need of the text either to be connected to a pre-existing literary tradition or to confront it, or both. Applying this theory closer to the text under consideration, it becomes clear that when writing the *History* Leo was aiming at a certain tenth-century audience whose expectations and literary tastes had influenced his own writing. This immediately focuses attention on the character of this audience.

In his theoretical essay on the act of reading, Wolfgang Iser defines three types of contemporary reader – a real one, who can be traced by documents; another who is reconstructed from what is known about the milieu of his time; and a third extrapolated from the reader's role laid down in the text.[21] In the case here, the only contemporary response to Leo's *History* (and also not a definite one) comes from the same passage from John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum* quoted above. Enumerating the names of earlier historians whom he criticized harshly for failing to produce true historical accounts, he mentions a certain Leo the Asian (ὁ Ἀσιανὸς Λέων), who is probably the tenth-century Leo the Deacon. Apart from this brief and general reference there is no

[21] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 28.

documentation of the response to his text. The analysis must, therefore, be based on the text itself, trying to reconstruct the "role which the author intended the reader to assume."[22] In this quest for *the* reader we must examine the artistic pole, as Iser further defines the author's text, and the aesthetic pole – the realization felt by the reader. Both aspects are, however, connected to the horizon of expectation. On the one hand Leo, the *artist* of the text, must have taken into consideration the norms of the genre, the intertextual dimension of the pre-existing literature. On the other hand, his audience's aesthetic criteria were based on the reading of that very same pre-existing literature.

Quotations

The literature that was supposed to be imitated and/or emulated can be detected by the quotations, references or its uses in the text. This, as Alice-Mary Talbot has pointed out, reveals Leo's education and literary style.[23] On a second level, the intertextuality set out by these quotations also hints at the literacy of his audience, which should also have been well acquainted with the passages and phrases Leo inserted into his text in order to understand the hidden meaning and connection between model and replica. In examining the imitation of Classical models in Byzantium, Herbert Hunger asserts that Homer, the tragedians, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Demosthenes, Plutarch, and Lucian were well known to literate Byzantines, who used them freely, as is evident by the quotations, allusions, and motifs that they adopted. Moreover, the titles or names of the authors of the Classical texts that were quoted were rarely given, which could be examined as a round game for intellectual readers/listeners.[24]

[22] Ibidem, 28.
[23] See here Talbot - Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*, 23-25, about the suggestion that after pursuing a general education *συλλογή λόγων* and *ἐγκύκλιος παίδευσις* Leo was well studied in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy.
[24] Herbert Hunger, "On the Imitation (Μίμησις) of Antiquity," *DOP* 23 (1969-1970): 15-38.

Literacy and education in the time of Leo the Deacon

Before continuing further, however, a point needs to be made concerning literacy and education in the tenth century in order to reconstruct the social background and context of reception of the text. The social, economic, and political elite of the empire consisted of educated men. The idea of literacy as a means of expressing social distance from the "ordinary" population had continued from ancient times through Late Antiquity to the end of Byzantium. Peter Brown has examined the relation between *paideia* and power and pointed out that education played an important role for the provincial aristocracy. With the decline of the Roman empire in the fourth century, however, pursuing education was possible in only a few centers – Athens, Antioch, Gaza, and Alexandria. This meant that children of aristocratic families from the provinces had to move to these centers in order to be considered as "initiated into *paideia*" and consequently as part of the upper level of society. This pattern did not change much from Late Antiquity onwards.[25] After the seventh and eight centuries, which are often characterized as an "obscure period", higher education was revived again, but almost exclusively in Constantinople.[26] A role in this rise of *paideia* played the iconoclastic period (from the early eight century to the "triumph of orthodoxy" in March 843). The theological discourses of the period and the need of proper argumentation resulted in refurbishing the traditional rhetorical education. One of the clearest examples for erudite scholar from this period is Leo the Mathematician (c. 790–

[25] See Peter Brown, "Paideia and Power," *Power and Persuasion. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 35–70. For detailed research on literacy in Byzantium see Claudia Rapp, "Literary Culture under Justinian," *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 376–97; Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring, ed. *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[26] Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 142 and Averil Cameron, "Byzantium and the past in the seventh century: the search for redefinition," *Le septième siècle: changements et continuités,* ed. J. Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (London: Warburg Institute, 1992), 250–76.

post 869), who was teaching in the newly founded imperial school - Magnaura.[27] The famous *Myriobiblos* (Latinized *Bibliotheca*) of Photios (patriarch of Constantinople in the period 858-867, and again in 877 till 886) provides an inside view of how knowledge was collected by abstracts from earlier sources both ancient and early Byzantine texts. Though the emphasis was put on Christian texts, it also introduced the reader to 147 ancient and pagan ones.[28] Whereas this hint toward the literacy and literary readings of the elite in the capital, it can perhaps be stated for the provincial aristocracy as well, for they too acquired their general education again in Constantinople. One must suppose that the *paideia*, which was intended for public servants for the provincial bureaucracy, had a more secular character in correspondence with their administrative duties. Nevertheless the educational system was one and the same, for, using Paul Magdalino definition, rhetoric was "the vital lubricant for the entire machinery of government".[29]

Thus the basic principle for learning grammar and eloquence was also the same, i.e. to collect examples of unusual modes of expression that were perceived as semantic and syntactic "deviation" from the norms of contemporary "Byzantine" Greek. In this way the students would appropriate such expressions and later use them as *tropoi*, or *schemata* in order to achieve special effects.[30] These stereotyped expressions and quotations may contradict modern tastes, but the Byzantine literate circle could estimate the *technē* upon which this *mimēsis* was based. These clichés were perceived as artistic

[27] On the Magnaura, the palace school, founded by Michael III and its re-structuring by Constantine VII see Paul Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin: notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture a Byzance des origines au Xe siecle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. 1971) (hereafter: *Humanisme*), especially chpater "Les écoles de Bardas a Constantin Porphyrogénète," 242-266. On Leo the Mathematician (also known as Leo the Philosopher) see ODB 2:1217 and Lemerle, "Leon le Philosophe (ou le Mathematicien)," *Humanisme,* 148-176.
[28] Nigel Guy Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, (London: Duckworth, 1983), 19-60 and Lemerle, "Photius ou le classicism," *Humanisme,* 177-204.
[29] Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge: CUP,1993), 336.
[30] Thomas Conley, "Byzantine Teaching on Figures and Tropes: An Introduction," *Rhetorica* 4 (1986): 335-374, especially 337-8.

expressions, recalling in the mind of the listeners images and ideas by indirect references, hints, or allusions.[31] The phraseological borrowings from Classical texts were to present the author as a well-read and refined *literatus* writing for a well-read and refined public.

Thus as a consequence of the *paideia,* a relatively wide range of Classical texts was familiar to the educated elite both in Constantinople and in the provinces. Homer was one of the basic authors to be read in school. Robert Browning demonstrated the use of *Iliad* as a schoolbook throughout Byzantine literature and gave examples of the use of quotations from and allusions to Homer. He placed particular importance on the revival of Homeric studies in the period of the Macedonian renaissance, giving as evidence the Venetus A of the Iliad – the oldest surviving manuscript of the poem, which was written in the tenth century and supplied with solid mass of commentary.[32] Another living proof from the period is the various commentaries on Homer such as the ninth-century work of Choiroboskos *Epimerismi in Psalmos* (juxtaposing the Homer poems with the Psalms) preserved in ten manuscripts and the later *Epimerismi Homerici* in three. The purpose of such lexicons was to serve as a schoolbook and "to inculcate the meaning of basic grammatical terms."[33]

Although outside of the capital the circulation was smaller, there are mentioning about private collections, though they were certainly poorer that the ones in the capital. Evidence for this is the fact that Constantine VII initiated a major search for books in the provinces that he could not find in Constantinople but were needed for his

[31] Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, "*Homo byzantinus* in the History of Literature and Art," *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks: 1991), 115.
[32] Robert Browning, "Homer in Byzantium," *Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1975): 15-34.
[33] Andrew Roy Dyck, *Epimerismi Homerici,* vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 25. In the introduction the editor suggests that Choiroboskos (fl. early 9th C.) was the author of both works.

intellectual activity.[34] It is reasonable to believe that they were based on the individual taste of their owners. The peculiar style of the *History* of Leo supports the idea that he was addressing a particular circle, bearing in mind its particular literary choice and possible experience of other texts. Leo's choice of quotations will illustrate this notion.

Quotations from Homer

Throughout the whole *History* a strong impression is created by the significant number of references to Homer, both direct and indirect. Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis Sullivan in their limpid translation of *The History* of Leo the Deacon identified 25 quotations from the Iliad and Odyssey in comparison to 16 from the New Testament and 25 from the Old Testament.[35] What I shall try to accomplish here is to define Leo's methods when using phrases from the poet and, hence, to demonstrate that that he and his audience must have been familiar not only with the Homeric language but with the exact usage and context of the phrases.

In the first book, the author gives an account of the military operation of Nikephoros Phokas in Crete. The general ordered his men to cut off the heads of the fallen enemies, impale some of them on spears, and hurl the rest at the town where their countrymen could recognize them and be seized with horror and mental confusion. In this passage one finds a clear quotation from the Iliad where Leo, in order to describe the lamentation and wailing of the Cretans, uses the words *ἀνδρῶν <u>οἰμωγαὶ,</u> καὶ <u>κωκυτὸς</u> γυναικῶν ἠκούετο, καὶ σχῆμα τὸ <u>ἄστυ</u> κατεῖχεν ἁλώσεως, ὁλοφυρομένων ἁπάντων καὶ ἀποκλαιομένων τὰ φίλτατα*[36] (Leo I, 8). Even a modern reader of the *History* who is acquainted with the poems can detect the typical Homeric lexica *οἰμωγαὶ, καὶ κωκυτὸς*. In this respect, for a Byzantine reader it must have been even

[34] Nigel Guy Wilson, "The Libraries of the Byzantine World," *GRBS* 8 (1967): 53-80.
[35] Talbot - Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*, 261.
[36] "…the lamentations of men and the wailing of women were heard, and the town took the appearance of one that had been conquered…"

easier taking into consideration the revival of interests in Homer and the study of Iliad in school, which was discussed above. Even if it is an exaggeration to consider that they knew the whole *Iliad* by heart (although Michael Psellos praises himself that he was able to recite the entire *Iliad*),[37] this passage in particular – the famous combat between Achilles and Hector must have been part of the readings. Thus the quotation from the Iliad would not only add delight to the reading experience by its refined lexical choice, but would also draw a comparison between the lamentations of the Cretans and these of the Trojans, who *ἀμφὶ δε' λαοὶ κωκυτῷ τ' εἴχοντο καὶ οἰμωγῇ κατα ἄστυ τῷ δε' μάλιστ' ἄρ' ἔην ἐναλίγκιον ὡς εἰ ἅπασα Ἴλιος ὀφρυόεσσα πυρὶ σμύχοιτο κατ' ἄρκης*.[38] Leo not only used direct quotation but also described the town (*ἄστυ*) of the Cretans in such a way as to recall the conditional comparative clause applied to Ilion in the passage from Homer cited above. One must note the art of imitation that Leo used when he combined both direct a quotation in the case of *οἰμωγαὶ, καὶ κωκυτὸς* with a more distant allusion in the second part of the sentence, replacing the *ὡς εἰ* clause with genitivus absolutus.

Two other examples describing empresses also echo Homer. In the episode of the marriage between Nikephoros II Phokas and Theophano (the widow of Romanos II and mother of future emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII), the bride was "distinguished in beauty, and was indeed a Laconian woman" (*ἀριπρεπῆ ταῖς ὥραις καὶ αὐτόχρημα τυνχάνουσαν Λάκονικαν* (Leo, III. 9). In this manner Leo is not only giving an account of her beauty, but perhaps he was also hinting at her betrayal, adultery, and

[37]In the *Encomium of His Mother* Michael Psellos gave information about his education stating that "… in one circuit of the sun I learned to write correctly and recited the entire *Iliad* — not learning the epic only, but also figure and trope and diction, and timely metaphor and harmonious composition." See Michael Psellos, "Encomium to His Mother," tr. Jeffrey Walker, *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 8 (2005): 239-313. Online version at http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1017-1078,_Michael_Psellos,_Encomium_of_His_Mother,_EN.pdf (accessed May 12, 2009).

[38] Homer, *Homeri Opera,* ed. D.B. Monro and T.W. Allen (Oxford: OUP, 1920), 22,409. "…and around them the folk was holden of wailing and groaning throughout the city. Most like to this was it as though all beetling Ilios were utterly burning with fire." Here and elsewhere I use the English translation of Augustus Murray (Homer, *The Iliad,* tr. Augustus Tauber Murray (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1960).

participation in the plot against her husband. The negative image is further strengthened when compared to the phrase applied to Maria Skleraina, the ex-wife of John I Tzimiskes, who had died before he became emperor. It is said that she was "greatly celebrated for her beauty and virtue," where for "celebrated" in the Greek text stands *κλέος* – a typical Homeric lemma that is essentially connected to the archaic perception of honour and good fame (Leo VII, 3).

One last instance, which Talbot and Sullivan have pointed out in the translation, is the scene of the murder of Nikephoros by John, when the latter was outraged because of the fact that the emperor had banished him to the countryside "like some alien without any rights"(*ὡσεί τινα ἄτιμον μετανάστην* (Leo V,7). The phrase is an exact quotation of the words of Achilles in the *Iliad* IX.648 when he expresses his anger toward Agamemnon, who has treated him ill despite Achilles' brave military deeds. There is no doubt that by this particular phraseology Leo wanted to convey to the reader an elegant connotation in regard to the character and self-esteem of John Tzimiskes. Furthermore, the echo of Homeric simile can be examined as part of the imperial propaganda and legitimization of the murderer and usurper of the throne. I shall return to this notion later.

It is worth drawing attention not only to the significant number of quotations from Homer but also the particular use of them. As has become clear in these examples, in his choice of references Leo was expecting his readers to identify both the Homeric lexis and allusions to events and personages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This leads to the conclusion that the two poems were equally well-known to the writer and the audience. Hence the reader was expecting to find the product of this *mimesis* in the texts, and was evaluating them on this basis.

Looking at the way actions on the battlefield are represented further defines Homer as a model for the *History*. John Haldon has indicated an important characteristic, namely, Leo's tendency to describe "individual combats, hand-to hand struggles between the heroes of two opposing armies, challenges to resolve whole battles on the outcome of a duel between the two chosen heroes of the Byzantines and their foes, the martial skill and courage of particular leaders."[39] Taken together with the significant number of references to Homer, such images and mis-en-scènes remind the reader of Homer's way of describing a battle.

Biblical and Patristic quotations.

Another type of quotation is derived from the Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers – texts that were read in church and also explained in rhetorical manuals. The Psalms were the most popular book from the Old Testament, as it became the Christian prayer book par excellence. Monks knew the Psalter by heart as they were singing it in the course of a week during the winter, and three weeks during the summer. But so did lay people, who memorized it as children in school, for the text was the main textbook and it was sung during the liturgy. Another proof for the popularity of the Psalms within the elite circle is the existence of the aristocratic Psalters.[40] This all leads to the conclusion that the poetic phraseology borrowed from the Psalms (as, for example, *αἱμάτων ἄνδρα* meaning *bloodthirsty warrior* – found in book III.1 and in Ps. 5:6, 25(26):9 et alibi) was detected and recognized by the Byzantine/Christian reader. On the other hand, there are more peculiar phrases that came from homilies and that might even have become quotidian sayings. Such, in my opinion, is the quotation *δοῦλοι γαστρὸς καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ γαστέρα*, "slaves of their stomachs and their sexual appetites" (literally "slaves of the stomach and part below the stomach"), which Leo had taken

[39] See John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London: University College London Press) (hereafter: Haldon, *Warfare*), 244.

from Basil the Great's Hexaemeron (9.2) and inserted in his account of the reign of Romanos II to be precise when describing the depraved persons who corrupted the young emperor (Leo II,10). As a result the role that these texts played in everyday life in Byzantium and their often use diminish their importance in this study as a mark for Leo's audience's aesthetics.

Quotations from earlier historians

This is not the case, however, of the considerable number of quotations from earlier historians found in the Leo's work; more precisely Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis Sullivan have identified ten citations from Prokopios of Caesarea, and fourteen from Agathias.[41] In contrast to the use of the Holy Scripture and Homer's poems, from which Leo takes only separate phrases or even single words, he copies whole sentences or rephrases others from the histories of these two authors. This raises questions about the background on which Leo constructed his text. As Jauss suggests "the history of reception is essential for the understanding of literary works which lie in the distant past."[42] Hence it is reasonable to suppose that Leo expected his audience to know the writings of Agathias and Prokopios either in full or as part of lexicons and *florilegia*.

Taking into consideration the way he used both sources, one is left with the impression that he could consult and browse through the books in full, searching for suitable passages to quote or allude to. For instance, Leo Phokas' speech of exhortation in front of the army draws from a similar exhortation speech from Prokopios' *Wars*. Comparing the two passages together can reveal Leo's skill in using and refurbishing previous writings.

[40] See ODB 3:1752 and Anthony Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium* (Paris: Picard, 1984).
[41] Talbot - Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*, 261. For more information on Prokopios see ODB 3:1732, on Agathias see ODB 1:35-6.
[42] Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", *New Literary History* vol. 2,1 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1970), 19.

> I have brought you together at the present time, not in order to stir up your minds against the enemy by addressing to you any reminder or exhortation (for I think that you need no speech that prompts to daring), but in order that we may deliberate together among ourselves, and choose rather the course which may seem fairest and best for the cause of the emperor. For war is wont to succeed by reason of careful planning more than by anything else.[43]

> Therefore I exhort and advise you, not so that you may face the enemy bravely (for I believe that there is no need of words to inspire to courageous deeds you men, who from your childhood have practiced bravery and daring), but so that you may face the enemy after planning the best course of action. For wars are usually won not so much by a pitched battle, as by cautious planning and victories won with cunning at the opportune moment.[44]

The similarity is aparent. Leo not only kept whole phrases, but had also followed the syntactical construction of Prokopios "advise you not so that… but so that" (that is even clearer from the Greek text with *οὐχ ὅπως... ἀλλ' ὅπως*). This provides evidence that the historian had read the two histories from the sixth century. The question that remains is whether his audience was familiar with them to such a degree so as to be able to estimate and appreciate Leo's references and allusion. Answering this is important for understanding the writer's intentions and strategy for writing history. The choice of books that he quotes is of significance in this sense. During the tenth century there was particular interest in the works of four sixth-century historians – Prokopios, Agathias, Menander Protector and Theophylact Simocatta.[45] They were highly estimated by Constantine VII, who considered them as exemplary and included many excerpts from them in *Excerpta de legationibus* – one of the 53

[43] ξυνήγαγόν τε ἐν τῷ παρόντι, οὐχ ὅπως ὑπομνήσας ἢ παραίνεσίν τινα ποιησάμενος τὴν ὑμετέραν γνώμην ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ὁρμήσω (Οὐ γὰρ λόγου δεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς τοῦ ἐς εὐτολμίαν ἐνάγοντος οἶμαι), ἀλλ' ὅπως ξυμβουλήν τινα ἔν γε ἡμῖν αυτοῖς ποιησάμενοι ἑλώμεθα μᾶλλον ἅπερ ἂν δοκῇ βέλτιστά τε καὶ ἄριστα τοῖς βασιλέως πράγμασιν εἶναι. πόλεμος γὰρ εὐβουλίᾳ πάντων μάλιστα κατορθοῦσθαι φιλεῖ. Procopius, History *of the Wars, Books I and II*, The Loeb classical library, ed. T. E. Page and W.H.D. Rouse., tr. H.B. Dewing, (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 398-9.

[44] παραινῶ τοίνυν καὶ συμβουλεύω, οὐχ ὅπως γενναίως ἀντιτάζοισθε τοῖς ἐχθροῖς (οἶμαι γὰρ μὴ δεῖσθαι λόγων ὑμᾶς ἐναγόντων ἐς εὐτολμίαν, οἷς ἐξ ἁπαλῶν ἀνδρία μετὰ τόλμης ἐξήσκηται)· ἀλλ' ὡς ἄν ἄριστα βουλευσάμενοι καταγωνίσοισθε τὸν ἐχθρόν. πόλεμος γὰρ οὐ τοσοῦτον ἐξ ἀντιπάλου κατορθοῦσθαι ῥοπῆς εἴωθεν, ὅσον εὐβουλίας προνοίᾳ καὶ τροπαίων ἐπαγωγῇ ῥᾳδιουργουμένῃ κατὰ καιρόν. (Leo II.3)

sections of the encyclopedic work written under the supervision of the emperor. Another clue toward the interest in the four historians is the existence of a glossary on these particular writers, namely Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν, transmitted together with the *Epimerismi Homerici*.[46] Though it is not certain if Leo himself or his readers knew about and consulted the lexicon in his reading of the histories, the mere existence of such glossary, as suggested by Dyck, demonstrates that the four historians were "attained as kind of canonical status for student of literature by the date of the lexicon."[47]

Hence, a reasonable question arises: Why did Leo the Deacon cite only Prokopios and Agathias? One would argue that Menander Protector is preserved only in fragments and therefore quotations from him may perhaps exist in Leo's work but cannot now be identified. The lack of bias toward Theophylact Simocatta, however, can be explained by looking and comparing the character of the works, for the account of the sixth-century historian "ranges beyond military matters to detailed accounts of the imperial ceremonial at Constantinople."[48] This is precisely what one cannot find in Leo's *History*, as its interest lies mainly in the military activities of the emperors. On the other hand, however, the accounts in Prokopios' *Wars* and Agathias' account of the eastern and western campaigns during the *renovatio imperii* of Justinian I correspond thematically to the events retold by Leo and this is why he is using particularly these two authors.

The close examination of the quotations, with the exception of the biblical ones, leads toward the identification of Leo the Deacon's audience. Taking Ingela Nilsson's definition of the task of the historian as "to determine the historical content and find a

[45] On the historian Menander Protector (fl. 6th century) see ODB 2:1338; on Theophylact Simocatta (fl. 6th century) see ODB 3:1900-1. The works of the four writers can be considered as a chain of histories.
[46] Andrew Roy Dyck, *Epimerismi Homerici* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995).
[47] Ibidem, 857.

suitable form for it – a form that suits both the content, the writer and the presumed audience,"[49] the Homeric similes and references and the implications of the work of previous histories centered on military activities reveals the horizon of expectation of the audience to whom the historian was addressing his text. Since the text is a mode of communication, the author should not only take into consideration the pre-existing literature, the norms of the genre, but also the cultural code of the readers. As Margaret Mullett suggests, when reading a text one must look at "the relationship of the text with what is beyond the text, with the world, with the milieu (or milieux) in which the text was generated, with the interpretative communities which first received the text."[50] Leo was writing for an audience that was eager to listen stories about heroic deeds, glory, campaigns, and military tactics, and this is what he offered, drawing upon the Classical war poem and previous war historians.

A further confirmation for this theory can be found in the strict division between the "good" events taking place outside the capital and the "bad" events that happened inside the city walls and especially at court. This tendency is not stated explicitly, but can be traced throughout the background of the narrative, when looking, for instance, at what happens with Leo Phokas, the general responsible for the successful operation against the Arabs in 960. In the beginning of book II he is highly praised:

> He [Leo] was a courageous and vigorous man, of exceptionally good judgment, and the cleverest of anyone we know at devising the proper course of action at time of crisis. Some divine force, I believe, used to fight alongside him in battles, overcoming all adversaries and making them surrender.[51]

[48] ODB 3:1901.
[49] Nilsson, "To Narrate the Events of the Past", 49.
[50] Margaret Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop*. Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 2 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 2-3.
[51] ἄνδρα γενναῖον ἐν περιστάσεσιν ἐπιφράσασθαι πάντων, ὧν ἴσμεν, ἐπιβολώτατον· ᾧ θεία τις, οἶμαι, κατὰ τὰς μάχας συνεμάχει ῥοπὴ, ἅπαν τὸ ἀντίπαλον καταστρεφομένη καὶ τιθεῖσα ὑπόσπονδον (Leo, II,1).

After accepting from his brother, Emperor Nikephoros Phokas, the title of *kouropalates* and *magistros*, however, such a rapid change occurred that taken out of the context the two passages could hardly be regarded as the words of one and the same author.

> Hard on the heels of this came the outrageous conduct of his brother Leo the *kouropalates*, who abandoned his manly and soldierly life, exchanging it for that of a city-dwelling and greedy entreneur, and was unable to resist making money and unjust gains, and heartlessly brought about famine and a scarcity of provisions.[52]

This sharp contrast between the glorious victories on the battlefield, the discipline and high virtue of the military life, and the degenerate city-life is a hint to the readers that the text was intended to reach. Hence, one is prone to think that Leo's audience had a negative perception of the life and dignity of the people living and working at court. This description fits the image of tenth century Byzantium provincial military elite, as John Haldon suggests.[53] This idea is supported by the social changes and the struggle for power within the ruling classes over the traditionally centralized government of the empire. Reading the text of the *History* one can foresee the dramatic changes in the division of the high military elite – the group consolidating itself around the ruling Comnenian dynasty acquiring power; while the other outside of the Comnenian clan "disappeared or entered the rank of civil nobility."[54]

In sum, the audience of Leo the Deacon's *History* which first received his text can be identified by analyzing the text and its characteristic features, which were

[52] Ταύτῃ παρείπετο καὶ τὸ τοῦ συναίμου αὐτοῦ Λέοντος καὶ Κουροπαλάτου πλεμμελές· ὅστις τὸν ἀνδρώδη καὶ στρατιωτικὸν αὐτοῦ βίον παρωσάμενος πρὸς τὸν ἀστικὸν καὶ φιλοκερδῆ μετετάξατο, ἥττων τε χρεμάτων καὶ λημμάτων γενόμενος, σιτοδείαν εἰργάσατο καὶ σπάνιν τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἀφιλάνθροπον (Leo, IV,6)

[53] See Haldon, *Warfare*, 244 where he speaks of "… motifs which reflect not only the reality of the warfare of the period along with the values of those who lead the imperial armies and the social milieu they represented, but also the evolution of a new attitude to the representation of warfare in the literature of this period, generated by the demands of the Byzantine social establishment as well as the preferred self-image of the soldiers themselves."

intended to suit this audience's literary taste. The new form of biographical history (*Kaisergeschichte)* and the numerous quotations from and similes to Homer's *Iliad* and the works of Prokopios and Agathias found in the *History,* were analyzed in correspondence to the revival of interest in classical texts (particularly the *Iliad*) and the four "official" histories from the sixth century. Drawing much on Homer, Leo was the first to introduce epic history. This tendency, however, increased in the following two centuries as is evident by looking at Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*.[55]

[54] See Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Changes in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 69.
[55] See Andrew Roy Dyck, "Iliad and Alexiad: Anna Comnena's Homeric Reminiscences." *GRBS* 27 (1986): 113-20.

Chapter 2

Nikephoros Phokas

Here comes the morning star,
there arises Eous,
he reflects the sun's rays with his glare,
the pallid death of the Saracens, Nicephoros the μέδων.

Liudprand,
Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana[56]

So far in the important role, which the anticipated audience of Leo the Deacon played in the process of writing the *History* was discussed by analyzing the quotations and allusions to previous literature. It was proved that the "skills" needed to decipher them can be used for identifying the characteristics of the contemporary tenth-century reader and that of the text as mirror to that reader's cultural code. This can further be corroborated by using the tool of narratology, as proposed by Ingela Nilsson, revealing how the narrative and its narrator function.

Byzantine historians and their sources

There are several sources for the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas. In chronological order these are the tenth-century *History* of Leo the Deacon, here examined, two works from the eleventh century – John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum* and Michael Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*, and John Zonaras' twelfth-century *Epitome Historion*.[57] From the

[56] During the reign of Nikephoros Otto I sent a diplomatic mission in order to arrange marriage between his son Otto II with a Byzantine Porphyrogoneta. In his *Relatio de legatione Constantinopoletana* Liudprand of Cremona, bishop leading this mission, recorded the above cited words as being called out by the people during a procession to Hagia Sophia. Though the account of the bishop must be regarded as product of anti-Byzantine propaganda, being careful with the mis-interpretation of Liudprand, one will find precious information of imperial ceremonial. See Liudprand, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, tr. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 244-5.

[57] John Skylitzes (fl. end of 11th century) was the author of *Synopsis historian* a history covering the period 811-1057. See Ioannis Skylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, CFHB 5, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973) with French translation *Jean Skylitzès: Empereurs de Constantinople*, tr. B. Fluisin (Paris: Lethielleux, 2003). Michael Psellos (ca. 1018-1081) apart from his famous *Chronographia* was probably the author of *Historia Syntomos* shorter didacticle history in the form of world chronicle. See *Historia syntomos*, ed. W. J. Aerts CFHB (Berlin: De Gruyer, 1990). *John* Zonaras (fl. 12th century) wrote at the court of Alexios I. His work *Epitome historian* starts from the creation till 1118. See *Epitome historiarum,* ed. L. Dindorf, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1868-75), and the English translation *The History of Zonaras. From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great*, tr. Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

Latin West one of the most popular accounts came from Liudprand of Cremona, a bishop at the court of Otto I, sent on a diplomatic mission to Nikephoros II Phokas. A full comparison between all of the sources would be impossible to achieve in the place and with the time provided for this thesis. It is, however, important for the further analysis of the text examined to outline the main points of the scholarship discussion regarding the relation between the Byzantine historical accounts.

In 1916 Michael Sjuzjumov published an article where he argued that Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes were using common source – one favorable to the Phokades. Whereas, however, the first was using only that source, the latter also used a hostile one.[58] Sjuzjumov's position was supported by other Byzantinists. The latest contribution to the topic is perhaps Jakov Ljubarskij's concise article "Nikephoros Phokas in Byzantine Historical Writings", discussing the interrelation between Leo the Deacon, Skylitzes, Psellos and Zonaras.[59] Analyzing and comparing the four works and particularly the segments from passages that are common to all of them, Ljubarskij concluded that concerning the common source favorable to Nikephoros "Leo drew 'the whole information', Psellos and Skylitzes [were] borrowing only its parts" and combining them with the account that was hostile to the emperor.[60]

Read alone, however, the *History* of Leo the Deacon skillfully conceals this bias. In order to examine this manipulation of the narrative I shall make a brief overview of the contents of his work juxtaposing it to Skylitzes' *Synopsis*, which will reveal the other side of the same coin.

[58] Michael Sjuzjumov, "Ob istočnikach Lva Diakona i Skilitzy" [On the sources of Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes], *Vizantijskoje Oborzenije* 2 (1916).
[59] Jakov Ljubarskij, "Nikephoros Phokas in Byzantine Historical Writings," *BSl* 54 (1993).
[60] Ibidem 252.

Leo the Deacon *vs.* John Skylitzes

Leo divided his work into two main sections marked by the reign of the two emperors that he described. The first five of altogether ten books of the *History* were devoted to Nikephoros Phokas. The organization of the work is based on the chronological order of events with the exception of a prolepsis in the tenth book, and some analepses concerning previous confrontations with neighboring countries when providing information on the campaign of Basil II against the "Mysians" (Bulgarians).[61] Most of the books start with the spring season as the beginning of the military campaign and consequently end with the coming of the winter, but between these events very few others are mentioned. The account starts from the year 959 – Romanos' II ascension to the throne and his campaign to Crete against the Arabs with Nikephoros as commander-in-chief (αὐτοκράτορ στρατηγός). The second book discusses the actions on two fronts – Leo Phokas' quick mission against Arabs in Asia Minor and Nikephoros Phokas' successfully capturing of Chandax, the town of the Cretans, in March 961. Both generals celebrated a triumph and retreated to their military camps whence Nikephoros led his "irresistible and invincible army" against the land of the Arabs, carrying off an enormous amount of booty. The last three chapters of the book reveal the turbulence at court caused by the sudden death of the emperor in 963. Nikephoros was again proclaimed commander of the army in the eastern provinces[62] ensuring the patriarch Polyeuktos of his good intentions and despite the efforts of the *parakoimomenos* Joseph Bringas[63]. The third book examines in details the

[61] Leo often substituted contemporary eponyms with classical terms. In this case he called Bulgarians Mysians.

[62] During the reign of Romanos II the military office *δομέστικος τῶν σχολῶν* (commander of the *tagma* – military unit) was divided into two – one leading the army in the East and the other in the West.

[63] About Joseph Bringas Leo writes "a eunuch of great influence at the imperial palace (for he was the proud bearer of the title of *parakoimomenos*), who was ill-disposed toward Nikephoros" (Leo II,10). *Παρακοιμώμενος,* literary meaning „sleeping at the side", was the eunuch-guardian of the emperor's chamber. From the mid-ninth-century these officals gained great influence and power in the government of the empire as was the case with Joseph Bringas, later Basil Lekapenos (see ODB 3:1584). Joseph

intrigues of the latter who desperately tried to get the support of two other generals – Marianos and John Tzimiskes – in order to deprive Nikephoros of his power. John reported everything to his uncle (Nikephoros) encouraging him to be proclaimed emperor by his army. After taking control over Constantinople with the help of Basil the Nothos (Lekapenos) Nikephoros entered the capital in a triumphal manner, was crowned by the patriarch and married Theophano – the widow of Romanos II. In the next book Leo retold the glorious victories of Nikephoros in Tarsos, problems with the military tribute to the Mysians (Bulgarians), an unfortunate campaign in Sicily and the continuous siege of Antioch. The reader also learns about public discontent connected to an accident in the Hippodrome that caused the death of many; Leo Phokas' degradation (the passage quoted in the previous chapter); some natural calamities such as an earthquake in Klaudioupolis, a devastating storm in Constantinople, or an eclipse of the sun. John Tzimiskes was reintroduced to the narrative in book five. After an account on the military activities of the Rus against the Mysians and the fall of Antioch, Leo described the plot of John and Theophano against Nikephoros, and in detail the murder of the latter. John ascended the throne, put the purple shoes and took control over the capital.

By this general overview of the *History* one can see the rhetorical effects of representing the emperors as mighty generals, and concentrating the account on military campaigning rather than political, diplomatic, economic and related issues. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Skylitzes criticized Leo for composing "his own history" stating that his intention was to plunge his audience "into dizziness and confusion". Before taking Skylitzes words for granted, it is worth looking at the

appears as the main antagonist in the first books of the *History*, as though officially empress Theophano was the regent of her two young sons, it was Joseph and the patriarch Polyeuktos who had actual power, see ODB 1:325-6. On the role of eunuchs in the imperial court see Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect*

structure of his narrative for the same events. The figure of Nikephoros appears in the account of the reign of Romanos II in connection to the campaign to Crete and later in Syria. Skylitzes also described in detail Joseph Bringas' plans to persuade with gifts and honours John Tzimiskes or Romanos Kourkouas (another general) to help him act against Nikephoros. This plan failed as Nikephoros was alarmed by the two generals, who advised and help him ascend to power. In addition the *Synopsis* suggests an alternative version of the causes, namely that Nikephoros had desired power for a long time and was further inflamed by his passion for Empress Theophano.[64] Another difference between the two texts is the brief report on the relationship between the emperor and the monk Antonios the Stoudite. But apart from the military operations to Sicily, Cilicia, Cyprus, Syria, and Antioch, Skylitzes inserted a passages referring to the hatred which the people felt towards Nikephoros. What is perhaps more important, he explained the reasons for that as the emperor's fault (ἡ αἰτία). I will briefly summarize the main points of this *Kaiserkritik*.

One of Nikephoros' many mistakes was that he did not care if his soldier were undisciplined (ἀτακτοῦσι) and that he left unpunished those who were harassing and plundering (διαρπαγέντων) the citizens. He did not only increas, but also added new various taxes characterized as "unimaginable robberies" (συντελειῶν … λεηλασίαις ἀνυποστάτοις). His military campaign infringed on the senate's interest, as he took part of their resources (φιλοτιμημάτων) which he needed for the army. Regarding his attitude towards the Church, Nikephoros issued a law by the power of which no bishop could be elected or ordained without his knowledge and approval. Further more, he

Servant. Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 163-183.

[64] Καὶ εἷς μὲν λόγος φέρεται οὕτως, ἕτερος δέ, ὁ καὶ δοκῶν ἀληθέστερος, ὡς πολὺν ὤδινε χρόνον τὴν τῆς βασιλείας ἐπιθυμίαν, καὶ οὐ τοσοῦτον αὐτὸν ὁ ταύτης ἔρως ἐξέφλεγεν, ὅσον ὁ τῆς βασιλίδος Θεοφανοῦς. (*Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum,* ed. I. Thurn, CFHB V (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 257. The English translation, where provided, is mine).

wanted soldiers who died fighting against the Arabs to be proclaimed saints stating that only in warfare can salvation be obtained. Next he decreased the value of the *nomisma*, a fiscal policy that led to scarcity of provisions in the capital. As the worst of his actions Skylitzes considered the building of a fortifying wall to the palace. The author called this "tyrant's dwelling against the miserable citizens" (τυραννεῖον κατὰ ἀθλίων πολιτῶν) especially because he order provisions to be kept there and even bakeries to be built in case there would be a rebellion, for there was a prophecy that he would die inside the palace.

From all these critiques only few are in evidence in Leo's account. One of them is the increase of the taxes: "the emperor mercilessly introduced taxes that had never before been conceived of, saying that he needed a lot of money for the army, and he oppressed his subjects with these [taxes]" (Leo IV,6).[65] But even this passage is preceded by the careful implication that "a rumor ran through." Moreover, if the reader is to believe this gossip about Nikephoros' lack of philanthropy the preceding passage is to instruct him that it was the emperor's brother, Leo the *kouropalates*, who had, as was discussed above, "abandoned his manly and soldierly life, exchanging it for a city-dwelling and greedy entrepreneur." Thus, even if the emperor manipulated the taxes it is to be concluded that he was badly influenced and manipulated by his brother. This statement might seem too strong, but the distinction that Leo the Deacon makes between the two brothers is quite obvious: one has abandoned the military lifestyle and hence virtue, while the other is leading his army and winning victory after victory. Even if one were to neglect this, the fact remains that these two lines are the only place where the heavy taxation is mentioned.

[65] καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς φόρους τοὺς μήπω ἐπινοηθέντας ἀπαραιτήτως ἐκαινοτόμει, ἐς τὸ στρατιωτικὸν λέγων χρημάτων ὅτι δεῖσθαι συχνῶν, καὶ τούτοις κατέτρυχε τὸ ὑπήκοον. (Leo IV,6)

On the contrary when Skylitzes recounted a starvation that inflicted the population after some natural calamities, he put more emphasis on the emperor's guilt, stating that he rejoiced more, than he helped his subjects, though he saw them suffering. In addition to this evil came Leo Phokas's misdeed, for he is charged with engaging in trade-traffic of food and thus causing misfortunes, many and of various kind.[66]

Another clear distinction is evident when reading Leo's account of building the fortifying wall in the palace (Leo IV,6) and comparing it to that of Skylitzes (Skyl.Nik.18). Both writers mentioned that there was a prophecy that Nikephoros will die in the palace and thus constructed a wall for protection. Leo, however, referred to the prophecy as to something uncertain (λέγεται) and seems to pay more attention to the construction describing it in detail and stating (perhaps even bragging) that it could be seen by his time. The interpretation and that one finds in Skylitzes' report is rather different, as here the ruler is said to had collected provisions after being warned about his potential assassination. Thus whereas Leo focuses once again on the emperor and his emotions, stating that he was terrified (περιδεής), Skylitzes observed the building of the wall caused additional distress for the citizens (ἠνίασε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους… ἡ τοῦ τείηους κτίσις) and increased their hatred towards him.

Skylitzes had elaborated the topic about the hatred against Nikephoros and described a series of events closely connected to each other in chapters 19 and 20. First on Easter a fight broke out between some sailors and Armenians (probably from the military troops) resulting in many deaths. The historian then relates this to a rumor that he had heard, namely that the emperor irritated by the citizens (χαλεπαίνων ὁ

[66] ὁ δὲ Νικηφόρος ἔχαιρε μᾶλλον, ἢ ἐβοήθει θλιβομένους ὁρῶν τοὺς ὑπηκόους. καὶ οὐχ οὗτοσ μόνος, ἀλλὰ καὶ Λέων ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ, ταῖς καπηλείαις προσκείμενος τῶν εἰδῶν, πολλῶν καὶ ποικίλων δεινῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐνέπλησεν (Skyl.Nik.20). Liudprand also mentioned that during a famine that raged horribly everywhere, Nikephoros was earning money by selling for two gold coins what he had bought for one (see Liudprand, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, tr. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 266.

Νικηφόρος τοῖς πολίταις) and considering them responsible for the riot, decided to punish them and plot a trap at the Hippodrome. He ordered his troops to imitate a battle with naked swords, the spectators, however, unaware that this was not for real, ran for their life and got trampled at the narrow and steep exits. Nikephoros during that moment was sitting on his throne still and undisturbed (ἀδεής τε καὶ ἄτρεπτος).

The same event can be found in Leo's *History*.

> Nikephoros ascended into the Hippodrome, and sat watching the chariot races he organized. He also gave orders to his soldiers to descend into the stadium, divide into opposing units, draw their swords, and attack each other in sport, to train in this way for battle. But the inhabitants of Byzantium, who knew nothing of military exercises, were panic-stricken at the flash of the swords, and, frightened by the assault of the soldiers in close quarters and by the clattering [of their arms], in their terror at the novel spectacle they turned to flight and ran to their homes. Quite a few deaths resulted from the shoving and the chaotic rush, as many were trampled underfoot and miserably suffocated. This tragic event was a beginning of hatred for the emperor in Byzantium[67]. (Leo IV,6).

Leo does not mention the possibility that the emperor might have instigated this accident on purpose. On the contrary it looks like a clumsy action of a benevolent emperor, who wanted to offer an astonishing and realistic spectacle that was misinterpreted by the audience and led to unfortunate consequences. This passage together with the one that follows in chapter seven are among the few episodes referring to the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. One could look at this as an indicator of Nikephoros' characteristic that the historian did not want to emphasize. What may be drawn from the clues is a representation of Nikephoros as an emperor

[67] αὐτὸς δὲ παρὰ τὸ θέατρον ἀναβάς, ἱππικὸν ἀγῶνα καθῆστο τελῶν. καὶ δῆτα τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν στρατιώταις ἐκέλευε, καταβάντας ἐπὶ τὸ στάδιον καὶ εἰς ἀντιπάλους ἀποκριθέντας φάλαγγας σπασαμένους τὰ ξίφη, κατὰ παιδιὰν ἐπαλλήλοις χωρεῖν, καὶ ταύτῃ γυμνάσασθαι πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον. Βυζάντιοι δέ, πολεμικῶν ἔργων ἀγνῶτες τυγχάνοντες, τὴν τῶν ξιφῶν καταπλαγέντες αὐγὴν, καὶ τὴν ὁμόσε τῶν στρατιωτῶν ὁρμὴν καὶ τὸν πάταγον ὑποδείσαντες, ἐκδειματωθέντες δὲ τῷ καινῷ τοῦ θεάματος, εἰς φυγὴν ἐτράποντο καὶ πρὸς τὰς σφῶν οἰκίας ἀπέτρεχον. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὠθισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀτάκτου φορᾶς οὐκ ὀλίγος φόνος συμβέβηκε, πλείστων συμπατηθέντων καὶ ἀποπνιγέντων οἰκτρῶς. τοῦτο τὸ δρᾶμα μίσους ἀφορμή τις γέγονε Βυζαντίου πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα (Leo IV,6).

who is so devoted to warfare that he has lost the relation with the civil population and can provoke only terror with exercises that seem usual for him.

Leo further omitted the continuation of the people's discontent, about which one reads in the following twentieth chapter of Skylitzes' *Synopsis*. The events took place during a procession on Ascension Day, i.e. forty days after the accident. As the emperor was returning from Pege[68] the relatives of those that died at the Hippodrome were calling Nikephoros "a vindictive murderer covered with the blood of compatriots" (ὁμοφύλοις αἵμασι μιαρόν… ἀλάστορα καὶ παλαμναῖον). Skylitzes final remark is that these assaults frightened the emperor and made him order the building of the fortifying wall.

In Leo's work one encounters a similar description of the events, but different interpretation and conclusions. The author, thus, stated that during a procession on the feast of the Ascension to Pege a fight broke out between Byzantines and Armenians in which the latter injured a significant number of people from the city. On the way back to the palace in the evening the crowd started insulting and throwing stones at the emperor. Franz Tinnefeld pointed out the rearranging of events – the fight between local citizens and Armenians happening after the misfortunate spectacle, and not before as in the *Synopsis,* for in this way Leo tried to undermine and to leave motiveless the hatred against Nikephoros.[69] Confirmation for that idea is the skillfully performed shift in the narrative's focus from the riot of the people to the *persona* of the emperor.

> When I saw the emperor Nikephoros riding slowly on horseback through the town, unaffected by such insults, maintaining self-control, and acting as if nothing unusual were occurring, I was astonished at the

[68] Pege (Πηγή) was a an ancient sanctuary of the Virgin, outside the Theodosian walls. The church was rebuilt several times. It was visited by the emperor on the feast of the Ascension. See ODB 3:1616.
[69] See Franz Tinnefeld, *Kaiserkritik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag: 1971), 112, 116.

> imperturbable spirit of the man, how fearlessly he maintained the nobility of his spirit in difficult circumstances. (Leo IV, 7)[70]

The text is in complete opposition to Skylitzes' conclusion. At the end of the episode Leo stated that Nikephoros just dismissed this act of drunkenness (ἔργον μέθης) from his mind, a point made to emphasize the magnanimity of the *basileus*, whereas a century later the author of the *Synopsis* wrote that the same *basileus* got scared and decided to built himself a stronger wall. It would be naïve to explain Leo's interpretation as product of his emotional youth memories (for he stated that at that time he was still a student), since as a contemporary to the events he must have been well aware of the public opinion and critics. It is more likely that he intentionally reduced to the minimum passages on Nikephoros' confrontation with the civic population. On the other hand he extended those on military campaigns inserting many details and separate tales representative of the almost personal contact between emperor and regular soldiers that are not to be found in Skylitzes' history. Thus, Leo leaves no place for doubt about the concern Nikephoros had for his soldiers. He is described training them (Leo I,9), marshalling the troops himself (Leo III,11), reminding them not to be careless (Leo IV,2), addressing them as "fellow soldiers" (συστρατιῶται) and comparing himself to their "loving father" (φιλόπαις πατὴρ) (Leo III,5). This is a clear contradiction to Skylitzes' account on the undisciplined soldiers, who were left to ravage the city without any punishment.

The comparative analysis using as a referent Skylitzes' *Synopsis* demonstrated several important characteristics of Leo the Deacon's work. First of all in the *History* one can easily detect the omission of accounts related to the emperor's interference in church questions – prohibition of donations, election of priests, and martyrdom of

[70]ἔφιππόν τε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Νικεφόρον βάδην ἰόντα βλέπων διὰ τοῦ ἄστεος, καὶ ἀπερικτύπητον ταῖς τοσαύταις ὕβρεσι πέλοντα, καὶ τὸ φρόνημα σταθηρὸν διασῴζοντα, καὶ ὡς μή τινος ἐπισυμβάντος καινοῦ διακείμενον, ἐτεθήπειν τὸ ἀκατάπληκτον τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, ὅπως ἄτρεστον παρὰ τὰ δεινὰ τὴν ψυχὴν συνετήρει εὐγένειαν (Leo IV,7).

soldiers. Second, even when some passages bear traces of *Kaiserkritik* this critic is diverted from the ruler – connected to the actions of his brother, reduced in significance, stated as unintentional, or a misunderstanding. Third and most important, events that are described mot- à -mot in the two works and Skylitzes presented as the cause for are interpreted by Leo as to reveal an indisputably magnanimous ruler.

The examination of the narrative's segments provides further an answer to the third question regarding the social group that is stated as the *oikos* of the protgonist, the community that is concerned with his deeds and depends on them.[71] In this sense the *oikos* is the place where the character's *andreia* can be manifested and in this regard it is important to underline that in the *History* of Leo the core of the emperor's *oikos* is presented as the army and not the "civil" *rhomaioi*. To use Paul Magdalino's terminology, the military community is the social group on whose behalf and at whose expense honour is defended and pursued. It is a dialogue that is in a way codified for the use of the two participating roles. By following the norms of behavior, Nikephoros shows his *andreia* and defends his honour in the imperial *oikos*.

Leo the Deacon *vs. De Cerimoniis*

The *History* of Leo is further to be compared with a particular chapter of the handbook on court ceremonial now known as *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae.* When revising and supplementing the books on imperial ceremonies, a chapter was added describing the inauguration of Nikephoros II Phokas. The text informs about the circumstances of the emperor's ascension to the throne, and provides information on the acclamation of Nikephoros by his army in the military camp in Cappadocia. The general is said to be drag out of his tent against his will lifted up (on a shield?) and

[71] Paul Magdalino examines *oikos* as "contained within the *genos* and formed its basic structure, the nuclear family of father, mother and unmarried children". See Paul Magdalino, "Honour Among Romaioi: the Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos," *Byzantine*

proclaimed *basileus* (βίᾳ καὶ μὴ βουλόμενον ἐκ τῆς τέντης ὑψώσαντες ἀνηγόρευσαν αὐτόν βασιλέα)[72]. Since he did not have crown or any imperial ornamentation, he just put on the purple shoes. This is the account from *De Cerimoniis*.

Leo, however, provides a much more detailed account, imbedding in his text a whole speech of Nikephoros that he held in front of the army and that reflects the main qualities a ruler must possess. As Basil Lekapenos (or whoever revised the ceremonial book) wanted to give an example of inauguration, he was not interested in defending and legitimizing Nikephoros' acts. After explaining in short the way in which the future emperor with the help of his brother took over Constantinople, he mentioned the different stages and stops of the procession. At dawn Nikephoros crossed the Sea of Marmara by the *dromon*[73] and landed near the Golden Gate, where he was saluted by the people; then on horseback he went along the outside city wall to the monastery of the Virgin of the Abramites in order to pray; still on horseback he then reached the Golden Gate, was greeted by the demes as βασιλέα αὐτοκράτορα Ῥωμαίων; continuing further to the forum, he entered the church of the Theotokos where he performed the *proskynesis* (a supplicant prostration); then, on foot accompanied by a solemn procession with a ceremonial cross he went to Hagia Sophia already dressed with *divetesion* (a long ceremonial tunic), the *kampagia* (footgear) and the *campotuba* (greaves); after another set of acclamation of the people, Nikephoros entered the church, where he assumed the *tzitzakion* (a special ceremonial costume), reached the

and Modern Greek Studies, 13 (1989) reprinted in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium* (Aldershot: Variorum Reprints, 1991), 185. (hereafter: Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi").

[72] See Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. J. Reiske, CSHB (Bonn, 1829), 434. Reiske in the Latin translation of the text suggested that he was "*levatum scuto*" – elevated on a shield. Dagron support such reading of ὑψώσαντες, underlining that Nikephoros' coronation had as a model that of Basil I, as both were "new men" and "their imperial proclamation looked like a triumph." See Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. Jean Birrel (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) (hereafter: Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*), 73-4.

[73] A type of decked warship (See ODB 1:662). The fact that Nikephoros entered the Golden Horn by warship makes his *adventus* resemble a military triumph.

narthex and went to the ambo accompanied by the patriarch who adorned him with the *chlamys* (long cloak) and the crown.[74]

The description of the proclamation is important first as evidence that the ceremonial remained fundamentally unchanged compared with previous examples – Nikephoros was crowned in Hagia Sophia like all his predecessors and after a proclamation and *adventus* similar to that of Leo I.[75] In connection with Leo's *History*, the account provides an important basis for comparison. The whole ceremony occupies just a few sentences in Leo's text.

> [Nikephoros] stripped off, and threw away his own tunic, and fastened on the imperial and royal robe, and made himself more regal. He mounted on a proud white horse, adorned with imperial ornaments and purple cloths, and entered the Golden gate, applauded and honored by all the people and officials. It was the sixteenth of August, of the sixth indiction, in the year 6470, when these things occurred. Then, when he went to the celebrated church of God and received worthy honors from the clergy, he was crowned at the age of fifty-five with the imperial diadem by Polyeuktos, who was guiding the patriarchate. [III, 8][76]

The differences are striking. There is no sign of the gradual transformation that the future emperor was expected to experience during the *adventus*, loosing his ferocity and becoming more and more civil, a metamorphosis that gave not power but legitimacy to the emperor.[77] By the account in *De Cerimoniis*, Nikephoros is following this model of conduct introducing a series of changes in his dress, walking on foot in the forum, praying procumbent in the church, and being given the imperial insignia by the patriarch. In the *History* the general is more proud than humble, no *proskynesis* is

[74] On the imperial ceremonial costumes see Elisabeth Piltz, "Middle Byzantine Court Costume," *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.:Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 39-52.

[75] See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 73-4.

[76] ὁ δὲ Νικηφόρος… τὸ ἰδιωτικὸν περιελὼν καὶ ἀποσφενδονήσας χιτώνιον, τὴν αὐτοκρατορικὴν καὶ βασίλειον ἐφεστρίδα ἐμπορπησάμενος, εἰς τὸ βασιλικώτερον ἑαυτὸν μετεσκεύασεν· ἵππου τε ἀγερώχου τῶν λευκῶν ἐπιβὰς, φαλάροις κεκοσμημένου βασιλικοῖς καὶ τάπησιν ἀλουργοῖς, διὰ τῆς χρυσῆς πύλης εἰσήλαυνεν, ὑπὸ παντὸς τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν ἐν τέλει κροτούμενός τε καὶ γεραιρόμενος. ἑκκαιδεκάτην ὁ Αὔγουστος ἤλαυνε μὴν, ἐπὶ τῆς ἕκτης ἰνδίκτου, ἐν τῷ ˏςυο΄ ἔτει, ὅτε ταῦτα ἐπράττετο. ἄρτι δὲ, ἐπεὶ πρὸς τὸν τοῦ θείου περίπυστον σηκὸν εἰσεφοίτησε, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ τῶν ἱερέων πληρώματος ἀξιοχρέους τιμὰς ὑπεδέξατο, πρὸς τοῦ τὴν πατριαρχίαν ἰθύνοντος Πολυεύκτου τῷ βασιλικῷ διαδήματι στέφεται, ἓν καὶ πεντηκοστὸν ἔτος τῆς ἡλικίας ἐλαύνων. (Leo III, 8).

ever mentioned. On the contrary as a conqueror of a seized town, he seems to be acting on his own will – changing his own clothes (ἑαυτὸν μετεσκεύασεν) before the ceremonial. He is transforming his physical appearance and acting in a royal, but not in a modest way. The passage itself seems to be divided into two. The first one – the triumphal entrance through the Golden Gate, is the actual ascension to imperial power. It is marked by the indication of the exact date. The latter one – the crowning by the patriarch is left in the background, as it is an addition to the former – the emperor entered the church to receive the honour that the clergy owned him (ἀξιοχρέους τιμὰς ὑπεδέξατο). The impression of Nikephoros being the only active figure in the story is achieved by making him the syntactical subject governing the sentences: (περιελών, ἀποσφενδονήσας, ἐμπορπησάμενος, μετεσκεύασεν, ἐπιβάς, εἰσήλαυνεν, κροτούμενός τε καὶ γεραιρόμενος, εἰσεφοίτησε, ὑπεδέξατο, στέφεται, ἐλαύνων).

From the analysis a conclusion can be made regarding Leo's judgment on what is of importance, and what is not, when describing imperial ascension to power. All the splendor of the ceremonial that was lasting for several hours is not of interest to the economy of the text. More significant than the vanity of the courtly life-style is the representation of Nikephoros himself who in his power and right had come and taken what belonged to him. At least this is how Leo wanted his readers to perceive the event. In this case, however, a question arises: How in the first place did Nikephoros get the right to claim the throne for himself?

The examination of the preceding passages will shed light on the motives of the author to pay less attention to the way the ceremonial was conducted. Instead of describing its splendor Leo devoted the pages of his *History* to the glorious battles of Nikephoros. It is clearly pointed out that the victorious general, adored by his army and

[77] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 65.

supplied with their military support, entered the City already possessing ultimate power and not depending on the coronation as a decisive element of receiving legitimacy.

Honour meaning legitimacy

As a general rule one could become legitimate *basileus* in four different ways: by marriage and integration into the family that possessed the right over the summit of power; by patrimony – "fraternal" partition of the power; by dynasty – usually *porphyrogennetoi* (children born in purple) becoming a co-ruler officially sharing the rulership with their fathers; or by usurpation.[78] Looking at the text of Leo, Nikephoros married the dowager Empress Theophano and became regent of the two legitimate children from the ruling dynasty. The Macedonian dynasty, however, was founded by Basil I (r. 867-886) by murder of the previous emperor Michael III (r. 842-867). The pro-Macedonian chronicles, written under the supervision of Constantine VII, fearlessly supported the merits over legitimacy of Basil I – the one who saved the empire from the purple-born Michael III, who was presented as a good-for-nothing drunkard and gambler and thus not worthy of the throne. Dagron observed that even in the eulogy of Leo VI more attention was being paid not to the legendary 'royal' origin of his father, but to "the powerful image of the 'renovator'".[79] Kingship was still considered to be divine, but it was God who appointed the future king, who was not necessarily coming from the ruling dynasty. This divine choice was further supported by a second level of legitimacy by public acclamation.[80]

Leo's account on the events taking place in 963 is in full confirmation to this perception of the superiority of merits. Nevertheless, in contrast to the *Life* of Basil I, in the *History* the author put much more emphasize on the military deeds of his hero,

[78] Ibidem, 24-5. Rosemary Morris suggested three patterns for legitimacy – marriage, regency and usurpation. See Morris, "Succession and Usurpation", 202.
[79] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 37.
[80] Ibidem, 49.

Nikephoros Phokas, than on anything else. This, as pointed out by Kazhdan and Constable, introduced the image of the "noble knight" into Byzantine literature.[81]

Of importance of my present study is to examine the way in which Leo the Deacon built the image of Nikephoros as a charismatic leader. For long before he received the support of his troops, and "all [the army] together they acclaimed him, declaring him the august emperor of the Romans" (Leo III,4), he had proven worthy to wear this title.

The image of Nikephoros is often composed of phrases borrowed from earlier historiographical writings which do not give a real notion of the particular character, and must rather be regarded as *topoi* in the construction of the image. Such phrases as "shrewd and energetic" (ἀγχίνους τε καὶ δραστήριος), "good at warfare" (ἀγαθόν τε τὰ πολεμικά) referring to Nikephoros are borrowed from Prokopios[82]. Afterwards, these general statements are supported by stories about particular events showing off his military virtue. Expressions like these are quite often inserted in the middle of the narrative, sometimes even disrupting a sentence (shown in this passage by underlining).

> While he was analyzing the situation and trying to reach a decision – for he was shrewd and energetic, the most clever of any man we know at grasping the best solution and carrying it out, had a temperate disposition, and was not tempted by pleasures; at the same time he was skillful at making the proper use of opportunities and events, and unequaled in strength and vigor. For it is said that once, when a champion of the most valiant barbarians attacked him, Nikephoros aimed his spear at his chest and thrust it with both hand, and the force was so great that the spear went right through him, piercing both sides of his breastplate – the idea occurred to him of making a circuit of the town and reconnoitering carefully, so that he might attack wherever it was vulnerable[83](Leo I,5).

[81] See Kazhdan and Constable, "Homo Byzantinus", 111.

[82] Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis Sullivan mentioned that the two phrases occur in 32 instances. See Talbot – Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon,* 60(footnote).

[83] Οὕτω διαλύοντι τούτῳ καὶ γνωματεύοντι (ἦν γὰρ ἀγχίνους τε καὶ δραστήριος, ἐννοῆσαί τε τὸ ξυνοῖσον καὶ εἰς πέρας ἀγαγεῖν πάντων, ὧν ἴσμεν, ἐπηβολώτατος, σώφρων τε καὶ μὴ εἴκων ἡδοναῖς· καὶ προσέτι δεινὸς τοὺς καιροὺς καὶ τὰ πρὰγματα εἰς δέον μεταχειρίσασθαι, τὴν μέντοι ἰσχὺν καὶ ῥώμην ἀκαταγώνιστος· λέγεται γὰρ πρωταγωνιστοῦ τινος τῶν ἀλκιμωτάτων βαρβάρων ἀντικαταστάντος αὐτῷ ποτε, τὸ δόρυ κατὰ τῶν στέρνων τὸν Νικεφόρον ἰθύναντα καὶ ἀμφοτέραις ὠσαμάμενον, οὕτω γενέσθαι σφοδρὰν τὴν ἀντέρεισιν, ὡς καὶ διαμπερὲς τὸ δόρυ διελθεῖν, καὶ ἄμφω διατεμεῖν τὰ μέρη τοῦ θώρακος),

Applying modern aesthetic criteria to literature we must admit that such passages sound mechanical and are lacking organic structure.[84] In the economy of the text, however, they serve a distinctive purpose, which is to accumulate as many instances as possible where Nikephoros is shown as befitting to be *autokrator*. His military deeds, which included the capture of Crete in 961 – an important strategic position for controlling the Aegean Sea – were highly praised and celebrated with a triumph during the reign of Emperor Romanos II.[85] Though the procession itself is not described, Leo gives an account of the magnificent reception that Nikephoros received from the emperor and the spectators, who "marveled at the magnitude and splendor of the booty." As a consequence, the general "received the admiration of all the people, the Emperor Romanos presented him with generous gifts and entrusted him with the command of Asia."[86] An abrupt change occurred after the death of Romanos when the *parakoimomenos* Joseph, suspecting that Nikephoros would use his army and revolt, belittled his services and tried to deprive the heroic general of his army and life. In light of the image of Nikephoros that Leo had built in the narrative till this episode, this act could be perceived only as depriving one of the best from what is his by right and honour. This is clearly stated by the speech the writer inserts in the protagonist's mouth: "What fine reward I receive for all my toil and labor from the man who is in charge of the imperial palace!" (Leo, II,11).[87]

ἔννοια γοῦν ἐπῆλθεν αὐτῷ, κύκλῳ τὸ ἄστυ περιελθεῖν καὶ ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς τοῦτο κατασκοπῆσαι, ἵνα ὅποι παρείκοι προσαγάγῃ τὸν πόλεμον. (I, 5]

[84] Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteraturvon Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527-1453),* (Munchen, 1897), 267-8.

[85] Evidence for that is the poem composed by Theodosios the Diacon "On the recapturing of Crete", where Nikephoros is highly praised for his military achievements. See CSHB XI, 261-306.

[86] Μεγαλοπρεπῶς τε παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Ῥωμανοῦ ὑποδεχθεὶς, θρίαμβον ἐπὶ τοῦ θεάτρου κατήνεγκε, παντὸς συναθροισθέντος τοῦ δήμου, καὶ τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος τῆς λείας θαυμάζοντος. (Leo II, 9).

[87] "Καλάς γε" ἔφη, "παρὰ τοῦ τῶν βασιλείων κατάρχοντος τῶν τοσούτων ἀγώνων καὶ πόνων καρποῦμαι τὰς ἀμοιβάς" (Leo, II,11)

The classical tradition in the dichotomy of *honour* and *shame*

Paul Magdalino has made it clear that the basic elements serving the identity and the social status for kin group and community remained to a great extent unchanged from the time of the ancient polis to modern Greek villages. The two basic co-ordinates of social existence included the honourable start in life (*eugeneia*), and the glory of a life honourably lived (*doxa*).[88] The first element was no longer a *conditio sine qua non* because of the Christian notion of *humilitas*.[89] Thus, the way to gain honour was to display *andreia* (valour, bravery) and, after achieving a place in the community, this status (in Nikephoros case that of commander-in-chief of Asia) had to be enhanced through the exercise of authority[90] so the individual could assert himself and not lose his reputation.

From the *indices* in the narrative the reader is inclined to consider the action Nikephoros undertook as in complete accordance with his right to defend his dignity. This is reminiscent of the archaic concept of honour, the key element that distinguished the hero from the weak. Examples can be found in Homer (perhaps once again serving as a model for Leo). In the *Iliad* Agamemnon was within his rights to take what he considers his, in contrast to the image of Thersites, who fails to stand firm behind his claims. In this sense, the reader is confronted not with usurpation, but with a legitimate succession of power, a power that belongs to the better.[91]

This impression is further strengthened by the speech that Leo put in the mouth of Nikephoros. The episode took place right after Nikephoros had been proclaimed august emperor by the army and was about to lead his soldiers to Constantinople and assert his

[88] Paul Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi,"183-5.
[89] See Markopoulos, "Constantine in Macedonian Historiography" for an interesting example for treating the problem of humble or noble origin of Basil I in the funeral oration by Leo VI, *Vita Basilii* by Constantine VII and *On the reign of emperors* by Genesios, 163-4.
[90] Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi," 203.

rights. Lars Hoffmann put great emphasis on the element of the speeches in the *History.*[92] Following his arguments, their role was to add more glamour to the story, to satisfy the expectations of the reader, and to make the narrative more trustworthy. By analyzing the six speeches presented by Leo the Deacon he identified six criteria from the ancient rhetorical genre of *logos paraklētikos* (stimulating speech), namely, that a deed has to be presented as just (δίκαιος), legitimate (νόμιμος), beneficial (σύμφερος), good (καλός), pleasant (ἡδύς), and facile (ῥᾴδιος).[93] Hence, this classical rhetoric structure can be observed in this particular speech through which Nikephoros justified his claims to the imperial throne. This speech was meant not for the soldiers (though the general must have encouraged his army before attacking the capital), but rather to serve as the next step in the narrative construction of the image and make the reader believe that Nikephoros embodied the perfect ruler.

Leo presented him as a selfless commander ready to sacrifice his own life for the common good if needed. The situation demanded that he act and struggle to save the empire, which was clearly endangered by the intrigues of the court administration. Since the audience of the speech (the physically present army but also all citizens of the empire) was suffering from this, to get rid of Joseph Bringas and to take control of the situation seemed just and beneficial to all – the army, the state, and, individually, to Nikephoros. He was driven not by desire for "rebellion against the state" (τόδε τὸ σῆμα τῆς βασιλείας ἀνείληφα), but by compulsion for the army, and responsibility and concern (φροντίδα καὶ πρόνοιαν) for their safety and that of the empire (εὐνοίᾳ μᾶλλον ὑμῶν). The charisma of the general is revealed even more in his devotion and

[91] On the rhythm of depriving(s) as a motive force in the narrative of *Iliad* see Bogdan Bogdanov, *Istoria na starogrutskata kultura [History of The Culture of Ancient Greece]*, (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1989), 69.

[92] See Lars Hoffmann, "Geschichtsschreibung oder Rhetorik? Zum *logos parakletikos* bei Leon Diakonos," *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter,* ed. Michael Grünbart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 105-139.

selflessness as he was "ready to lay down my very life for your sakes" (πρόθυμός εἰμι, καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), as the soldiers had chosen him to release them from the "unwarranted madness of the eunuch and his rabid and irate insolence" (τὴν τομίου ἔκσπονδον ἀπόνοιαν καὶ τὴν λυσσώδη καὶ ὀργῶσαν ἐκείνου αὐθάδειαν) (Leo III,5).

The passage resembles the genre of mirror of princes, as in it the author stated the basic virtues of the ruler – to act with responsibility, modesty, philanthropy, and most important to be concerned about his subject.[94] In support of the legitimization of Nikephoros' action comes the stress put on the oaths and agreement broken by Joseph Bringas. On this ground the victim of this injustice (i.e., Nikephoros) held him responsible for the violation. Moreover, Leo emphasized the wrong the *parakoimomenos* had done to the general, depriving him of the dignities that Romanos II had awarded him, and which were perceived as part of Nikephoros' rights because they were merited and could be forfeited only on account of capital crimes.

> For I am convinced that in this struggle you will have as your helper even the Almighty. For it is not we who have broken the agreements and oaths, but the hostility of Joseph, who for no good reason has sent my relatives onto exile and, although I have not wronged him, he has cruelly and mercilessly devised death against me (Leo III,5). [95]

The last element of the argumentation proved that going against their own capital and shedding the blood of fellow Christians would be *pro bono patriae*, for the army

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[93] Ibidem, 109.

[94] For collection of Byzantine works devoted to political thought see Ernest Barker ed., *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). In his article "Lawful Society and Legitimate Power," Dagron discussed the notion of the term "legitimate power" as the absolute power of the emperor could only be tamed by advices (i.e. mirrors of princess) and not restrained by laws (Gilbert Dagron, "Lawful Society and Legitimate Power: ἔννομος πολιτεία, ἔννομος ἀρχή," *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth – Twelfth Centuries,* Angeliki E. Laiou and Dieter Simon ed. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994), 27-52.)

[95] Πέπεισμαι γὰρ ἔξειν ἐπὶ τουτονὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα συνεργὸν καὶ τὸν κρείττονα. τὰς γὰρ σπονδὰς καὶ τοὺς ὅρκους οὐχ ἡμεῖς, τὸ τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ δὲ διέφθειρε δυσμενές, ὃς τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀγχισεῖς ἐπὶ προφάσει μηδεμιᾷ ὑπερορίᾳ παρέπεμψεν, ἐμοὶ δὲ τούτων εἰδηκότι μηδέν, ὠμῶς καὶ ἀφιλανθρώπως θάνατον ἐσκαιώρησε. (Leo III,5)

would fight for the good of the empire. The greatest evidence was to be that God would stay by their side. It is His Providence that guided everything and would lead them to the fulfillment of their good intentions.

Emperor-warrior in a sacred war

After pointing out the clear emphasis on military virtue in the structure of imperial presentation, logically one would ask oneself why the author chose to use such an approach. Markopoulos suggests an answer, namely that, in the tenth century "the struggle of the Byzantines against the Arabs acquired the character of a sacred war."[96] The implication of such notion in regard to military activity is stated in several places in the narrative. First, in the speech of Nikephoros before the battle against the Cretans a clear distinction is made between the Romans-Christians and the barbarians-Arabs, when he recalled to the memory of the soldiers the "cruelty and ferocity of the descendants of the maidservant" (τὸ μὲν ὠμὸν καὶ θηριῶδες τῶν τῆς παιδίσκης ἐκγόνων) (Leo 1,6).[97] Such key words would trigger a whole set of biblical connotations about the lost tribes and Gog and Magog who were constantly threatening the Christian world. On a second level this would imply also the comparison and even unification between the image of Alexander the Great, closing the gates and saving the ancient civilization, and that of Nikephoros, the mighty warrior who ensured the safety of his Christian empire. Furthermore one is tempted to connect such references to the idea of sacred war led by a general, who clearly felt as the hand of God, stating: "Providence ... with the help of Almighty has brought us here to repay them [Arabs] sevenfold the evil fortunes" (πρόνοια … τῇ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ῥοπῇ ἡμᾶς ἐνταῦθα διεπεραιώσατο, ἑπταπλασίως αὐτοῖς ἀποδοῦναι τὸ ἀνταπόδομα) (Leo 1,6).[98]

[96] Markopoulos, "Constantine in Macedonian historiography," 165.
[97] The descendants of Hagar the maidservant of Abraham. Cf. Genesis 16:15.
[98] For further studies on the notion of sacred war in Byzantium see Tia Kolbaba, "Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire," *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 194-221 and George T. Dennis,

On the other hand, the representation of the emperor is "Christianized" by the description of his pious and moderate lifestyle. For he is not only devoting his private time to prayer, avoiding luxuries, revelry and other pleasures (Leo III,9), but he is also a passionate connoisseur of sacred objects – using the cross as military standards, taking sacred tiles, images, crosses from unbelievers and depositing them in churches in Constantinople. A representative example is presented by Leo in the passage about his campaign to Antioch. On the way he captured Edessa, entered the church of the Holy Confessors "for he has heard that the image of our Savior God that was imprinted on a tile was kept in this fortified city ... Nikephoros after capturing the town, took this very sacred tile away; later he had a case adorned with gold and gems, reverently set the tile in it, and dedicated it to the church of the Mother of God".[99]

If one follows Markopoulos in his opinion that pursuing the example of Constantine I was a must for every Byzantine emperor,[100] then one has to consider this episode as an illustration of this pattern: Nikephoros regains Antiochia for the Christian faith, delivers sacred relics into the possession of Constantinople, and bears the cross as his military insignium. The last is reminiscent of the mise-en-scène of Constantine I dreaming of the victorious symbol and winning the battle against Maxentius.[101]

The passage recording Nikephoros' murder provides one last instance for the holiness of the emperor. Here Leo inserted an impressive mis-en-scene depicting the

"Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium," *The Crusaders from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 31-39. The latter argued that Byzantines did not have any concept of true holy war, and consequently there were imperial, not holy wars. Dennis stated, however, that "religious rhetoric and ritual were prominent and persuasive" (ibidem, 35).

[99] ἠκηκόει γάρ, τὴν ἐν κεράμῳ τοῦ Σωτῆρος καὶ Θεοῦ ἐκτυπωθεῖσαν μορφὴν ἐν τῷδε τῷ φρουριῷ παρακατέχεσθαι… τότε δὲ Νικεφόρος ὁ βασιλεύς, ἐξελὼν τὸ ἄστυ, τὸν τοιοῦτον σεπὸν κέραμον ἐκεῖθεν ἀνείληφε, καὶ χρυσῷ καὶ λίθοις θήκην διασκευάσας μετέπειτα, καὶ ταύτῃ περιστείλας τοῦτον σεπτῶς, ἐν τῷ τῆς Θεομήτορος ναῷ, τῷ κατὰ τὴν βασίλειον ὄντι ἑστίαν, ἀνέθηκεν. (Leo IV,10). For the role of sacred object see Ioli Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of Relics," *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 till 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 53-80.

[100] Markopoulos, "Constantine in Macedonian historiography," 169.

emperor surrounded by sacred images - holy icons of the theandric image of Christ and the Mother of God and John the Baptist, making "his usual prayer to God and devoted himself to study of the Holy Scriptures. When the need for sleep came upon him, he lay down on the floor, upon the leopardskin and scarlet felt cloth…"[102]

The emphasis on the sacred war and the importance of defending Christendom may be explained by the eschatological tension towards the end of the first millennium as the time of the Second Coming of Christ.[103] Leo himself was no stranger to that notion and discussed in the opening of the first book that "many people believe that life is now undergoing a transformation, and that the expected Second Coming of the Savior and God is near, at the very gates."[104] He also showed his affection for extraordinary events – an earthquake that is described as premonition of God against human acts contrary to divine ordinance and "draining the cup of God's untempered wrath" (τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκπιοῦσα τὸ ποτήριον ἄκρατον) (Leo IV,9); a storm compared to the flood described in Genesis [IV,9]; an eclipse of the sun that had its precedent during at the time of the Passion of the Lord [IV,11]; the birth of Siamese twins [X,3]; a comet foretelling "bitter revolts, and invasions of foreign peoples, and civil wars, and migration from cities and the countryside, famines and plagues and terrible earthquakes, indeed almost total destruction of the Roman empire."[105] In this apocalyptic atmosphere the presence of a warrior at the helm of the empire must have been felt as some relief. If

[101] See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, tr. Averil Cameron and Stuard George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 80-1.
[102] Τὰς συνήθεις εὐχὰς ἀνέπεμπε τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ τῇ μελέτῃ τῶν θείων γραφῶν διεσχόλαζεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸν ὕπνον ἡ φύσις ἀπήτει… παρ᾽ τὸ παρδάλειον δέρρος καὶ τὸν κοκκοβαφῆ πῖλον, ἐπ᾽ ἐδάφους διανεπαύετο (Leo V,6).
[103] On millenarianism and apocalyticism around the year 1000 in Byzantium see Paul Magdalino "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," *Byzantium in the year 1000,* ed. Paul Magdalino, 233-270.
[104] ὡς πολλοῖς δοκεῖν, ἀλλοίωσιν ἄρτι τὸν βίον λαβεῖν, καὶ τὴν προσδοκωμένην δευτέραν κατάβασιν τοῦ Σωτῆρος καὶ Θεοῦ ἐπὶ θύραις ἐγγίζειν. (Leo, I,1)
[105] ἀποστασίας δὲ χαλεπὰς, ἐθνῶν τε ἐπιδρομὰς, καὶ ἐμφυλίους στάσεις, καὶ μεταναστάσεις πόλεων καὶ χώρων, λιμοὺς καὶ λοιμοὺς, καὶ φρικώδεις σεισμοὺς, καὶ πανολεθρίαν σχεδὸν τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἐπικρατείας (Leo, X,6)

one pushes this idea further, Leo might have sought to depict the *basileus* the last king to stand in the way of the Antichrist.

Conclusions

The portrait of Nikephoros in Leo the Deacon's work includes several notions. First, as the comparison with Skylitzes' *Synopsis* demonstrated, the main subject of the *History* is the military life of the *basileus* and not his "civil" activities, with a well-defined pro-Nikephoros reinterpretation of the critics against him. The fact that Leo neglected the importance of imperial court ceremonial as mean of providing legitimacy (in opposition to the account from *De Cerimoniis*), hinted towards the important role military glory (δόξα) and manliness (ἀνδρεία) played in the narrative. By the constant ascertainment of these two virtues Nikephoros is presented not as usurper of the imperial throne but as possessor of something that is befitting his qualities. Leo was the first to reintroduce military virtue as part of the ideal image of the *basileus*. Continuation of this trend can be traced in following eleventh and twelfth century in the works of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos, and also implicitly in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*.[106] The origin and reasons for this kind of representation as ruler-warrior can be sought both in the classical epic tradition and in the concept of fighting a sacred war.

[106] On the qualities in which honour consist as presented by Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos, see the above cited Paul Magdalino, "Homour among Romaioi."

Chapter 3

John Tzimiskes and making the image of a murderer

In the previous chapter, by analyzing and comparing the *History* of Leo the Deacon with other sources, I made an attempt to outline the qualities with which the author credited his hero – Nikephoros – in order to present him as honourable *basileus.* Looking closely at the peculiarities of these virtues, it has become clear that the main argument for the legitimacy and rightfulness of the newly elected emperor was seen in his military activity, glory and bravery. Similar pattern also appears in the remaining five books of the history devoted to the reign of John I Tzimiskes (r. 969-976). The focus of this chapter, however, will be on elements which distinguish the two narratives from each other and, respectively, the two modes of constructing imperial honour.

A murderer on the throne

The general impression when reading Leo's *History* is one of an account treating the two emperors in almost an equally positive manner. However one must keep in mind the difficulty the author must have faced in this task. For if Skylitzes is criticized for his almost schizophrenic description of Nikephoros Phokas,[107] the same must be said for Leo's report presenting John first as the murderer of the highly exalted emperor Nikephoros, and later praising the very same villain. The problem arose from the fact that the author was using a pro-Phokades source (panegyric or family records) for the first part of his work, and a pro-Tzimiskes one for the second part.[108] The principle of the composition had to be changed in respect to the different circumstances around John's ascension to power. A basic structural analysis will shed more light on this principle.

[107] Holmes, *Basil II*, 94-5, explaining this schizophrenic analysis with the employment of two contradictory sources.

In order to be perceived as a real *hero*, every hero needs to oppose an anti-hero. This is the case that is presented in the books devoted to Nikephoros, for he was the main protagonist acting against a clearly defined antagonist – the wicked eunuch Joseph Bringas. But, if one reads Leo's accounts of the events taking place in December 969, by killing Nikephoros, John deprived Byzantium of one of its most glorious emperors, endowed with extraordinary courage, physical strength, modesty, justice, magnanimity in affairs of state, and who had great experience in warfare. What is even more unfortunate, if it were not for this "malicious fortune" (βάσκανος τύχη) in which John played a quite significant role, "the Roman empire would have obtained greater glory than ever before" (μεγίστην ἄν ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονία καὶ οἵαν οὐκ ἄλλοτε εὔκλειαν ἀπηνέγκατο) (Leo V,8). Even if "in reality" Nikephoros was not so highly appreciated by his contemporaries and his subjects, in the "reality" of the text the narrator had presented the murdered ruler as a hero, and thus had to figure out a way to present the murderer as the "new" hero in the remaining part of his work. The fact that John Tzimiskes personally plotted and took part in the assassination did not leave any option for the personal confrontation between the two characters to be concealed, a confrontation that marked the beginning of John's reign as sinful.

Therefore, opening the next five books of the *History*, Leo the Deacon started afresh with an impersonal absolute genitive stating the fact that Nikephoros was murdered (τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Νικηφόρου… ἀναιρεθέντος) and thus, conceiling the agent of the murder. In contrast, the act of usurpation (if one can employ this term) is expressed with an elegant phrase which evokes the image of the empire as chariot, and of John as pulling its reins (τὰς τῆς βασιλείας ἡνίας Ἰωάννης… ὑποζώννυται). Even in Leo's version, however, he could not slide over this delicate issue and had some

[108] Rosemary Morris argued that a sign for the use of panegyric is a description of John Tzimiskes that Leo the Deacon reproduced in his work (Morris, "Succession and Usurpation," 209). On the discussion

difficulties satisfying the demands of Patriarch Polyeuktos, in order to receive the right to be blessed by him and, more important, to be crowned in the proper way on the ambo of the church. This passage is introduced in the *History* with a gentle remark on the holiness and the "fervent spirit" (ζέων τῷ πνεύματι) of the old man, perhaps hinting ats the stubbornness of his character. Furthermore, the demands of the patriarch are called φάσιν (talks, propositions, statements) and the whole controversy between the two is described as guidance of a senior towards one newly embarked upon matters of state. In comparison, Skylitzes' text is much more dramatic, as Polyeuktos openly accused John that his hands were bloody and refused him entry into the church. In his defense, the latter transferred the guilt for the murder to the Empress Theophano and two of his other fellows and immediately (εὐθέως) obeyed the patriarch's ultimatum to banish the first and punish the second, and in addition, to abolish Nikephoros' decree, which was against the church's interest (Skyl.Jh.2).

Another important element of Leo's narrative is the episode describing the ascension to power. In the case of Nikephoros, the author considered the emperor's entry in Constantinople as a starting point for his legitimate imperial power (an episode after his acclamation by the army and before his crowning). In the case of John, however, this moment marked the actual taking of power, for one reads that "after he thus gained sufficient security for himself and his government, and purged the state of every suspicious element, he spent his time in the palace. He was in his forty-fifth year when he assumed the imperial rule" (Leo VI,2).[109] Only after making this explicit statement, supported by a detailed description reminiscent of a panegyric and praising John's physical appearance and military virtue, Leo went on discussing the problematic

about the different sources Leo used see above, p. 25

[109] ἱκανὴν οὖν ἐντεῦθεν ἀσφάλειαν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπιβραβεύσας, καὶ ἅπαν τὸ ὕποπτον τῆς πολιτείας ἀνακάρας, ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις διέτριβε. Πέμπτον καὶ τεσσαρακοστὸν ἔτος ἦν αὐτῷ τῆς ἡλικίας, ὅτε τῆς βασιλείου ἐπέβη ἀρχῆς. (Leo VI, 2).

negotiations with Polyeuktos. Thus, the author clearly presents his hero's personal qualities as more important for legitimate wielding of the imperial power than the mere acts of unction and coronation by the patriarch.

This notion of civil, or better to say military, acclamation versus ecclesiastical approbation is connected with the genre or type of work and the audience addressed. An example contrary to Leo's idea of the meaning of the act of anointing can be traced in the *Canones* of Theodore Balsamon from the twelfth century. For him, the unction performed by the patriarch before the coronation cleanses the future emperor from the sins he has committed before his acclamation.[110] A different interpretation of the ceremony corresponds inasmuch with the time gap as with the different intention of the two texts, for, Theodore Balsamon was writing about canon law and practices and Leo was arguing for the superiority of military virtue over ceremony.

This suggestion can further be confirmed by the phrase the author uses saying that the procedure of ascending the ambo, being blessed by the patriarch and crowned was "customary" (εἴθισται) for those who had newly embarked upon rule. There is no mention of cleansing from the murder, which is reasonable since in Leo's version the only one accusing John is the rebel, Bardas Phokas,[111] who, later in book seven, calls the emperor "impious and accursed John, who has killed a sleeping lion, the emperor" (ὁ ἀνόσιος καὶ παλαμναῖος Ἰωάννης … τὸν μὲν αὐτοκράτορα … κοιμώμενον λέοντα κτείνας ἀνηλεῶς) (Leo VII,5).

[110] Theodore Balsamon, Canones, in MPG, CXXXVII, 1156: ἐπεὶ τὸ χρίσμα τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος τὰ πρὸ τοῦτο ἁμαρτήματα ἀπαλείφει, οἷα καὶ ὅσα ἂν ὦσι, πάντως καὶ τὸ χρίσμα τῆς βασιλείας τὸν πρὸ ταύτης γεγονότα φόνον παρὰ τοῦ Τζιμισκῆ ἐξήλειψεν. For a further discussion on the role of unction as presented in byzantine sources see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 265-276, and Donald M. Nicol, "Kaisersalbung: The Unction of Emperors in Late Byzantine Coronation Ritual," *Studies in Late Byzantine History and Prosopography* (Variourum: London, 1986), I 37-52.

[111] Bardas Phokas was the son of Leo Phokas and the nephew of Nikephoros Phokas. When he turned to rebellion Tzimiskes sent against him Bardas Skleros, brother of Tzimiskes' first wife, Maria Skleraina (Leo VII).

Nevertheless this passage, coming from a letter sent from the nephew of Nikephoros to Bardas Skleros, is a sign that there were people (probably mainly the Phokades) questioning John's right to hold the throne. Though the guilt of the murder was distributed among the empress and her accessaries, it was Leo's task to present the new *basileus* as equal to the former one, if not even better.

An invisible *Kaiserkritik*

The historian accomplished this task by inserting into the narrative a series of "selling points," as Rosemary Morris reasonably calls them, which probably derived from the pro-Tzimiskes propaganda Leo used as sources.[112] It is worth examining these passages in correspondence to the *Kaiserkritik* of Nikephoros that is never mentioned explicitly by Leo, but is implicitly included in this imperial image-making rivalry.

In first place, John was presented as an astonishing general, surpassing everyone in everything: from leaping to throwing the javelin, and shooting a bow. Even more significant is Leo's account on his bravery in the battlefield. The image of the hero who often went ahead of the army fearlessly "attacking single-handed an entire enemy contingent" (ἐς ὅλην ἀντίπαλον φάλαγγα οὐκ ἀπεδειλία μόνος ὁρμᾷν) and afterwards returned "with great speed" (ἀπτερώτῳ τάχει) unscathed, evokes in the mind of the reader the image of the invincible Achilles, swift on foot (πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς), who was so often represented by Homer in the very same fashion – fighting alone in the vanguard of the army. Apart from the pure soldierly virtues that were "becoming the commonplace of imperial portrayal at this time,"[113] these qualities were also presented as necessary for the construction of imperial honour and could fit into the genre of mirror of princes.

[112] Morris, "Succession and Usurpation," 208-9.
[113] Ibidem, 209.

According to the *History* one of the first things that John did after his coronation was to divide ancestral property (κτῆσιν ἀνέκαθεν) that was in excess (προσοῦσαν). This mention was intended to hint first at John's glorious family (λαμπροτάτου γένους), and second at his generosity and charity. Leo stated that the *basileus* granted part of this money to the hospital for lepers. Moreover, a clear proof for his magnanimity and compassion is proved by the fact that he visited the incumbents there, distributing gold to them and "treated as best he could their ulcerated limbs, which were ravaged by the disease, even though he was an aesthete of quite delicate sensibilities."[114] He increased the stipends for the nobles and the senate because of his "generous and kindly spirit" (φιλοτίμῳ καὶ φιλαγάθῳ γνώμῃ κινούμενος) (Leo VI,5).

The thing missing from this eulogy is a comparison to Nikephoros, who was heavily criticized for these matters, which were stated by Skylitzes and omitted by Leo, as discussed in the previous chapter. Thus the method of compiling and composing the *History* comes to light. For when one reads that John was generous and concerned about his subjects, one is easily inclined to draw a parallel and continue the phrase saying that, on the contrary, the previous emperor, Nikephoros, was a miser trying to earn money through people's suffering. In the same way passages describing John averting famine in the city (Leo VI,8) can be connected to those from Skylitzes relating that Nikephoros and Leo Phokas sold food at double prices (Skyl.Nik.20). During the revolt of Bardas Phokas the emperor is said to have tried to avoid bloodshed (ἡμεῖς τοιγαροῦν ἐμφυλίῳ αἵματι μιᾶναι τὴν γῆν εὐλαβούμεθα) (Leo VII,3) governing his subjects in a "gracious disposition and equitable manner" (ἤθους εὐμενείᾳ καὶ τρόπων χρηστότητι) always "gentle and reasonable" (προσηνής τε καὶ ἐπιεικὴς) (Leo VII,9), whereas his predecessor was accused of instigating a bloody accident in the

[114] Τὰ ἡλκωμένα καὶ τῇ νόσῳ κατειργασμένα τούτων μέλη οὐκ ἀπηξίου θεραπεύειν κατὰ το ἐνὸν, καίτοι ἁβρότατος ὢν καὶ λίαν φιλόκαλος.

Hippodrome on purpose (Skyl.Nik.19). Finally, contrary to Nikephoros' legislation against the funding of monasteries, John ordered the church of Christ the Savior at the Brazen Gate, which he thought was too narrow, to be "rebuilt from the foundations in a more splendid and sacred fashion" (ἐς τὸ μεγαλειότερον καὶ εὐαγέστερον ἐκ βάθρων τοῦτον οἰκοδομεῖν) (Leo VIII,1).

Perhaps this is how the pro-Tzimiskes source which Leo used sounded. Leo, however, could not afford to blacken the glorious image of Nikephoros which he had built with such attention to every detail in the previous books. Therefore he had to expurgate these passages of critique, but their ghostly shadow can still be traced between the lines.

Helping hands for legitimacy

As Dagron stated in *Emperor and Priest*, "when a fortunate usurper ended a dynasty or when a new man was entrusted with the empire, he looked for or was obliged to make a marriage into the fallen imperial family or one of those which preceded it."[115] This principle of junction between royal blood and the election of a charismatic leader was put into practice in the case of John Tzimiskes. In order to obtain ecclesiastical sanction, he was forced to separate himself from Theophano, the source of his power. Probably on the advice of Basil Lekapenos, who was acting once more as *parakoimomenos* in the palace, he married Theodora, the daughter of Constantine VII. This episode is placed at the end of book seven, after Leo has retold at full length the tribulations around Bardas Phokas' revolt and the first part of the campaign against the Rus. Furthermore, the stress is put on Theodora's qualities[116] rather than on the fact that the usurper had now become a legitimate member of the ruling dynasty. On the contrary, in his account of the same event, Skylitzes, stated that

[115] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 40.
[116] See above p.15-16.

with this action John provoked great joy among the citizens, for he kept the imperial power within the dynasty.[117] Leo also stated that people were overcome with tremendous rejoicing, but for a different reason – namely, the emperor was treating them kindly and providing them with entertainment in the Hippodrome. Thus, even if Skylitzes' report consists of only two sentences, it reflects the political act of integrating into the ruling dynasty through marriage with a *porphyrogenneta*, whereas Leo's account again focuses on the figure of the *basileus.* Theodora is presented as a good choice for John not because of her royal blood, but her virtues. Thus, the reader is led to the conclusion that his qualities were sufficient for his legitimacy.

Ecclesiastical taming and heavenly help

Nikephoros, as is known from Skylitzes, entertained a difficult relationship with the church. Leo mentioned this fact briefly in book six as part of the patriarch's demands of John, namely, to return "to the synod the powers that by decree Nikephoros had improperly revoked."[118] John also faced problems at the beginning of his reign because Polyeuktos refused to allow him entry into the church. It was not, however, the patriarch who had this alternative absolute power of the emperor, but the accumulation of memories and the ceremonial, which were a mechanism for evoking the past and fixing the present.[119] As was mentioned above, Leo presented this episode as appendix to an already signed contract, the official introduction of the ruler to his subjects. Soon afterwards John had an opportunity to regain his supremacy over the church by appointing the new patriarch. Leo emphasized this moment very well, stating that the emperor "was eager" (σπουδὴ ἐξεγένετο τῷ αὐτοκράτορι) to appoint his own candidate (Leo VI,6). Leo supported his hero's rights by inserting the only non-military speech in

[117] Καὶ ταυτῃ τῇ πράξει μεγάλως εὔφρανε τοὺς πολίτας, ὡς τὸ τῆς βασιλείας κράτος περιφυλάττων τῷ γένει. (Skyl.Jh.8.)
[118] Καὶ προσέτι τὸν τόμον τῇ συνόδῳ προσαποτίσῃ, ὃν ὁ Νικεφόρος παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἐνεώχμεσεν. (Leo VI,4).

the *History*. The emperor, speaking to the clergy and the senate, delivered one of the clearest expressions of Byzantine political and religious thought. In summary, he stated: there is one Authority above – God – and two here on earth – the priesthood and the imperial rule; it is God who promotes the patriarch, and so the emperor himself is raising the one chosen by God to the ecclesiastical throne. In contrast, Skylitzes never mentioned such imperial interference in ecclesiastical matters, but briefly notes that Polyeuktos died 35 days after the inauguration and a new patriarch – the monk Basil Skamandrenos – was elected.[120] Without engaging an estimation of which one of the two accounts represents the "real" course of events, it is worth pointing out the effort which Leo made to demonstrate his hero "taming" the ecclesiastical authority.

On the other hand, John Tzimiskes' military success was ascribed to divine favor towards the emperor. Leo made this very clear. At the beginning of book eight he describes the emperor leading a procession to the church of Christ the Savior to ask for God's help in the march that he planned against the Rus'. Leo pin-pointed his piety by stating that he ordered the small church to be rebuilt. Furthermore, John made two more prayerful processions, to Hagia Sophia and to the church of the Mother of God, where he asked to "be granted an angel to go before the army and make straight the road" (ἄγγελόν τε αὐτῷ δοθῆναι ἐξαιτησάμενος, προπορευόμενον τοῦ στρατοῦ, καὶ τὴν ὁδὸν κατευθύνοντα). As a clear manifestation of the legitimacy of the emperor his prayer was fulfilled, for a divine personage was sent to the battle field later on (Leo IX,9-10). The scene, which is found also in Skylitzes (Skyl.Jh.17), describes a virgin dedicated to God who saw in her dream the Mother of God calling Theodore the martyr and sending him to help John. The divine personage then appeared on the battle field leading the

[119] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 113.
[120] ἐπὶ τριάκοντα δὲ καὶ πέντε μόνας ἡμέρας μετὰ τὴν ἀναγόρυσιν καὶ ὁ Πολύευκτος ἐπιβιοὺς κατέλυσε τὴν ζωήν. καὶ προχειρίζεται ἀντ᾽ αὐτοῦ πατριάρχης Βασίλειος μοναχὸς ὁ Σκαμανδρηνός (Skyl.Jh.3)

Romans to fight fiercely. Thus, the atmosphere of supernatural support was granted on account of the ruler's humility.

Furthermore, Leo presented his hero's humility in the triumphal procession after defeating the Rus at the end of book nine. John is said to have refused to mount a chariot, but placed an icon brought as booty from the campaign on the chariot's golden throne. The procession is remarkable as it is described in great detail – the emperor riding behind the chariot, crowned with the diadem and holding the imperial regalia, led the procession throughout the city and donated the captured crown of the Mysians as gift to God (Leo IX.12). The procession was probably deliberately staged in this novel fashion by the court officials.[121] I doubt, though, that the novelty was the reason why Leo paid so much attention to this particular ceremony. Rather, the cause was his intention to present John as pious ruler and underline his humility in this spectacular way. Confirmation for this suggestion can be found in another passage, where the emperor again manifested his righteousness by further adorning the church of Christ the Savior, the one that he had rebuilt from the foundations with a very precious sacred icon (Leo X,4).

Leo constructed the image of John Tzimiskes by ascribing to him, on the one hand, qualities similar to those of Nikephoros (mainly military virtues), and on the other underlining his Christian piety. Thus, his legitimacy is due not to the blessing of the patriarch, nor to the royal blood of his bride Theodora, but to the virtuous personality of a ruler supported by God.

[121] Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 173.

Conclusions

As it was mentioned in the introduction of this study, the *History* of Leo the Deacon has been considered as an important, but rather biased source for the reigns of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes. Thus the general conclusion so far has been that modern historians dealing with this period first have to remove the veil of Leo's personal (mis)interpretations and preferably to juxtapose the information which he provided with other sources. On the contrary, this research demonstrated that Leo's text and more particularly this biased way in which he described the two emperors provides a key for understanding the social background of the events taking place in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Analyzing the main characteristics of the *History* in respect to classical or earlier Byzantine works that the author was quoting, making allusion to, imitating, or mentioning explicitly in his text, it has become clear that the work was intended to an audience with taste toward military writings. Thus John Haldon came up with the conclusion that Leo was writing for a provincial military élite following a "new attitude toward the representation of warfare in the literature of the period".[122] On the basis of his study of the speeches in the *History* and their fictitious character, Lars Hoffmann proposed that the text was intended to serve as a military manual, offering a collection of examples for behaving as ideal general and emperor in the form of historical novel.[123]

This suggestion can now be further corroborated by the analysis made in the chapters on Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes revealing the focus on military matters and the image of the emperor as *the* perfect warrior. As such Leo presented his

[122] John Haldon, *Warfare*, 244.
[123] Lars Hoffmann, "Geschichtsschreibung oder Rhetorik?," 136-7.

two heroes. The central motif of the narrative is that of assignation of honour depending on one's merits and deprivation of honour in spite of them. Thus the reader is first introduced to the qualities of the protagonists. Both of them were acting according to the military code of honour – leading their armies wisely, achieving victories against the enemies and being honored with triumphs. The turning point and thus the inception of the action is when they felt their pride being hurt – Joseph Bardas refused Nikephoros access in the city and deprived him from his office, and Nikephoros later, already emperor, banished John Tzimiskes from the capital and from the army. The very lack of justification for these deprivations of social status in turn justified their respective defensive actions and, furthermore, their strife for the purple.

The fact that Leo served neither Nikephoros', nor John's interests when presenting them, leads to the conclusion that the implied reader was not connected to the Phokades or Tzimiskes' Armenian family. I am inclined to believe that the author's intension was to provoke his audience's compassion for the committed *atimia* towards the generals. Thus it is even more reasonable to look beyond the veil of the narrative in search for traces of struggle over military offices and accordingly influence taking place in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The correspondence is obvious, as in this period emperors were trying to diminish the role of noble families leading the army and often appointed eunuchs as generals considering them to be the perfect servants, guarding the interest of the emperor.[124] The repercussions of this strive between court officers and professional commanders is clearly presented in several passages in the text, when Leo stated that a certain general was successful though he was eunuch (Leo IV,7) or openly criticized eunuchs as being inexperienced and effeminate (Leo I,2).

[124] See Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 163-183.

The negative attitude towards court life and administrative procedures in general is implicitly stated throughout the narrative by the briefly mentioning and diminishing significance of court ceremonials. Leo described ceremonies as part of a protocol which can only detain or caused problems to the emperor. Even the description of the crowning and unction by the patriarch is lacking solemnity.

The *History* is really one of novel fashion, understanding "novel" in both meanings of the word. Its novelty is a product of the vividness of the narrative, supplied with reports on speeches, letters and private conversation – elements that were more or less forgotten in the chronicles from the earlier periods. The work, as suggested by Hoffmann, can be regarded as historical novel, a pleasant reading, a story about and for the military élite. It not only has the character of a military manual, but also of a charter of principles, glorifying the idea of a professional military class and underlining its superiority over court officials in term of honour and dignity. Placing this idea into the context of tenth-, eleventh- and twelfth-century changes in the administration and influence on the governance of the empire, one can see in the image of Nikephoros and John the representatives of the high military elite trying to oppose the traditional/court power. This confrontation between the erudite palace type of ruler and the military one can be traced also in the work of Liudprand. Though he was serving his and Otto's I interest when writing the *Legatio*,[125] it is of importance that he noticed the difference, and reported the critiques of Nikephoros' own court officials. Their opinion of the emperor that he is "ταχύχειρ man, that is, one eager for combat; he avoids the palace like the plague, and he is called by us almost a lover of rivalry and an argumentative fellow" is in clear opposition to that of Leo and his audience.[126]

[125] See Henry Mayr-Harting, "Liudprand of Cremona's Account of His Legation to Constantinople (968) and the Ottonian Imperial Strategy," *The English Historical Review* 116 (2001): 539-556.
[126] Liudprand, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, tr. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 273.

Thus this thesis has answered the question that was posed at the beginning, namely to detect the presumed audience and their code of honour presented in the text. This is only a case study of examining a Byzantine text with the help of modern literary theories. It is definitely not the first one using this approach, as it has models within the ongoing discussion on Byzantine literature, placing studies of Byzantine historiography writings somewhere between traditional *Quellenforschung* and literary criticism. (And here I must mention two particular scholars, namely Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson, whose studies have influenced this thesis and changed the way I read Leo the Deacon's *History*.)[127] For thanks to their ideas of applying modern literary theories to Byzantine studies, historical writings are now reevaluated as literary communication between an author and an audience. The analysis of Leo's *History* has reconfirmed this indivisibility and coherence between text and milieu, that are hidden behind the veil of rhetoric. The text as shown above revealed not only the factual data of who did what during the reign of Nikephoros and John, but also the understanding and perception of these data within the social group, which Leo addressed.

Going one step further, one may try to reconstruct a literary and social discourse taking place in this period, analyzing Leo's text in parallel to earlier or later military manuals such as the *Tactica* of Leo VI (r. 886-912), the tenth-century *Sylloge Tacticorum* and the so-called *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions* commissioned in the court of Constantine VII (r. 945-959), and most importantly the two manuals attributed to Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963-969) himself – the *De velitatione bellica* and the *Praecepta militaria,* or the chronologically somewhat later *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos. This comparative study should be based not so much on the principles and strategy of warfare, but on the analysis of interaction between author

[127] Nilsson, "To Narrate the Past"; Nilsson, Scott, "New History of Byzantine Literature"; Mullett, "New Literary History."

and reader, looking at the way of addressing and treating the topic, and the mode of narration. This is how one may trace the characteristics of works accomplished at the court and others being a product of ex-court professional soldiers.

On another level the fictional elements of Leo's *History* taken into account together with the general character of the work standing between history and historical novel, allow the text to be examined in relation to the forthcoming chivalry literature represented by the epic romance *Digenes Akritas* or Anna Komnene's famous *Alexiad.*

It is, thus, important to consider Leo's *History* as part both of the synchronic social interaction between different circles in tenth-century Byzantium and the swiftly flowing diachronic course of Byzantine literature.

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