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Depictions of power in the imperial art of the early Macedonian Emperors: Basil I, Leo VI and Alexander.

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This thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for a degree.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

List of Figures

List of Plates

List of Tables

Introduction and Literature Review p 1

Part One: Constructing Power

Chapter 1: Images of Imperial Power p 56

Chapter 2: Innovation and Adaptation in Imperial Iconography p 85

Chapter 3: Emperors as Builders p 131

Part Two: Power Relations

Chapter 4: Images of the Emperor and His Family p 173

Chapter 5: Emperors and Patriarchs p 208

Conclusions p 243

Bibliography p 253

Plates

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca.</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae.</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Histoiae Byzantinae.</i>
Mansi	<i>Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio.</i>
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, I - III</i> , ed. by A. Kazhdan (Oxford, 1991).
Paris Gregory	Codex Graecus 510, the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca, 1 - 161</i> , ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1857-1866).
<i>Sacra Parallela</i>	Codex Graecus 923, a florilegium, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
<i>Vita Basilii</i>	<i>Chronographia Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur</i> , ed. I. evčenko, (Berlin, 2011).

FIGURES

1a & b:	Gold Solidus of Theophilos, Class I, 829-830, Obverse and Reverse, Malcolm Hackman Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 58
2a & b:	Gold Solidus of Michael III, Class III, 856-867, Obverse and Reverse, Accession Number BZ 1948.17.2692. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 58
3a & b:	Gold Solidus, Basil I, Class III, 882, Obverse and Reverse, Freeman and Sear Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com , courtesy of Freeman & Sear	p 59
4a & b:	Gold Solidus of Basil I, full standing figure, Class I, 868, Obverse and Reverse, Accession Number BZ.1948.17.2708. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 59
5a & b:	Gold Solidus of Leo VI as older man, Class I, 886-908, Obverse and Reverse, from a Private Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 65
6:	Image of Constantine I, 847-870s, Patriarchal Rooms, Hagia Sophia. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 77
7a & b:	Gold Solidus of Leo V, Class I, 813, Obverse and Reverse, Freeman and Sear Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com , courtesy of Freeman & Sear Gemini I	p 87
8a & b:	Gold Solidus of Michael II, Class I, 821, Obverse and Reverse, the Golden Horn Collection. Courtesy of Stack's Co. Ltd	p 87
9a & b:	Copper Follis of Leo V and Constantine, Class II, 813-820, Obverse and Reverse, from a Private Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com for A.L Fournier	p 88
10a & b:	Copper Follis of Michael II and Theophilos, Class II, 821-829, Obverse and Reverse, the H. D. Rauch Collection With permission of wildwinds.com and H.D. Rauch GmbH.	p 88

11a & b:	Copper Follis, Basil I, Basil enthroned, Class V, 879-886, Obverse and Reverse, Malcolm W. Heckman Collection. With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 91
12a & b:	Gold Solidus, Alexander, crowning image, Class II, 912-913, Obverse and Reverse, from a Private Collection, With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 121
13a & b:	Silver Miliaresion, Alexander, 912-913, Obverse and Reverse, Harvard Art Museums/ Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore, © President and Fellows of Harvard College	p 124
14a & b:	Gold Solidus of Theophilos with Michael II & Constantine, Obverse and Reverse, Class III, 830-840, With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 183
15a & b:	Gold Solidus of Theodora with Michael III and Thekla, Obverse and Reverse, Class I, 842-843, With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com	p 186
16a & b:	Seal of Leo VI, depicting Leo and Alexander, 886 - 912, Obverse and Reverse, Accession Number BZS.1955.1.4298 © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 188
17a & b:	Seal of Alexander, with a second figure (now missing), 912-913, Obverse and Reverse, Accession Number BZS.1955.1.4296 © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 193
18:	Seal of Basil I, showing Basil I and Constantine, 869-879, Reverse, Accession Number BZS.1951.31.5.42, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.	p 196

TABLES

1:	Iconography of Basil I's Coins .	p 92
2:	Iconography of Basil I's Seals.	p 93
3:	Iconography of Leo VI's Coins.	p 113
4:	Iconography of Leo VI's Seals .	p 114
5:	Iconography of Alexander's Coins.	P 119
6:	Iconography of Alexander's Seals.	P 119
7:	Coin types with imperial figures, reign of Basil I.	p 175
8:	Seal types with imperial figures, reign of Basil I.	p 176
9:	Coin types with imperial figures, reign of Leo VI.	P 185
10:	Seal types with imperial figures, reign of Leo VI.	P 186
11:	Coin types with imperial figures, reign of Alexander.	P 190
12:	Seal types with imperial figures, reign of Alexander.	P 191
13:	Schema for David narratives in the Paris Gregory, <i>Sacra Parallela</i> and the David Casket.	p 221
14:	Characteristics of imperial art, 867 - 913.	P 244

PLATES

- 1: Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510,
Folio Cv, Basil being crowned by Gabriel,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.
- 2: Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510,
Folio Br: Eudokia, Leo and Alexander,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.
- 3: Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510,
Folio 174v, the anointing of David,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.
- 4: Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510,
Folio 355r: the Council of 381,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.
- 5: Mosaic of an emperor before Christ, narthex,
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Photo: Neil Churchill.
- 6: Detail of emperor in narthex mosaic,
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Photo: Neil Churchill.
- 7: Location of mosaic of Emperor Alexander, North Gallery,
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Photo: Neil Churchill.
- 8: Mosaic of Emperor Alexander, North Gallery,
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Source: Neil Churchill.

SUMMARY

The last comprehensive study of Byzantine imperial art was published in 1936 and there have been surprisingly few investigations of the art of the Macedonian Dynasty, despite their reputation as active propagandists. Most studies of imperial art have taken a centuries-long perspective, identifying major patterns but overlooking choices made by or on behalf of individual emperors. This thesis considers imperial art in the reigns of the first three Macedonian Emperors: Basil (867 - 886) and his sons Leo (886 - 912) and Alexander (912 - 913). It seeks to understand how they constructed images of their power and what imperial art says about the power dynamics at Constantinople.

Chapter 1 considers imperial portraits. It concludes that although elements of the imperial image were unchanging, there were nevertheless important differences in the public images put forward by each emperor. Basil's physical power was often depicted, whilst Leo was depicted as a wise ruler. Aspects of emperor's private lives are also visible in their art.

Chapter 2 charts the changing iconography between reigns. It studies the emergence and development of the motif of an emperor being crowned by a heavenly figure, which signified the idea of anointing, and its assimilation into imperial art. The chief innovator in terms of imperial iconography, however, was Alexander, and not Basil.

Chapter 3 considers Basil and Leo's records as builders and renovators of churches, monasteries, palaces and other buildings. Whilst multiple motives were at work, Basil and Leo acted in different ways. Basil's activity, it is argued, partly reflected his response to the earthquake of 869, which might have jeopardised the perceived legitimacy of his seizure of power in 867.

Chapter 4 considers power relations between the emperor and other members of the imperial household. It finds evidence of tension, for example between Basil and his surviving sons Leo and Alexander, as well as examples when imperial behaviour was not dynastic in character.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between emperor and patriarch, at a time when there may have been ideological differences about the extent of imperial power. It suggests that patriarchal art presented a potential challenge to unfettered imperial power, which Basil was prepared to accept but which ran counter to the way that Leo saw his own authority.

The study of imperial art in these decades supports that interpretation that art was evolutionary and adaptive in character. Yet it was more grounded in the ideas, character and preferences of individual emperors than has often been recognised and did, on occasion, respond to topical concerns, hopes and fears.

Introduction

'I doubt if any other family has ever been so much favoured by God as theirs has been, which is odd when you come to think of the unlawful manner of its establishment and how it was planted in slaughter and blood. None the less, the plant took root and sent out mighty shoots, each bearing royal fruit, that none other can be compared with it for beauty and splendour'.¹

Michael Psellos

'That which is described by words must appear like an image or a sketch; which in itself is infinitely superior than words can describe'.²

Leo VI

With the benefit of hindsight, Michael Psellos reflected on the achievements of the long Macedonian Dynasty, which began in 867 and lasted until 1056, and found it splendid. Twentieth-century historians like Romilly Jenkins have often followed Psellos' lead, dubbing the dynasty founded by Basil I 'the greatest and most glorious' ever to occupy the Byzantine throne.³ Yet for several decades the Macedonian grip on the throne was tenuous, vulnerable to hostile forces within

¹ Οὐ γὰρ οἶδα εἴ τι ἕτερον γένος ὡς τὸ περι ἐκείνας ἡγάπηται τῷ Θεῷ και θαυμάζω κατανοῶν ὅτι μὴ ἐννόμως αὐταῖς τῆς οἰζης παγείσης και φυτευθείσης ἀλλὰ φόνους και αἵμασιν οὕτω τὸ φυτευθὲν ἐξηνθήκει και τοσαύτας προῦ- βάλλετο βλάστας και ἐκάστην μετὰ τοῦ βασιλείου καρποῦ ὡς μὴ ἔχειν ἐτέρας ἀντισυγκρίναι ταυταις οὔτε πρὸς κάλλος οὔτε πρὸς μέγεθος. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, Book 6, Chapter 1, edited by E. Renauld, *Michael Psellos, Chronographie ou Histoire d'un Siècle de Byzance, 976 - 1077, Livres I - VI*, (Paris, 1926), p 117, lines 6-13. Translated by R. Jenkins, *Byzantium, The Imperial Centuries*, (London, 1966), p 183.

² Ὅσα μὲν ὁ λόγος γράφοι, ὥαπερ εἰκόνα τινὰ ἢ σκιαγραφίαν ἐμφαίνεσθαι, αὐτοὺς δ' ἄπειρον ὑπερκεῖσθαι τῶν ἐκ τοῦ λόγου φαινομένων Leo's funeral oration for his father Basil, published in A. Vogt and I. Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils, Léon VI Le Sage,' *Orientalia Christiana* 26.1 (1932), p 40, lines 29-31. My translation.

³ Jenkins, *The Imperial Centuries*, p 183.

the court as well as beyond the Empire. Early threats included armed rebellions, armies at the walls of Constantinople and the existential challenge of Western Emperor Louis II's claim to the imperial title.⁴ Nevertheless, during the decades following Basil's coup in 867, the Macedonian family came to be seen as the sole legitimate occupiers of the Byzantine throne. Indeed, potential tenth-century usurpers never succeeded - and arguably never whole-heartedly tried - to displace the Macedonian House. How the Macedonians secured their grip on power, and the part played by propaganda in that achievement, is of considerable interest.

It has been long established that the Macedonians were proactive propagandists.⁵ Leo VI, for example, described his goal as the creation of an 'εἰκόνα' of his father in the funeral oration he delivered for Basil early in his reign.⁶ What kind of demands did emperors make of their artists? Cormack suggested that there were principally three: first, to demonstrate the power and glory of rule; second, to make spaces and buildings for the public display and drama of power; and third, to educate the public about the state's thinking.⁷ These are excellent organising principles for this thesis, which will consider how power was shaped and displayed, how buildings encompassed art with spaces for political drama and how ideological differences and personal preferences may have been communicated through art. The following pages provide an analysis of the role played by imperial art and architecture in the visual and political culture of Constantinople in the reigns of Basil I (867 - 886) and his sons Leo VI (886 - 912) and Alexander (912 - 913). It considers thematically, rather than chronologically,

⁴ The Bulgars reached the walls of Constantinople in 896; the Arabs in 904; the Rus in 907 and 911. Louis II's challenge over the imperial title in 871 was described by C. Wickham, 'Ninth-century Byzantium through western eyes' in L. Brubaker (ed), *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century: dead or alive?* (Aldershot, 1998), p 253.

⁵ The character of Macedonian imperial art as propaganda was recognised by A. Grabar, *L'Empereur dans L'Art Byzantin: recherches sur l'art officiel de l'Empire d'Orient*, (Paris, 1936).

⁶ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oration Funèbre,' p 40, line 30.

⁷ R. Cormack, 'Away from the centre: provincial art in the ninth-century,' in Brubaker (ed), *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, pp 161-163

the extent to which the early Macedonians created and used visual propaganda to forge the image of a divinely appointed and blessed dynasty, which could protect Constantinople and give its people a sense of security, achievements and pride.

Part One explores how power was conceived, shaped and portrayed under Basil, Leo and Alexander, in portraits, iconography and architecture. Chapter 1 examines imperial portraits from coins, mosaics and manuscripts. These reveal the public image that each emperor sought to convey but also suggest aspects of their character and personal power, including the way their subjects reacted to them as individuals. Basil struck an intimidating presence full of physical power, whilst Leo's personal authority was associated with wisdom. Chapter 2 examines signs of power used in imperial art, including the development over time of the motif of heavenly crowning, which has become strongly associated with the Macedonian Dynasty.⁸ This originally evolved to justify Basil's seizure of power but was assimilated into imperial art by Leo and Alexander and adapted to suit changing circumstances. This crowning motif was one iconographic innovation in an era unusually open to new forms of visual expression. Leo adopted the Virgin on his coins for the first time in Byzantine history and Alexander left a bigger trace on imperial iconography than might have been expected for such a short reign. Chapter 3 considers how power was displayed through architecture. Both Basil and Leo were active builders and although little or nothing remains of their actual constructions, there is considerable textual evidence about their association with them. Basil diverted huge resources into building the New Church and may have also renovated scores of churches and monasteries across the capital, as well as facilities used by other sections of the population such as merchants. Leo's building work was more limited but may have included attempts to sanctify members of the imperial family and some testimony survives in the emperor's own words.

⁸ A. Walker, *The Emperor and The World: exotic elements and the imaging of Middle Byzantine imperial power, ninth to thirteenth-centuries CE* (Cambridge, 2012), p 49.

Part Two considers what imperial art says about the relational power between the emperor and other important figures at court. Chapter 4 explores the visual expression of the relationship between the emperor and other members of his family, including the empress, junior emperors and other children. Coins and seals are a particularly helpful guide to the official changes in court hierarchy but mosaics and manuscripts can also be revealing. To a large extent, a study of imperial imagery reflects the life cycle of imperial births, appointments and deaths but at times the expected pattern breaks down and choices were made which reflected personal circumstances, even at a risk to the Macedonian succession. This includes Basil's failure to promote any of his surviving sons for the succession after the death of his eldest son Constantine and Alexander's marginalisation of his nephew, Constantine VII. Chapter 5 considers the power dynamics between the emperor and the patriarch, highlighting the confidence of patriarchal art in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy and exploring whether emperor and patriarch competed for spiritual power. This is a significant question for political theory, as it comes at a time when Photios (Patriarch 858 - 867 and again from 877 - 886) appears to have set out distinct functions for emperor and patriarch, in a political philosophy known as the 'diarchy' or 'two powers'.⁹ This analysis provides the context for a partial re-appraisal of the Codex Graecus 510, a ninth-century copy of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (henceforth described as the 'Paris Gregory'). This was not just a work of imperial panegyric but also qualified or even critiqued imperial power.

The thematic approach means that some works of art are considered in more than one chapter. For example, the David Casket, in Rome's Palazzo Venezia, is considered in the chapter on imperial iconography, where the focus is on its images of crowning and anointing as well as in the chapter on emperor and patriarch, for the analogy it makes between Basil and David. Cross references are

⁹ These distinct roles were set out the *Epanagogue* of 886. See below, p 23 and Chapter 5, p 227 for analysis.

provided in the footnotes where relevant. An overview of each object is provided in the introduction.

The Study of Byzantine Imperial Art

All modern studies of imperial art in Byzantium have taken André Grabar's 1936 work, *L'Empereur Dans L'Art Byzantin*, as their starting point.¹⁰ Grabar was the pioneer on the subject and his work is still one of a kind. It is described as the 'classic' text on imperial art by scholars including Maguire, Shepard, Jolivet-Lévy and Walker.¹¹ Much of Grabar's work is still authoritative and nowhere else is there such a comprehensive account of how emperors constructed their public image and displayed their power.

Grabar explored imperial art from a number of different perspectives, initially through a process of categorisation (for example, standing portraits, sitting portraits, portraits on horseback) but also with some thematic and chronological perspectives. He concluded that imperial art was both Roman and Christian in character but took a distinctive religious turn under Basil, who he saw as an important innovator.¹² This was partly through the introduction in his reign of what Grabar saw as one of the key motifs of Macedonian imperial art: what he termed 'Coronations' involving celestial figures like Christ, Virgin and saints.¹³ This was one of the ways that Basil's art initiated a 'new wave' of influences,

¹⁰ Grabar, *L'Empereur*.

¹¹ Grabar's book is described as 'the classical discussion of the art of the imperial court' by H. Maguire, 'Images of the court' in H. Evans and W. Wixom (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium: art and culture of the Middle Byzantine era, AD 843 - 1261* (New York, 1997) p 512 n3; 'the classic work' on the subject by J. Shepard in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500 - 1492*, (Cambridge, 2008), p 55 n10; as 'ouvrage pionnier et toujours fondamental' by C. Jolivet Lévy, 'L'Image du pouvoir dans l'art Byzantin à l'époque de la Dynastie Macedonienne, (867 - 1056), *Byzantion* 57, (1987), p 442 n4; and as 'uncontested' by Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p 13.

¹² 'Le grand initiateur de l'art post-iconoclaste,' Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116.

¹³ 'Le motif du Couronnement,' *Ibid*, p 116

drawn from ancient artistic themes.¹⁴ Grabar strengthened this interpretation over time, suggesting that despite a long-term decline in the quality of artistic imagery, art nevertheless became more intense as propaganda during the Macedonian Dynasty, able to make a few forceful impressions with brutal clarity.¹⁵ Yet he also saw the second half of the ninth-century marking an 'offensive' of church art in the domain of imperial art, in which the restoration of Orthodoxy infiltrated every aspect of imperial art and changed its nature.¹⁶ The coronation motif itself, he argued, was itself a crystallisation of the idea that there were two equal but different powers: emperor and patriarch.¹⁷ This, in essence, was the notion of the diarchy, propagated by Photios in the *Epanagoge* of 886. For Grabar, therefore, the Macedonians were forceful as propagandists, but their power was increasingly subjugated to religion. By contrast, the art of the earlier iconoclast emperors had put temporal power centre stage.

Grabar's work has its limitations, however. He did not consider a number of important artistic works. The portrait of Alexander in the North Gallery of Hagia Sophia was not rediscovered until 1959.¹⁸ Another omission was the votive crown, now in San Marco, Venice, which depicts Leo VI.¹⁹ Some works dismissed in part by Grabar are now considered to be highly significant. The Paris Gregory, for example, is now agreed to be an important work of imperial panegyric. Although Grabar deemed its crowning image significant, he thought the remaining images derivative.²⁰ Furthermore, Grabar took a narrow definition of imperial art,

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 267.

¹⁵ A. Grabar 'Byzantine architecture and art' in J. Hussey (ed), *Cambridge Medieval History IV: Byzantine Empire, Part II: Government, Church and Civilisation*, (Cambridge, 1967), pp 307-353.

¹⁶ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 264.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 175.

¹⁸ The image was sketched in 1849 but then covered over and only rediscovered in 1959.

¹⁹ Grabar did briefly consider it later, in the context of western art; A. Grabar, 'L'Archéologie des insignes médiévaux du pouvoir,' *Journal des Savants*, (Janvier-Mars, 1956), pp 5-18, 77-91

²⁰ See below, p 31.

restricting his study to works commissioned or used by emperors. This excluded objects believed to be commissioned outside the court, like the David Casket, which Grabar relegated to a single footnote.²¹ A wider definition would also consider works which express imperial ideology - cultural assumptions about emperors and their power - whether or not they contain images of emperors and whoever commissioned the works in question.²² Most recent historians, such as Trilling, have adopted a wider definition.²³ This thesis follows their example.

One consequence of Grabar's thematic approach has been a focus on the development of iconography over the long-term, rather than within specific periods of history. This has given undue weight to some individual elements of iconography which supported Grabar's thesis of Christian Roman Kingship, such as the heavenly crowning motif, whilst differences between reigns were overlooked. Grabar's overarching thesis of Christian Roman Kingship has itself been challenged. Mathews, for example, argued that Grabar had viewed Byzantine imperial art from the perspective of an exile from a vanishing twentieth-century imperial tradition.²⁴ In other words, he was seeing things in Byzantine art which simply were not there. Walker, despite recognising Grabar as the 'driving force' behind scholarship on imperial art, nevertheless concluded that he marginalised work which challenged his underlying theory.²⁵

Despite his recognition of the importance of the Macedonian Dynasty, Grabar did not devote a specific chapter to the Macedonians. Rather, his analysis of their art was piecemeal and interspersed throughout his book. This gap has not yet been filled: the main studies of imperial iconography under the Macedonians have

²¹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 112, n1.

²² P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge, 1977), p 171.

²³ J. Trilling 'Daedalus and the nightingale: art and technology in the myth of the Byzantine court' in H. Maguire (ed), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), p 217.

²⁴ T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: a reinterpretation of early Christian art*, (Princeton, 1994)

²⁵ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, p 15.

been fragmentary. Jolivet-Lévy published an overview of the period in one journal article, which endorsed Grabar's interpretation that imperial art had been 'penetrated' by religious iconography and came to reflect the idea that emperor and patriarch were 'two powers'.²⁶ The *Byzantium 330 - 1453* exhibition included several important works from the Macedonian period, including the Palazzo Venezia ivory casket, Leo VI's votive crown and ivory sceptre or comb, but considered them as examples court art over a much longer period of time.²⁷ The most important recent study has been Brubaker's comprehensive assessment of the Paris Gregory.²⁸ Her book examines the imagery of the manuscript within its ninth century context and includes a chapter on imperial panegyric. In fact, it goes further than anyone in laying foundations for a re-appraisal of early Macedonian imperial art, by examining motifs from the Paris Gregory in the context of other artistic images from the time, including the David Casket, Kainourgion mosaics and coins.

Nevertheless, no comprehensive recent study has been published about Byzantine imperial art, despite the revival of interest in the ways that kings and emperors harnessed imagery to promote their authority. In other fields, Garrison has demonstrated how works of art influenced the historical narrative preferred by tenth-century Ottonian emperors.²⁹ Sharpe has traced ways in which artists constructed royal authority for the Tudors.³⁰ It is surprising, perhaps, that although the Macedonians have long been acknowledged as active propagandists, there has been little study of this aspect of their rule. Grabar laid the

²⁶ Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'Image du pouvoir,' p 443.

²⁷ R. Cormack and M. Vassilaki, *Byzantium: 330 - 1453*, (London, 2008), pp 111-139.

²⁸ L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: image as exegesis in the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁹ E. Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Authority and Portraiture: the artistic patronage of Otto II and Henry II*, (Aldershot, 2012)

³⁰ K. Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: authority and image in sixteenth-century England*, (Yale, 2009).

foundations but there is a need for art historians to build on his work. This thesis is a contribution to filling that gap.

The Construction of Power

The first section of the thesis examines how the early Macedonian emperors sought to construct and display their power, through portraits, iconography and architecture, in order to demonstrate their divine legitimacy.

Portraits of emperors could articulate their power, both by communicating a public image and by expressing something of their character. Much has been written about portraits of Byzantine emperors, in the context of medieval portraiture. A distinction has generally been made between ‘portraits’ and ‘types’. Portraits, according to Gadamer, were intended by the artist to represent a specific individual.³¹ This was not necessarily achieved through mimesis. The extent of likeness involved in depicting the imperial figure in Byzantium was often rudimentary. Instead, portraits used a combination of factors, such as symbols, likeness and inscription, to depict a particular individual.³² Portraits function as both works of art and expressions of social lives, reflecting the social norms and value systems of contemporary society and often intended to shape the subject’s reputation.³³ They therefore contextualise as well as express imperial power. Types, by contrast, had no such occasionality and could represent a genre of individuals, such as an emperor, over a long period of time. Coin images were often ‘conventional imperial effigies’ in

³¹ R. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, (London, 1983), p 7.

³² S. Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: a prehistory of portraiture in late medieval France* (Chicago, 2009) traced the development of portraiture in medieval kingship.

³³ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, p 11.

Grierson's description and could stand for any emperor.³⁴ Mosaics could have this property too. An image of Michael VII Doukas was altered to represent his successor Nikephoros Botaniates simply by changing the inscription.³⁵ Such images conveyed conventional public image rather than personal power.

It is widely accepted that Byzantine emperors sought to depict their public image against a normative, standard of ideal ruler, which was timeless and unchanging.³⁶ Imperial imagery depicted 'the Emperor, not emperors' in Grabar's phrase.³⁷ Maguire noted the use of idealised depictions of emperor's physique, deportment and costume, alongside a stylized set of metaphors to evoke his imperial qualities.³⁸ Walker agreed that the emperor was depicted through highly formulaic presentations of the 'universal leader'.³⁹ The relation between imperial figures was influenced by careful attention to details of court hierarchy in portraiture, observed Hennessy.⁴⁰

This normative dimension meant that there was an ideological element to Byzantine portraiture. The Byzantine conception of imperial authority has been described as the *kaiseridee* or imperial idea, a concept first developed by Treitinger and Hunger, which has strongly influenced notions of imperial power.⁴¹ Angelov has summarised the main ingredients of the *kaiseridee* as being sacral

³⁴ P. Grierson, *A Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection, Volume 3, Parts 1*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1973), p 142: 'There are few representations on coins of the eighth to eleventh-centuries which can be regarded as characterised portraits; the vast majority are conventional imperial effigies.'

³⁵ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 118.

³⁶ For example Grabar, *L'Empereur*. Maguire, 'Images of the court'

³⁷ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p v.

³⁸ Maguire, 'Images of the court,' p 185.

³⁹ Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p 2.

⁴⁰ C. Hennessy, *Images of Children in Byzantium*, (Aldershot, 2008), p 143.

⁴¹ O. Treitinger, *Die Ostromische Kaiser und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im hofischen Zeremoniell*, (Gentner Verlag, 1938); H. Hunger, *Proomion: elemente der Byzantinischen kaiseridee in den arengen der urkunden*, (Munich, 1964).

rulership, possession of divine virtues, sun mimicry and a number of traditional metaphors and epithets such as 'helmsman' and 'victor.'⁴² Another element of normative imperial authority was disinterested calm, denoting stability, continuity, orthodoxy.⁴³ Brubaker has shown how impassivity could itself be a sign of imperial majesty.⁴⁴ Together these ingredients constituted the ideal public image of the emperor and his court, which as Maguire has shown was believed to be a mirror image of the heavenly court.⁴⁵ These ideas permeated imperial rhetoric which, Kazhdan has argued, were consistently applied from a very early period.⁴⁶

These considerations, however, have often obscured the different ways in which Byzantine emperors sought to portray themselves. It is true that, to an extent, the public image of the emperor was a mask or a metaphysical portrait: the individual as he should be, not as he really was.⁴⁷ Yet this is an inadequate description of imperial portraiture. Even within the core elements of the *kaiseridee*, emperors had the opportunity to emphasise different qualities, such as their military strength or wisdom. And personal qualities might be visible too. Medieval art historians often make a distinction between the public body of a ruler, representing the continuity of rule and the official power of state and the private body, reflecting the individual holder of the imperial office, his character, personality and appearance. This distinction was first drawn by

⁴² D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204 - 1330*, (Cambridge, 2007), p 10.

⁴³ A. Cameron, 'The construction of court ritual: the Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies*' in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds), *Rituals of Royalty: power and ceremony in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1987), p 87.

⁴⁴ L. Brubaker, 'Gesture in Byzantium' in M. Braddick (ed), *The Politics of Gesture: historical perspectives, Past and Present* 203, *Supplement 4*, (2009), pp 36-56.

⁴⁵ H. Maguire, 'The Heavenly court' in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture*, pp 247-258.

⁴⁶ A. Kazhdan, 'Certain traits of imperial propaganda in the Byzantine Empire from the eighth to the fifteenth-centuries' in G. Makdisi et al (ed), *Prédication et Propagande au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, (Paris, 1983), pp 13-28.

⁴⁷ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, pp 12 and 78.

Kantorowicz, in his study of Tudor political theology.⁴⁸ Both the emperor's public and private body may be visible in Byzantine imperial art, reflecting different dimensions of their power. Art historians have, however, tended either to consider individual images or imperial iconography over many centuries. For example, there have been a number of studies of the narthex mosaic in Hagia Sophia, which may portray Basil I, Leo VI or Constantine VII.⁴⁹ There have been remarkably few attempts to consider portraiture in individual reigns or explore how they changed between reigns, despite the fact that historians have explored the origins of individual imperial reputations, such as Leo's reputation for wisdom.⁵⁰ This thesis considers a number of prominent portraits of Basil, Leo and Alexander from coins, mosaics and manuscripts. It asks to what extent imperial portraits followed recent normative precedents or were adapted to suit the character, priorities and beliefs of individual emperors. It also considers whether any elements of the emperors' private lives were visible in art, alongside their preferred public image.

Basil's self-image is of particular interest. Critics from the tenth-century onward have viewed Basil through the prism of his murder of Michael III. The language used by historians has often been emotive. Tobias called the murder of Michael III 'heinous' and labelled Basil 'unscrupulous'.⁵¹ Constantelos thought Basil 'cruel', 'unethical' and 'immoral'.⁵² The implication has been that Basil had cause to repent his involvement in the assassination. Yet that might not have reflected Basil's perspective at all. The Byzantines themselves clearly believed that they

⁴⁸ E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a study in medieval political theology*, (Princeton, 1957).

⁴⁹ See below p 36 and Chapter 1, from p 67.

⁵⁰ For Basil, see G. Moravcsik, 'Sagen und legenden über Kaiser Basileios I,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15, (1961), pp 59-126; For the origins of Leo's reputation for wisdom, S. Tougher, 'The wisdom of Leo VI' in P. Magdalino (ed), *New Constantines: the rythm of imperial renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, (Aldershot, 1994), pp 171-179.

⁵¹ N. Tobias, *Basil I, Founder of the Macedonian Dynasty*, (New York, 2007), pp 77-8.

⁵² D. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*, (New Brunswick, 1968), p 135.

had the right to depose an unworthy ruler, in certain circumstances.⁵³ Basil may have regarded his coup as legitimate, both on grounds of personal safety and the national interests. Historians can do their best to explain the circumstances of Michael III's death. Basil's art, however, provides a rare opportunity to study the public image of an emperor who had disposed of his predecessor. This needs to be approached with an open mind.

A second way emperors displayed their power was through iconography. Indeed, Grabar rightly drew attention to the motif of crowning, which emerged under Basil I. How should we understand the significance of the signs and symbols which appear in imperial art? Imperial iconography, like portraits, has generally been considered to be formulaic and unchanging, with signs and allegories of power often viewed over the long-term.⁵⁴ Aspects of imperial power, authority and legitimacy were signified by objects such as the crown, *larabum* (a military standard with a Christogram at the top), *globus cruciger* (a globe surmounted with a cross) and *akakia* (a cylinder thought to have contained dust as a symbol of mortality). Some studies have attempted to understand the significance of these objects through their use in ritual, and much of this work has focused specifically on the Macedonian Dynasty, thanks to the prominence of the *Book of Ceremonies* as a source.⁵⁵ This was a book of court ceremonial, compiled from a range of earlier sources and traditions in the 950s, under Leo's son Constantine VII. This approach may not be very fruitful, as considerable doubts have been raised about the value of descriptions of imperial ceremony. It is questionable how many of the rituals collated by Constantine VII were either known to or followed by Basil, Leo or Alexander. Cameron challenged the prevailing literal interpretation of the *Book of Ceremonies* and questioned our ability to

⁵³ A. Kaldellis, 'How to usurp the throne in Byzantium: the role of public opinion in sedition and rebellion' in D. Angelov and M. Saxby (eds), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2013), p 52. J.C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et Contestations à Byzance, 963 - 1210*, (Paris, 1990), Chapter 1.

⁵⁴ Eg. Grabar, *L'Empereur*.

⁵⁵ For example, J. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley, 1981).

understand ritual and its significance in Byzantine contexts.⁵⁶ Cutler also queried the link between art and ceremony, pointing out that rituals described in the *Book of Ceremonies* were not explicit about the objects used.⁵⁷

As a result of this ambiguity, many art historians have studied objects as signs. Parani and Galavaris, for example, have examined the depiction of imperial clothing, such as the *loros* and *chlamys*, and tried to determine what associations they may have held for Byzantines.⁵⁸ This has generated ideas about the symbolism of imperial clothing on feast days like Easter. A number of helpful thematic studies have also been published. Hennessy explored images of family and children, which included a comparative analysis of images of Basil's family in the Paris Gregory and the Kainourgion mosaics.⁵⁹ The imperial family could itself be a sign of power, as having children signified God's blessing. Images of nature, which featured in several works of art by the early Macedonians, were examined by Maguire.⁶⁰ These might associate parts of the imperial palace with the Garden of Eden. The iconography on coins and seals from the period have also been closely studied but few attempts have been made to systematically include them alongside other forms of imperial art for this period. Grierson has studied the development of iconography on Macedonian coins and Nesbitt has examined their seals.⁶¹ Attempts have also been made to understand the influence emperors had over the design of coins.⁶²

⁵⁶ Cameron, 'The construction of court ritual,' pp 106-136

⁵⁷ A. Cutler, 'At court' in Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*, pp 115.

⁵⁸ M. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine material culture and religious iconography, 11th to 15th Centuries*, (Leiden, 2003). G. Galavaris, 'The symbolism of the imperial costume as displayed on Byzantine coins,' *Museum Notes* 8, (1958), pp 99-117.

⁵⁹ Hennessy, *Images of Children*, pp 144-151.

⁶⁰ H. Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion: nature in Byzantine art and literature*, (Oxford, 2012).

⁶¹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*. V. Nesbitt (ed), *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Fogg Museum of Art, Volume 6: Emperors, Patriarchs of Constantinople, addenda*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 2009)

⁶² C. Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority and *kharakter* on the marketplace' in P. Armstrong (ed), *Authority in Byzantium*, (Aldershot, 2003). pp 65-82.

Most iconographic studies have focused on the long-view, for example by comparing religious and temporal power. Yet the short-term is often important too. The late ninth- and early tenth-centuries were times of considerable innovation in imperial iconography. The earliest surviving images of an emperor being crowned by a heavenly figure date from the reign of Basil. Leo was the first emperor to show the Virgin on his coins. Alexander alone is associated with four innovations on his coinage in just thirteen months of rule. Focused art historical studies are needed to understand and explain these developments. This thesis attempts a tighter focus on the deployment of signs of power in the art of Basil, Leo and Alexander. In particular, it examines the development over time of what has been seen as the most important sign of power to emerge under the Macedonians: the motif of emperors being crowned by holy figures. Although Walker noted that the iconography of ‘divine endorsement’ had become the official iconography of the emperor by the tenth-century, there has been no analysis of how this developed.⁶³ Grabar noted the significance of this motif but his interpretation appears unsatisfactory, as he considered them as ‘coronations’ and overlooked related images of blessings on objects like the David Casket.⁶⁴

Finally, emperors sought to display power through architecture, in a manner which has been followed by rulers in every historical era.⁶⁵ Buildings might be constructed to impress the elites and masses at home or visitors from abroad. Constantine VII noted that the imperial throne ‘shall be as the sun’ in its effect on visitors.⁶⁶ The city itself was intended to be a beacon for Christianity too. ‘As a city on a mountain, hath He raised thee up,’ observed Constantine VII about

⁶³ Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p 8.

⁶⁴ Grabar, *L’Empereur*.

⁶⁵ D. Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex: how the rich and powerful and their architects shape the world*, (London, 2006).

⁶⁶ ‘Ο θρόνος σου ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐναντίον. Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio*. Translated by R. Jenkins, edited by G. Moravcsik, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1966), p 46, line 33.

Constantinople, so that ‘the nations may bring to thee their gifts and thou mayest be adored of them that dwell in the earth’.⁶⁷ This sense of spectacle and manifestation of imperial power could be a source of enjoyment to emperors. Leo VI himself acknowledged the ‘display and enjoyment’ that could be obtained through the pageantry of imperial power and authority.⁶⁸ Conversely, the appearance of damage and decay in Constantinople could be harmful. Emperors put a great deal of effort into promoting the image of good order across the whole *polis*.⁶⁹ The collapse of a building, especially a church, might be seen as evidence of divine displeasure, as well as impoverished imperial power.

Imperial construction work could play a part in reinforcing imperial power over the inhabitants of Constantinople. By investing in building work, particularly churches and monasteries, emperors could demonstrate to the people that their rule was blessed by God. In addition, emperors could win support by investing in facilities for particular groups within the city: merchants, traders or the urban poor. This was important because the population of Constantinople itself could grant or deny power to a challenger to the throne.⁷⁰ The people of Constantinople had supported Leontios against Justinian I in 695, for example. Kaldellis concluded that it was ‘imperative’ for emperors to retain the support of public opinion in the capital.

Basil’s building work was a major element of his posthumous reputation, as set out in the *Vita Basilii*. His New Church, on the Great Palace site in Constantinople, occupied large amounts of labour and resources and was full of

⁶⁷ ὡς πόλιν ἐπ’ ὄρους ἀνύψωσεν, ὥστε δωροφορεῖσθαι ὑπὸ ἔθνῶν καὶ προσχυνεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν κατοικούντων τὴν γῆν, *Ibid*, p 46, lines 37 - 39. Translation by Jenkins, *ibid*.

⁶⁸ ἐπίδειξις καὶ ἀπόλαυσις. Leo VI, *Taktika*. Edited and translated by G. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), Prologue, p 2, line 8. Leo’s point was that there was a higher purpose than the display and enjoyment of power, which was to improve the lives of citizens. However, he in so doing tacitly accepted that he did enjoy the display of power.

⁶⁹ J. Shepard, ‘Aspects of moral leadership: the imperial city and lucre from legality’ in Armstrong, *Authority in Byzantium*, p 11.

⁷⁰ Kaldellis, ‘How to usurp the throne,’ pp 43-56.

relics tied to his regime.⁷¹ Thanks to the *Vita*, historians have interpreted Basil's construction and renovation work in the traditions of the Roman Empire. Jenkins argued that the *Vita Basilii* depicted Basil as the refounder of the Roman State, drawing on earlier writers such as Isocrates, Plutarch and Polybius.⁷² The intention, he argued, was to depict the emperor as a New Augustus. An eagle, for example, features in stories about both Augustus and Basil.⁷³ Alexander believed that although renewal was always a key part of Byzantine imperial ideology, it reached an apogee in the *Vita Basilii*.⁷⁴ Yet, no comprehensive examination of Basil's building work has been undertaken since Vogt, in 1908, who took a literal interpretation of the claims of the *Vita Basilii*.⁷⁵ Chapter 3 opens with an assessment of the reliability of the *Vita* as a source.⁷⁶

Imperial motivations for building work would have varied. Emperors might invest in new buildings to demonstrate their temporal achievements as well as their piety.⁷⁷ It is likely that that emperors pursued different strategies.⁷⁸ Chapter 3 considers what the evidence reveals about the approaches taken by Basil and Leo (Alexander died too soon to initiate new constructions), who they sought to impress and why. It also reappraises Basil's 'renewal' of Constantinople, considering how, when and why this became an important part of his reputation.

⁷¹ P. Magdalino, 'Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 37, (1987), pp 51-64.

⁷² R. Jenkins, 'The classical background of the *Scriptores Post Theophanem*,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8, (1954), pp 13-30.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p 25.

⁷⁴ P. Alexander, 'The strength of capital as seen through Byzantine eyes' in *Speculum* 37.3, (1962), pp 339-357

⁷⁵ A. Vogt, *Basile Ier, Empereur de Byzance et la Civilisation Byzantine à la Fin du IXe Siècle* (Paris, 1908).

⁷⁶ Chapter 3, p 134.

⁷⁷ L. James 'Building and rebuilding: imperial women and religious foundations in Constantinople in the fourth to eighth-centuries' in *Basilissa* 1, (2004), pp 51-64.

⁷⁸ R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine society and its icons*, (Oxford, 1985), Chapter 5.

In summary, portraits, iconography and architecture were used to construct images and perceptions of imperial power. Art and architecture, like rhetoric, could be used as a means of persuasion, by which emperors could influence how they were perceived. Although the word ‘propaganda’ is a relatively modern term, there is no doubt, as Auzépy observed, that the Byzantines knew the fact, if not the word.⁷⁹ Yet this phenomenon should not be considered in purely rational terms. This was not so much about communicating a message as inculcating a state of mind. This phenomenon may best be understood as ‘the political imaginary,’ which Herman has defined as ‘how politics gets imagined’.⁸⁰ The context in which imperial art was displayed was intended to shape a ‘symbolic or imagined realm of society’.⁸¹ To a large extent, the purpose was to impress and even to overawe. Part of this effect was achieved by the use of fine craftsmanship and rare or exotic materials.⁸² Imperial art thereby displayed ‘conspicuous virtuosity,’ a form of Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption.⁸³ On a more human scale, works of art and the buildings which housed them need to be understood as part of what MacCormack termed a *Staatspräsentationen*, in which images and ritual sought to make imperial authority visible in front of the elites of the empire.⁸⁴ Where possible, therefore, it is important to consider how art and architecture were viewed, by whom and in what circumstances.

⁷⁹ M.F. Auzépy, ‘Manifestations de la propagande en faveur de l’orthoxie’ in Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, p 85.

⁸⁰ P. Herman, *Royal Poetrie*, (Cornell, 2010), p 3.

⁸¹ Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p 17.

⁸² M. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: art, trade and power*, (Austin, 1993)

⁸³ Trilling, ‘Daedalus and the nightingale,’ p 225.

⁸⁴ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, p 13.

Relations of Power

The second section of the thesis considers what light art can throw on the power relations between the emperor and other key figures at court, notably the imperial household and the patriarch.

The crown was vulnerable. Byzantium saw the dethronement of 65 emperors over its history.⁸⁵ Only 39 reigns ended peacefully.⁸⁶ Members of the imperial family could themselves threaten imperial power: the danger was often close to the throne. Basil, the founder of the Macedonian Dynasty, instigated the murder of his patron Michael III and believed that his son Leo was a threat to his life.⁸⁷ Leo may have been complicit in his father's death and suspected his brother Alexander of plotting against him.⁸⁸ Once he became emperor, Alexander seems to have overseen his own exodus of court officials and dignitaries and given no regard to the prospects for the sole Macedonian candidate for the succession, his co-emperor, the young Constantine VII.⁸⁹ Clearly, relations within the Imperial Palace could often be complex, heated and fraught. It might, of course, be objected that there was no such thing as a Macedonian Dynasty, if we believe tenth-century chronicles that Leo was in fact the son of Michael III and not

⁸⁵ Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, p 11.

⁸⁶ L. Brehier, *Les Institutions de l'Empire Byzantin*, (Paris, 1949) p 17

⁸⁷ Basil was said to be one of the conspirators in the murder of Michael in the account by Georgius Monachos, PG 110, 836: 20 - 837: 22. The *Vita Basilii* lay responsibility on 'magistrates and wise members of the senate' - οἱ δοκιμώτατοι καὶ τὸ ἔμψρον τῆς συγκλήτου. *Vita Basilii*, edited by I. Ševčenko, *Chronographia Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur*, (Berlin, 2011), Chapter 27, p 108. Basil's suspicions about Leo were described in the *Vita Basilii*. This reported that Leo was persuaded by a monk called Sandabarenos to carry a knife, who then told Basil that Leo had murderous designs on the emperor's life. Basil believed the monk. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 100, p 328.

⁸⁸ Al-Tabari reported that Basil was murdered and not killed in a hunting accident, see A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes II: la dynastie Macedonienne, 867 - 969, Volume 2, Book 2*, (Brussels, 1950), p 10. Mango thought Leo was complicit in the assassination plot, see C. Mango 'Eudocia Ingerina, the Normans and the Macedonian Dynasty' in *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskos Instituta* 14/15, (1973), pp 17-27. Leo's suspicions towards Alexander were documented by S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI, 886 - 912: people and politics*, (Leiden, 1997) p 223.

⁸⁹ P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Emperor Alexander's bad name' in *Speculum* 44, (1969), pp 585-596.

Basil.⁹⁰ This question of paternity has been the subject of debate from at least the time of Constantine VII. This thesis concurs with Tougher, who concluded that what matters is the fact that Basil treated Leo as if he were his own son.⁹¹

Relations between the emperor and other imperial figures can be considered through the lens of art, including coins and seals, which were probably the most direct expression of official imagery. Although some features of coin imagery are well understood in the long view, such as the representation of junior emperors, they have been little studied for their insight on power dynamics in individual reigns, partly because there have been few recent studies of domestic politics in this period. Only occasionally have art historians found evidence of private lives in individual images, for example Hennessy's suggestion that depictions of Basil's family suggested tense personal relations.⁹² At its most basic level, imperial power involved maintaining a grip on the throne and passing it on to a chosen successor, usually the eldest son. This was not automatic. The Byzantine throne was not technically hereditary. In theory, the emperor was elected by the church, army and senate and acclaimed by the people.⁹³ One of the functions of this period of imperial art was to designate an intended successor, for example on the coinage. Yet clear contrasts are visible, for example, between the depiction of Basil's sons before and after the death of Constantine in 879, which suggest that Basil's relationships with Leo and Alexander were different from his relationship with his eldest son. Imperial imagery may also be revealing about other members of the Imperial Household. Empress Eudokia features in a number of images in Basil's reign, on coins, in mosaics and in the Paris Gregory. She may have played a prominent part in court life, although studies about her have

⁹⁰ For example, Georgius Monachos, PG 110, 835. Tougher, *Leo VI*. Chapter 2.

⁹¹ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 48.

⁹² Hennessy, *Images of Children*, pp 148-149. This is explored in Chapter 4.

⁹³ J. Bury, *The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire*, (Cambridge, 1910).

tended to focus on her origins and the question of her relationship with Michael III.⁹⁴

Although much has been written about the power dynamics during each reign, it is worth noting that historical accounts are incomplete, with the reigns of Basil and Alexander in particular requiring some re-appraisal. The Macedonian period is one of the best known eras of Byzantine history and contains several much studied incidents of political history, including Basil's murder of Michael III, Leo's four marriages and Photios' break with Rome. As a consequence, there is a considerable volume of historical literature on the period. Yet despite this, several of the main accounts are now quite old and in need of review and there has been piecemeal approach to recent enquiry about the early Macedonian Emperors. Most writing on the reigns of Basil and Leo have been 'selective investigations' in Tougher's phrase, and there are significant gaps.⁹⁵ The last comprehensive study of Basil's domestic policy, for example, was published by Albert Vogt in 1908.⁹⁶ Historical accounts of Leo's reign are more up to date, with an important modern study by Tougher, which built on earlier work by Jenkins and Karlin-Hayter.⁹⁷ There has not yet been a similar reconsideration of Alexander's short reign and as a result much historical analysis is once again heavily influenced by chroniclers who may have had a bias against him. This is evident in the main general histories. Ostrogorsky claimed that Alexander was 'frivolous' and 'only living for pleasure'.⁹⁸ Jenkins went further and argued that Alexander was possibly the worst emperor ever to occupy the throne.⁹⁹ This might have changed as a result of a thoughtful study by Karlin-Hayter, who

⁹⁴ Mango, 'Eudocia Ingerina.' E. Kisliger, 'Eudokia Ingerina, Basileios I und Michael III,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 33, (1983), pp 119-136.

⁹⁵ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 3.

⁹⁶ Vogt, *Basile 1er*. Tobias, *Basil I*, focused more on foreign policy.

⁹⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*.

⁹⁸ G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, (New Brunswick, 1968), p 241.

⁹⁹ Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, p 209.

argued that there is little we can know for sure about Alexander's rule and historians should be wary about the evidence for his bad reputation.¹⁰⁰ However, this work has not stopped the idea of Alexander's incompetence and corruption. Treadgold, for example, depicted Alexander as someone interested only in hunting and drinking, although the only source he cited is Karlin-Hayter, who had thrown doubt on those claims.¹⁰¹ Tougher, by contrast, filled some of the gap by considering Alexander's relations with Leo before his assumption of sole power in 912.¹⁰² But there are still significant lacunae in our understanding. For the art historian this is disappointing, for as from an iconographic perspective Alexander's short reign is the most innovative of all of the early Macedonian emperors.

The second area of power dynamics considered in this thesis is the relationship between the emperor and the patriarch. Surprisingly little has been written about patriarchal art in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Some images of patriarchs from the *Sekretion* of Hagia Sophia have been studied in detail.¹⁰³ The appearance of the patriarch in the mosaics of the Chrysotriklinos Throne Room, however, has largely been overlooked. The most thorough appraisal of patriarchal art from the ninth-century has been Brubaker's detailed examination of the Paris Gregory, as a work seemingly commissioned by Patriarch Photios.¹⁰⁴ The Paris Gregory is a multi-dimensional work, functioning as imperial panegyric as well as iconophile polemic. Both of these are characteristic of Photios, who has been recognised as a director and sponsor of propaganda, both for the Iconophile position but also for Basil I. He used art and rhetoric to

¹⁰⁰ Karlin-Hayter, 'The Emperor Alexander's bad name.'

¹⁰¹ Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, (Stanford, 1997), pp 450ff.

¹⁰² Tougher, *Leo VI*, Chapter 9.

¹⁰³ R. Cormack, and E. Hawkins, 'The mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: the rooms above the south-west vestibule and ramp,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, (1977), pp 235-240.

¹⁰⁴ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*. See below, p 31, for the attribution to Photios.

champion the Orthodox position and to criticise Iconoclasts.¹⁰⁵ He and other Iconophiles may have deliberately exaggerated the extent of the persecution in order to damage the ongoing influence of the Iconoclasts.¹⁰⁶ Photios was also apparently behind the creation of a fake genealogy for Basil which claimed descent from Tiridates, the Armenian king.¹⁰⁷

It has been suggested that there were ideological differences between emperors and patriarchs about the limit of imperial power. Photios set out distinct roles for emperor and patriarch in the *Epanagoge*, which could be seen as a challenge to imperial power because it located the emperor's authority in the law and gave the patriarch spiritual authority.¹⁰⁸ An alternative point of view has also been put forward, in which emperor exercised both temporal and spiritual power, sometimes known as 'caesaropapism'. Runciman, for example, had argued that emperors pursued a form of theocracy.¹⁰⁹ This idea was taken further by Dagron, who drew in particular on the reigns of Basil and Leo.¹¹⁰ Dagron went so far as to argue that the early Macedonian emperors pursued a deliberate policy of sanctifying their dynasty, developing cults for Basil's son Constantine, Leo's wife Theophano and even Basil himself. The idea of caesaropapism is still influential. Walker concluded in 2012 that the imperial image reflected both *christomimesis* and caesaropapism.¹¹¹ Other historians have seen more evidence of caesaropapism in Leo's reign. Magdalino, for example, has written in detail about

¹⁰⁵ For example, Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁶ L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680 - 850*, (Cambridge, 2011), p 427.

¹⁰⁷ Nicetas David, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*. Edited and translated by A. Smithies, *Nicetas David, The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 2013), p 119.

¹⁰⁸ This is discussed in Chapter 5, p 227.

¹⁰⁹ S. Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, (Cambridge, 1977).

¹¹⁰ G. Dagron, *Empereur et Pretre: étude sur le "caesaropapisme" byzantine*, (Paris, 1997). Revised and translated as *Emperor and Priest: the imperial office in Byzantium*, (Cambridge, 2007).

¹¹¹ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, pp 2, 161

the views of Leo Choirosphaktes, a prominent member of Leo's court, suggesting that he offered a radical vision of political and religious autocracy that Leo did not explicitly reject and may have endorsed.¹¹²

Other historians have suggested that such ideological differences between emperor and patriarch may have been exaggerated. Nicol concluded that there was little or no political theorising after the fourth-century in Byzantium.¹¹³ Dvornik suggested that power dynamics between emperor and patriarch may have been less due to ideology and more influenced by personality.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the division between Church and State was less clear-cut in Byzantium than it was in the early medieval West. In practice, Byzantium did not have a rigid separation between secular and ecclesiastical power but instead had more of a 'State Church' headed by the emperor, who appointed the patriarch, chaired church Councils and signed ecclesiastical laws.¹¹⁵ There were certainly disagreements about the extent of imperial power over the church and the balance of power between institutions is likely to have fluctuated over time according to circumstances and personality.¹¹⁶ This certainly appears to have been the case at times in the early Macedonian period. Photios may have resigned or been dismissed as patriarch in protest at Basil's murder of Michael III but was later reinstated by Basil and became his chief adviser as well as a teacher for his children.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, Leo in turn dismissed Photios again, installing his brother Stephen (Patriarch 886 - 893) and then a series of allies on the

¹¹² P. Magdalino 'In search of the Byzantine courtier: Leo Choirosphaktes and Constantine Monasses' in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture*, pp 141-166

¹¹³ D. Nicol, 'Byzantine political thought' in J. Burns (ed), *Medieval Political Thought c350 - 1450*, (Cambridge, 1988) p 55.

¹¹⁴ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: origins and background*, Volume 2, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1966).

¹¹⁵ Bury, *Constitution*, p 32.

¹¹⁶ The mutability of power is explored by D. Savoie, *Power: where is it?* (Cambridge, 2010)

¹¹⁷ Georgius Monachos reported that Photios was removed by Basil: Georgius Monachos, 841. Anastasius reported that he was asked to resign: Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, XVI, 6. Tobias, *Basil I*, p 353, n16.

patriarchal throne. Nevertheless, Leo suspected his friend Nikolas (Patriarch 901 - 907) of involvement in an assassination attempt in 903.¹¹⁸ Leo later faced a powerful challenge to his authority from Nikolas and other bishops, when he was barred from Church after his uncanonical fourth marriage in 906. Alexander, by contrast, restored Nikolas in 912 and appears to have worked closely with his patriarch in his overhaul of senior bishops and officials.

Personalities on the imperial and patriarchal thrones did matter, yet there may have been ideological differences too. Chapter 5 considers works of imperial and patriarchal art from the perspective of the relationship, first between Basil and Photios and then between Leo and his patriarchs. In so doing, it offers a partial re-appraisal of the images in the Paris Gregory, a work of patriarchal art, whether or not it was personally commissioned by Photios for Basil. Brubaker acknowledged that the images expressed Photios' superiority as well as flattery but her work did not examine the full extent to which the imagery withheld praise for Basil or sought to qualify his power. Scholarship on the rhetoric of panegyric demonstrates that it can serve multiple purposes. Rundle, in his work on Renaissance panegyric, has shown that although it was intended to flatter, it could also convey exhortations to particular imperial virtues as well as contain hidden criticisms and subtle warnings.¹¹⁹ If so, this would undermine the idea that Byzantine art did not respond to contemporary developments, such as attempted coups, raids and even usurpations. Jolivet-Lévy has, for example, argued that no topical events are discernable in imperial art, rather emperors rose above the fray of day to day politics in their imagery.¹²⁰

In summary, the emperor was at the apex of powerful institutions of authority - state, church and military. Yet power in Byzantium was inherently personal. It

¹¹⁸ Treadgold, *Byzantine State*, p 467.

¹¹⁹ D Rundle, 'Not so much praise as precept': Erasmus, panegyric and the Renaissance art of teaching princes in Y. Too and N. Livingstone (eds), *Pedagogy and Power: rhetorics of classical learning* (Cambridge, 1998) pp 162-3.

¹²⁰ Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'Image du pouvoir,' p 469.

did not derive from large bureaucracies or the rule of law so much as through the personal standing of the emperor and his relationships with noble families, officials, churchmen and generals. Power, in essence, is the ability to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of people and resources, across a spectrum of influence which runs from intimidation and fear to commitment and loyalty in all of the overlapping social networks on which their power depended, whether ideological, economic, military or political.¹²¹ It makes sense, therefore, to consider medieval kingship as a social construct, in which power depended on relationships with others.¹²² From this perspective, the power emperors enjoyed in practice depended to a large degree on how they were perceived or, as Bury concluded, Byzantine emperors could do pretty much what they could get away with.¹²³ Their freedom for manoeuvre would depend, to an extent, on the extent to which they shared power or allowed others to accumulate it. The visual imagery adopted by emperors itself influenced perceptions of their authority among the imperial family, elites and populace of Constantinople. This was a political culture in which imperial privileges were jealously guarded. Crossing the line - for example when Romanos Lekapenos was persuaded to put on the red shoes reserved for the emperor during Constantine VII's minority - was a highly symbolic act.¹²⁴ Rivals might come from within the imperial family, from other noble families or from senior generals.¹²⁵ All of these challenges occurred in the early decades of the Macedonian Dynasty. Yet emperors were not passive in the face of such opposition. Indeed, they actively sought to promote their authority

¹²¹ M. Mann *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1: a history of power from the beginning to AD 1760* (New York, 1986). L. Neville *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950 - 1100* (Cambridge, 2004).

¹²² T. Reuter 'Regemque, quem in Francia pene perditit, in patria magnifice recepit: Ottonian ruler representation in synchronic and diachronic comparison' in G. Altholt and E. Schubert (eds), *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im Ottonischen Sachsen*, (Sigmaringen, 1998), pp 363-380.

¹²³ Bury, *Constitution*, pp 29, 40.

¹²⁴ Such an incident is described by Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, Chapter 35. Edited by Becker, J. *Die Werke Liudprand von Cremona, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, (Hanover, 1915). Translated by F. Wright, *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, (London, 1930).

¹²⁵ Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et Contestations*, Chapter 1. Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'Image du pouvoir,' p 469. Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p 18.

and undermine their opponents in obvious and more subtle ways.¹²⁶ Leo himself articulated the power that images have: ‘That which is described by words must appear like an image or a sketch; which in itself is infinitely superior than words can describe.’¹²⁷ Art was one of the ways that emperors sought to consolidate their power and make it harder for others to contemplate challenging their authority or get away with it if they did.

Works of Art and Sources

The thesis is organised thematically and so individual works of art are mentioned in more than one chapter. For ease of reference, this section introduces the main works of art considered in the thesis, provides an overview of their design and where appropriate their inscriptions and addresses any controversies over their date or attribution to individual emperors. Textual sources for some works of art are also provided. Where these are short, complete texts are given; where longer, selections from the text are made.

a) Works of Art

The Chrysotriklinos Mosaics

The Chrysotriklinos or ‘Golden Hall’ was the throne room of the Great Palace. This building has not survived and so its mosaics are lost. However, some mosaics are mentioned in an epigram contained in the *Anthologia Graeca*, a collection of 3,700 epigrams compiled in the tenth-century.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ D. Angelov ‘Power and subversion in Byzantium: approaches and frameworks’ in Angelov and Saxby (eds), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, p 12.

¹²⁷ ὅσα μὲν ὁ λόγος γράφοι, ὥαπερ εἰκόνα τινὰ ἢ σκιαγραφίαν ἐμφαίνεσθαι, αὐτοὺς δ’ ἄπειρον ὑπερκεῖσθαι τῶν ἐκ τοῦ λόγου φαινομένων Leo’s funeral oration for his father Basil, published in Vogt and Hausherr, ‘Oraison funèbre,’ p 40, lines 29-31. My translation.

¹²⁸ J. Henderson (ed), *The Greek Anthology I*, (Harvard, 1916), epigram 106, pp 67-68. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312 - 1453: sources and documents* (Toronto, 1986).

The epigram reads as follows: ‘A ray of truth has shone forth again and blinded the eyes of the false teachers. Piety has increased and error has fallen: faith is flourishing and grace is spreading. Look: Christ, pictured again, shines above the imperial throne and banishes dark heresies. Above the entrance, like a holy door, the Virgin stands guard, inscribed on a tablet. The sovereign and the patriarch, as banishers of error, are represented nearby with their fellow workers, and all around as sentries of the house are spirits, disciples, martyrs, priests; thus we now call the ‘hall of Christ’ that which formerly took its name from the word ‘gold’, since it has the throne of Christ the lord and the mother of Christ, and the images of the heralds of Christ, and of Michael whose works are wisdom.’¹²⁹

Both emperor and patriarch were portrayed in the Chrysotriklinos mosaics. The emperor was clearly Michael III. There are different views about the identity of the patriarch. Paton, who edited the text in 1916, believed the patriarch was Methodios (843 - 847). Mango disagreed and identified the patriarch as Photios (whose first term as patriarch was 858 - 867).¹³⁰ This was on the grounds that the epigram makes no mention of either Theodora, who was expelled in 856, or Basil, who was crowned as co-emperor in 866. If the mosaic was created between 856 and 866 as Mango suggested, this makes Photios the likelier candidate.

¹²⁹ Ἐλαμψεν ἀκτὶς τῆς ἀληθείας πάλιν καὶ τὰς κόρας ἤμβλυσε τῶν ψευδηγόρων ἡὔξησεν εὐσέβεια, πέπτωκε πλάνη καὶ πίστις ἀνθεῖ καὶ πλατύνεται χάρις. Ἴδου γὰρ αὖθις Χριστὸς εἰκονισμῶνος λάμπει πρὸς ὕψος τῆς καθέδρας τοῦ κράτους καὶ τὰς σκοτεινὰς αἵρέσεις ἀνατρέπει. τῆς εἰσόδου δ’ ὑπερθεῖν ὡς θεία πύλη στηλογραφεῖται καὶ φύλαξ ἡ Παρθένο. ἄναξ δὲ καὶ πρόεδρος ὡς πλανοτρόποι σὺν τοῖς συνεργοῖς ἱστοροῦνται πλησίον. κύκλῳ δὲ παντὸς οἷα φρουροὶ τοῦ δόμου νόες, μαθηταί, μάρτυρες, θρηπτοὶ. ὅθεν καλοῦμεν χρυσοτρίκλινον νέον τὸν πρὶν λαχόντα κλήσεως χρυσωνύμον, ὡς τὸν θρόνον ἔχοντα Χριστοῦ κυρίου Χριστοῦ τε μητρός, Χριστοκηρύκων τύπους καὶ τοῦ σφουργοῦ Μιχαὴλ τὴν εἰκόνα. Epigram about the *Chrysotriklinos* throne room. Henderson (ed), *The Greek Anthology*, pp 67-68.

¹³⁰ Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p 184.

The David Casket

The David Casket is in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. It was given to an emperor and empress by an aristocratic couple. The lid of the casket depicts the emperor and empress being blessed by Christ. On the side panels are depicted scenes from the life of David. These scenes follow the traditional structure for a speech of praise, beginning with David's birth. Other scenes depict David as a shepherd with his flock; killing a lion; David being anointed by Samuel; playing a harp; David fighting Goliath; cutting off the giant's head; David in triumph; Saul giving his daughter Michal to David in marriage; Michal helping David escape from Saul; Ahimelech helping David; the massacre of men, women and children; David sparing Saul's life; David showing Saul that he could have killed him; and David being crowned king.

The inscription on the lid of the casket reads: 'O Christ bless the imperial couple: the couple, your servants, duly make obeisance to you'.¹³¹ The inscription around the rim is damaged but probably reads: 'Your soul is a treasure of gifts from lofty emperors, it is a vessel of imperial riches. Furthermore, your body, O Empress, is a treasure chest of foreign assets, for such a great husband'.¹³²

There has been a debate about the date of the casket, which some have located to the reign of Basil, others to that of Leo VI. Most scholars have associated the casket with Basil. Guillou believed that the casket dated from the marriage of Basil and Eudokia, which would make it the earliest in the series of surviving images of emperors with heavenly figures.¹³³ Maguire supported the association

¹³¹ ΧΡΙCΤΕΥΛΟΓΗΤΟΝΑΕ CΠΙΟΤΩΝCYNWΠΙΔΑ ΔΥΛΗCYN NWΠIC ΤΑCΙ AN. Translated by H. Maguire, 'The art of comparing in Byzantium,' in *Art Bulletin* 70.1 (1988), p 89.

¹³² Θεοσυρὸς δῶρων ὕψιμων αὐτοκροτόρων Ἡ οἷ ψυχὴ καὶ οκεῦος ὕειων χρημάτων Πλὴν καὶ ὕ ηοσυρὸς προτερημάτων ζένων τὸ σὸν οκήνος, ὦ βασιλις, Ἐιγαρ τηλικούτω συζιγω. Translation by Maguire, *ibid*, p 91.

¹³³ A. Guillou 'Deux ivoires Constantinopolitains daté du IX^e et X^e siècle,' in S. Dufrenne (ed), *Byzance et les Slaves. Études de civilisation: Melanges Ivan Dujcev*, (Paris, 1979), pp 207-211.

with Basil as he believed that the David scenes on the casket echoed aspects of Basil's life, such as his relationship with Michael.¹³⁴ Kalavrezou used stylistic differences in carving technique, such as heavy undercutting and simple folds in clothing, to date the casket at some point between the 860s and 880s.¹³⁵

Cutler and Oikonomides, however, argued that the inscriptions on the casket suggest that the item was made for one of Leo VI's marriages, most probably to Zoe Zaoutzaina in 900.¹³⁶ If this was a wedding, the emperor depicted is unlikely to be Basil, who married Eudokia before becoming co-emperor in 865 or 866 when he was *parakoimomenos* and certainly not *autokrator*, the title he is given in the inscription.¹³⁷ There is no good reason, however, for believing that the casket does show a wedding. The text and imagery could simply depict Christ's blessing for the imperial couple. As such, it could have been made at any time after Basil became sole emperor in 867. Kalavrezou, Maguire and Brubaker date the casket to Basil's reign on stylistic and iconographic grounds.¹³⁸ This seems the most secure dating.

The Paris Gregory depicting Basil I, (PLATES 1, 2, 3, 4)

The manuscript known as the Paris Gregory was produced in Constantinople for Basil and his family between 879 and 882, probably to mark the dedication of the New Church. It consists of 464 folios and includes 46 full-page miniatures, in full-colour, with over 200 distinct scenes. These include images of Basil being

¹³⁴ Maguire, 'The art of comparing,' p 93.

¹³⁵ I. Kalavrezou, 'A new type of icon: ivories and steatites,' in *Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and His Age, Second International Byzantine Conference*, (Delphi, 1989), pp 377-396.

¹³⁶ A. Cutler and N. Oikonomides, 'An imperial Byzantine casket and its fate at a humanist's hands,' *Art Bulletin* 70.1, (1988), pp 77-87

¹³⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*, pp 43-4.

¹³⁸ Kalavrezou, 'A new type of icon,' pp 392-393; Maguire 'Art of comparing,' pp 91-93; Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, pp 185-186

crowned and Eudokia with Leo and Alexander. A number of leaves at the end of the manuscript have been lost.

The significance of the Paris Gregory as a work of imperial panegyric has now been understood. A mismatch had been identified between text and image, with the latter appearing to have little to do with the subject matter. Grabar believed that this was because the images had been copied from pre-iconoclastic books.¹³⁹ However, Der Nersessian and later Brubaker set out how in fact the images acted as a panegyric to Basil.¹⁴⁰ Many of the illustrations in the Paris Gregory work at the level of allegory, encouraging viewers to make comparisons between Basil and Biblical and historical figures. For example, Biblical figures are shown wearing a *chlamys* and *tablion* and sometimes holding imperial regalia too, like the orb and *labarum*. Occasionally, the figures appear in situations which recall actual court ceremonies or historical incidents. Joseph, for example, is shown being made co-emperor in a ceremony which looks like the appointment of a Caesar.¹⁴¹ It seems possible that the image of Joseph in triumph may also be a reference to Basil, for Joseph is shown in a chariot which bears no relation to the Biblical story but may reflect Basil's triumphs through Constantinople in 873 and 879, shortly before the Paris Gregory was produced in around 879-882.¹⁴²

Brubaker argued that the Paris Gregory manuscript was commissioned by Photios for Basil, making it highly significant in the context of Macedonian court politics. It is rare to find an art work linked to two major figures at court. This conclusion has been challenged. Tougher, for example, has questioned the extent to which

¹³⁹ A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme Byzantin: le dossier archéologique*, (Paris, 1967), p 340; Grabar, 'Byzantine architecture and art,' p 335.

¹⁴⁰ S. Der Nersessian, 'The illustrations of the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus' in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962); Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*.

¹⁴¹ Folio 69v. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, Fig 12.

¹⁴² M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: triumphal rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, (Cambridge, 1986), p 154. Composition of Paris Gregory dated by Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, pp 412-414.

Brubaker's argument depends on the identification with Photios and suggested that the manuscript was more 'idiosyncratic' than Brubaker believed.¹⁴³ There is certainly a danger of over-interpretation of individual images in the Paris Gregory but thematically the manuscript does indicate how power was conceived and pictured by a figure close to Basil's court. Although Photios cannot with certainty be identified as the patron of the manuscript, the imagery certainly seems to have originated within a patriarchal tradition, given the careful visual exegesis of religious themes, from the Psalms and Gregory's homilies.

The Kainourgion Mosaics depicting Basil I

The Kainourgion Palace was constructed by Basil I on the Great Palace site, in the area of Constantinople between the Hippodrome and the sea walls. The Great Palace was an irregular assortment of buildings from various periods of history, separated by gardens and playing fields.¹⁴⁴ The Kainourgion Palace consisted of a number of residential rooms. Nothing has survived from the site, so evidence comes from a long passage in the *Vita Basilii*.¹⁴⁵ This text, a panegyric to Basil I written on behalf of his grandson Constantine VII, provides what appears to be a detailed description of several of the mosaics, including Basil surrounded by his family and Basil in triumph over defeated cities. The following excerpts describe the mosaics:

'In the space above the columns up to the very ceiling and in the eastern semi-dome the whole building has been covered with beautiful golden mosaic cubes. The work's creator presides over, attended by his comrades-in-arms - his subordinate commanders - who offer to him as gifts the cities that had been conquered by him. Again, in the ceiling above' reads the text 'are depicted the

¹⁴³ S. Tougher 'Image and text,' *The Classical Review*, Vol 50.1, (2000), pp 36-37.

¹⁴⁴ A. Kazhdan (ed), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford, 1991), p 869.

¹⁴⁵ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89

Herculean labours of the emperor: his efforts on behalf of his subjects, his exertions in warlike struggles and the victories granted to him by God'.¹⁴⁶

'Next, there comes another delight, showing the emperor, creator of the building and his spouse Eudokia enthroned and crowned with diadems. The children shared by the couple are depicted all around the chamber as if they were bright stars: they, too, are resplendent in imperial robes and diadems.

Of these, the males are shown holding books containing the Holy Commandments that they had been brought up to obey; the female offspring as well are seen holding certain books containing Divine Laws. The artist seems to have sought to indicate that not only the male but also the female offspring had been instructed in Holy Writ and were not unfamiliar with Divine Wisdom.'¹⁴⁷

'The emperor of glorious memory himself, his spouse and all their children: they shine like stars in the heavens, stretch out their hands towards God and the life-giving sign of the cross as much as to exclaim 'All that is good and pleasing to God has been accomplished and achieved in the days of our rule through this victorious symbol'. [On the ceiling] there is also contained an inscription addressed to God and offering Him the thanks of the parents on behalf of their children and again those of the children on behalf of their parents. The inscription of thanks coming from the parents runs, almost word for word: 'We thank Thee, O supremely good God and King of Kings for having surrounded us

¹⁴⁶ ἄνωθεν δὲ τῶν κίωνων ἄχρι τῆς ὀροφῆς καὶ [κατὰ] τὸ κατὰ ἀνατολὰς ἡμισφαίριον ἐκ ψηφίδων ὠραίων ἅπας, ὁ οἶκος κατακεκρύσσεται προκαθήμενον ἔχων τὸν τοῦ ἔργου δημιουργὸν ὑπὸ τῶν συναγωνιστῶν ὑποστρατήγων δορυφορούμενον ὡς δῶρα προσαγόντων αὐτῷ τὰς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐαλωκυίας πόλεις, καὶ αὐθις ἄνωθεν ἐπὶ τῆς ὀροφῆς ἀνιστόρηται τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἡράκλεια ἄθλα καὶ οἱ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὑπηκόου πόνοι καὶ οἱ τῶν πολεμικῶν ἀγώνων ἰδρῶτες καὶ τὰ ἐκ Θεοῦ νικητήρια. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 17-24.

¹⁴⁷ ἔνθρονον δεικνῦσα τὸν τοῦ ἔργου δημιουργὸν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ τὴν σύζυγον εὐδοκίαν στολαῖς κεκοσμημένους βασιλικαῖς καὶ ταινιουμένους τοῖς στέμμασιν. οἱ δὲ κοινοὶ παῖδες ὡς ἀστέρες λαμπροὶ τοῦ δόμου πέρις ἰστόρηνται, ταῖς βασιλείοις καὶ αὐτοὶ στολαῖς καὶ τοῖς στέμμασι καταγαλίζόμενοι. ὦν οἱ μὲν ἄρρενες τόμους ἐπιφερόμενοι δείκνυνται τὰς θείας ἐντολάς, αἷς στοιχεῖν ἐπαιδεύοντο, περιέχοντας, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ γένος καὶ αὐτὸ βιβλους τινὰς κατέχον ὁρᾶται νόμων θείων ἐχούσας περιοχὴν, βουλομένου δεῖξαι τοῦ τεχνίτου τυχὸν ὡς οὐ μόνον ἡ ἄρρην γονή, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ θήλεια τὰ ἱερὰ μεμύηται γράμματα καὶ τῆς θείας σοφίας οὐκ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 42-52.

with children who are thankful for the magnificence of Thy wondrous deeds. Preserve them within the bounds of Thy will and may none of them transgress any part of Thy Commandments, so that we may be grateful to Thy goodness for this as well'. In turn, the inscription of the children offers this message: 'We are thankful to Thee, O Word of God, for having raised our father from Davidic poverty and having anointed him with the unction of Thy Holy Ghost. Preserve him and our mother by Thy hand and deem them and ourselves worthy of Thy heavenly Kingdom'.¹⁴⁸

It is important to note that Byzantine descriptions of works of art may not have been intended as factual descriptions. Such *ekphraseis* had a literary rather than descriptive function, often concentrating on the reaction of the viewer rather than depicting what they saw.¹⁴⁹ For example, Photios' description of the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Sophia can be compared with the surviving mosaic.¹⁵⁰ Photios' words on this occasion may have been intended as an expression of spiritual reality rather than a factual description.¹⁵¹ The sections of the *Vita Basilii* which describe the Kainourgion mosaics have the character of *ekphraseis*, conveying the impression made by images on the author. Given its explicit panegyric nature, inducing emotions in the reader or listener probably

¹⁴⁸ περὶ ὃν ὡς ἄστρα κατ' οὐρανὸν Θεάσῃ ἐκλάμποντα αὐτόν τε τὸν ἀοίδιμον βασιλέα καὶ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων πάντων τὴν σύνευνον, πρὸς τε Θεὸν καὶ τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ζωοποιὸν σημεῖον τὰς χεῖρας ἐπαίροντας καὶ τοῦτο μονονουχὶ βοῶντας ὅτι `διὰ τοῦδε τοῦ νικοποιοῦ συμβόλου πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ φίλον Θεῷ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ἡμετέρας βασιλείας διαπέπρακται καὶ κατῶρθωται ὃ καὶ εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι θεὲ ὑπεράγαθε καὶ βασιλεῦ τῶν βασιλευόντων, ὅτι περιέστησας ἡμῖν τέκνα εὐχαριστοῦντα τῇ μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ τῶν θαυμασίων σου. ἀλλὰ φύλαξον αὐτὰ ἐν τῷ θελήματί σου, μή τις αὐτῶν παραδράμῃ τι τῶν σῶν ἐντολῶν ἵνα καὶ ἐν τούτῳ εὐχαρίσωμεν τῇ σῇ ἀγαθότητι. ἡ δὲ τῶν παιδῶν αὐθις ταῦτα διαγορεύουσα δείνεται εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, Λόγε τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅτι ἐκ πτωχείας Δαυιτικῆς ἀνύψσας τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν καὶ ἔχρισας αὐτὸν τῷ χρίσματι τοῦ ἁγίου σου πνεύματος. ἀλλὰ φύλαξον αὐτὸν τῇ χειρί σου σὺν τῇ τεκούσῃ ἡμῶν ἀξιῶν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἡμᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου σου βασιλείας. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 62-81.

¹⁴⁹ R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Aldershot, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Photios, Homily 17. Edited by S. Aristarches, 'Εκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, *Second Series, Vol II*, (Istanbul, 1886), pp 177 - 198. Translation in Mango, *Art of Byzantine Empire*, pp 190..

¹⁵¹ R. Ousterhout 'Reconstructing ninth-century Constantinople' in Brubaker (ed), *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, p 118.

mattered more to the author of the *Vita Basilii* than offering a realistic description of Basil's work.

The New Church and its portrait of Basil I

Basil's New Church is known from a variety of sources. The earliest description might be by Harun-ibn-Yahya, which survives in the chronicle of Ibn Rosteh, who was writing in the first half of the tenth-century.¹⁵² There has been a debate about when Harun's visit occurred. Vasiliev thought it may have been as early as 880.¹⁵³ Grégoire set the date after 910.¹⁵⁴

The most accurate account is probably within the *Vita Basilii*. This occupied the whole of Chapters 83 to 86. The church was described as like 'a bride decked out and adorned with pearls and gold and gleaming silver'.¹⁵⁵ It was said to contain 'the most beautiful things assembled from everywhere,' adding that the glories of the building 'are better seen than heard about to be believed'.¹⁵⁶ Chapter 84 mentioned the decoration of the sanctuary, chancel and altars as well as the rugs that covered the floor. Chapter 85 described the courtyards and fountains outside the church. Chapter 86 described the mosaics of the porticoes and the garden located nearby. The New Church obviously made an impression, for it was also mentioned in passing by a number of visitors to the city, including Liudprand of

¹⁵² Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, pp 382-389.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p 381.

¹⁵⁴ H. Grégoire, 'Études sur le neuvième siècle,' *Byzantion* 8, (1933), pp 666-673

¹⁵⁵ ὅν ὡς νύμφην ὠραΐσμένην καὶ περικεκοσμημένην μαργάροις τε καὶ χρυσῷ καὶ ἀργύρου λαμπρότησιν. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 83, lines 15-17.

¹⁵⁶ τὰ πανταχόθεν συνέδραμεν κάλλιστα, ἃ τοῖς ὁρῶσι μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἀκούουσιν οἶδε τυγχάνειν πιστά *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 83, lines 14-15.

Cremona, writing about his first embassy in 949-950, Stephen of Novgorod in 1348 or 1349 and Ignatius of Smolensk in 1389.¹⁵⁷

An image of Basil I in the New Church is mentioned in the Book of Ceremonies.¹⁵⁸ No description of the portrait is given. The image appears to have been located between the women's section and the oratory.

Mosaics from Hagia Sophia, (PLATES 5, 6, 7, 8)

An unnamed emperor is depicted in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, above the Imperial Door to the Nave. This is in a very central position on a processional route into the Great Church.¹⁵⁹ The mosaic shows an emperor kneeling before an enthroned Christ. Much of the scholarship about this portrait has focused on the identity of the emperor. There are five main schools of thought. The image has been interpreted as Basil showing penitence at the Ecumenical Council of 869.¹⁶⁰ It has been more often seen as the humiliation of Leo VI after his controversial fourth marriage to Zoe Karbonopsina.¹⁶¹ A revisionist theory challenged this. Instead of humiliation, it was suggested that the unusual composite biblical text included on the mosaic constituted a reference to God's gift of wisdom to Leo.¹⁶² The figure has also been identified as Constantine VII, who was sometimes

¹⁵⁷ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 3, Chapter 34. Stephen of Novgorod in G. Majeska, *Russian Travellers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), pp 36-38. Ignatius of Smolensk in *ibid*, p 96.

¹⁵⁸ *Book of Ceremonies*. Edited and translated by A. Moffatt and M. Tell, *The Book of Ceremonies*, (Canberra, 2012). Book 1, Chapter 19, p 118.

¹⁵⁹ R. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: architecture, structure and liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1988), Map p 280.

¹⁶⁰ J. Scharf, 'Der Kaiser in proskynese' in *Bemerkungen zur Deutung des Kaisermosaiks im Narthex der Hagia Sophia von Konstantinopel*, (1964), pp 27 - 30; A. Schminck, 'Rota tu volubilis: Kaisermacht und patriarchenmacht in mosaiken' in L. Burgmann et al (ed), *Cupido Legum* (Frankfurt, 1985), pp 211-234.

¹⁶¹ N. Oikonomides, 'Leo VI and the narthex mosaic of Saint Sophia,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 30, (1976), pp 151-172.

¹⁶² Z. Gavrilovic 'The humiliation of Leo VI the Wise: the mosaics of the narthex at Saint Sophia' in *Cahiers Archéologiques* 28, (1979), pp 87-94.

depicted in his art as a wise older man, similar to the narthex image.¹⁶³ Finally, it has been argued that the absence of any inscription suggests that the image was not meant to be a specific emperor at all but a generic image of an emperor.¹⁶⁴ The absence of any inscription suggests that this image of an unnamed emperor was likely to have been intended as a generic emperor and not a specific individual. Of all the portraits in surviving Hagia Sophia mosaics, only the Virgin and Child and archangel in the apse, along with the narthex mosaic, appear to have been without inscriptions when made. Cormack concluded that the lack of an inscription should be read as a clear statement that a generic emperor was being portrayed and not a named individual.¹⁶⁵ Others also reached that conclusion. Grabar had earlier suggested that the combination of verses on the Bible was unprecedented and acted as a reminder to emperors present and future passing though about their duties and their need for divine guidance.¹⁶⁶ Dagron thought that the mosaic was left without inscription in order to send a general message of humility to emperors present and future about to cross the threshold into the Church.¹⁶⁷ The location of the image above the imperial doors to Hagia Sophia is strong evidence that the image was meant to portray the unchanging public body of the emperor. Yet even if this was intended to be a generic emperor, the context of its creation must nevertheless have reflected something about notions of imperial power at the time it was made, probably between the years 880 - 920.

A mosaic of Emperor Alexander is set high up on the east face of the north-west pier in the North Gallery. Alexander is shown in full-standing form, facing the viewer. An inscription beside the figure reads: 'Lord help thy servant, the

¹⁶³ For example the ivory of Constantine VII crowned by Christ in the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow, Figure 68 in Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*.

¹⁶⁴ R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, (Oxford, 2000), p 125.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp 124ff.

¹⁶⁶ Grabar. *L'Empereur*, p 101.

¹⁶⁷ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp 114-124.

orthodox faithful emperor'.¹⁶⁸ Teteriatnikov argued that the mosaic had been set up when Alexander was a junior emperor as a deliberate act of marginalisation by Leo.¹⁶⁹ It seems much more likely that the mosaic dates from Alexander's period of sole rule, for a variety of reasons, including the use of the title 'despot' and the fact that no portraits of junior emperors are known from church locations. Nevertheless, its obscure location requires explanation.

Four images of patriarchs, together with an image of Constantine the Great, are located in the *Sekreton*. These two rooms, the Great and Small *Sekreton*, open off the south end of the West Gallery. These rooms were used to host receptions and ecclesiastical meetings. An account of the mosaics was published by Cormack and Hawkins.¹⁷⁰

Cameo depicting Leo VI

A cameo of Christ blessing Leo is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.¹⁷¹ It includes an inscription calling on Christ to save Leo. The inscription reads:

'Jesus, save *despotes* Leo.'¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Κύριε βο(ή)θει (τῷ σῷ) δού(λ)ῳ ὀρθοδόξῳ πιστῷ δεσπ(ό)τῃ. P. Underwood and E. Hawkins 'The mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul: The portrait of the Emperor Alexander: a report on work done by the Byzantine Institute in 1959 and 1960,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, (1961): pp 187-217.

¹⁶⁹ N. Teteriatnikov, "Why is he hiding? The mosaic of Emperor Alexander in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople' in *Arte Medievale* 1 (2012), pp 61-76.

¹⁷⁰ Cormack and Hawkins, 'The rooms above the south-west vestibule.'

¹⁷¹ Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, pp 174-175.

¹⁷² ΙΗCOY CWCON ΛΕΟΝΤΑ ΔΕCΠΟΤ. *Ibid*, p 175.

Ivory Sceptre or Comb depicting Leo VI

An ivory object depicting Leo, thought to be part of a sceptre or a comb, is in the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin. On one side, Mary is depicted about to place a pearl or jewel into the crown of an emperor, identified in an inscription as Leo. On the other side, Peter and Paul are shown alongside Christ.

The main inscription on the ivory, spread over back and front arches, reads ‘Lord in your power the emperor Leo will rejoice and in your salvation he will exult exceedingly’.¹⁷³ The inscription on the front lintel reads ‘By the prayers of the disciples, Lord, help your servant’ while the one on the back lintel says ‘Strive, prosper and reign lord Leo’.¹⁷⁴ This seems very unlikely to have been Leo IV, an Iconoclast emperor; nor would it be Leo V, who instigated the second period of Iconoclasm. Neither would have been likely to have had himself depicted alongside an image of the Virgin. The most logical candidate is therefore Leo VI.

The object has been identified both as a sceptre and as a comb. For many years it was identified as a sceptre, with Corrigan, for example, attributing its iconography to a ritual use in Hagia Sophia.¹⁷⁵ More recently Buhl and Jehle argued that it was part of a comb, citing material evidence that it had been used intensively, which would be unlikely to have happened with a ceremonial object.¹⁷⁶ This seems unsatisfactory, however, as the item is twice the thickness of other ivory combs.¹⁷⁷ A ceremonial use seems more likely and Buhl and Jehle’s

¹⁷³ Arches inscription: Κ[ύρι]Ε ΕΝ ΤΗ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΕΙ ΣΟΥ ΕΥΦΡΑΝΘΗΣΕΤ[αι] ΛΕΩΝ Ο ΒΑΣ[ιλεύς]. ΚΑΙ ΕΠΙ ΤΩ ΣΩΤΗΡΙΩ ΣΟΥ ΑΓΑΛΛΙΑΣΕΤΑΙ ΣΦΟΔΡΑ. Translated by K. Corrigan ‘The ivory sceptre of Leo VI: a statement of post-iconoclastic imperial ideology’ in *Art Bulletin* 60.3, (1978), p 409.

¹⁷⁴ Lintel inscription: ΛΙΤΑΙΣ ΦΟΙΤΗΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤ[ε] [ή]ΓΟΝ ΣΩ ΔΟΥΛΩ. ΕΝΤΕΙΝΟΝ Κ[αι] ΚΑΤΕΒΟΔΟΝ Κ[αι] ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΕ ΛΕΩΝ ΑΝΑΨ. *Ibid*, p 409.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁶ G. Buhl and H. Jehle, ‘Der Kaisers altes zepter - des Kaisers neuer kamm,’ *Jahrbuch Preubischer Kulturbesitz*, (2002), pp 289-306.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid* p 292.

hypothesis does not seem strong enough to definitively overturn the identification as a sceptre.

The image of Mary placing a pearl or jewel into Leo's crown could be considered as part of a series of images of an emperor being crowned by a heavenly figure, which is examined in Chapter 2. However, Mary is not in fact shown crowning Leo. The act of crowning, I argue, was meant to convey divine legitimacy. The act of placing a pearl or jewel into Leo's crown, as occurs here, suggests instead a comment on the character, not legitimacy, of Leo's rule. As such, this image has been examined in Chapter 5, alongside other depictions of Leo's spiritual authority.

Votive Crown depicting Leo VI

The votive crown depicting Leo is in the Treasury of San Marco Venice, where it is part of the Virgin of the Grotto, a later medieval assembly. The crown itself was a diadem of Leo VI, made in silver gilt. It originally included 14 enamel medallions edged with pearls. Seven medallions have survived, which show Emperor Leo flanked by St Paul, St Andrew, St Mark, St Bartholomew, St Luke and St James. The missing medallions are thought to have depicted Christ and the six Apostles. It is thought that the diadem was made into the Virgin's Grotto in thirteenth-century Venice. Little has been written about the Votive Crown beyond catalogue entries.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ For eg. Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*, p 396. The most substantive appraisal was in D. Buckton (ed), *The Treasury of San Marco Venice*, (Venice, 1984), pp 120ff. Some consideration was given to this object in K. Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels from the fifth to the thirteenth-century*, (New York, 1969) p 57.

Imperial Bath-House

Leo Choïrosphaktes wrote a poem which may describe a bath-house built by Leo on the Great Palace site, near the New Church.¹⁷⁹ There has been a debate about the date of the imagery. Mango thought the iconography was much older than the ninth-century and argued that there was no connection with Leo.¹⁸⁰ Magdalino, however, thought that Leo might have been responsible.¹⁸¹

The following excerpt refers to what appears to be an image of the emperor holding a sword and the empress scattering flowers:

‘See the sight of the earth-ruler on the preconch, wearing a rosy appearance and holding a sword in his hands. From there, the empress in turn throws out the beauty of petals, in her sweet face wearing a rosy appearance. Words cannot describe the beauty.’¹⁸²

The next two extracts illustrate how the poem praised Leo for his spiritual wisdom:

¹⁷⁹ P. Magdalino, ‘The bath of Leo the Wise’ in A. Moffatt (ed), *Maistor, Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, (Canberra, 1984), pp 225-240.

¹⁸⁰ C. Mango ‘The Palace of Marina, the poet Palladas and the bath of Leo VI’ in *Euphrosynon: Aphieroma ston Manole Chatzidake*, (Athens, 1991), pp 321-330.

¹⁸¹ P. Magdalino ‘The bath of Leo the Wise and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’ revisited: topography, iconography, ceremonial, ideology,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), pp 97-118.

¹⁸² Ἰδίως θέαν Γεούχου
ἐπὶ τὴν πρόκογχον ὄψει
ροδέην φύσιν φοροῦσαν
ξίφος ἐν χερσὶν κρατοῦσαν.
καλύκων χάριν προπέμτει
Βασιλισσα κείθεν αὖθις
γλυκερωτάτοις προσώποις
ροδέην φυὴν φοροῦσα.
Λόγος οὐ γράφει τὸ κάλλος.
Translated by Magdalino, ‘Bath of Leo the Wise’ p 116, lines 33-41.

‘Reject all babble of false words; Leo has now gathered all rhetorical eloquence’.¹⁸³

‘Let the revolving axis of heaven rejoice that Leo perceives the unalterable threads of the bearers of heaven’.¹⁸⁴

Other Building Work by Basil and Leo

Unfortunately the major constructions associated with Basil, such as the New Church, have not survived. In fact, only two buildings survive from the early Macedonian period in Constantinople. The church of Theotokos of Libos, now known as the Fenari Isa Camii, was established by Leo’s courtier Constantine Lips in 907. This was the north church on this site, in the centre of the city, which also served a nearby convent and a hospice for travellers.¹⁸⁵ An unidentified church, now the Atik Mustafa Pasa Camii in the Ayvansaray quarter may date to Basil’s reign.¹⁸⁶

Chapters 76 to 94 of the *Vita Basilii* are dedicated to accounts of the emperor’s programme of founding and restoring churches, monasteries and palaces, one-seventh of the overall text and the longest section dedicated to a single theme.¹⁸⁷ According to the *Vita*, Basil built or renovated 31 named churches,

¹⁸³ Ψευδαλέων ἐπέων ρίψατε λέσχην
τεχνικῶν νῦν λογίων δράξατο Λέων.
Ibid, p 117, lines 67-68.

¹⁸⁴ Π ὦλος ὁ κυκλοφόρος γῆθ’ ὅτι Λέων
ἄτροπα φωτοόρων νήματα δέρκει.
Ibid, p 117, lines 85-86.

¹⁸⁵ J. Freely and S. Cakmak, *Byzantine Monuments of Istanbul*, (Cambridge, 2004) pp 174 - 178.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp 172 - 174.

¹⁸⁷ *Vita Basilii*, Chapters 76 - 94.

along with many more it did not identify.¹⁸⁸ The *Vita Basilii* is the only primary source for Basil's involvement in a number of constructions and renovations. Vogt took the *Vita*'s claims at face value in his account of Basil's reign.¹⁸⁹ Osterhout observed an emphasis on the restoration of religious buildings, including many prominent buildings associated with Constantine and Justinian.¹⁹⁰ Magdalino thought instead that effort was invested in palace buildings, churches and monasteries.¹⁹¹

Evidence for Leo's architectural achievements comes from a variety of texts, including from his own homilies.¹⁹² One of the most important constructions in Leo's reign was the Church and monastery of St Lazarus, on the northern fringe of the Great Palace site in Constantinople.¹⁹³ Leo organised for some important relics to be transferred there, notably those of Lazarus from Cyprus and Mary Magdalene, from Ephesus.¹⁹⁴ Another significant new construction was the Church of All Saints, constructed adjacent to the Church of Holy Apostles.¹⁹⁵ This was initially dedicated to the sanctity of Leo's first wife Theophano, who died in about 893. After objections from bishops, however, it was renamed All Saints.

¹⁸⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 93, pp 304-305. For an overview of the building work see Ousterhout, 'Reconstructing Constantinople.'

¹⁸⁹ Vogt, *Basile 1er*, pp 395ff

¹⁹⁰ Osterhout, 'Reconstructing Constantinople.'

¹⁹¹ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia'. P. Magdalino, 'Constantinople médiévale: études sur l'évolution des structures urbaines' in *Travaux et Mémoires* 9, (1996), pp 27-28

¹⁹² For example, Leo, Homilies 28 and 34. Edited by T. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae*, (Brepols, 2008). Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp 202-205.

¹⁹³ The *Vita Euthymii* referred to this church as being newly built in 901. Edited and translated by P. Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP*, (Brussels, 1970), 63, 18-20. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 309. Its construction is also noted in *The Patria*. Edited and translated by A. Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: the Patria*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 2013), Book 3, Chapter 209.

¹⁹⁴ *The Patria*, Book 4, 35.

¹⁹⁵ G. Downey 'The Church of All Saints (Church of St Theophano) near the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople' in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9-10 (1955-56); Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp 206-7.

Leo also ordered the construction of the Church of St Demetrios, which contained figurative images of Christ supported by angels and saints.¹⁹⁶

Janin published a comprehensive account of the textual evidence relating to churches and monasteries in Constantinople which were associated with Basil and Leo, which is especially helpful for consideration of Basil's programme of building and renovation.¹⁹⁷ The Great Palace site at Constantinople is not well understood and archaeological work is still ongoing.¹⁹⁸ Ebersolt's 1910 account is now considered outdated.¹⁹⁹ Mango's re-assessment from 1959 is a more reliable guide in part because it was open about the gaps in scholarly knowledge.²⁰⁰ Janin provided a useful summary of the main textual sources for the palace sites as well as other secular buildings in the city but these are hard to locate with any precision.²⁰¹

Coins and Seals

A significant number of coins and seals have been examined in the course of the thesis. I have used Grierson's categorisation of coins, based on those in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection.²⁰² The seals are from the representative sample published by Nesbitt from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and Fogg Museum of

¹⁹⁶ Leo, Homily 19. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*.

¹⁹⁷ R. Janin, *La Géographie Ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantin: première partie, le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique: tome 3, les églises et les monastères*, (Paris, 1953).

¹⁹⁸ The Istanbul Archaeological Museum staged an exhibition about the Great Palace site in 2012, although no catalogue was published.

¹⁹⁹ J. Ebersolt, *Le Grand Palais de Constantinople*, (Paris, 1910).

²⁰⁰ C. Mango *The Brazen House: A study of the vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, (Copenhagen, 1959).

²⁰¹ R. Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine: développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris, 1964).

²⁰² Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*.

Art.²⁰³ In the illustrations, however, I have used images from a variety of collections, some public, others private, where the quality of reproduction is superior. These are linked back to Grierson and Nesbitt's typologies.

Coins would have brought imperial images to a wide audience. Morrisson estimated that the number of gold coins issued each year varied from 400,000 under Constantine VII to 1,430,000 under Herakleios.²⁰⁴ Basil is likely to have minted large numbers of coins. His military campaigns would have been expensive: two tenth-century campaigns against Crete are reported to have cost 234,732 and 127,122 gold coins respectively.²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, gold coins would have been largely used by the wealthy. One gold solidus is believed to have been worth one modios (c. 889 square metres) of first-quality land, which would have generated one twenty-fourth of a gold coin in annual tax.²⁰⁶ Gold would therefore only have been used by the biggest landowners.

Most Byzantines would not have seen many gold coins. Many of the Empire's subjects would have paid tax in kind or in copper. Although payment of tax had to be in gold coins, villages were collectively responsible and the wealthy collected dues from local communities and then paid the Treasury. Furthermore, Byzantium was not a thoroughly monetised economy in the ninth- and tenth-centuries. Hendy suggested that it was less monetised than the contemporary Anglo-Saxon economy and was at times and in places quite precarious.²⁰⁷ For example, although the payment of salaries was the largest expense of the state, this was not a particularly liquid process. Soldiers were still paid in kind until the

²⁰³ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*.

²⁰⁴ Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority,' p 65 n4.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p 53.

²⁰⁶ A. Laiou, and C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, (Cambridge, 2007), p 50.

²⁰⁷ M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c300 - 1450*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp 301 and 297.

mid-ninth century with full monetisation taking another hundred years.²⁰⁸ The regions of the empire were even less monetised than Constantinople. A system of patronage, barter and exchange must have operated for most Byzantines, with the capital much more familiar with coins. Given the fact that Byzantium was not well monetised, it seems likely that much of the gold coinage stayed in Constantinople or was traded for goods with merchants there. The images on gold and silver coins would therefore have been largely restricted to the elite: officials, major land-holders, senior army and navy commanders and merchants. Copper circulated more widely. This suggests that images on gold were intended for elites, whilst images on all denominations were intended for all sections of society.

Images not considered.

A few images have sometimes been described as works from the early Macedonian period but have not been included here because dating is too uncertain or the objects appear to be later. Constantine of Rhodes left a description of mosaics from the Church of Holy Apostles.²⁰⁹ Although these images might have been created during Basil I's renovations, and Mango attributes them to Basil I, there is no way to securely date them from this period.²¹⁰ Constantine's poem itself dates from the tenth-century. A mosaic above the south door of the narthex in Hagia Sophia, depicting Justinian and Constantine presenting models of the Church and city to an enthroned Virgin and Child probably date to the mid tenth-century, after the period covered by this thesis. Finally, the Troyes Casket, an ivory work regarded as being a powerful

²⁰⁸ J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh-Century*, (Cambridge, 1990), pp 147ff

²⁰⁹ L. James, *Constantine of Rhodes, On Constantinople and the Church of the Holy Apostles* (Aldershot, 2012).

²¹⁰ Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p 200.

statement of imperial ideology, is now convincingly dated to the mid tenth-century.²¹¹

b) Textual Sources

The textual sources for the reigns of Basil, Leo and Alexander were composed at different times. Sometimes, they were contemporary or near contemporary with the events they described. At other times, they were composed several decades later. This section sets out the textual sources in their likely chronological order, in order to allow some assessment of their perspectives and reliability.

Sources from Basil's Reign

No contemporary account of Basil's life has survived, although some histories appear to have been written because Leo refers to them in his funeral oration for his father.²¹²

Photios' surviving homilies date from his first patriarchate of 858 - 867. They make reference to Michael and Basil as emperors, as well as to the restoration of figurative imagery in Hagia Sophia.²¹³ Photios was a prolific author and note taker and a number of his works survive. His letter to Khan Boris of Bulgaria in 865 set out the qualities of an ideal Christian ruler.²¹⁴ Photios' *Bibliotheca* provides insight in those texts ancient and Byzantine that Photios had read or come across.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Walker, *Emperor and the World*, pp 52ff.

²¹² Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre,' p 44, lines 23-26.

²¹³ C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, (Harvard, 1958).

²¹⁴ D. White and J. Berrigan, *The Patriarch and the Prince*, (Brookline, 1982).

²¹⁵ N. Wilson, *Photius, The Bibliotheca*, (London, 1994).

An anonymous poem in praise of Basil (which may have been by Photios) has been preserved in a later work *Contra Manichaei Opinionones Disputatio* by Alexander Lykopolite.²¹⁶ The poem seems to date from the period 867 - 872. It contains 231 lines, of which the first 60 are lost. The poem was written as a panegyric but refers to Basil's humble origins.

One of the key texts from a political philosophy perspective is the *Epanagoge*, promulgated in around 886.²¹⁷ Photios probably wrote the section on the roles of the emperor and patriarch. Photios probably also authored two *Paraineseis* for Leo, in 879 and 886, which set out advice for the future emperor and the qualities of a good ruler.²¹⁸

Sources from Leo's Reign

Leo himself authored a number of important works. Most significant for the purposes of this study are his homilies, which outline how Leo interpreted his role as emperor.²¹⁹

Leo's funeral oration for his father was written in 886 or 887. This was clearly intended as an encomium and follows traditional patterns of panegyric rhetoric.²²⁰ It is notably short on facts about Basil's life and does not even

²¹⁶ A. Markopoulos, 'An anonymous laudatory poem in honor of Basil I,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46, (1992), pp 225-232.

²¹⁷ E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium*, (Oxford, 1957)

²¹⁸ Basil I, *Paraenesis to Leo and Second Paraenesis*. Edited by J.P. Migne, PG 107, (Paris, 1869), pp xxi-lx.

²¹⁹ T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI*, (Leiden, 1997).

²²⁰ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre'

mention names. However, it is notable for its articulation of elements of Basil's personal legend, including his descent from the Arsacids. Elements of Leo's account of his relationship with his father were challenged by some contemporary Arab Chroniclers, including Tabari, who reported that Basil's sons had been involved in his murder.²²¹ Tabari chronicled events up to 910 and died in 923. Leo's *Taktika* was also compiled at some point during his reign.²²² This work address military matters but also indicates the emperor's views about power relations between Byzantium and its neighbours.

A Life of Leo's first wife Theophano, who died in 893, was written by a friend of her family.²²³ This presented an idealised account of the relationship between Leo and Theophano, which was at odds with the account provided by the *Vita Euthymii*.

The *Vita Ignatii* was written by Nicetas David, probably between 910 and 920.²²⁴ It is hostile towards Photios, who displaced Ignatios as Patriarch in 858. Photios became a key figure in the government of Basil I. Nicetas suggests that Photios created Basil's royal genealogy in order to win the emperor's favour. Ignatios was restored to the patriarchate by Leo VI.

²²¹ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, p 10.

²²² Dennis (ed), *The Taktika of Leo VI*

²²³ Edited by E. Kurtz, 'Zwei Griechische textle uber die hl. Theophano, die gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI' in *Memoires de l'Academie Imperiale des Sciences de St Petersburg* III, No 2, (St. Petersburg, 1898), pp xi-75.

²²⁴ Nicetas David, *The Life of Patriarch Ingatius*.

Sources from 920s

The *Vita Euthymii* appears to have been written between 920 - 925 by an eyewitness to some of the events he described.²²⁵ The author was sympathetic to Leo VI but sharply critical of Alexander.

Later Tenth-Century Sources, including the Vita Basilii

Tenth-century chronicles exist in two main groupings. First are those sympathetic to Basil, which were produced by figures associated with the court of Constantine VII. A helpful overview of these sources was published by Kazhdan.²²⁶ The first of these figures was Joseph Genesios, who at the request of Constantine VII wrote a chronicle covering the years 813 - 886, probably in the years 944 - 949.²²⁷ This work is consistently positive towards Basil, who was Constantine VII's grandfather. Subsequently, an unknown figure at Constantine VII's court wrote the *Vita Basilii* as a fifth book of the continuation of the *Chronographia* of Theophanes. Ševčenko oversaw an authoritative edition, which was published in 2012.²²⁸

Other tenth-century chronicles were hostile to Basil. The main surviving account is believed to have been written by Symeon the Logothete in the tenth century. Symeon was a partisan of Romanos Lekapenos, the usurper who interrupted the reign of Constantine VII. Symeon's chronicle exists in several variants: one in the name of Leo Grammaticus was edited by Bekker in 1832.²²⁹ Another by Pseudo-

²²⁵ Karlin-Hayter (ed), *Vita Euthymii*.

²²⁶ A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature, 850 - 1000*, (Athens, 2006), Chapter 7.

²²⁷ A. Kaldellis (ed), *Genesios, On the Reigns of the Emperors*, (Canberra, 1998).

²²⁸ Ševčenko, *Vita Basilii*.

²²⁹ Leo Grammaticus, edited by J.P.Migne, PG 108, (Paris 1861), 1038-1186.

Symeon was edited by Bekker in 1838.²³⁰ A third, the Continuator of Georgius Monarchos, was edited by Migne in 1863.²³¹

Two further works of Constantine's court are also useful. The *Book of Ceremonies* was a compilation of earlier texts about court ritual.²³² Although there are doubts about the extent to which these rituals were ever practised, the Book remains an important source about Basil and Leo, containing reference to the image of Basil in the New Church and a tonsuring ceremony Basil had performed for Leo. The *De Administrando Imperio* purports to provide Constantine VII's advice about the management of power relations between Byzantium and its neighbours.²³³

Finally, important evidence about the Byzantine court in the mid tenth-century comes from Liudprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis* and *Embassy to Constantinople*. Liudprand visited Byzantium at least twice (certainly in 949-950, 968 and possibly 971) and his father and stepfather had conducted embassies in 927 and 942).²³⁴ Liudprand supplied the anecdote that, by the mid-tenth century, the New Church was reported to have been Basil's expiation for murdering Michael III.²³⁵

The *Patria of Constantinople* describes parts of the building and renovation work undertaken by Basil and Leo.²³⁶ The work was compiled in around 989 - 990, using some earlier written sources. Although it is not believed to be exact historically, it has been regarded as a better source for popular sentiment among the inhabitants of Constantinople.

²³⁰ Symeon Magister. (Pseudo-Symeon), *Chronicle*, edited by I. Bekker, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, (Bonn, 1838).

²³¹ Georgius Monachos, edited by Migne, PG 110.

²³² Moffatt and Tell (eds), *The Book of Ceremonies*.

²³³ Moravcsik (ed), *De Administrando Imperio*.

²³⁴ Becker (ed), *Die Werke Liudprand von Cremona*.

²³⁵ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 1, Chapter 10.

²³⁶ Berger (ed), *The Patria*.

Later Sources

A few later sources are relevant. Michael Psellos provided an eleventh-century perspective on the early Macedonian emperors and their reputations in his *Chronographia*.²³⁷ Another eleventh-century account came from John Skylitzes, who drew on earlier sources, now lost, for the reigns of Basil, Leo and Alexander.²³⁸

Evidence for the appearance of the New Church and its courtyards came from Stephen of Novgorod's account of his pilgrimage to Constantinople in 1348 or 1349.²³⁹ It is important to note that the Church he saw might have changed since its construction in the ninth-century.

The Thesis

The early Macedonian period produced some outstanding works of imperial art, such as the Paris Gregory and Hagia Sophia mosaics. These were part of a wider restoration of figurative imagery after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Yet the ninth-century, as Brubaker has remarked, is too often judged as signifiers for events which took place in the centuries either side of it.²⁴⁰ In the case of imperial art, those events have been the concept of Christian Roman Kingship, the phenomenon of iconoclasm and Constantine VII's literary heritage.

The time is right to revisit the development of imperial art in this formative and influential period, building on the foundational insights of Grabar but incorporating subsequent discoveries, such as the Alexander mosaic in Hagia

²³⁷ Psellos, *Chronographia*.

²³⁸ J. Wortley, *John Skylitzes: a synopsis of Byzantine history, 811 - 1057*, (Cambridge, 2010).

²³⁹ Majeska, *Russian Travellers to Constantinople*.

²⁴⁰ Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, p vii.

Sophia and recent scholarship, such as the work of Der Nersessian and Brubaker on the Paris Gregory. The focus on the decades from 867 to 913 provides an opportunity to investigate the subtle differences in art within and between reigns which can be obscured by studies of the long *durée*, often over many centuries.

In particular, the study presents three opportunities of wider significance. First, it will be possible to study the emergence of the motif of heavenly crowning, which became almost a permanent feature of imperial art in Middle Byzantium. Although this motif is well known and has been studied within individual images, its development over the first few decades of Macedonian rule has been neglected. This presents an iconographic case study for evolution, adaptation and assimilation in imperial art. Second, the period is interesting for the opportunity to examine how Basil presented and justified his seizure of power. Little has been written about usurpations in Byzantium and yet they took place regularly throughout its history. Basil's imagery can be studied in its own right and compared and contrasted with previous usurpers of the imperial throne. Finally, the early Macedonian period provides a rare opportunity to consider in detail how two generations of rulers used art and architecture as visual propaganda, alongside other forms of rhetoric. Not only have many images survived but there is direct testimony from some of the main protagonists, like Leo VI himself and the Patriarch Photios which might help us understand their perspectives and intentions.

Michael Psellos, writing from the perspective of the eleventh century, identified the apparent contradiction at the heart of Macedonian political success.²⁴¹ This longstanding and seemingly successful dynasty not only came to power through usurpation but its early decades were associated with a succession of rivalries and attempted coups. Art played a part in helping the Macedonians establish their legitimacy and authority over the first few decades of their rule, but it also

²⁴¹ Psellos *Chronographia*, Book 6, Chapter 1. See epigraph, p 1.

indicates how power could be vulnerable to both moral and physical challenge. Overall, the early Macedonian decades constitute one of the richest and most important periods for the study of early medieval royal or imperial art.

Part One

Constructing Power

Chapter 1

Images of Imperial Power

A number of images of Basil, Leo and Alexander have survived. These presented each emperor as he wanted to be seen and as such are revealing about the way imperial power was conceived and expressed. This chapter considers how these prominent images of individual emperors reflected and helped shape perceptions of their power.

Two dimensions of power can be discerned within visual depictions of emperors. First of all, there was the emperor's public image. Over the centuries, this was often idealised, showing emperors in triumph over their enemies or undertaking pious acts such as the dedication of a new church.²⁴² The intention may have been to present a metaphysical portrait, the emperor as he should be, not as he really was. Nevertheless, even within this long iconographic tradition, there were opportunities for artistic variation: figures could be in military or religious contexts, for example, or based on one of a number of possible influences such as David, Augustus or Constantine. Iconographic innovation was particularly notable under the early Macedonian rulers, both in the portrayal of individual emperors and in the wider iconography of power.²⁴³ Secondly, aspects of the emperor's private life can also sometimes be discerned underneath the public mask.²⁴⁴ This might deliberately reflect the emperor's personality, constitute a response to the circumstances of his reign or even be a subconscious reaction to

²⁴² See introduction, from p 9.

²⁴³ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116, acknowledged Basil as an innovator. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, Volume 2, p 523, highlighted Alexander.

²⁴⁴ The distinction between the public body of a ruler, representing the continuity of rule and the official power of state and the private body, reflecting the individual holder of the imperial office, his character, personality and appearance was identified by Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*.

his character by the artist. This chapter explores the ways in which Basil, Leo and Alexander sought to be portrayed and, at times, how they might have been seen by their subjects.

A number of imperial portraits are examined from the three reigns, including imperial images from coins. Most coin images were not portraits, but rather ‘types’. A distinction can be made between ‘portraits’ and ‘types’. Portraits were intended to represent a specific individual.²⁴⁵ In Byzantine times, this would not have been wholly through mimesis but through a combination of techniques, including symbols, likeness and inscription.²⁴⁶ Types, by contrast, had less occasionality and could represent a genre of individuals, such as emperors, over a long period of time, regardless of who held the office. In imperial art, types were generally expressions of the emperor’s public image. The early Macedonian decades produced a number of prominent imperial portraits too. Portraits also depicted the public image but might also be revealing about the private life and character of the emperor. From Basil’s reign, the chapter considers a standing image from a gold solidus issued in 868 and a series of portraits of the emperor from the Kainourgion Palace, including one of him in triumph, which have not survived but are known from the *Vita Basilii*.²⁴⁷ From Leo’s reign, a portrait of the emperor as an older man is considered from a gold solidus probably issued in 908. Also considered is the controversial image of an unnamed emperor from the narthex in Hagia Sophia, which scholars have usually identified as either Basil or Leo. Finally, the portrait of Alexander in the Upper Gallery of Hagia Sophia is also examined.

²⁴⁵ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, p 9.

²⁴⁶ Bedos-Rezak argued that personal identity was expressed in medieval times through a lexicon which included careful differences of posture, costume and emblems: B. Bedos-Rezak, ‘Medieval identity: a sign and a concept,’ *American Historical Review* 105.5, (2000), pp 1489-1533. See also Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King*.

²⁴⁷ An image of Basil from the New Church, known from the *Book of Ceremonies*, is excluded because no description has survived. A statue of Basil from the New Church, believed to have been adapted from one of Solomon, is considered in Chapter 3.

Portraits of Basil

The examination of Basil's image begins with a consideration of coins. Basil seized power in 867. For many decades beforehand, the image of the emperor which appeared on coins had corresponded to a recognisable type. For example, the depiction of Michael III in 856 (Figure 2b below) was little different from the depiction of his father Theophilos in 829 (Figure 1a). Both appeared in half profile, bearded, wearing loros and crown: only the inscription distinguished them.



*Figure 1a and b: Gold Solidus of Theophilos, Class I, 829-830
Obverse and Reverse, Malcolm Hackman Collection.²⁴⁸
With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com.*



*Figure 2a and b: Gold Solidus of Michael III, Class III, 856-867,
Obverse and Reverse, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.²⁴⁹*

²⁴⁸ <http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/theophilos/sb1655.jpg> (viewed August 2015).

²⁴⁹ Accession Number: BZC 1948.17.2692. <http://www.doaks.org/museum/online-exhibitions/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/the-isaurian-and-amorium-dynasties-717-867/solidus-of-michael-iii-842-867> (viewed August 2015).

Basil himself used something very like this generic imperial image, as the gold solidus from 882 shows (Figure 3a below). The image of Basil seems to be copied from the image of Michael III in Figure 2b, with the exception of the re-inclusion of the globus cruciger from the coin type used by Theophilos (Figure 1a). Yet in the year after his accession to the throne, 868, a wholly different image of Basil appeared on a single gold coin. Rather than the half profile of the emperor, on the reverse of the coin Basil was depicted as a full standing figure (Figure 4b)



*Figure 3a and b: Gold Solidus, Basil I, Class III, 882
Obverse and Reverse, Freeman and Sear Collection.²⁵⁰
With permission of wildwinds.com, courtesy of Freeman and Sear.*



*Figure 4a and b: Gold Solidus of Basil I, full standing figure, Class I, 868
Obverse and Reverse, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.²⁵¹*

This standing image broke with the recent practice showing half-portraits and created an aggrandising feel for Basil's presence. Such a full-length standing

²⁵⁰ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/basil_1/sb1703.jpg (viewed August 2015).

²⁵¹ Accession No: BZ.1948.17.2708. <http://www.doaks.org/museum/online-exhibitions/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/the-macedonians-and-their-immediate-successors-867-1081/solidus-of-basil-i-867-886> (viewed August 2015).

figure had not been used since Justinian II, over 150 years before.²⁵² Justinian had also been the first emperor to include an image of Christ on imperial coins and it is conceivable that Basil's moneyers looked to it for inspiration, as they adapted the depiction of Christ. Yet the moneyers had no need to look so far back for an image of Christ as versions had appeared on the coins of Michael III and Theodora only 20 years earlier (Figure 2a). There are few stylistic similarities between Basil's coin and Justinian II's version, making it unlikely to be a copy. Instead, the standing image may have been conceived by the goldsmith at the mint or the official who supervised the production. If so, the choice may have reflected Basil's physical presence.

Was this intentional? Coins constituted some of the most direct expressions of imperial imagery, as they were officially controlled and sanctioned.²⁵³ The Byzantine mints had centralised over the preceding century, with the Constantinople mint setting the tone for the remaining regional mints, resulting in growing standardisation.²⁵⁴ The central mint was probably located on the Great Palace site, under the influence of the emperor and his servants.²⁵⁵ Although coins were designed, produced and issued in Constantinople, Morrisson concluded that there was little direct evidence that emperors themselves took a personal interest in coin design.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless she argued that the emperor's wishes or his counsellor's were still decisive. Some emperors may have taken more interest in their image than others and some may have been content to delegate control to their officials. Yet even if the emperor was not directly involved, he would have had an influence. Mint officials would have been well

²⁵² Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 477.

²⁵³ A. Bellinger, 'The coins and Byzantine imperial policy,' *Speculum* 31. 1, (1956), pp 70-81.

²⁵⁴ Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, pp 84ff. In Basil's reign, mints were also located in Constantinople, Syracuse (until 879), Reggio (from 879), Cherson and Thessalonika. Coins for eastern provinces were issued from Constantinople.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority,' p 75.

placed to understand how emperors saw themselves and wished to be portrayed. New imperial portraits, in palaces or churches, would have been noticed. At the very least, officials working inside the mints must have been careful to produce imagery consistent with their understanding of the wishes of the emperor. There is every reason to believe that the images on coins reflected the way emperors wanted themselves to be seen.

What does this 868 gold solidus say about how Basil was perceived or wanted to be perceived? According to the later, partisan *Vita Basilii*, it was Basil's physique which first got him noticed at court: Basil won fame for taming the emperor's wild horses and defeating a Bulgar in a wrestling contest.²⁵⁷ He was also renowned for killing a wolf during a hunt.²⁵⁸ These incidents themselves may not have been literally true but tenth-century writers believed it was credible to depict Basil as a powerful physical presence. The full-standing figure may have been a deliberate attempt to promote Basil's physical power or a subconscious reflection of the emperor's physical stature. The latter seems more likely, given that the standing image was used briefly but not repeated, suggesting that it was not a conscious visual strategy on behalf of court officials or Basil's moneyers but a reaction to his rise to power. If so, this early coin may demonstrate that the initial impression Basil made at court was of a man who made his physical presence felt.

Although the standing image appeared only once, imperial art in Basil's reign emphasised the emperor's physical power. A series of images in the Paris Gregory depict scenes from the life of Samson, which Brubaker concluded drew allusions to Basil's strength as a young man.²⁵⁹ The same quality was also a prominent element of a second portrait, part of a series which were displayed in the

²⁵⁷ The wrestling contest is in *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 12, pp 46-51; The horse taming is in *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 13, pp 51-53.

²⁵⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 14, pp 54-55.

²⁵⁹ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 184.

Kainourgion Palace, which the emperor built on the Great Palace site. This image is known only from a description in the *Vita Basilii*. ‘In the ceiling above’ reads the text ‘are depicted the Herculean labours of the emperor: his efforts on behalf of his subjects, his exertions in warlike struggles and the victories granted to him by God’.²⁶⁰ Each of these descriptions appears to underscore Basil’s heroic strength. Ekphrasis, which may appear to describe works of art, should not be understood as literal descriptions of images. Rather, they were designed to evoke emotions in the reader or listener.²⁶¹ The phrase ‘Herculean labours’ need not have denoted any particular kind of action, but seems intended to highlight the emperor’s physical power. When the *Vita Basilii* was written, Basil’s strength and agility were certainly important parts of the story being told about his rise to the throne and it is likely that Basil’s physical menace was part of the way he was perceived from the very beginning. Indeed, the frequency by which Basil was depicted for his physical strength makes it possible to conclude that his power stemmed in large part from the threat of violence. This matches what the sources reveal about Basil’s ruthlessness and temper. He had secured the throne through successive murders of Caesar Bardas and Michael III. Basil once seized Leo by the hair and beat him until he bled, when he was accused of adultery.²⁶² Even the loyal *Vita Basilii* reported that Basil had to be restrained from ordering his son blinded over his suspected involvement in a plot.²⁶³ Basil appears to have been a man prone to sudden outbursts of violence.

Not only did the Kainourgion mosaics present Basil as an impressive and perhaps intimidating figure, they also made another point about imperial power, by

²⁶⁰ καὶ αὐθις ἄνωθεν ἐπὶ τῆς ὀροφῆς ἀνιστόρηται τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἡράκλεια ἄθλα καὶ οἱ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὑπηκόου πόνοι καὶ οἱ τῶν πολεμικῶν ἀγῶνων ἰδρῶτες καὶ τὰ ἐκ Θεοῦ νικητήρια. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 22-24. It is not completely clear whether the text is describing a single image, a pair of images or a series. However, the two sentences are joined with the linking phrase ‘καὶ αὐθις’ which suggests the author was describing more than one image.

²⁶¹ Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*.

²⁶² *Vita Euthymii*, pp 39-40.

²⁶³ *Vita Basilli*, Chapter 100, p 330.

depicting Basil as a triumphant emperor, which was an imperial quality the Byzantines highly valued. In one of the mosaics, Basil appeared surrounded by his generals, who were offering him cities they had captured during their campaigns. All that is known about the mosaic is captured in one sentence: ‘the work’s creator presides over, attended by his comrades-in-arms - his subordinate commanders - who offer to him as gifts the cities that had been conquered by him.’²⁶⁴ This choice of language shows that the author of the *Vita Basilii* wanted to convey the idea that Basil was himself a warrior emperor who had personally led successful campaigns.²⁶⁵ This image may well have been based on an actual event from Basil’s reign, for the emperor led campaigns in 871 (against Tephrike), 873 (against Melitene) and 879 (again against Tephrike, this time with his son Constantine) and conducted triumphs in Constantinople in 873 and 879.²⁶⁶ The wording of the *Vita* is different to an earlier scene described by Procopius, from the vestibule of the Grand Palace or Chalke Gate which has been put forward as a model for the Kainourgion mosaic.²⁶⁷ In that mosaic, a prominent role was given to the general Belisarius, who presented Justinian with the captured towns: ‘On either side is war and battle, and many cities are being captured.....The Emperor Justinian is winning victories through his General Belisarius, and the General returning to the Emperor, with his whole army intact, and he gives him spoils, both kings and kingdoms and all things that are most prized among men.’²⁶⁸ Procopius was a supporter of Belisarius and would have

²⁶⁴ προκαθήμενον ἔχων τὸν τοῦ ἔργου δημιουργὸν ὑπὸ τῶν συναγωνιστῶν ὑποστρατήγων δορυφορούμενον ὡς δῶρα προσαγόντων αὐτῷ τὰς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐαλωκυίας πόλεις. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 19-22.

²⁶⁵ συναγωνιστῶν, ὑποστρατήγων. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, p 290.

²⁶⁶ Tobias, *Basil I*, pp 104, 117ff. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, pp 154-156.

²⁶⁷ Both Grabar, *L’Empereur*, p 40 and Mango, *Art of Byzantine Empire*, p 197, n 69 suggested that the Kainourgion mosaic may have been influenced by Justinian’s Great Palace mosaic.

²⁶⁸ ἐφ’ ἑκάτερα μὲν πόλεμός τέ ἐστι καὶ μάχη, καὶ ἀλίσκονται πόλεις παμπληθεῖς, πῇ μὲν Ἰταλίας, πᾷ δὲ Λιβύης. καὶ νικᾷ μὲν βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὑπὸ στρατηγοῦντι Βελισαρίῳ, ἐπάνεισι δὲ παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα, τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιφνὲς ὅλον ὁ στρατηγός, καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐξαισία. Procopius *De Aedificis* I, 10, 5ff. Edited and translated by H. Dewing, *Procopius, Buildings*, (Harvard, 1940), I, x, 16.

wanted to underline the general's central contribution but his readers would probably have known the mosaic in question, making this likely that Belisarius did feature prominently. By contrast, the scene described by the *Vita Basilii* appears to show Basil's direct involvement in the campaign and affords recognition to no single general working on the emperor's behalf. On one level, this might reflect Basil's caution about over-powerful generals. His previous encounters with Caesar Bardas would have shown him the risk to imperial power which could be posed by a military overlord. What is more significant, however, is the fact that Basil gave a prominent place to military power in his own public image, not least within the new palace he constructed on the Great Palace site.²⁶⁹ Unlike Justinian's image from the Chalke Gate, the scene of triumph from the Kainourgion Palace is in a more private location, visible to elites but not to the wider population.²⁷⁰ It is possible that Basil ordered triumphal images to be made in more public parts of Constantinople, but if he did so there is no mention of it in the *Vita Basilii*, which does not hold back from trumpeting Basil's achievements. It is possible, therefore, that Basil's intention was to convey a message about his power to the court and imperial household.

One significant feature of the Kainourgion image lies in the fact that Basil appears to have restored images of triumph to imperial imagery after a period of more occasional use. The image of an emperor being presented gifts of captured towns has a long tradition in Byzantine imperial art.²⁷¹ In addition to the Justinian scene at the Chalke Gate, other known examples included images of Constantine V and his campaigns against the Arabs which appear to have been constructed on the walls of public buildings and to have generated enthusiasm among the inhabitants of the city.²⁷² No earlier triumphal images from the ninth-

²⁶⁹ Basil is said to have built the Kainourgion Palace. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, p 293.

²⁷⁰ *Vita Basilii*, 87 p 282. The layout of the Great Palace site and access to its buildings is considered in Chapter 3.

²⁷¹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 39.

²⁷² Actes du Concile de 787, Mansi XIII, 354. Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 40.

century are known before Basil's, however.²⁷³ Basil was reviving an artistic tradition that had begun to lapse. This was noted by Jolivet-Lévy in a context which observed the decline of triumphal imagery in Macedonian iconography.²⁷⁴ This is clearly not true of Basil, who organised triumphs and pictured himself in triumph and is an example of where a long-term trend, the decline in triumphal images, has obscured the choices of individual emperors.

Portraits of Leo

Basil's son and heir Leo tended to follow Basil's example in the way in which he was portrayed on coins. He appeared enthroned both alone and together with his son and junior emperor Constantine.²⁷⁵ In many of these examples, Leo's profile could have been copied from Basil's. Yet, probably towards the end of his reign, Leo issued a completely different image on a gold coin which showed the emperor as an older man with a long beard (Figure 5b).²⁷⁶



Figure 5a and b: Gold Solidus of Leo VI as older man, Class I, 886-908, Obverse and Reverse, Private Collection.²⁷⁷

With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com

²⁷³ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, Chapter 2.

²⁷⁴ Jolivet-Lévy 'L'Image du pouvoir,' p 435.

²⁷⁵ For enthroned images, compare Leo AE 5.1, Plate XXXIV in Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, with Basil 12.1, Plate XXXIII, *ibid*. For the image with son and heir, compare Leo 6.3, Plate XXXIV, *ibid* with Basil, 9b.2, Plate XXXI, *ibid*.

²⁷⁶ The image of Mary on this coin type is considered in Chapter 2.

²⁷⁷ www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?D=153237 (viewed August 2015).

It has been suggested that the more detailed imagery on this coin reflected a growing naturalism in Macedonian art.²⁷⁸ The figure of Leo was presented in more detail, with folds visible on his clothes and a fuller and heavier crown.²⁷⁹ Grierson contrasted this artistic expressiveness with what he saw as a period of 'almost unrelieved monotony' on Isaurian and Amorion coins and suggested that Leo's goldsmiths may have been better craftsmen than those who worked for Basil.²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the image of Leo as an older man does not appear to exhibit naturalism. Leo was not actually an older man when this coin was issued. He was about 40. The image may not, therefore, have been intended as a likeness at all but as an expression of Leo's power, a way to signify that Leo was a wise ruler. Beards in Byzantine art were signs of maturity.²⁸¹ The long beard and older physiology used on this coin were recognised symbols of wisdom.²⁸² By contrast, impious emperors, such as Julian, were sometimes depicted by their critics as beardless.²⁸³ There is considerable evidence that Leo was praised by contemporaries for his erudition and learning.²⁸⁴ This was a contrast to his father, Basil, who may have been illiterate.²⁸⁵ Only Leo and his son Constantine VII were depicted with a longer beard in Macedonian times and both had reputations for

²⁷⁸ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, pp 508-509. Grierson saw this as part of a wider social development, witnessed in literature as well as art, in which people were seen as individuals: Grierson, *Byzantine Coins Part 1*, p 142. This was echoed by Jenkins, 'The Classical background,' pp 13-15.

²⁷⁹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 508. Grierson noted that Leo restored a fuller representation of the crown which had disappeared after the reign of Heraklios. This 'real crown' took the form of a row of six large pellets between two rows of dots, with a larger pellet in a circle of fine dots in the centre, surmounted by a cross of five pellets. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 127ff.

²⁸⁰ For example, Grierson suggests that Basil's die-sinkers did not know how to depict an *akakia*. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 484.

²⁸¹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 110, 127ff; Underwood and Hawkins 'Portrait of Alexander,' p 193.

²⁸² Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 110.

²⁸³ For example folios 374v and 409v of the Paris Gregory. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, pp 227-235.

²⁸⁴ Tougher, *Leo VI*, Chapter 5. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 18 n 89.

²⁸⁵ Basil's illiteracy is strongly implied in *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 5, p 221 n91.

learning. It is possible that the coin image of Leo as an older man was meant to signify Leo as a ruler in the image of Solomon.²⁸⁶ This is significant because images to the Byzantines were more than representations of power. They stood in for the people they depicted.²⁸⁷ Lawcourts, for example, displayed the image of the emperor to demonstrate that he was acting through them.²⁸⁸ Images were not just representations but also conductors of power.

The gold solidus of Leo as an older man is extremely rare and Grierson has not been able to date it securely, although he believed it to come from the later years of Leo's reign.²⁸⁹ It may have been issued for a particular occasion, connected with the appearance of Mary on the obverse of the coin, a precedent which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.²⁹⁰ The depiction of Leo as a wise man may have had something to do with that special occasion. However, it must also have reflected the way Leo wanted to be seen. What is surprising, perhaps, is that this was not a sustained part of his iconography but a single experiment. The fact that innovative images, like Leo's older face, appeared on only one type of coin makes it possible that messages were crafted for particular occasions rather than mass consumption, perhaps distributed on occasions replete with the theatre of power associated with court ritual.

The portrait of the emperor in the narthex

The portrait of an unnamed emperor in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, which dates from between 880 - 920, is probably the most controversial of all imperial

²⁸⁶ Tougher suggested that Old Testament models influenced Leo. Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 130.

²⁸⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp 102ff

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp 103-6.

²⁸⁹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 509.

²⁹⁰ Chapter 2, from p 112.

portraits, having been interpreted in radically different ways (PLATES 5 and 6).²⁹¹ An unnamed emperor is shown kneeling before Christ in the act of proskynesis. The emperor's head is on the same level as Christ's knee, his eyes cast down towards Christ's right foot, his hands held out before him, empty in supplication. His body is crouched, his legs drawn up to his elbows. The smaller, largely white figure of this emperor, set against large areas of red and gold elsewhere on the mosaic, gives the impression of humility. The larger figure of Christ dominates the scene, neither gesturing at or looking towards the emperor but instead sitting on an elaborate throne, gazing directly ahead towards the viewer, offering a blessing, his right foot a little ahead of the left, creating a slight barrier between Christ and emperor. The Virgin, on half-figure within a medallion looks towards Christ, repeating the emperor's gesture. On the right hand side is an angel in a second medallion. Although there is no inscription, the image includes an unusual combination of text on the Bible in Jesus' left hand. It includes a passage from Luke 24 (verse 36) and John 20 (verse 19/ 26). The first verse is a blessing: 'Peace be with you'; the second a reminder of Jesus' mission: 'I am the light of the world.'

The introduction has already considered arguments about whether the portrait depicted a particular emperor, concluding that it was probably a generic image of an emperor dating from the period of Leo's rule or shortly afterwards. This section considers the image as an expression of imperial power and whether it reflected strength or weakness. Oikonomides, for example, saw the image as an unambiguous sign of weakness, believing as he did that it represented Leo's 'humiliation' in the Tetrarchy affair.²⁹² The mosaic's location lies above the Imperial Gates which were twice shut in Leo's face when he was barred from communion.²⁹³ In this interpretation, the image depicts a contrite emperor,

²⁹¹ See Introduction, p 36.

²⁹² Oikonomides, 'Leo VI and the narthex mosaic.'

²⁹³ *Vita Euthymii*, pp 76ff.

repenting his sins incurred in his controversial fourth marriage to Zoe Karbonopsina at the very gate which barred him from communion.²⁹⁴ Even if the image was meant to be generic, therefore, its location may strongly suggest a penitent emperor being taken back into the folds of the Church, emphasising the power of the patriarch who acted in judgement on Leo by suspending the sacrament of communion and absolving his sins upon his repentance.²⁹⁵ Dagron, who thought this a generic imperial image, nevertheless believed that it represented power draining from emperor to patriarch.²⁹⁶

The idea that the image reflected imperial weakness depends to an extent on the interpretation of the gesture of proskynesis being performed by the emperor. Was proskynesis necessarily a sign of weakness? Certainly, images of an emperor performing this act of submission are extremely rare. Grabar indicated only five other known examples but only one of these was earlier than the narthex mosaic and this statue, of Justinian, showed the emperor on his knees and not on the ground.²⁹⁷ The narthex mosaic was therefore one of a kind for its time. The act of proskynesis itself was highly charged and showing an emperor performing this act might have been shocking for some viewers. In many contexts, proskynesis

²⁹⁴ Leo had a troubled marital history. He was forced into marrying his first wife Theophano. Martinakiou by his parents but separated from her before she died. He then married his mistress, Zoe Zaoutzina, who died soon after. Increasingly anxious for an heir, Leo married again, to Eudokia Baiane, but she too died. He then took another mistress, Zoe Karbonopsina, who gave birth to the future Constantine VII. Leo decided to take the unprecedented step of marrying for a fourth time, which resulted in a substantial clerical backlash with international implications. This act resulted in Leo being twice barred by the patriarch from entering Hagia Sophia through the imperial door over which the mosaic now stands. Tougher, *Leo VI*, Chapter 6.

²⁹⁵ The relative power of the patriarch might appear even stronger if the mosaic was constructed after Leo's death, as suggested by Oikonomides 'Leo VI and the narthex mosaic,' for in this instance it would show how Leo had needed to bend to the judgement of the patriarch to be taken back into the Church. Even if the image represented Basil and not Leo it could express the moral authority of the church over the emperor. Basil, of course, came to power by murdering Caesar Bardas and Michael III. He is recorded to have said at the eighth Ecumenical Council in 869-870 that there was no shame in prostrating oneself before God and submitting to the Church and priests. Mansi XV, I col 94, 356.

²⁹⁶ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p 124.

²⁹⁷ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 101 n 3. Cutler suggested that there may be another example of an earlier emperor shown genuflecting, a statue of Justin I, from an unknown location in Constantinople: A. Cutler, *Transfigurations: studies in the dynamics of Byzantine iconography*, (Pennsylvania, 1975), pp 63-64.

could signify defeat. The captured enemies of the Empire, for example, were traditionally shown performing proskynesis before the emperor and the act was a well understood symbol of humility, submission and even capitulation and continued to be used in rituals of triumph over defeated enemies staged by Basil I and other emperors.²⁹⁸ On the obelisk of Theodosius in Constantinople, the emperor's defeated enemies were shown kneeling before him.²⁹⁹

The ritual performance of proskynesis was, however, highly nuanced and context specific, generally signifying submission before a superior power. In the Bible, members of King David's court fell down to the ground in front of him.³⁰⁰ Similar rituals were performed at the Imperial Palace. Guiland noted that the practice varied according to the status of the person being addressed and ranged from an inclination of the head to full prostration on the ground, with several degrees in between.³⁰¹ In the *Book of Ceremonies*, individuals presented to the emperor were expected to prostrate themselves face-down on the ground.³⁰² Just such an experience of participating in an act of proskynesis was described by Liudprand of Cremona, and the mechanical movement of the throne away from the ground surprised Liudprand and shows that the act of proskynesis was sometimes accompanied by other elements of political theatre designed to heighten the distance between the emperor and his supplicant: 'I was brought into the emperor's presence. At my approach the lions began to roar and the birds to cry out, each according to its kind.....So after I had three times made obeisance to the emperor with my face upon the ground, I lifted my head and behold! The man whom just before I had seen sitting on a moderately elevated seat had now changed his raiment and was sitting on the level of the ceiling....On that occasion

²⁹⁸ McCormick. *Eternal Victory*, pp 154-7.

²⁹⁹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, Plate XII, 2.

³⁰⁰ 2 Samuel 24, 20.

³⁰¹ R. Guiland, 'Autour du *Livre des Ceremonies* de Constantin VII Porphyrogenète' in *Revue des Études Grecques*, Tome 59-60, (1946-47), p 251.

³⁰² *Ibid*, p 252.

he did not address me personally, since even if he had wished to do so the wide distance between us would have rendered conversation unseemly, but by the intermediary of a secretary he enquired about Berengar's doings and asked after his health'.³⁰³

Did emperors themselves perform proskynesis in any aspect of church or imperial ritual? The evidence is mixed. Guiland concluded that even imperial princes had to kiss the feet of the emperor.³⁰⁴ Liudprand gave an example in which the young Basil II and Constantine VIII performed proskynesis to Nikephoros II Phokas, whilst they were co-emperors, although the situation he described in his 968 mission may be far from typical, in that Nikephoros appears to have been actively marginalising the young princes.³⁰⁵ But these were co-emperors and princes, not the senior emperor himself. Grabar's claim that the emperor regularly performed proskynesis at the very spot where the narthex mosaic is situated is less certain, however.³⁰⁶ A reading of the *Book of Ceremonies* suggests that the emperor inclined his head three times rather than knelt on the ground.³⁰⁷

The analysis demonstrates that proskynesis did consistently symbolise submission but it was not an unambiguous sign of powerlessness. Indeed, there were clearly historical occasions when the act of proskynesis denoted privilege not weakness.

³⁰³ 'Ante imperatoris presentiam sum deductus. Cumque in adventu meo rugitum leonas emitterent, aves secundum speties suas perstreperunt, nullo sum terrore, nulla admiratione commotus, quoriam quidem ex his omnibus eos qui bene moverant fueram percontatus. Tercio itaque pronus imperatorem adorans, caput sustuli, et quem prius moderata mensura a terra elevatum sedere vidi, mox aliis indutum veetibus poenes domus laqueor sedere prospexi; quod quolitur fieret, cogitare non potui, nisi forte eo sit subvectus orgalio, quo torcularium arbores subvetuntur. Per se autem tunc nihil locutus, quoniam, et si vellet, intercapedo maxima indecorum faceret de vita Berengarii et sospitate per logothetam est percontactus.' Liudprand, *Antapodosis* Book 6, Chapter 5, p 153. Translation by F. Wright. The effect would have been even more intimidating, as Brubaker noted that Liudprand would have been carried into the emperor's presence: Brubaker, 'Gesture in Byzantium,' p 44.

³⁰⁴ Guiland, 'Livres des Ceremonies,' p 258.

³⁰⁵ Liudprand, *The Embassy to Constantinople*, Chapter 10, p 182.

³⁰⁶ Grabar. *L'Empereur*, p 101. Mango interpreted this passage differently, arguing that the emperor did not prostrate himself. C. Mango 'The mosaics of the Hagia Sophia' in H. Kahler (ed), *Hagia Sophia* (New York, 1967) p 54.

³⁰⁷ *Book of Ceremonies*, eg. Book 1, Chapter 1, p 27 and passim thereafter.

Liudprand related a tenth-century court official describing how the Genoese performed the act before the emperor whilst the Venetians were denied it: the interpretation being that Genoese were trusted allies, while the Venetians were regarded with distrust and refused access to the imperial body.³⁰⁸ In addition, in the army only the officers were allowed to perform proskynesis to the emperor, making it something of a status symbol, and not a sign of defeat.³⁰⁹ Brubaker noted occasions when a senior emperor might humble himself as part of religious ritual, citing an example when the emperor washed and kissed the feet of the poor in an act of piety.³¹⁰ In the aftermath of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, proskynesis could be a statement of piety.³¹¹ Humility, philanthropy, Orthodoxy: these were qualities all emperors wanted to convey in their public image and would have been signs of virtue and hence of imperial strength.

There are several reasons to reject the idea that the image represents a draining of power away from the emperor and towards the Church. First, the emperor arguably strikes a majestic and not a humble figure. While Louis the Pious exchanged his royal robes for the garb of a penitent in his act of submission before the church, the Byzantine emperor in the narthex portrait retained his imperial clothing and dignity.³¹² The emperor's purity is emphasised by the white limestone used to depict his chlamys and the gold nimbus around his head. He is wearing the imperial chlamys, a symbol for one who has been anointed to power.³¹³ The emperor's imperial status is evident in the vermillion of his boots

³⁰⁸ Brubaker 'Gesture in Byzantium,' pp 49-50.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 46.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 50.

³¹¹ A. Grabar, 'Un manuscrit des homelies de Saint Jean Chrysostome à la Bibliothèque Nationale d'Athènes' in *Recueil d'Etudes: Archéologie, histoire de l'art, études byzantines*, (Prague, 1932), pp 259-298.

³¹² M. De Jong, *The Penitential State: authority and atonement in the age of Louis the Pious 814 - 840*, (Cambridge, 2009).

³¹³ Galavaris, 'The symbolism of the imperial costume,' p 110.

(now faded to white), a symbol of his unique status.³¹⁴ Second, and more significantly, it is striking that the emperor was depicted alone before Christ, with no holy figure to mediate: the emperor himself is in direct communion with Christ. This is notably different from other contemporary imperial portraits, such as the depiction of Basil with Elijah and Gabriel in the Paris Gregory or the depiction of the emperor alongside the patriarch and bishops in the Chrysotriklinos mosaic. The emperor in the narthex had no such need of intermediaries between himself and Christ. This may reflect a different conception of imperial power, in which the emperor himself has spiritual authority.³¹⁵

Gavrilovic observed a number of signs of wisdom in the portrait, including the composite Biblical text and the depiction of the emperor with a longer beard.³¹⁶ Similar signs were used by Leo in the gold coin discussed above and this may have been a feature of some of his portraiture. Although a longer beard was also adopted by Constantine VII, he did not rule as senior emperor until the 940s, which is later than the date most scholars give for the mosaic. The historical reception of the narthex image also associated it with Leo. Antony of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople on pilgrimage in 1200, described an image beside the narthex door representing 'Leo the Wise' with a precious stone on his brow that lit up the church of Hagia Sophia by night.³¹⁷

There may, in fact, have been a specific historical reason for associating Leo with the narthex portrait. For one source indicates that the image was constructed on

³¹⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 117. Red shoes were exclusive to emperors: the privilege of wearing them was jealously guarded. Liudprand described how Romanus I Lecapenus persuaded the senate to give him the right to wear red shoes as a first step towards winning status as emperor; Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 3, Chapter 35, p 85. The importance of red shoes as a sign of power is underlined by the *Vita Basilii*, which reported how Leo was deprived of these items on his arrest in 883; *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 100, pp 328-329.

³¹⁵ This idea is examined in more detail in Chapter 5.

³¹⁶ Gavrilovic, 'The humiliation of Leo VI.'

³¹⁷ C. Morey, 'Mosaics of Hagia Sophia' in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (New York, 1944), pp 201 - 210.

the very site of an incident where Leo does appear to have performed proskynesis in front of the imperial gate to the church. It was by this door that Leo appears to have cast himself down in front of the patriarch, in his protestations against being barred entry from church after his fourth marriage to Zoe. The incident is recorded by the *Vita Euthymii*.³¹⁸ ‘Then did Leo the emperor show royally and as an emperor, for he cast himself down on the ground and then, having wept a long time, rose up again and said to the patriarch ‘Go in my lord, absolutely without hindrance from me, for the multitude of my unmeasured trespasses rightly and justly I am suffering.’ And with these words and taking leave of the other, he turned to the side door leading to the Metatorion.’³¹⁹ This act, performed in front of members of the senate, was intended to demonstrate that Leo was being unfairly treated by a patriarch who had gone back on his promise to admit the emperor to the church. Leo was playing for sympathy and reaching for the moral high ground. He had transgressed but repented. The patriarch, however, was unyielding and had gone back on his word to pardon. On this occasion, according to the *Vita Euthymii*, members of the senate strongly sided with the emperor. His proskynesis was not a gesture of humiliation but a sophisticated statement of power.

The artist or whoever ordered the work may have had this incident in mind when constructing the image. Leo himself acknowledged that artists had a degree of creative freedom in the way they depicted their subjects, so it is possible that this was the artist’s doing.³²⁰ Hawkins noted that the narthex mosaic had been

³¹⁸ τότε Λέων ὁ βασιλεὺς βασιλικόν τι βασιλικῶς ἐποίησεν, ἑατὸν ἐπ’ ἑδάφους ρίψας. καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ δακρύσας ἀναστὰς τῷ πατριάσῃ ἔφη. ἔειλθε δέσποτα, μὴ παρ’ ἐμοῦ τὸ παράπον ἐμποδιζόμενος. διὰ γὰρ τὸ πλῆθος τῆν ἐμῶν ἀμετρήτων σφαλμάτων ἀξίως καὶ δικαίως πάσχω. καὶ ταῦτα προσειπὼν καὶ τούτῳ συνταξάμενος μετεστράφη πρὸς τὴν πλαγίαν πύλην τὴν εἰς τὸ μηταώριον ἀπάγουσαν. *Vita Euthymii*, p 77, lines 25-31. Translation by Karlin-Hayter.

³¹⁹ The location of the Metatorion is not certain. Silentarius suggests it was in the south aisle, Mainstone argues that it was by the south wall of the eastern bay, Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, pp 223-5.

³²⁰ For example, in Homily 37, Leo considered the intention of the artist who created mosaics at the church built by Stylianos Zaoutzes. Homily 31 also demonstrates that Leo talked to artists about their work. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 240-245.

executed with spontaneity.³²¹ Yet it would have been a bold act for an artist. It seems more likely that it was requested that the image include aspects of Leo's identity (if not his name). There is one person who might have revelled in depicting Leo at that location: his fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina (Regent 913 - 919). Zoe had dismissed Nikolas Mystikos, the very patriarch who had refused Leo entry to the church, near the beginning of her regency in 914.³²² By drawing on signs of Leo's wisdom, the image would have been both a justification of Leo and Zoe's marriage (which had produced an heir) and an act of spite in re-living a moral victory against an old adversary.

Nevertheless, those circumstances would have been soon forgotten. Probably the most important aspect of the narthex image is what is known of its later reception in Byzantium. Not only was it linked to Leo but it seems that the image was considered perfectly compatible with the conception of Leo as a wise ruler. Leo was often associated with legends of wisdom, many of which had no link whatever to his actual reign.³²³ Anthony of Novgorod and probably his Byzantine hosts interpreted the narthex mosaic in the same vein as other images and legends of Leo's wisdom, suggesting that the portrait was not seen by contemporaries as one of humiliation for the emperor depicted. Indeed, it seems likely that the image was designed to achieve a moral authority. The presentation of the emperor as an older man with a longer beard matches the similar image from Leo's gold coin. The depiction of emperor and Christ, without intermediary, underlines the emperor's wisdom, piety and moral authority. This was a very different kind of authority from that depicted by Basil, whose physical strength and military success were foremost in his imagery.

³²¹ J. Hawkins, 'Further observations on the narthex mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul' in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22, (1968), p 166.

³²² I am grateful to Jonathan Shepard for this observation.

³²³ By 1200, Leo's name was associated with other works of public art in Constantinople usually in contexts denoting wisdom. For example, a Russian pilgrim reported that the serpent columns in the Hippodrome had been built by Leo: anonymous description of Constantinople: Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, p 145. Leo was also named as an icon painter, *ibid*, p 141.

Portrait of Alexander

The image of Alexander in the North Gallery of Hagia Sophia appears at first sight to be very much that of the ideal emperor (PLATE 8). He faces the viewer in full-length figure, dressed in a *loros* with long ornamented scarf and pearls and jewels sweeping in double lines from the crown and golden circlet on his head to the boots on his feet. Alexander holds symbols of earthly power in his hands: a *globus cruciger* in his left, a sign that the emperor held the world in his hand, on behalf of God, and the *akakia* in his right, a cylindrical purple silk roll containing dust, held during ceremonies and symbolising mortality.³²⁴ The *globus* is mirrored by the roundels at the top of the mosaic, one of which bears Alexander's name. The background is largely made from gold and silver tesserae, which reinforce the sense of splendour and majesty as well as representing purity.³²⁵ Alexander was named in his mosaic, which also contains a more personal text, in the form of a blessing for the emperor's reign: 'Lord help thy servant, the orthodox faithful emperor'.³²⁶

This image has received relatively little attention but has generally been seen as an idealised depiction of imperial strength. Belting, for example, thought the image 'demanded worship' in the ancient pagan tradition of Roman Emperors.³²⁷ Teteriatnikov thought it 'seemingly stereotypical'.³²⁸ Alexander's face may itself be a reflection of his contemporaries' idea of good kingship, for it looks very similar to Constantine the Great in what is probably a slightly earlier image from the Patriarchal Rooms of Hagia Sophia (Figure 6).³²⁹ Both are shown bearded, a

³²⁴ Signs of power like the *globus* and *akakia* are discussed in Chapter 2.

³²⁵ L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, (Oxford, 1996)

³²⁶ Κύριε βο(ή)θει (τῷ σῷ) δοῦ(λ)ω ὀρθοδόξω πιστῷ δεσπ(ό)τῃ

³²⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 102.

³²⁸ Teteriatnikov 'Why is he hiding?'

³²⁹ Cormack and Hawkins, 'The rooms above the southwest vestibule'

sign of mature authority. They wear similar clothing, jewellery and crowns, signs of their imperial rank. There are no obvious distinguishing personal features. The image of Alexander could have been copied from the image of Constantine, the ultimate model for an ideal emperor.

*Figure 6: Image of Constantine I, 847s - 870s, Patriarchal Rooms, Hagia Sophia.*³³⁰



Despite this idealised form, Alexander's image is easy to miss, located high in a dark niche in the North Gallery (PLATE 7). Modern visitors often inspect the signage describing the portrait but sometimes fail to spot the portrait itself. The contrast between the magnificent clothes and regalia and the obscure and hidden location of the image is remarkable. Teteriatnikov has recently suggested that the location and design of the mosaic reflected a deliberate attempt by Leo to marginalise Alexander whilst he was junior emperor.³³¹ She noted, for example, that the double strands of prependicularia on Alexander's crown were more common in the depiction of empresses than emperors and were hence suggestive of lower imperial status.³³² These arguments are unconvincing. It is true that double prependicularia were associated with empresses who became regents, like Theodora (842 - 856) and Zoe (914 - 919). Yet the portrait of Alexander is

³³⁰ Photograph by Bob Atchison. <http://www.pallasweb.com/deesis/mosaics-room-over-vestibule-hagia-sophia.html> (viewed August 2015).

³³¹ Teteriatnikov, 'Why is he hiding?' p 62

³³² *Ibid*, p 69.

elaborate in other ways, such as the ornamented scarf. Moreover, Alexander was described on the mosaic as '*despot*', a term generally used for senior emperors.³³³ Perhaps most significantly, it would have been unusual for a junior emperor to be depicted at all.

There is an alternative, and perhaps surprising, explanation for the location of the mosaic. It could have been constructed for private devotional purposes. The mosaic is clearly visible from the ambo where the patriarch stood during services. The location may therefore have been an act or a statement of piety, giving Alexander a direct line of sight into the heart of the church and its liturgical rituals. The inscription also indicates Alexander's Orthodoxy. Teteriatnikov thought this might have been an implicit criticism of the denial of communion to Leo during the Tetrarchy crisis, although it seems highly unlikely that Leo would have tolerated the construction of a critical image in his own reign.³³⁴ The image could nevertheless have been a claim to spiritual authority by the new emperor, implying a degree of piety with which Alexander has never been credited. Yet the image itself contains no sign of devotion. A comparison with other imperial images in Hagia Sophia demonstrates that Alexander did not yet have strong claims to make for his appearance. Whilst other emperors were shown with a pious gift of some kind, often a church they have dedicated, Alexander has only the regalia of power. His power was latent and not yet fulfilled. The obscure location of the mosaic also makes it difficult to imagine his image being given the same kind of veneration as Basil's image in the New Church, in front of which candles were lit and gospels read.³³⁵ It seems most likely that the obscure location of the mosaic reflected the limited bargaining power of a new emperor over the design of such an important church as Hagia Sophia.

³³³ Underwood and Hawkins 'The portrait of the Emperor Alexander,' p 193. Basil had been called *despot* in the Paris Gregory, which dates from about 879-882.

³³⁴ Teteriatnikov 'Why is he hiding?'

³³⁵ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 19, p 118.

Whilst the location of Alexander's mosaic cannot be considered prestigious, the design of his image appears to be a bold statement of imperial power.

Underwood and Hawkins concluded from Alexander's clothing that the emperor was being shown in the context of the Easter rituals, which was one of the most important occasions of state as well as religious calendar.³³⁶ The *loros*, worn on occasions such as Easter Sunday and Pentecost, reflected the emperor's role as Christ's representative.³³⁷ Alexander had himself portrayed in the clothing of a senior emperor in the context of the most important religious festival of the year. And he was seen not in the simpler form present in some Macedonian art but in more ostentatious dress - the long ornamented *loros*, the red *skaramangion* and the embroidered *sagion*. The emperor is on public display - both as a participant in ritual and as an image in Hagia Sophia.³³⁸

The context of the Easter ritual and the use of the term *despot* suggest that the image dates from Easter 913, the only Easter Alexander celebrated as full emperor. This would have been his most impressive public appearance.³³⁹ The Easter celebrations saw the emperor hailed, if the *Book of Ceremonies* is a trustworthy guide, by acclamations from church, senate, army, navy and city population wishing him a long and effective reign. Priests, officials and Senate would have fallen to the floor and wished the emperor many good years.³⁴⁰ The celebrations may well have represented both the summit of Alexander's now realised ambition to be emperor but also could have marked what was expected

³³⁶ Underwood and Hawkins, 'The portrait of the Emperor Alexander,' p 92.

³³⁷ Galavaris 'The symbolism of imperial costume,' p 111. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images*.

³³⁸ Galavaris 'The symbolism of imperial costume,' p 109. The *skaramagia* was a surviving element of military costume, although it is uncertain to what extent it retained that association in the tenth-century.

³³⁹ Cameron, 'The construction of court ritual,' p 117, described the Hippodrome acclamations in this manner.

³⁴⁰ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 1, pp 22ff

to be a turning point from the old to the new regime. If Easter was a time of rebirth, in 913 that included the imperial Dynasty, with a new emperor on the throne. Easter was also a significant time politically. State salaries were paid and more officials were therefore present at court.³⁴¹ If this was anything like the occasion witnessed by Liudprand of Cremona, this would have been a public demonstration of imperial patronage involving the most prominent officials of the palace.³⁴²

The added edge here is that Alexander oversaw a significant change in leading court personnel early in his reign. The *De Administrando Imperio* reports that Alexander ‘superseded all who had been appointed to any commands by [Leo] being thereto persuaded by malicious and foolish men’.³⁴³ Karlin-Hayter argued that this re-organisation of the senior ranks of the administration was a cause of his poor reputation.³⁴⁴ The Easter meal held at the end of the day could have taken on an added significance as many around the table would have been newly promoted to positions of power and influence whilst other prominent figures would have been notable for their absence.³⁴⁵ The emperor might have handed his new officials the newly minted gold solidus featuring him being crowned.³⁴⁶ Alexander had asserted his authority early and forcefully. As many came to Constantinople to claim their pay and acclaim the Emperor, Easter could have been the gathering point of his forces. The creation of the mosaic could well have been inspired by a sense of triumph and what Brilliant observed as the wish to endure.³⁴⁷ Its appearance so early in his reign make it a picture of hope and

³⁴¹ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, p 12.

³⁴² Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 6, Chapter 10.

³⁴³ Ἀλέξανδρος, τῆς αὐτοκράτορος ἀρχῆς ἐγκρατῆς γεγονώς, ὡς πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ μακαρίου βασιλέως καὶ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ προβληθέντας ἐν τισιν ἀρχαῖς διεδέξατο, χαιρεκάκοις καὶ κακοβούλοις ἀνδράσιν πεισθείς. *De Administrando Imperio* Chapter 50, lines 197-200.

³⁴⁴ Karlin-Hayter ‘The Emperor Alexander’s bad name,’ pp 594-595 Tougher, *Leo VI*, Chapter 9.

³⁴⁵ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 9, pp 70ff

³⁴⁶ See Figure 12a, p 121.

³⁴⁷ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, p 14.

expectation as much as fulfilment. If so, it was to be short-lived, as Alexander was dead within two months.

Given his short reign, Alexander's very presence in Hagia Sophia is in fact more surprising than his absence would have been. Senior emperor for only 13 months, with no building work, heir or imperial victories to his name, Alexander was a figure whose reputation was already in question during his reign and about whom rumours of pagan practices had surfaced soon after his death.³⁴⁸ The obvious question is why did Alexander act so soon to set up his image in Hagia Sophia? It can be noted that this image coincided with a highly proactive period of minting early in the reign, which is explored in Chapter 2. This was an emperor acting fast to put his image before his subjects, which went wider than the traditional act on the accession of a new emperor of distributing portraits across the Empire which could be welcomed with incense, candles and garlands.³⁴⁹ Could it have been that Alexander was as concerned about establishing his authority even among the most elite Byzantine audiences of court, church and Senate at Constantinople? The historical evidence for Alexander's 'purge' at Constantinople after his succession suggests it was controversial and incomplete by the time he died in summer 913.³⁵⁰ The early months of a reign were a period of vulnerability for many new emperors, surrounded by officials put in power by a predecessor with no certain loyalty to his successor. This must have been an uncertain time for both emperor and court. Contemporary evidence, albeit from sources hostile to Alexander, suggests that the emperor encountered opposition. The *Vita Euthymii*, a hostile source, described an occasion when the patriarch Nikolas, acting on Alexander's orders, sought to enforce the resignation of some bishops they regarded as adversaries. After meeting Alexander, says the *Vita Euthymii*, Nikolas 'ordered soldiers to be sent sword in hand to bring five, and five only, of

³⁴⁸ *Vita Euthymii*, p 114

³⁴⁹ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 102.

³⁵⁰ Karlin-Hayter, 'The Emperor Alexander's bad name.'

the metropolitans to him in the Gallery of the Great Church....Nikolas sitting in judgement upon them individually began to abuse them.’ They resisted and Nikolas went back to the emperor saying they had predicted Alexander would soon be dead.³⁵¹

The scene shows Alexander with allies and opponents, bent on changing senior figures in the church. This incident took place in the gallery of Hagia Sophia. It might have taken place in front of Alexander’s portrait, if Nikolas wanted to use the image to convey imperial authority for his attempted manoeuvres. This may be why the bishops insulted the emperor. Such an interpretation is speculative but what is certain is that Alexander’s active image-making coincided with the turbulence that comes with changing powerful figures at the apex of important and influential institutions of power. The *Vita Euthymii* is a contemporary text and this passage demonstrates some of the contempt with which Alexander was held by some while he was alive. The strenuous image making, on coins as well as in mosaics, contrasts with Leo’s willingness to wait more than a decade before minting gold coins with his image. Alexander’s imagery is unusual in that it dates from the early period of a reign, at a time when his authority may not have been completely accepted. His rush to create an image may denote anxiety to impress his new status on the elites of Constantinople and rally loyalty around his own figure, rather than Constantine VII.

Although surely intended as the image of an ideal emperor, Alexander’s portrait implicitly says much about Alexander’s personal power too: the impatient claims to authority so early in his reign, the clothing putting him in the pomp and circumstance of imperial ceremony and not in pious reflection, the lavish jewellery and outsized scarf reflecting perhaps a man who had been on the sidelines for much of his life, trying to impose his presence on those around him, to lay his claim to the institutions and trappings of power. This is the image of a

³⁵¹ παρευθὺ γὰρ κελεύει ξιφήρεις σατράπας ἀποσταλῆναι καὶ πέντε μόνους τῶν μητροπολιτῶν ἐν τοῖς τῆς Μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας ὑπερώοις πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀγαγεῖν...κατ’ἰδίαν τε προκαθεσθεις ἤρξατο διὰ λόγου τούτους πλήττειν *Vita Euthymii*, p 115, line 27 - p 117, line 5.

younger brother finally bursting out of his family's shadow. The appearance of this portrait does not support the idea that Alexander was a lazy emperor with no interest in politics. Rather, he seems one with a keen interest in his own image and prestige. Yet the speed with which the image was created suggests a degree of anxiety to take a grip on power. It is a depiction of imperial power whose ambivalence is captured in the contrast between the glorious, idealised image and the hurried execution in an obscure part of the Great Church.

Conclusions

In conclusion, recognisable images have survived of Basil, Leo and Alexander, which contain both aspects of their preferred public image as well as traces of their lives. Both private and public dimensions reveal aspects of their power.

Whilst it is true that Macedonian art is formulaic in character and fits the rules of the *kaiseridee*, there is also evidence of significant variation in imagery between emperors, even of ones of the same family. There is in fact a richness to imperial art that has not been fully recognised by historians. All emperors sought to be depicted as an ideal emperor but they pursued this in different ways, through their own visual styles. It is interesting, in particular, to contrast the way Basil and Alexander presented themselves on their accession to the throne.

Basil presented himself as a powerful physical figure, in triumph over his defeated enemies and as the head of a large family, with several adult sons. He may also have been seen as an intimidating, even volatile personality. Leo was portrayed as a wise ruler and spiritual guide, yet never with any consistency. Alexander imitated images of Constantine and set himself in the context of one of grandest ritual celebrations of the year.

Imperial images could have a degree of ambiguity. The unnamed emperor in the narthex was depicted in an act of submission that was simultaneously an

expression of piety and spiritual leadership. For a period and to an elite audience, this image could well have recalled an incident featuring Leo VI which occurred on that site, about which people probably had different opinions. Alexander's image in Hagia Sophia was simultaneously an assertive act of image-making by an impatient new emperor and a reflection of his limited influence on the fabric of the Great Church and his vulnerability in his early months before his power had been consolidated.

The approach taken by individual emperors to imperial imagery provides valuable insight into the power politics of the day and shows the centrality both of visual image and personality to power in the ninth-century. Nevertheless, there was little consistency to imperial art. Images appeared fleetingly and may not have been repeated. The approach appears to have been evolutionary rather than systematic.

Chapter 2

Innovation and Adaptation in Imperial Iconography

Imperial portraits were used by the early Macedonians to express aspects of their power, by defining the public office of emperor and communicating their own personal qualities, values and aspirations. In this context, changes to imperial iconography were equally significant in expressing imperial power. Basil, Leo and Alexander were each associated with important iconographic innovations, many of which were adopted by future emperors.

Imperial power had been expressed through signs and symbols since the very beginnings. Some of these symbols had been used for centuries, such as Constantine's cross, representing victory through Christ or the *globus cruciger*, which denoted temporal power. Yet the appearance, design and context in which these signs were deployed could be different in the reigns of each of the early Macedonian Emperors. Furthermore, other signs, as I shall show, were introduced into imperial iconography for the first time under Basil, Leo and Alexander, through a process of innovation, emulation and adaptation. This chapter explores the symbols of power used in a variety of objects, including coins and seals, as well as works of art such as the David Casket and the Paris Gregory.³⁵² The examination takes a chronological perspective, to highlight the distinctive features of iconographic innovation in each reign and aid understanding of the evolution of particular artistic motifs over time. Where possible, the analysis begins in each reign with symbols used on coins and seals and expands from these

³⁵² The ivory sceptre featuring Leo VI is not considered in this chapter. This is because it depicts Mary placing a pearl or jewel into Leo's crown, rather than an image of crowning. It is considered in Chapter 5. This decision is explained in the introduction, p 40.

more official images into other forms of art, like ivory caskets, less directly associated with court artists.

The chapter opens with the accession of Basil I, which marked a change of dynasty, from the Amorians to the Macedonians. This provides an opportunity to consider how a new emperor like Basil, who had gained the throne by violence, chose to be depicted in imperial imagery. In particular, does Basil's iconography indicate how the emperor sought to establish the legitimacy of his power? Particular consideration is given to the emergence in Basil's reign of the image of an emperor being crowned by a heavenly figure, which led Grabar to conclude that Basil was the main innovator in imperial art.³⁵³ This crowning image was subsequently adopted, with adaptations, by Leo and Alexander (and subsequent Byzantine Emperors). However, the iconography used by each of Basil's sons was distinctive. Leo oversaw the introduction of Mary onto imperial coins, the first time this had taken place in Byzantine history.³⁵⁴ Alexander's imagery was the most innovative of all, despite the fact that he ruled for just thirteen months.

Innovation Under Basil

Basil I took power after his murder of Michael III in 867. It is of considerable interest how Basil sought to claim legitimacy for this action and his iconography should provide clues. In order to understand Basil's approach, it is helpful to compare his iconography with the most recent occasion on which an emperor had been overthrown. This took place in 820 when Michael II (820 - 829) overthrew Leo V (813 - 820). It is quite possible that stories still circulated at court about this previous usurpation. Both murders started new dynasties: Michael II inaugurated the Amorian Dynasty and Basil became the first of the Macedonians, when he in turn murdered Michael III. Yet although both Michael II and Basil needed to establish their legitimacy, the contrast in artistic terms between these

³⁵³ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116.

³⁵⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 508

two incidents is revealing. Coin images are all that have survived from the reign of Michael II but their official nature give us some insight into Michael's chosen public image. It seems obvious from surviving imagery that Michael sought to legitimise his rule by closely matching the visual style of his murdered predecessor.



*Figure 7a and b: Gold Solidus of Leo V, Class I, 813
Obverse and Reverse, Freeman and Sear Collection.³⁵⁵
With permission of wildwinds.com, courtesy of Freeman and Sear.*



*Figure 8a and b: Gold Solidus of Michael II, Class I, 821
Obverse and Reverse, the Golden Horn Collection.³⁵⁶
Courtesy of Stack's Co Ltd.*

In a gold coin issued by Leo V, for example, the emperor is shown wearing the imperial chlamys on the obverse and the loros on the reverse, garments which symbolised different aspects of imperial power (Figure 7a and b). A very similar coin was issued by his murderer Michael II (Figure 8a and b). In fact, it is virtually identical, apart from the addition of a patriarchal cross. In these coins, the

³⁵⁵ http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/byz/leo_V/sb1626.jpg (viewed August 2015).

³⁵⁶ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/michael_II/sb1639.jpg (viewed August 2015)

identity of the emperor is only signified by the inscription and not by any other aspect of iconography. The message appears to be one of the old order continuing under barely noticeable new management.



Figure 9a and b: Copper Follis of Leo V and Constantine, Class II, 813-820
Obverse and Reverse, from a Private Collection.³⁵⁷
With permission of wildwinds.com for A.L.Fournier.



Figure 10a and b: Copper Follis of Michael II and Theophilos, Class II, 821-829
Obverse and Reverse, the H. D. Rauch Collection.³⁵⁸
With permission of wildwinds.com and H.D. Rauch GmbH.

Another example follows the same pattern. A copper coin was issued by Leo V in a design built around the Greek letters M and A (Figure 9b). These letters have been interpreted by numismatists to represent ‘*Multos Annos*’ - many years, an acclamation that appears to have often been used in imperial ceremony.³⁵⁹ An

³⁵⁷ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/leo_V/sb1630.jpg (viewed August 2015).

³⁵⁸ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/michael_II/sb1642.jpg (viewed August 2015).

³⁵⁹ Eg. *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1 Chapter 38. The coin type first originated in the 720s.

almost identical coin was subsequently issued by Michael II until his son Theophilos was crowned co-emperor, when he replaced the A with a Θ (Figure 10b), probably to reflect the initial letter of his son's name, itself an adaptation that had occurred in earlier reigns. The similarity between Leo V's coins and those of his assassin is striking. Michael's imagery seems to be deliberately stressing the continuity between his rule and those emperors who came before him, not just between immediate generations but over the period of a hundred years.

It might seem surprising that these coins show no visual response to an episode of usurpation. However, this term is potentially misleading. Historians have argued that usurpation was in fact a legal route to the throne in Byzantium, and could be the first act in a process of legitimization.³⁶⁰ There was in fact something like a 'legal right of revolution,' in Bury's phrase, by which impious emperors could be removed by challengers selected by God.³⁶¹ The question was less about how power had been obtained and more about how it was seen to be legitimate. This notion of 'legitimate power' was defined by Basil in a letter to his son Leo from around 879 - 886.³⁶² According to Basil, legitimacy came from governing by the laws of God and respecting the law himself.³⁶³ Continuity could, therefore, be evidence of order, and legitimate power. In fact, it seems that iconographic

³⁶⁰ P. Lemerle, quoted in P. Karlin-Hayter 'L'Enjeu d'une rumeur: opinion et imaginaire à Byzance au IX^e siècle' in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 14 (1991), pp 85 - 111. R. Morris 'Succession and usurpation: politics and rhetoric in the late tenth-century' in P. Magdalino (ed), *New Constantines: the rhythm of imperial renewal in Byzantium 4th to 13th centuries* (1994) pp 199-214.

³⁶¹ Bury, *Constitution*, p 9.

³⁶² *ἔννομος ἀρχή*. PG 107, cols xxi - lvi.

³⁶³ G. Dagron 'Lawful society and legitimate power' in A. Laiou and S. Simon, *Law and Society in Byzantium: ninth to twelfth-centuries*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), pp 27-52.

continuity was more common in Byzantine history than innovation when usurpers seized power.³⁶⁴

The coin evidence suggests that Michael II adopted the imperial iconography of his predecessor, with the result that the arrival of the Amorian Dynasty resulted in no significant changes to the imperial image on the imperial coinage. Basil's imagery, however, took a different course. Rather than following his predecessor's coin imagery, Basil had himself depicted in full standing form, as I discussed in the previous chapter in a different context, which had not occurred on coins for 150 years (Figure 4b).³⁶⁵ This full standing image suggests Basil's physical presence, the quality by which he had first earned attention at court and which was still being celebrated nearly a century later in the *Vita Basilii*. Basil went on to adapt the coinage by depicting himself enthroned (Figure 11a), an approach which also emphasised his full physical figure, this time given emphasis by the wide throne rather than the standing form. These signs reinforce the point made in the previous chapter that Basil's power stemmed at least in part to fear and intimidation.

³⁶⁴ V. Penna and C. Morrisson 'Usurpers and Rebels in Byzantium: image and message through coins' in D. Angelov and M. Saxby (eds), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (2013), pp 21-42. Penna and Morrison cited more examples where usurpers modelled imagery on their predecessors, like Basilicus (475-6) and Artavasdos (742/2 - 742/3) than examples where there were significant iconographic changes. Although Herakleios fits the latter category, his case is unusual because he minted coins whilst fighting the incumbent emperor.

³⁶⁵ Chapter 1, Page 59.



Figure 11a and b: Copper Follis, Basil I, Basil enthroned, Class V, 879-886
Obverse and Reverse, Malcolm W. Heckman Collection.³⁶⁶
With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com.

It is evident, therefore, that Basil wanted or allowed his imperial image to look different upon his accession. This was not only the case for the image of the emperor but also for his iconography and Basil's early coins in particular show a number of changes from his predecessor's.³⁶⁷ Table 1 sets out the symbols of power depicted on Basil's coins, by the main types and by the year of issue, using the classification system established by Grierson.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/basil_I/sb1709.jpg (viewed August 2015).

³⁶⁷ Walker argued that Basil acted quickly to remove coins showing himself and Michael III from circulation: *Emperor and The World*, p 194, n 16.

³⁶⁸ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*.

TABLE 1: Iconography of Basil I's Coins

Type	Year	Obverse	Reverse
Gold Class I	868	Christ enthroned <i>IhSXPSREX REGNANTIYM</i>	Basil standing, in <i>loros</i> , holding <i>globus</i> and <i>akakia</i> <i>bASILIOSECΘ EYbASILEYS-b</i>
Gold Class II	868-879	Christ enthroned <i>IhSXPSREX REGNANTIYM</i>	Busts of Basil in <i>loros</i> and Constantine in <i>chlamys</i> , with patriarchal cross. <i>AVGG B</i>
Gold Class III	882*	Bust of Basil, holding <i>globus</i> and <i>akakia</i> <i>bASILIOS bASILEYS</i>	Busts of Constantine in <i>chlamys</i> , holding <i>globus</i> and Eudokia holding cross sceptre
Fractional gold Class III	879*	Bust of Basil, holding cross and <i>akakia</i> , in <i>loros</i> <i>bASILIO AYG</i>	Busts of Leo and Alexander, both beardless, each in <i>chlamys</i> <i>AVGG</i>
Silver	868-879	Inscription naming Basil and Constantine <i>bASILIS ROMEOs</i>	Cross potent with <i>globus</i> beneath
Copper Class I	868-870	Busts of Basil (bearded) and Constantine (beardless), each in <i>chlamys</i> , holding ornamented labarum <i>AVGG</i>	Inscription only <i>bASILEIS ROMAION</i>
Copper Class II	868-870	Basil (bearded) and Constantine (beardless) enthroned, each in <i>loros</i> , holding ornamented labarum	<i>bASILEIS ROMAION</i>
Copper Class III	870-879	Busts of Basil in <i>loros</i> , Leo and Constantine each in <i>chlamys</i> .	<i>bASILEIS ROMAION</i>
Copper Class IV	870 - 879	Busts of Basil in <i>loros</i> , Leo and Constantine each in <i>chlamys</i> . Basil raises left hand, possibly in blessing.	<i>bASILEIS ROMAION</i>
Copper Class V	879-886	Basil enthroned, in <i>loros</i> , holding labarum	<i>bASILEVS ROMEON</i>
Copper Half Follis	879 - 886	Basil, wearing <i>loros</i> , holding cross potent and <i>akakia</i>	Busts of Leo and Alexander, each in <i>chlamys</i> <i>AVGG</i>

Table 2 sets out the main types of seal featured in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and Fogg Museum of Art.³⁶⁹ The three columns show the emperors shown on the seal and any objects they hold.

TABLE 2: Iconography of Basil I's Seals

<i>Type</i>	<i>Obverse</i>	<i>Reverse</i>
A. Rare (1 example)	Christ	Basil holding labarum
B. Common (18 examples)	Christ	Basil and Constantine holding patriarchal cross or labarum
C. Rare (1 example)	St. Basil αγ βασιλειε βοηθει	Basil in <i>loros</i> , Constantine and Leo, both in <i>chlamys</i> .

These tables demonstrate that Basil's official iconography was at its most innovative and experimental in the early years of the reign and that it then settled down into patterns more in keeping with previous rulers. The most unusual coin was his very first, the gold solidus from 868. This included the adapted figure of Christ enthroned, the full standing figure of Basil and a new title. While Christ was the *REX REGNANTIYM* - 'King of Kings' on the obverse - the reverse of the coin called Basil the *bASILEYS-b*. Grierson believed this stood for *Basileus Basileuontwn* - 'Emperor of Emperors'. This was the ancient title of the Babylonian and Persian kings. No Byzantine Emperor had used this title before and Grierson believed it would have seemed blasphemous to contemporaries, on the grounds that *basileus*, the word used for emperor, was more senior than *rex*, the word often used for Christ.³⁷⁰ The origins of the title may indicate an interest in Persian kingship, which some scholars argued was part of broader Eastern influence on Macedonian imperial art.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*.

³⁷⁰ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 477.

³⁷¹ Walker, *Emperor and The World*.

More likely, however, this was an attempt to match Basil with an imperial Christ. A number of changes had been made to the Christ depicted by Theodora and Michael III in order to make it an imperial image. This earlier Christ (from 843) had been a heavenly figure: shown in bust, wearing a tunic and himation, clothes associated with Biblical figures.³⁷² The figure on Basil's coins was Christ Pantokrator, the dimension of Christ linked with his heavenly kingship (Figure 4a).³⁷³ Basil's adaptations added a throne and imperial costume. The intention in image and inscription was to demonstrate the parallel between Christ and Emperor. This image of Christ enthroned underscored imperial power by mirroring the full body of the emperor on the obverse and possibly by modelling the throne on an actual imperial throne. The effect was to make this an imperial Byzantine Christ, modelled on a contemporary Byzantine ruler, rather than the first-century figure shown on Michael's coins. By using imperial imagery to signify Christ's authority, the effect was to show power flowing from Christ to the imperial office.

How significant was the innovation of 868? Potentially this was very significant, as Basil's regime looked different from his predecessor's, in contrast with previous recent usurpations. Yet to what extent would Byzantines have noticed changes to the imagery on coins? This has been the subject of some debate.³⁷⁴ Although Byzantium was not fully monetised in the ninth-century, coins were issued in large enough quantities to pass through a lot of people's hands, especially among the elite. The number of gold coins issued each year varied from 400,000 under Constantine VII to 1,430,000 under Herakleios.³⁷⁵ Yet it is possible that their imagery was taken for granted and ignored. Whilst some symbols appear to have been intended to prompt particular meanings, it is

³⁷² Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 463. This was apparently copied from the 'classical' head of Christ from Justinian II's first reign rather than the 'Syrian' head used in his second.

³⁷³ Kazhdan, *OBD*, p 1574. J. Matthews, *The Pantokrator: title and image* (New York, 1976).

³⁷⁴ Summarised by Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority' pp 78ff.

³⁷⁵ See introduction, p 45. Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority,' p 65 n4.

possible that others had become less distinct over time and had lost much of their significance. Neither is interpreting signs of power a simple task. McCormick has argued that the Byzantine *Herrschaftszeichen* may have lacked a consistent system.³⁷⁶ Some of the objects which appear in imperial portraiture, such as the *globus cruciger*, may not even have existed in reality and were not used in actual ceremonial.³⁷⁷ Some caution is therefore needed in being too analytical in the reading of signs of power. Nevertheless, it seems likely that Byzantines did notice images on coins. Morrisson has argued that coins were not simply commodities that people took for granted, partly because the imagery determined their authenticity and partly because there is evidence that Byzantines could identify different types of coin.³⁷⁸ In extreme cases, innovation could also generate controversy, as when Isaac I Komnenos depicted himself with a sword in 1057-59.³⁷⁹

Emperors and their officials were likely to have given some thought to the way they wanted their image to appear on coins. The 868 solidus is important because it suggests that Basil or his officials wanted to distance themselves from the imagery of Michael III, not only in the imperial image and titles but also in the image of Christ. Overall the approach seems to have been more one of experimentation than design. The effect of the 868 coin may have been mixed and the inscription 'Emperor of Emperors' was soon dropped. Nevertheless, the image of Christ continued to be deployed for dynastic purposes under Basil. In the Paris Gregory (879 - 882), Christ holds a book with the message: 'My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.' Brubaker pointed out that this text was used both on wedding rings and as a closing reading for the

³⁷⁶ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p 19.

³⁷⁷ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 131.

³⁷⁸ Morrisson, 'Displaying the Emperor's authority', p 79.

³⁷⁹ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, p 3. Isaac's depiction of the sword was interpreted by some to imply that imperial power came from military might and not from God.

birthday celebrations for Constantinople on 11 May.³⁸⁰ In her interpretation, the wedding ring text was likely to have symbolized procreation through Christ, giving legitimacy and authority to Basil's successors. This was a dynastic message. Moreover, Christ's blessing came at the beginning of the manuscript just before the images of Basil, Eudokia, Leo and Alexander. Christ was therefore seen to bless Constantinople through Basil and his successors.

While his first gold coin issue was innovative, Basil's subsequent coin types were more likely to use or adapt traditional iconography than to establish precedents, for example reverting to more familiar imperial busts and more conventional titles ('βασιλεις' and 'AVGG' for Augustus) and imagery, focused mainly on Basil and Constantine with the patriarchal cross. One copper issue from 870 - 879 might be highly innovative, if the emperor is shown giving a blessing, something usually reserved for Christ himself. However, the workmanship on this coin type is poor and it is difficult to be sure whether the figure of Basil is meant to be giving a blessing or holding an *akakia*. On the whole, it seems likely that the uncertainty is the result of a flaw and not design. Basil's provincial coins, it should be noted, are much more conventional. Coins issued from the mints at Syracuse and Cherson, for example, more closely resemble those of Michael III than Basil's own innovations, suggesting that Basil took an interest in an elite audience at Constantinople and that it took time for new ideas to filter through to the regions of empire.

This pattern of early innovation followed by more conservative adaptation is intriguing. It suggests a forceful but possibly unplanned start to official iconography, mediated by more cautious subsequent adaptation and a return to what Walker has described as a mixture of conservatism and covert innovation.³⁸¹ Indeed, this is an apt description of Basil's route to power over the body of

³⁸⁰ L. Brubaker 'To legitimise an Emperor: Constantine and visual authority in the eighth and ninth-centuries' in Magdalino (ed), *New Constantines*.

³⁸¹ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, p 6.

Michael III. In this context, it is interesting that the most famous image to have emerged during Basil's reign, of crowning by a heavenly figure, survives not in official art but from works associated with other figures at Basil's court.

The David Casket and Images of Crowning

The most important iconographic innovation to occur from the reign of Basil was almost certainly the image of a divine figure crowning the emperor. Strictly speaking, the earliest example of crowning comes from the Paris Gregory. Yet the David Casket, which is slightly earlier, is arguably related in terms of its iconography, in particular its image of an emperor and empress being blessed by Christ. These figures are likely to have been Basil and Eudokia.³⁸²

This work, now in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, was commissioned by an aristocratic couple.³⁸³ As well as the image of Christ's blessing on the lid, there are scenes on the sides of the casket of David being anointed by the prophet Samuel and crowned, again by Samuel. The selection and design of these scenes suggest that associations were deliberately being drawn by the artist between David and Basil. For example, David is shown wearing imperial clothing, being crowned and acclaimed in front of a crowd. Byzantine emperors, equally, were crowned and acclaimed by the people, army and Senate. Chapter 5 will describe how Basil associated himself with David.³⁸⁴ The focus of this chapter is on the representation in imperial iconography of blessing, anointing and crowning. The David Casket depicts all three of these acts and it is interesting to note which was considered constitutive of royal power. This was clearly the act of anointing.

³⁸² Arguments for dating the David Casket to the reign of Basil were considered in the introduction.

³⁸³ The casket appears to have been made for the aristocratic couple on the lid who are presented as the subject and not the object of the inscription: 'Christ bless the imperial couple: the couple, your servants, duly make obeisance to you' - ΧΡΙΣΤΕΥΛΟΓΗΤΟΝΑΕ ΣΠΟΤΩΝΣΥΝΩΡΙΔΑ ΔΥΛΗΣΥ ΝΩΡΙC ΤΑΣΙ ΑΝ. Translation by Maguire, 'The art of comparing,' p 89.

³⁸⁴ Chapter 5, p 220.

In the Book of Kings, David was not crowned but anointed by Samuel. It was this act that demonstrated authority transferring from Saul to David. Samuel anointed Saul saying 'the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance'.³⁸⁵ The act itself actually appeared to cause a change within Saul: 'God gave him another heart'.³⁸⁶ In effect, Samuel made Saul King on God's instruction. Similarly, when Saul fell out of favour with God, Samuel was instructed to anoint another in his place.³⁸⁷ Samuel duly anointed David, once God had shown him whom to anoint.³⁸⁸

By the ninth-century, Byzantine art had not yet depicted the public act of anointing.³⁸⁹ Instead, unction was shown as a private act that denoted a personal initiation into the service of God. On the David casket, the scene of anointing is relatively private, as there are only two observers. This contrasts with the image of David being crowned, which clearly takes place in front of a crowd of onlookers. This crowning scene is unlikely to have derived from the Old Testament. Crowns are mentioned less often in the books of the Old Testament than acts of anointing. Where they are mentioned, however, they are symbols of authority rather than objects used in a ceremony. Crowns appear twice in chapters about David. First, an Amalekite man arrived from battle bearing Saul's crown, whom he has killed, and gave it to David.³⁹⁰ Later, David took the crown from the head of the King of Rabbah after defeating him and placed it on his own head.³⁹¹ In both of these examples, crowns are clearly a sign that power has been

³⁸⁵ 1 Samuel 10, 1.

³⁸⁶ 1 Samuel 10, 9.

³⁸⁷ 1 Samuel 16, 1-3.

³⁸⁸ 1 Samuel 16, 13. It is interesting to note, however, that Saul carries on as King without God's spirit or blessing. This suggests that the act of anointing is constitutive of divine spirit and selection but may not immediately confer temporal status and authority.

³⁸⁹ C. Walter, 'The significance of unction in Byzantine iconography' in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2.1, (1976), pp 53-73. Walter noted that public acts of anointing were not portrayed until the eleventh-century.

³⁹⁰ 2 Samuel 1, 10. Another verse in Samuel suggests that Saul killed himself.

³⁹¹ 2 Samuel 12, 30.

transferred, but the act of putting on the crown is not the constitutive act. David did not become King when the crown was put on his head. Rather, the act of putting on the crown signified that power had become his. It is striking that nowhere in the Old Testament does Saul crown David. Indeed, the scene of David being crowned appears to be without precedent in Byzantine art.³⁹²

There can be no doubt that David was meant to represent the emperor, for he is dressed in imperial costume. Brubaker concluded that coronation was particularly significant to Basil.³⁹³ This may have been the case but could be an overly narrow interpretation of the casket's imagery. Instead, these three scenes when considered together - Christ's blessing of the imperial couple, David's anointing and then crowning - demonstrate a strong emphasis on imperial power deriving from divine selection. The repetition of this idea in different visual form demonstrates that divine selection was almost certainly the crucial element of Basil's justification for his seizure of power from Michael III and the main source of his legitimacy.

The evidence shows that Basil took an interest in the act of anointing, which may have evolved from rhetoric into ritual during his reign. Although anointing was part of Western ceremony in the eighth-century, it has usually been seen as being purely rhetorical in Byzantium.³⁹⁴ Anointing features in sermons by Photios, such as a homily from 864, in which he argued that the emperor was anointed from birth to rule over his people.³⁹⁵ A text from the eighth-century *Euchologion*, a liturgical compilation which was read at Pentecost, also asked God to anoint the

³⁹² Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 186.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, pp 158-162.

³⁹⁴ J. Nelson *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1986), p 271. D. Nicol 'Kaiseralbung: The unction of emperors in late Byzantine coronation ritual' in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2, (1976), pp 37-52.

³⁹⁵ Homily 10. Edited by P. Lambeck, *CSHB*, (Bonn, 1843), pp 194-202. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 189.

emperor with the oil of gladness, a prayer for success.³⁹⁶ Both of these references appear to be metaphorical descriptions and not descriptions of any actual ritual. Most scholars have concluded that anointing did not feature in Byzantine ritual.³⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Basil was sufficiently interested in anointing to ask Photios for information about it.³⁹⁸

Significantly, perhaps, one section of the *Book of Ceremonies* described a ritual which has been interpreted as an anointing ceremony for Leo.³⁹⁹ This reports that ‘under the emperor Basil of blessed memory, the cutting of the hair of his son Leo the Christ-loving ruler, took place....recipients of the hair of the imperial child were Leo the patrician and strategos of the Anatolikoi, the Krateros and the strategos of the theme of Kappadokia and the tourmarchai and merarchai and all the rest of the thematic archons of the said themes, along with the droungarioi and kometes’.⁴⁰⁰ Vogt initially interpreted this as an act of tonsuring, designed to bar Leo from the throne.⁴⁰¹ However, he revised his opinion and later suggested that it was a kind of anointing.⁴⁰² The incident itself is hard to reconstruct but the gift of imperial hair to the aristocratic families suggests that this was a ceremony intended to mark a stage in Leo’s path to power, possibly associated with his appointment as junior emperor. The scene is suggestive of an attempt to convey the idea of selection or anointing.

³⁹⁶ *Euchologion*, quoted in Corrigan ‘The ivory sceptre of Leo VI,’ p 410.

³⁹⁷ Walter, ‘The significance of unction.’

³⁹⁸ Magdalino, ‘Nea Ekklesia,’ p 58.

³⁹⁹ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 2, Chapter 23, p 622.

⁴⁰⁰ ἐπὶ δὲ Βασιλείου τοῦ υἱοιδίμον βασιλέως γέγονε τὸ κούρενμα Λέοντος τοῦ φιλοχρίστου δεσπότη καὶ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ οὕτως....ἀνάδοχοι δὲ τῶν τριχῶν τοῦ βασιλικοῦ παιδὸς γεγόνασιν ὁ τε πατρίκιος Λέων καὶ στρατηγὸς τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν ὁ κρατερὸς καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς Καππαδοχίας καὶ οἱ τουρμῦρκαὶ καὶ μεράκαὶ καὶ οἱ λοιμοὶ πάντες θεματικοὶ ὕρχοντες τῶν αὐτῶν θεμύτων μετὰ καὶ τῶν δρουγγαροχομήτων. *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 2, Chapter 23, lines 1-11. Translated by Moffatt and Tall.

⁴⁰¹ Vogt, *Basile 1er*, p 59.

⁴⁰² A. Vogt, ‘La jeunesse de Léon VI le sage’ in *Revue Historique*, 174 (1934), pp 397-399.

Why might anointing have been of such interest to Basil? Two aspects of the Old Testament seem especially important here. First, the idea of anointing reflected the reality of divine blessing. It was a sign visible to others that God has chosen who should rule. Second, the divine selection involved in being anointed king seemed to offer some protection against being overthrown. David repeatedly refused to harm Saul because he was ‘the Lord’s anointed’.⁴⁰³ Later, David was angry that Saul had been killed and executed his murderer.⁴⁰⁴ The effect of divine favour, visible in the idea of being anointed, would have been a form both of self-promotion and self-protection. Yet such divine authority could be withdrawn as well as bestowed. Saul had been anointed king and yet lost divine favour. David nearly lost the divine blessing. Indeed, Photios argued that only repentance allowed David to be again deemed worthy.⁴⁰⁵ The image of anointing was therefore double-edged. Whilst it conveyed divine authority, it also justified the removal from power of emperors without divine blessing, like Michael III.

The nature of anointing raises questions about who had the power to bestow divine blessing, or remove it from an impious emperor. The Bible was ambivalent about this. On the one hand, Biblical kings could themselves anoint their successors: David, the prophet-King, ordered Solomon to be anointed by Zadok the Priest and Nathan the prophet, suggesting that the senior emperor was the ultimate authority.⁴⁰⁶ David indicated clearly that it was he who made the decision: ‘I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah’.⁴⁰⁷ Zadok performs the act on his instructions.⁴⁰⁸ Nevertheless, there were other occasions when a prophet granted or withdrew divine power: Samuel the prophet anointed

⁴⁰³ 1 Samuel 24, 6 and 1 Samuel 26, 9-11.

⁴⁰⁴ 2 Samuel 1, 10.

⁴⁰⁵ Homily 1. Edited by S. Aristarches in *‘Εκκλησιαστική ἀλήθεια Series I, Vol II*, (Istanbul, 1881-82), pp 407-416. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 50.

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Kings 1, 34.

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Kings 1, 35.

⁴⁰⁸ 1 Kings 1, 39.

Saul and later withdrew the gift and anointed David instead, offering a parallel with the patriarch.

The fact that the David Casket includes scenes of blessing, anointing and crowning suggests that there was no settled artistic tradition through which to represent the divine selection and legitimacy of an emperor. The iconography appears to be an example of how artists might experiment in order to articulate visually ideas which were present in imperial rhetoric. It seems likely that the object was commissioned by the aristocratic couple as a visual demonstration of their loyalty to the new emperor.

The Image of Crowning in the Paris Gregory

Another important work of art dating from Basil's reign is the Paris Gregory (BN Gr 510). Like the David Casket, this manuscript contains an image of the anointing of David (PLATE 3).⁴⁰⁹ However, there is also a prominent new image of Basil being crowned by the Archangel Gabriel, while the prophet Elijah hands him a labarum (PLATE 1).⁴¹⁰ All three figures stand on a platform, with Basil in the central position. In his left hand Gabriel holds the orb, symbol of Basil's dominion.

The appearance of Gabriel is striking. Gabriel was the herald of Jesus' birth and his selection for this image demonstrates that the patron of the work was also looking forward. Basil's accession was a sign of good times to come. This idea is echoed in the inscription, which reads 'Elijah promises victory over [Basil's] enemies. But Gabriel, having predicted joy, crowns you Basil, governor of the

⁴⁰⁹ Folio 174v.

⁴¹⁰ Folio Cv.

cosmos'.⁴¹¹ Both of the Biblical figures were offering predictions for the future, the one for military success, the other good deeds, together they validated the choice of Basil as emperor. This idea might have been even more striking if the original draft had been retained. For an underdrawing on folio Bv, a jewelled cross, reveals what appears to be a preliminary sketch for the crowning of Basil now surviving on folio Cv.⁴¹² In this depiction, both Gabriel and Elijah hold the crown over Basil's head, an image which appears to convey twice as much heavenly authority in the act of recognition.⁴¹³ Kalavrezou-Maxeiner believes the sketch was abandoned for artistic and iconographic reasons, the heads being too small and the labarum being preferred to the double crowning. The change may have been made for artistic or political reasons: the inclusion of the labarum may have referred to Basil's military successes, which could now be added as further proof of the emperor's divine blessing.

It is difficult to find parallels for this image of heavenly crowning in any earlier iconography, whether Roman, Biblical or Byzantine. Images of emperors being crowned had been seen before but no equivalent images have survived from the 300 years before the Paris Gregory.⁴¹⁴ Images of an emperor and empress apparently being blessed by Christ and Mary are known from an altar cloth in Hagia Sophia, described by Paul Silentarius in the sixth-century.⁴¹⁵ The David Casket, as has already been observed, featured an image of David being crowned. There were precedents in ancient art: examples include a muse

⁴¹¹ ΕΜΦΑΝΩΣ ΝΙΚΗΝ ΚΑΤΕΧΘΡΩΝ ΗΛΙΑΣ ΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΕΙ Ο ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ ΔΕ ΤΗΝ ΧΑΡΑΝ ΠΡΟΜΗΝΥΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΕ ΣΤΕΦΕΙ ΣΕ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ ΠΡΟСТАΤΗΝ. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'Portraits of Basil I', p 22 n13. Translated by Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 158.

⁴¹² I. Spatharakis, 'The Portraits and the Date of the Codex Par. Gr. 510' in *Cahiers Archeologiques* 23, (1974), pp 97-105, suggested the image represented the crowning of Basil's son Constantine but this was rejected by I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'Portraits of Basil I in Paris Gr 510' in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* (1978), pp 19-24 who observed that the figure was shown bearded, which Constantine never was and that it is unlikely that Constantine would appear before Basil in the ordering of the pages.

⁴¹³ Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 'Portraits of Basil'

⁴¹⁴ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116.

⁴¹⁵ Paulus Silentarius, edited by P. Friedlander, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentarius* (Leipzig, 1912). Mango, *Art of Byzantine Empire*, p 89.

crowning Apollo and a personification of the senate crowning Vespasian, yet there is no reason to think these images would have been known to Basil's artists.⁴¹⁶ The crown itself has a long artistic tradition in Rome but tended to represent achievement more than imperial status. In ancient Rome, there was a difference between the treatment of the crown and the diadem.⁴¹⁷ The diadem or circular band was seen as a symbol of sovereignty and was for that reason avoided in much Roman art. The crown, however, or a laurel worked in metal, was regarded as a reward for a feat of some kind, possibly a triumph in battle, and this was more often depicted. The two elements - diadem and crown - were brought together by Constantine, and both crowns and diadems are found in early Byzantine imperial art. It seems unlikely that these ancient examples would have been an influence in the ninth-century. Yet it is clear that just as in Roman times, crowns were used in Byzantium in more contexts than just coronations. Basil was reported to have received a 'crown' publicly during his triumph of 879, after defeating the Germanica and Adata and capturing Tefrike.⁴¹⁸ It seems important not to assume, therefore, that scenes of an emperor being crowned are the same as coronations. An image might have been intended to represent a coronation or some other form of recognition, such as military success.

Looking beyond the image of Basil being crowned by Gabriel, it is clear that the artists who created the Paris Gregory do appear to have drawn on what happened in actual Byzantine ceremonies. The crowning of one emperor by another, for example, was mirrored in another miniature from the Paris Gregory about the life of Joseph, in which the pharaoh leans forward from his throne and places the purple imperial robe around Joseph's shoulders.⁴¹⁹ Brubaker observed that this

⁴¹⁶ Walter 'Significance of Unction'

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid* .

⁴¹⁸ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p 154.

⁴¹⁹ Folio 69v.

scene appears to match the promotion of a senior figure to the rank of Caesar.⁴²⁰ The *Sacra Parallela* (Paris Gr 923), which also dates to the latter ninth-century, depicts the elevation of Joseph as the coronation of a co-emperor, in which the pharaoh himself places a crown on Joseph's head.⁴²¹ It is intriguing to observe that imperial iconography from this period depicts a number of different agents of crowning. Sometimes this is performed by a religious figure, as when Samuel crowns David (in the David Casket) or when Gabriel crowns Basil. Sometimes, it is performed by an imperial figure, as when the pharaoh elevates Joseph (in the Paris Gregory) or crowns him (the *Sacra Parallela*). It appears that artists were not able to draw on any settled tradition in their depictions of crowning.

Was Grabar correct to see this crowning motif as a reflection of a growing ecclesiastical influence over the visual representation of the coronation ceremony?⁴²² In reality, the act of coronation was usually performed by the senior emperor and not the patriarch. Basil himself had been crowned by Michael III. This was a heavily stage-managed affair in the wake of Caesar Bardas' murder, with Michael very much the kingmaker. The majority of the chroniclers report that Michael crowned Basil himself, after Photios as patriarch had blessed the crown, announcing that this was in recognition of Basil's loyalty and his part in protecting the emperor's life.⁴²³ According to the later *Book of Ceremonies*, the patriarch would have blessed the chlamys and the crown, before giving them to the senior emperor who in turn clothed the new co-emperor in the robe and

⁴²⁰ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 175 n135.

⁴²¹ Folio 12r.

⁴²² Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116

⁴²³ George Cont PG 110, 1061 (832:12 - 833: 1-6); Leo Grammaticus PG 108, 1077-1080 (246). Symeon Magister XLIII, 741. George Cont reported that Photios crowned Michael, who in turn crowned Basil. Leo Grammaticus reported that Photios gave the crown to Michael, who then crowned Basil. Symeon, however, reported that Photios took the crown from Michael's head and crowned Basil. It is interesting to note that the chroniclers closely match the ceremony set out in the *Book of Ceremonies*. However, they were composed at a similar time at Constantine VII's court, so may not be a reliable guide to the events of 866. Ritual seems to have been quite fluid in the ninth and tenth-centuries. M. McCormick 'Analysing imperial ceremonies' in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 35, (1985), pp 1-20.

placed the crown upon his head.⁴²⁴ Here, the role of the patriarch seems to have been to bless the symbols of power; the role of the senior emperor was to confer them. It was only in cases where there was no senior emperor that the patriarch was to put the crown on the new emperor's head.⁴²⁵ The crowning of a junior emperor by a senior emperor was a more common practice than the crowning of a new emperor by the patriarch.

For the early Macedonians, the practice of coronation always involved a senior emperor: Basil was crowned by Michael; Leo and Alexander were crowned by Basil; Leo in turn crowned his son Constantine.⁴²⁶ Crucially, however, the appearance of images of crowning as a motif in imperial art occurred at a period in which artists could not depict the reality of imperial coronation ceremony. For Michael could not be depicted to express Basil's legitimacy. Michael had been murdered by Basil a few months after Basil's coronation and whatever the reality of Michael's personal rule, whether or not his ill reputation was deserved by his conduct as emperor, Basil's court propaganda deliberately set out to undermine

⁴²⁴ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 38, p 194.

⁴²⁵ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 38, p 193.

⁴²⁶ It seems probable that Basil was not crowned again when he became sole emperor in 867. Most chronicles suggest there was a thanksgiving service instead, although Genesios says that Basil was crowned (Genesios Book 4, Chapter 29, p100). Magdalino has supported that view, reporting that Ignatios crowned Basil: P. Magdalino 'Basil I, Leo VI and the Feast of the Prophet Elijah' in *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 38 (1988) p 194. This seems unlikely. Michael III was murdered on the night of 23 September 867, after which Photios resigned or was dismissed. Ignatios was not installed as patriarch until as late as 23 November 867, two months after the coup (Kazhdan, *ODB*, pp 1669). The *Vita Basilii* noted that Basil staged a procession through Constantinople as one of his very first acts once he had become sole ruler, distributing 'vast sums' from his own wealth (χρήματα πολλά *Vita Basilii* 29, pp112-113). It seems likely that this would have happened quite quickly as a physical demonstration of Basil's authority and if so, Ignatios may not yet have been appointed patriarch. Admittedly, a ceremony could have taken place after Ignatios' accession in late November but that could not have been one of Basil's first acts and it is hard to see why such an occasion would be missing in most chroniclers' accounts. It seems likely to me that Basil would have moved fast to demonstrate his grip on power and he had no need to wait for Ignatios. Basil had already been crowned co-emperor the year before by Michael, so no new ceremony was necessary.

his predecessor's reputation.⁴²⁷ This fact necessitated a symbolic representation of the act of crowning, partly because a realistic representation was politically impossible and partly because a heavenly crowning was politically desirable. As a result, Basil was shown crowned by an angel. The image of crowning developed in a way which did not match reality. The image Grabar associated with the draining of imperial power towards the patriarchate was born of necessity.

This political reality was implied by Leo, in his homily for his father. There, Leo indicated that although another unnamed emperor 'in those days held the sceptre,' it was Basil who had been selected by God to 'arrive at the imperial office'.⁴²⁸ These words demonstrate that whereas direct imperial lineage could be important in legitimising an accession, ultimately divine selection was ultimately more important. Intriguingly, therefore, the iconography of crowning developed in such a way that it excluded representation of the role of the senior emperor in performing that ceremony. Therefore, whilst Biblical scenes of David and Joseph on the David Casket and Paris Gregory show what look like Byzantine coronation ceremonies, the scenes involving Basil do not. In the Paris Gregory, instead, Gabriel plays the part which would in practice have been undertaken by the senior emperor.

The depiction of the emperor crowning his successor was, in the final analysis, a route not taken in imperial art. Under different circumstances, the image of a senior emperor crowning a junior emperor may have emerged in imperial iconography. The crowning image by a heavenly figure was a powerful depiction

⁴²⁷ Whether Michael's bad reputation was deserved is a matter of debate. Surviving sources depict him an increasingly volatile drunkard. Traditional interpretations including Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, pp 153-167 and Treadgold, *Byzantine State*, pp 450-455 suggest that the chronicles were a fair reflection of Michael's character. Re-evaluations of Michael's reputation have been published by Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp 217-232 and E. Kislinger, *Michael III - Image und Realitat*, EOS 75, (1987), pp 389-400, who both argue that Michael was the victim of Basil's propaganda.

⁴²⁸ 'Ἐρχεται δὴ ὅσα γε τὸ ἀνθρώπινον πρὸς τὸν κατ'ἐκείνο καιροῦ κρατοῦντα τῶν σχήπτρων, ὑπὸ τῆς περὶ ταῦτα φήμης ἀνενεχθεῖς, τὸ δ'ἀληθὲς ὑπο τοῦ πάντα προ γενέσεως διατάξαντος ἤδη ἐπὶ τὴν βασιλείαν προσάγεται, ἵνα μηκέτι ἀνὴρ ἐν ἰδιώτῃ βασιλικῶς διαπρέτων βίῳ ἐτέροις ἐπιτηδεύμασιν, ἀλλὰ βασιλικοῖς διαβιώῃ. Vogt and Hausherr, 'Funeral Oration' p 50.

of divine selection and blessing, which was the underlying reality for the Byzantines. But it also acted as a reminder that divine blessing was usually mediated: in this case by Gabriel, on earth by the patriarch. The inclusion of a spiritual intermediary in the visual expression of Basil's authority demonstrated that the emperor was dependent on the patriarch for confirmation of his legitimate power. The imagery of crowning created room for some to argue, as Photios did in the *Epanogoge*, that the patriarch and emperor were partners in power. Over time, the mediation of a heavenly figure in artistic images of imperial authority may have helped give the patriarch a symbolic role he did not actually often play. In later centuries the patriarch himself was shown crowning the emperor.⁴²⁹

This conclusion does not necessarily support Grabar's contention that imperial art became dominated by religious ideas and concerns. Over the long term, it is true that the coronation ceremony itself became increasingly religious over time.⁴³⁰ Yet the crowning image is more nuanced and multi-faceted than Grabar's hypothesis allows. The motif reflects Basil's need for his patriarch's support, to demonstrate his divine blessing. Photios, of course, also engineered Basil's lineage, the other potential source of imperial authority.⁴³¹ The crowning image was more a product of the political realities of the 870s than it was a reflection of longer term trends in the relationship between church and throne.

⁴²⁹ For example a miniature in Skylitzes Matritensis dating from second half of eleventh-century, depicting Constantine VII crowned by the patriarch. The young Constantine would in fact have been crowned by his father Leo VI. Grabar, *L'Empereur*, Plate XXVII, 2.

⁴³⁰ In the fourth-century, coronation appears to have been largely a military ceremony but this evolved into a double coronation with both civil and military elements. Over time, the civil element of the ceremony came to the fore, with the coronation performed either by the senior emperor or by the patriarch. Grabar argued that, during the ninth-century, the coronation ceremony became definitively fixed as an ecclesiastical ceremony presided over by the patriarch, just at the time that the iconographic image of coronation appeared. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, pp 245-246. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, p 262. Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 113.

⁴³¹ For Photios' construction of Basil's lineage, see Nicetus David, *Life of Ignatius*, p 119.

The image of heavenly crowning, as it first appeared under Basil, therefore implicitly acknowledged the power of the patriarchate to acknowledge (or withhold recognition for) the emperor's divine blessing and legitimacy. On one level, this might have strengthened perceptions of the power of the patriarch. Yet there is another, more personal, dimension of this image. One of the unusual aspects of the manuscript is the fact that it was probably given by Photios to Basil.⁴³² As established earlier, Photios was probably the patriarch who crowned Basil in 866 and either resigned or was dismissed as patriarch in 867 when he criticised Michael III's murder.⁴³³ It is conceivable, therefore, that the imagery also reflects something of the reality of Photios and Basil's personal and political relationship. As a private gift from patriarch to emperor, could either or both parties have read more into the imagery than first meets the eye?

At the surface level, the crowning image is a clear and unambiguous depiction of imperial power. Iconographically, the overall effect of the design is to summarise the various elements of imperial legitimacy seen on the David Casket - selection, crowning and acclamation - into a single, powerful gesture of divine approval. The image appears to demonstrate a degree of sophistication in imperial propaganda. By showing Basil crowned by Gabriel, the image clearly implies that Christ is the origin of Basil's power, with the angel acting as his intermediary. For Basil, the image - if he contemplated it - may have been perfectly in keeping with his own attempts to damn the memory of Michael 'the Drunkard' and give legitimacy and justification to his own seizure of power. Here was the patriarch, the man who so lavishly praised Michael, showing that Basil was emperor by gift of God. The *Book of Ceremonies* says explicitly in its section on coronations that God was the ultimate source of the emperor's crown: the emperor is described as being crowned by god.⁴³⁴ Here we have a visual equivalent of this idea. The image strongly suggests that the intention was to emphasise Basil's legitimacy. If

⁴³² See Introduction, p 31.

⁴³³ See Introduction, p 24, n 117.

⁴³⁴ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 1, Chapter 38, p 195

the manuscript was a private gift from Photios to Basil, it may not have been intended to persuade others. On the face of it, the image is an unambiguous acceptance by Photios of Basil's legitimacy as emperor.

This would have represented a significant about-face by the patriarch. Photios was a relative of Michael and owed his promotion to the rank of patriarch to Michael.⁴³⁵ Photios had also praised Michael's piety and rule just weeks before the senior emperor's murder in 867. In a homily, Photios celebrated Michael's feats in war and restoration of church buildings.⁴³⁶ According to one of the chroniclers, Photios was dismissed as patriarch because he denied Basil communion after the murder.⁴³⁷ Yet although the image was a clear representation of Basil's legitimacy, it was not an unambiguous depiction of imperial power. For the image was also, at one and the same time, an articulation of the reality that divine favour comes from God, is mediated by God's representative on earth and can be withdrawn as well as bestowed.

In fact, Photios may have understood the imagery of heavenly crowning in the Paris Gregory to depict the restoration of divine blessing after repentance and may well have seen himself in the role played by Elijah. Basil himself may not have altogether resisted the idea of repentance. After all, he certainly acknowledged the need for repentance in his introductory comments to the eighth Ecumenical Council.⁴³⁸ Furthermore, Basil was attracted to Biblical prophets, such as Elijah, who the *Vita Basilii* claimed had predicted Basil's rise to power.⁴³⁹ Elijah was a prophet known for his confrontations with kings who

⁴³⁵ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 32.

⁴³⁶ Homily 18. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, pp 306-315.

⁴³⁷ George Cont 841.

⁴³⁸ Mansi XVI, col 94, 356

⁴³⁹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 8. P. Magdalino, 'Basil I, Leo VI and the feast of the prophet Elijah' in *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 38, (1988), pp 193-196.

strayed from orthodoxy: his curse upon Ahab; his confrontation with Ahaziah.⁴⁴⁰ Here was a prophet who acted as a guide and judge of kings.

The crowning image in the Paris Gregory can therefore be read on a number of levels. Politically, it was a powerful sign of Basil's legitimacy and an indication of future achievements. Personally, it would have demonstrated Photios' recognition of Basil's legitimacy, something the patriarch may have challenged in 867. However, the image also implicitly established a key role for the patriarch in legitimising imperial authority. It is also possible that the imagery denoted Basil's repentance and his acceptance of Photios' spiritual guidance. These power dynamics between emperor and patriarch are considered more extensively in Chapter 5.

Over the long-term, it is possible that Basil's imperial iconography and its adoption by his successors contributed towards a gradual change in Byzantines attitudes towards the throne. Although the crown was in theory elective, over time the idea of inheritance came increasingly to be accepted. A number of factors influenced this shift. Emperors deliberately promoted sons as chosen heirs.⁴⁴¹ Hill, James and Smythe have highlighted the role played by the empress as a renewer of power.⁴⁴² It seems that propaganda might have played a part too. Over time, imperial imagery helped the early Macedonians convey the idea that their dynasty was chosen and blessed by God. This idea was powerfully expressed in the motif of an emperor crowned by a heavenly figure, which first appeared in Basil's reign and was assimilated into official art by Alexander.

⁴⁴⁰ Kings.

⁴⁴¹ A phenomenon explored in Chapter 4.

⁴⁴² B. Hill, L. James and D. Smythe 'Zoe: the rhythm method of imperial renewal' in Magdalino, *New Constantines*, pp 215-229.

Innovation Under Leo

Many aspects of Basil's iconography can also be seen in the imperial art of his son and successor Leo. A cameo survives depicting Christ blessing Leo.⁴⁴³ Leo was also depicted with a crown and a holy figure, in an ivory ceremonial sceptre, now in Berlin. In this case, the heavenly figure was Mary. There was an important difference in design, however, Rather than crowning Leo, Mary was depicted placing a jewel or pearl into Leo's crown. In the introduction, I suggested that the imagery was not about conferring power but instead about the quality of Leo's rule and the nature of the emperor's authority. As such, the image will be explored in Chapter 5.

The association between Leo and Mary was, however, probably the most striking aspect of Leo's iconography. He was the first emperor to depict Mary on his coins, one of a number of iconographic changes from Basil's reign. His coin iconography also exhibits subtle adaptations and innovations. Table 3 sets out the iconography of Leo's coinage and Table 4 does the same for Leo's seals. It should be noted that historians have not been able precisely to date Leo's coin featuring Mary. It is extremely rare and was almost certainly minted for a special occasion rather than wide circulation. Grierson believed that it was likely to belong to the later years of the reign.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, pp 174-175. See p 37.

⁴⁴⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 509.

TABLE 3 *Iconography of Leo VI's Coins*

Format	Year	Obverse	Reverse
Gold Class I	Date uncertain, believed to be late in reign.	Virgin Orans <i>MARIA</i>	Leo with long beard in chlamys. Holding globus with cross <i>bASILEYS ROMWN</i> One version has <i>EN CRISTO</i> inscription
Gold Class II	908-912	Christ enthroned, giving blessing and holding book	Leo and Constantine, each in loros, holding patriarchal cross between them. Constantine holds globus <i>AVGG ROM</i>
Silver Class I	886-908	Leo <i>bASILEVS RWMAIWN</i> <i>εν χω EvSEBHS</i> Abbasid globules	Cross potent <i>Globus</i>
Silver Class II	908-912	Leo and Constantine <i>bASIL ROM</i> <i>εν χω EvSEBHS</i> Abbasid globules	Stepped cross <i>Globus</i>
Copper Class I	886-912	Leo enthroned, in <i>loros</i> , holding labarum	<i>εν θεο bASILEVS ROMEON</i>
Copper Class II	886-912	Leo (bearded) and Alexander (beardless), holding labarum between them, each in <i>loros</i> , Alexander holding <i>akakia</i>	<i>bASIL ROMEON</i>
Copper Half follis	886-912	Leo (bearded) and Alexander (beardless), holding labarum between them, each in <i>loros</i> , Alexander holding <i>akaki</i>	<i>bASIL ROMEON</i>
Copper Class III	886 - 912	Bust of Leo in <i>chlamys</i> , holding <i>akakia</i> .	<i>bASILEVS ROMEON</i>

TABLE 4 Iconography of Leo's Seals

<i>Type</i>	<i>Obverse</i>	<i>Reverse</i>
A. Rare (2 examples)	Christ	Leo (loros) and Alexander (chlamys) holding decorated labarum
B. Rare (1 example)	Archangel Michael holding sword and globes	Leo (loros) and Alexander (chlamys) holding decorated labarum

Table 3 suggests that Leo took little interest in his imagery in the first part of his reign. The only coins Leo issued were copper (assuming that the ceremonial coin featuring Mary is of a later date) suggesting that he must have been content to allow his father's gold coins, which probably featured his dead brother Constantine, to continue in circulation. The iconographic innovation probably therefore occurred after the birth of his son, Constantine, in 908. The depiction of Mary on a gold coin (Figure 5a) was the first time this had taken place in Byzantine history.⁴⁴⁵ It is believed that the figure of Mary depicted on Leo's coin was based on the icon of the Virgin Orans, kept in the Church of St. Mary of Blachernae in Constantinople, which also contained the Veil of the Virgin as a relic.⁴⁴⁶ The Virgin was known by Byzantines as the defender of Constantinople. This icon of the Virgin was believed to have protected Constantinople against the Arab siege of 717-718 and the Rus invasion of 864.⁴⁴⁷ The city was again regularly threatened during Leo's reign, first by the Bulgars who reached the walls of Constantinople in 896 and then by the Arabs in 904 who went on to sack Thessalonike.⁴⁴⁸ The Rus also returned to the walls of Constantinople in 907 and 911.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p 508.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p 508; Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 169.

⁴⁴⁷ Georgios Monachos, PG 109, 888 D.

⁴⁴⁸ Tougher, *Leo VI*, pp 178-187

Mary's role as the city's protector may itself have been the reason for the depiction of Mary on this coin. Leo certainly sought more widely to associate his rule with Mary, for example by dedicating a number of homilies to her.⁴⁴⁹ Mary also appears on an ivory sceptre, where she was depicted adding a jewel to Leo's crown (an image which will be discussed in Chapter 5). This iconography contrasts with Basil I, who had tended to use Old Testament figures. In fact there is perhaps surprisingly little evidence that Basil I sought to associate his rule with the Virgin. Although he may have restored the shrine at Pêgê after the earthquake of 869, there was nothing in his programme of buildings and renovations to suggest a strong or deliberate link with the cult of the Theotokos.⁴⁵⁰ The choice of Mary might reflect an important difference between Leo and his father. For Leo was not himself a campaigning emperor.⁴⁵¹ Unlike Basil, he never led an army or took the field of battle.⁴⁵² Mary may have appealed to Leo because she protected the city through her personal piety and relationship with God. The adoption of the Virgin on Leo's coins may have implied that the emperor was defending the city through his piety and character, just like the Virgin.

The association with the Virgin may have also had a personal dimension, as Mary's role as mother of Christ would have made her sympathetic to Leo's prayers for a son and heir. By the 900s, Leo still did not have a male heir who

⁴⁴⁹ Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 162 - 172. Antonopoulou points out that these were highly abstract, lacking much narrative.

⁴⁵⁰ Grierson suggested that Leo might have struck the gold coin featuring Mary to mark the completion of a shrine to the Virgin begun by Basil. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 509. Basil and Leo's building activity is explored in Chapter 3.

⁴⁵¹ S. Tougher 'The imperial thought-world of Leo VI, the non-campaigning emperor of the Ninth-Century' in Brubaker (ed), *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, pp 51-60.

⁴⁵² Leo nevertheless took an interest in the tactics of war and published a manual offering advice to his generals.

could succeed him.⁴⁵³ Both Leo's first and fourth wives had a personal association with Mary. Theophano, his first wife, was often linked to the Virgin by contemporaries and died at Blachernae, by the shrine dedicated to the Virgin.⁴⁵⁴ A poem dedicated to Theophano compared the empress' philanthropy with Mary's.⁴⁵⁵ Leo's fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina had an even stronger association with Mary, who may have cured her infertility.⁴⁵⁶ A tenth-century story reported that Zoe became pregnant with the future Constantine VII after wearing a girdle of silk that had been measured around the icon of the Virgin in the crypt of the church of the Theotokos at Chalkoprateia, in the Copper Market district of the city.⁴⁵⁷ Leo is known to have embellished that church with mosaics and frescoes and he also built or restored the chapel of St Anne, another saint associated with childbearing.⁴⁵⁸ Constantine was eventually born in 905.

It seems most likely that the coin depicting Mary was issued after Constantine's elevation to junior emperor in 908 as a thanksgiving for her intercession in the conception of a son. This would have been an appropriate occasion on which to mint a ceremonial coin and the rarity of this solidus suggests that it was never minted for wider circulation. After all the struggles Leo had undergone to produce a male heir, his prime political goal, the appearance of the Virgin on this coin may have been a highly personal act of piety, relief and triumph. This idea is strengthened by the later appearance of the Virgin in a gold coin issued by Zoe

⁴⁵³ Leo had a daughter, Eudokia, with his first wife Theophano.

⁴⁵⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 509.

⁴⁵⁵ N. Koutrakou 'Use and abuse of the image of the Theotokos in the political life of Byzantium in M. Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God* (2005), pp 77-90.

⁴⁵⁶ B. Pitarakis 'Female Piety in Context: understanding developments in private devotional practices' in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, pp 152-166.

⁴⁵⁷ This story has survived from a tenth-century source, published in *Acta Sanctorum Novembris* III 885E. Alternative accounts say that Zoe was cured of possession: *Menalogos* of Basil, PG 98, 613 AB; *Synaxarion of Constantinople* CP, 936 l20.

⁴⁵⁸ PG 109 161A. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, pp 42, 248.

and Constantine in 914, suggesting that there was indeed a deep family devotion to the Theotokos and her role in securing Constantine's birth.

Leo differed from Basil in his use of other symbols of power. In contrast to Basil's emphatic claim to be the 'Emperor of Emperors', Leo used different, more spiritual titles. He called himself 'εὐσεβής' for example, meaning 'pious' and instead of being Emperor 'in God', which was traditional usage, Leo held the office 'in Christ' suggesting a personal devotion, that he had considered the meaning of the words and expressed ideas in his own way. The seal depicting St. Michael is especially interesting, given the fact that Basil had murdered Michael III. Basil had largely avoided associations with the archangel Michael. Leo had no reason to continue this policy. He reburied the body of Emperor Michael in Constantine's mausoleum at the Church of Holy Apostles.⁴⁵⁹ Leo may also have been behind the re-dedication of a chapel in Basil's New Church from Gabriel to Michael.⁴⁶⁰ The depiction of Michael on Leo's seals demonstrated that Leo was not associated with the acts of his father and may suggest that he was critical of his father's behaviour.

In terms of iconography, Leo's coins and seals are notable more for their differences than their similarities with those produced by his father. His coins included eastern-inspired designs, notably a ring of dots with a series of eight circles or 'globules' which Grierson believed were copied from a similar design on Abbasid dirhem.⁴⁶¹ This may have been an example of appropriation of a foreign sign of power as an expression of Byzantine hegemony.⁴⁶² Walker argued that Leo could have incorporated Moslem imagery into his iconography in order

⁴⁵⁹ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 62.

⁴⁶⁰ Magdalino 'Nea Ekklesia' p 56 n26

⁴⁶¹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 510.

⁴⁶² Walker, *Emperor and the World*.

to demonstrate the ecumenical nature of his power.⁴⁶³ If he did, however, the extent of foreign influence in Leo's iconography remained quite limited and the imitation may have been unconscious. The quality of the workmanship under Leo was also considerably better than it was under Basil, with more naturalistic effects for example in the depiction of crowns and clothing. Moreover, the signs Leo used seem to tell a different story. Basil was a physical presence, occupying the throne and defending the empire by force. Leo was a wise and pious ruler, whose close association with the Virgin Mary offered protection to city and empire.

Innovation Under Alexander

Despite their rarity, Alexander's coins are among the most fascinating produced by any Byzantine emperor. No copper coins have survived from the reign and there are only two specimens of miliaresion and about a dozen gold *solidi* (see Table 5 below).⁴⁶⁴ However, this handful of coins contains four significant iconographic innovations.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, p 76.

⁴⁶⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 523

TABLE 5: Iconography of Alexander's Coins

	Year	Obverse	Reverse
Gold Class I	912-913	Bust of Christ, in blessing, holding book	Bust of Alexander in chmalys and elaborate crown holding <i>globus</i> <i>AVGYSTOS ROM</i>
Gold Class II	912-913	Christ enthroned, in blessing, holding book	John the Baptist or St Alexander crowns emperor Alexander, in <i>loros</i> , who holds <i>globus</i> <i>AVGYSTOS ROM</i>
Silver	912-913	Cross potent with medallion containing bust of Christ. <i>Globus</i>	ΕΥ ΧΩ <i>AYTOCR</i> <i>EUSEb BASIL ROM</i>

TABLE 6 Iconography of Alexander's Seals

Type	Obverse	Reverse
Rare(1 damaged example)	Christ	Alexander (loros) 2nd figure holding labarum

Alexander was the first emperor to depict the image of a heavenly crowning or coronation on his coins. He was the first to show a saint or prophet on his coins other than Christ or Mary.⁴⁶⁵ He was the first to put the image of Christ in a medallion on a cross on the silver miliaresion. And he was the first emperor to use the title *Autokrator* on his coins.⁴⁶⁶ Not only that, but Alexander appeared determined to differentiate himself from Leo and declined to continue much at all of his father and brother's imagery. For example, he replaced the image of Christ enthroned, which had appeared on Basil and Leo's gold coins, with a bust

⁴⁶⁵ Although Basil depicted a Saint Basil on a seal. Neville, *Seals*, p 91.

⁴⁶⁶ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 523.

of Christ very similar to the one used by Michael III.⁴⁶⁷ This seems to have been a deliberate attempt to look different. Alexander did retain Leo's 'pious' title but included it in a wider list of attributes, including *Autokrator*.

A comparison between Tables 3 and 5 demonstrate that Alexander's accession to power was nothing like Leo's. Whilst Leo had been content to issue no gold coins until his son was born, 12 years into his reign, Alexander was energetic from the very start, issuing two different types of gold solidus and one type of silver miliaresions in thirteen months. By contrast, only one type of a seal has been catalogued from Alexander's reign and the surviving example is damaged (Table 6). Rather than displaying iconographic innovation, it appears to closely match the design of seals from previous reigns by depicting senior and junior emperors side by side, holding the labarum.

Images of imperial crowning by a heavenly figure were incorporated on the coinage for probably the first time under Alexander. Certainly the gold solidus issued by Alexander in 912 or 913 is the oldest surviving example of this motif. This coin shows Alexander being crowned by a bearded holy figure standing barefoot in a long tunic and holding a cross in his left hand (Figure 12b). The emperor is wearing the loros and holds a globus cruciger. The appearance of the crowning motifs on coins is important because it is the first surviving example from coinage and would have reflected the official public imagery of the emperor. Previous examples had been restricted to more intimate settings: the David Casket and Paris Gregory both probably gifts, the sceptre a ceremonial object that would have been visible to relatively few and only from close quarters. Gold coins, by contrast, would have been seen by many more of the elite. These were the coins Alexander would have presented to his senior officials at Easter, the context of his image in Hagia Sophia portrait (discussed in Chapter 1).

⁴⁶⁷ In Grierson's classification, Basil used type Ia and Leo used type Ib which were very similar. Alexander issued type VIIa, which was closer to the image of Christ used by Michael III, type Vc. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 152-153.



Figure 12a and b: Gold Solidus, Alexander, crowning image, Class II, 912-913
Obverse and Reverse, from a Private Collection.⁴⁶⁸
With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com

Some of the meaning behind the crowning motif would have been derived from the heavenly figure bestowing the crown. Basil had been shown with Elijah on the Paris Gregory and with Christ on the David Casket. Leo had been presented next to Mary on the ivory sceptre. The figure on Alexander's gold coin has been identified as either St. Alexander or as John the Baptist.⁴⁶⁹ If the figure is St. Alexander, the emperor would have been using his namesake, probably in order to emphasise his legitimacy. The Byzantines did have a special regard for homonymous saints, especially in the tenth and eleventh-centuries. Basil, for example, had used an image of St. Basil on one of his seals.⁴⁷⁰ But this does not appear to have been common. A study of seals has found that there was a low correspondence in offerings made by Byzantines to homonymous saints, suggesting that an individual's name bore little relation to their preference for

⁴⁶⁸ <http://www.sixbid.com/browse.html?auction=604&category=13642&lot=614280> (viewed August 2015).

⁴⁶⁹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116; Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 523; Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'Image du Pouvoir'

⁴⁷⁰ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, p 91.

any particular saint.⁴⁷¹ Even at the peak of the trend for homonymous saints, if lead seals are a reliable guide, only 17.3% of offerings followed this example and the vast majority were for a handful of common holy names. In a sample of 66 seals dedicated to Alexios, none were from a man of the same name. If Alexander had intended the image to depict St. Alexander, it would have been an unusual, self-promoting act.

It seems more likely that the figure represents a Biblical figure. Jolivet-Lévy argued that the image is more consistent iconographically with representations of John the Baptist.⁴⁷² The beard, bare feet and flowing robe are closer to other Byzantine images of Biblical figures like the Baptist than depictions of saints, who were more often shown in Byzantine dress. It is conceivable that the figure was Elijah, whose visual appearance was similar to John the Baptist, and who was sometimes called Elijah in the Bible.⁴⁷³ Nevertheless, there are no other examples of Leo or Alexander incorporating Elijah, a figure associated strongly with Basil, into their art and indeed Alexander broke with Basil's iconography in other aspects of his art, such as in the depiction of Christ. The figure seems most likely to be John the Baptist, which would have been a highly significant choice, suggesting a parallel was being drawn between the coronation of the emperor and the baptism of Christ. This would have had a strong prophetic quality, heralding the emperor as Christ's representative on earth. This was not unique in Macedonian art. Gabriel, another who prophesied Christ's coming, had been depicted crowning Basil in the Paris Gregory. Yet this was an image on a coin and not an illumination in a book of homilies and as such must have been intended as a powerful expression of imperial ideology.

⁴⁷¹ J. Cotsonis 'Onomastics, gender, office and images on Byzantine lead seals: a means of investigating personal piety' in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32 (2008), pp 11-12. Cotsonis found that the most frequent homonymous names were Demetrios, Maria, Nicholas, George, Michael and Theodore. These names were chosen by individuals with the same name in more than 30 per cent of surviving examples.

⁴⁷² Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'Image du Pouvoir' p 448.

⁴⁷³ Compare Elijah and the Baptist's appearance in 2 Kings 1:8 and Matthew 3:4 respectively. The Baptist is called Elijah in Matthew 11: 13-14.

Was this adaptation or innovation? Alexander may have known the crowning image from the Paris Gregory, which may have been a gift for Basil's sons, although that is far from certain that he did: the book appears to have been little used.⁴⁷⁴ Alexander may have created the image for his own purposes without sight of earlier examples. Whether he was innovator or adaptor, Alexander is likely to have played a prominent part in intruding the image into official imperial iconography. As such, he must have felt that legitimacy deriving from his anointing as emperor was more powerful than legitimacy from imperial lineage, an alternative source of power that was open to him as the son of Basil. There may have been doubts about the strength of the Macedonian Dynasty even in 912, over 40 years after Basil took power.

This was not the only way in which Alexander's imagery displayed signs of innovation. Alexander was the first emperor to use the title '*autokrator*' on his coins, which appeared on his silver miliarion (Figure 13b). *Autokrator* had been used since the eighth-century to denote the senior emperor.⁴⁷⁵ However, this title had not been used before on Byzantine coins. Basil and Leo tended to describe themselves as '*basileus*' when depicted alone or '*augusti*' when shown alongside their co-emperors. When Michael III overthrew his mother as regent and began sole rule, he used the term '*imperator*'. When Basil became his co-emperor in 866, he described himself as '*megas basileus*' to register his superiority, but not the title '*autokrator*'.⁴⁷⁶ *Autokrator* implied that there was no other emperor sharing the throne. Such circumstances should not have applied to Alexander, who was technically the senior emperor alongside his nephew Constantine VII. Precedent would have suggested he used the title '*basileus*' used for most senior emperors or possibly '*megas basileus*' but '*augusti*' would have been sufficient.

⁴⁷⁴ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*.

⁴⁷⁵ J. Sansterre 'A propos des titres d'Empereur et de Roi dans le Haut Moyen Age' in *Byzantion* 61, (1991), pp 15-43.

⁴⁷⁶ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 466.

Alexander, however, appears to have been bent on writing Constantine out of the picture. Alexander had been waiting for decades for the chance of power and had experienced many frustrations along the way. Now he was emperor, he may have wanted to throw off the shadow of his older brother and his nephew, who had kept him in the shade all his life.



*Figure 13a and b: Silver Miliaresion, Alexander, 912-913
Obverse and Reverse, Harvard Art Museums/ Arthur M Sackler Museum
Bequest of Thomas Whittemore. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.⁴⁷⁷*

Alexander also adapted the patriarchal cross on the same silver coin by adding a medallion with the image of Christ. This would have made it look more like the labarum, the military standard associated with Constantine, which often included a portrait of the emperor.⁴⁷⁸ The inscription around the cross reads 'Jesus Christ Victory'.⁴⁷⁹ This inscription drew on earlier representations of Constantine the Great's victory after his conversion to Christianity.⁴⁸⁰ This was a powerful statement by an emperor who had not been on campaign or earned a triumph. Grierson noted that silver coins were more likely to circulate beyond the

⁴⁷⁷ <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/75047> (viewed August 2015).

⁴⁷⁸ Future emperors would adapt Alexander's cross by putting their own image in the medallion, in place of Christ's.

⁴⁷⁹ Ιησυχρι στυχικα.

⁴⁸⁰ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, pp 32ff.

frontiers of Byzantium, giving them an element of religious propaganda.⁴⁸¹

Byzantium was threatened by both Arabs and Bulgars during his reign. The victory symbols on the coin may have been intended to present a confident imperial image abroad.

This degree of assertion is not as visible in the Hagia Sophia portrait of Alexander.⁴⁸² There, Alexander was depicted with traditional signs of power like the *akakia* and *globus cruciger*. The *globus* probably represented the orb of the world and was one of the most ubiquitous symbols of imperial power, even though the object may not have existed in reality or been used in any ceremony.⁴⁸³ There are suggestions that the *globus* designated secondary imperial status. In earlier centuries, the *globus* had usually been held by junior emperors yet this association seems to have broken down by the Macedonian period, when both senior and junior emperors were depicted holding it.⁴⁸⁴ The *globus* did not designate the very peak of power, as empresses and consorts were shown holding it too. Similarly, the *akakia* did not designate seniority. This had evolved from a *mappa* over the centuries and symbolised mortality and piety. Interestingly, it was strongly associated with the Amorian Dynasty and became much less common after 867.⁴⁸⁵ During the early Macedonian years, the *akakia* seems to have been associated with more junior figures. For example, there is a coin of Leo in which Alexander, as junior emperor, is shown with an *akakia*. It is possible that different signs of power were used in those very different contexts. The church was an appropriate setting to depict piety, for example, as symbolised by the *akakia*. However, it also seems fair to conclude that the greater innovation of the coin iconography shows that imperial intention was most quickly brought to

⁴⁸¹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 179.

⁴⁸² Discussed in Chapter 1.

⁴⁸³ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 131.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p 134.

fruition in coins and seals, works which originated in the Imperial Palace. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Hagia Sophia portrait was influenced by coin imagery, particularly in its use of cruciform monograms.⁴⁸⁶

The iconography of Alexander's coins demonstrate that he looked back further than his brother's reign for inspiration for his iconography. The bust of Christ on his gold coin was closer to Michael III's than to Leo's enthroned Christ. Basil had introduced the lyre-backed throne onto his coins, but it was crudely depicted in outline. Leo's coins added greater naturalism and sophistication into the image, showing jewels on the throne, a cushion behind the emperor. Alexander's moneyers undid all Leo's changes, reverting to the cruder throne image depicted by Basil. The very force of Alexander's accession to the throne can be detected from these few surviving coins. Creating a powerful image of coronation in his first gold coins was a strong personal statement of arrival and presence. Neither Basil nor Leo had ascended the throne with such force. The incorporation of the heavenly crowning motif onto coins for the first time maximised the propaganda effects of the most powerful imagery associated with the Macedonian Dynasty and shows that Alexander's approach to his iconography was bold and innovative. Although Basil wanted it to be known that his rule was prophesied by Elijah, it may have taken years before the claim was depicted in imagery.⁴⁸⁷ Alexander took the opportunity presented by earlier and slower iconographic innovation to present his crowning by heaven within a year of inheriting the throne. Relatively minor innovations on coin images had in the past led to protests.⁴⁸⁸ Alexander's innovations were numerous and significant, perhaps more in keeping with an emperor whose claim to power was disputed.⁴⁸⁹ The emperor who spent the

⁴⁸⁶ Teteriatnikov, 'Why is he hiding?'

⁴⁸⁷ Basil became sole emperor in 867 yet Elijah does not appear on surviving coins or seals. The Elijah crowning image in the Paris Gregory dates from 879.

⁴⁸⁸ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, p 3.

⁴⁸⁹ There are some parallels, for example, with Artavasdos (741/2 - 742/3), a usurper whose short reign saw three coin types issued. Penna and Morrisson 'Usurpers and Rebels'

shortest time on the throne, therefore, seems to have left the biggest impact on his coins. It seems likely that Alexander took a more proactive interest in visual propaganda than his father or brother. Furthermore, his political strategy led him to establish more differences with his Macedonian forebears than Basil had needed when he replaced the Amorian Dynasty.

Conclusions

Macedonian imperial iconography deserves its reputation for innovation. However, the nature of the innovation has sometimes been misunderstood. The evidence considered here supports Walker's view that imperial art was not static but developed through a pattern of covert innovation, appropriation and adaptation.⁴⁹⁰ Both longstanding signs of power, such as the cross and labarum, and new signs, like the Virgin and image of crowning, were used by emperors. Innovation was often associated with important moments in the reign. Basil's coins were most innovative shortly after his accession to sole rule in 867. Leo introduced the Virgin onto his coins after the birth of his son and may have intended to associate the arrival of an heir with the defence of Constantinople. Alexander's accession was marked by a burst of innovations in imperial imagery.

The significance of innovation for a study of power depends very much on context. Basil took care to distinguish his public image from that of the predecessor he sought to discredit, Michael III. Nevertheless, he retained key elements of Michael's iconography, such as the image of Christ on his coins. Beyond this balanced approach, however, some of Basil's innovations, such as the standing figure or the Persian title, appear experimental or even accidental. Imperial iconography was not settled in this period and emperors and artists appear to have been looking for ways to reflect court rhetoric in their imagery.

⁴⁹⁰ Walker, *Emperor and the World*.

The overall appearance is of officialdom responding to a powerful new presence but not discovering or implementing any systematic iconographic plan.

By contrast, Leo appears not to have given much thought to altering his public image until the birth of his son, not even issuing gold coins until late in the reign. The early period of Leo's reign was marked by relatively little innovation, although there were subtle differences in inscription and iconography. The most striking new feature came after the birth of Constantine VII in 908, when Leo most probably placed the image of the Virgin on his coins. Mary also appeared in other works of art produced for Leo and it seems likely that the association with Mary expressed gratitude for the birth of an heir and supplication for the defence of Constantinople in the face of continued external threat. Overall, however, Leo seems not to have been consistently active in manipulating his visual image.

Alexander was in a category of his own, with regard to iconographic innovation. Although Grabar believed Basil to be the main instigator of Macedonian art, the emperor with the biggest claim to that title was actually Alexander.⁴⁹¹ In just thirteen months, Alexander introduced several innovations in his official imagery, including the first representation on coin of an emperor being crowned by a holy figure. The evidence suggests that proactive image making had been a prominent feature of Alexander's passage to power, raising questions about contemporary claims that the emperor was a lazy ruler with no interest in government.

One motif has come to be strongly associated with the power of the Macedonian Dynasty and that is the image of heavenly crowning. It was introduced under Basil and used in the official art produced for Alexander. It continued to be used by Constantine VII, Basil II and challengers to the Macedonian throne like Romanos. This analysis of the imagery of power given by heaven suggests strongly that these were not meant to be depictions of coronations but rather these images express the idea of anointing: the metaphorical act by which God chose

⁴⁹¹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116.

who would wield power as emperor. The historical evidence suggests that anointing was not a part of imperial ritual in the ninth and tenth centuries. It is also evident that this idea of anointing did not have a settled iconography in this period. The scenes of power bestowed by Heaven conveyed the same idea shown in earlier 'hand of God' imagery which was used by Constantine and some of his successors but which had largely disappeared from the capital's coins by the fifth century. Under the early Macedonians, the metaphorical act of anointing was expressed both through the image of divine blessing and through the image of crowning by a holy figure.

Byzantine writers often claimed that the emperor was divinely chosen. What various objects from Basil's reign onwards indicate is how this symbolic act might appear visually. The idea of anointing is known to have been of interest to Basil and this interest is reflected in the art presented to him: both by the aristocratic couple shown in the David Casket and in the pages of the Paris Gregory, presented by Photios. Why this occurred is no mystery. Despite Photios' efforts to create an ancestry for the new emperor, Basil was unable to claim authority from imperial lineage, as many of his predecessors had done. His claim to power was based instead on divine favour. Essentially, Basil defended his coup on the grounds that it was an act of divine will. This demonstrates that the most famous motif introduced by the Macedonians was both a sign of power and a sign of weakness.

On the one hand, the new imagery of divine favour was sustained and repeated by successive emperors, suggesting it was considered more powerful than imagery depicting imperial descent, which was possible for the sons of Basil who could claim lineage. Challenges to established rule could be presented and feared as challenges to the divine order. However, divine favour could be withdrawn as well as bestowed. The message of power bestowed by Heaven and not imperial descent provided a ready-made justification for future challengers to the imperial throne. Romanos Lekapenos was the first to turn this imagery

against the Macedonians, when during Constantine's minority he minted a coin showing himself being crowned by Christ. This was probably intended as a clear sign that power was passing away from the Macedonians.

The survival of the crowning image may suggest that the Macedonians' hold on power was not considered fully secure even by the turn of the tenth century. The usurpation of power by a father may still have needed justification by his sons. Nevertheless, over time the image became a source of strength as a sustained period of relative prosperity and success would have demonstrated divine favour towards members of the dynasty. As Michael Psellus noted, the Macedonians were able to associate their dynasty as a whole with notions of divine favour. The imagery of power given by Heaven may have played a part in this achievement by reinforcing the idea in Byzantines' minds that Basil, Leo and Alexander in turn had been blessed and appointed by God, the core idea of anointment made visible for the first time for centuries in coins, mosaics and other works of art. However secure Basil, Leo and Alexander felt on the throne, which clearly varied, it was always useful to be able to show that God was on their side.

Chapter 3

Emperors as Builders

Portraiture and iconography were important ways in which imperial power was communicated and understood. However, often these could be visible only to the select few. The Paris Gregory, for example, was intended for the emperor and his sons. Other means were necessary to communicate imperial power to the majority of Byzantines. For most people in medieval Constantinople, imperial power was displayed through architecture, processions and ritual. This chapter considers the role of architecture in shaping perceptions of power.

Roman Emperors had for centuries been associated with their buildings. Augustus trumpeted his physical rejuvenation of Rome, which was praised by contemporary Roman historians.⁴⁹² Byzantine emperors may not have been familiar with these Latin texts but their imperial rhetoric suggests that they were well aware of Rome's magnificence and sought to surpass it.⁴⁹³ Basil certainly knew of David and Solomon's roles in constructing the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁹⁴ In fact, for the Byzantines, great emperors were often great builders. Constantinople was dominated by buildings associated with Constantine the Great, the founder of empire.⁴⁹⁵ Justinian was still being praised in the tenth-

⁴⁹² A. Cooley (ed), *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, (Cambridge, 2009), Chapters 20 and 21; Tacitus, *Annals*, edited by R. Martin and A. Woodman, *Tacitus, Annals*, (Cambridge, 1989), Chapters 19 - 21.

⁴⁹³ Jenkins argued that the *Vita Basilii* was based on Roman exemplars: 'The classical background,' pp 13-30. Jerusalem was also a point of comparison. The story that Justinian claimed to have outdone Solomon after building Hagia Sophia may be apocryphal, according to Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, p 10. Nevertheless, it was reported by the Byzantines in the *Narratio de Structura Templi S. Sophiae*, T. Preger, ed), *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, (Leipzig, 1901), pp 74-108.

⁴⁹⁴ G. Dagron, *Constantinople Imaginaire: études sur le recueil des Patria*, (Paris, 1984), pp 294-301 and 305-310. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, pp 265-266.

⁴⁹⁵ Not all were actually built by Constantine. Some were, such as the Church of Holy Apostles. Others were not but were believed to have been in the ninth and tenth-centuries, such as the Church of St Mokios. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 52, p 367.

century for his achievement of Hagia Sophia.⁴⁹⁶ The chronicler Theophanes associated good rulers with new constructions and poor rulers with the destruction of buildings.⁴⁹⁷ Buildings could be used as a way of criticizing emperors, as the Iconoclast Theophilos found when his Bryas Palace was condemned for adopting Islamic influences.⁴⁹⁸

What kind of mark did the early Macedonians make on the city of Constantinople and other towns across the empire? Only Basil was reputed by Byzantines to be a major builder and yet there are few physical remains. No major buildings in Constantinople or elsewhere can be ascribed to these decades with complete confidence.⁴⁹⁹ Without physical evidence, historians have had to turn to textual sources.

The most significant new construction of the whole early Macedonian period was the New Imperial Church, built by Basil and consecrated on 1 May 880.⁵⁰⁰ There are several descriptions of this church, including the *Vita Basilii*, an account by Harun-ibn-Yahya preserved in the chronicle of Ibn Rosteh and reports by Liudprand of Cremona and Russian pilgrims, like Stephen of Novgorod.⁵⁰¹ The New Church appears to have been part of a wider architectural programme. Altogether, according to the *Vita Basilii*, a self-acknowledged work of propaganda, Basil built or renovated 31 named churches, along with many more it did not identify.⁵⁰² Basil was also reported to have constructed buildings on

⁴⁹⁶ For example, in the tenth-century mosaic in the south-west porch at Hagia Sophia, depicting Justinian and Constantine presenting models of the Church and city to an enthroned Virgin and Child.

⁴⁹⁷ James, 'Building and rebuilding,' p 51, n5.

⁴⁹⁸ Walker, *Emperor and The World*, p 41.

⁴⁹⁹ See introduction, p 42.

⁵⁰⁰ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p 209.

⁵⁰¹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 84; Harun-Ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, pp 382-389; Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, Chapter 34; Stephen of Novgorod in Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, pp 36-38.

⁵⁰² *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 93, pp 304-305.

four palace sites: on the Great Palace site alone, the *Vita* assigned eight chapels and six secular buildings to him. Historians have concluded that this activity had a distinctly imperial character, associating Basil with churches and monasteries built by predecessors like Constantine and Justinian.⁵⁰³

Leo did not build on as grand a scale as his father but he was responsible for the church and monastery of St Lazaros and arranged for important relics to be brought there.⁵⁰⁴ He also built the church of St Demetrios.⁵⁰⁵ A tenth-century manuscript described Leo's renovations to the Church of the Mother of God at Pêgê.⁵⁰⁶ Importantly, surviving homilies reveal Leo's own thoughts about new religious buildings and the artwork inside, including the church at the monastery of Kauleas and another built by his adviser, Stylianus Zaoutzas.⁵⁰⁷ Leo may have tried to dedicate churches to at least one of his wives. The *Patria of Constantinople* recorded that Leo dedicated a church to his first wife Theophano, which was later renamed All Saints.⁵⁰⁸ Furthermore, tenth-century chroniclers claimed that Leo built a church to St Zoe in honour of his second wife, Zoe Zaoutzaina (although this may have been a misunderstanding).⁵⁰⁹ Leo also seems to have built a bath house near the Great Palace.⁵¹⁰ Alexander had too little time

⁵⁰³ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' pp 52-55; L. James, 'Making a name: reputation and imperial founding and refounding in Constantinople' in L. Theis et al, *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, (Vienna, 2012), pp 63-72.

⁵⁰⁴ *Vita Euthymii*, p 63, lines 18-20.

⁵⁰⁵ Leo, Homily 19. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Dated 886-894 by Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, p 69. Greek text in Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, third edition, (Brussels, 1957), 538.

⁵⁰⁶ *De Sacris Aedibus Deiparae ad Fontem*. Edited by V. Palmé, *Acta Sanctorum*, third edition, (Paris, 1863), pp 878-889. Translated by Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp 205-206.

⁵⁰⁷ Leo, Homily 31 (dedication of Monastery of Kauleas, dated 893-901 by Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 69) and Homily 37, (dedication of church of Stylianos Zaoutzes, dated before 893 by Antonopoulou, *op cit*, p 69). Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*.

⁵⁰⁸ *The Patria*, Book 3, 209.

⁵⁰⁹ *Leo Grammaticus*, PG 108, 274; *Theophanes Continuatus*, PG 109, 364. Tougher concluded that this was a mistake by the chronicler, *Leo VI*, p 145.

⁵¹⁰ Magdalino, 'The bath of Leo the Wise'

to launch construction projects. His thirteen months of rule were not associated with any known buildings or renovations.

This chapter considers Basil and Leo's record as builders in turn and considers how they used architecture to shape perceptions of their power. Given the significance of the *Vita Basilii* as a source for much of this work, the chapter begins with an assessment of its reliability.

The Claims of the Vita Basilii

The *Vita Basilii* is the earliest and sometimes only primary source for many of Basil's artistic works, including the mosaics in the Kainourgian Palace and most of his buildings and renovations. Chapters 76 to 94 of the *Vita Basilii* are dedicated to accounts of the emperor's programme of founding and restoring churches, monasteries and palaces, one-seventh of the overall text and the longest section dedicated to a single theme.⁵¹¹

The *Vita* is, of course, a work of propaganda, compiled half a century after Basil's reign. To what extent is it a reliable source for Basil's building work? Could the programme of constructions and renovations it describes have even been invented? A study of Procopius' writings has suggested that some of his descriptions of building work may be rhetorical rather than literal.⁵¹² In this case, monuments could function as metaphor, expressing imperial ideology without being a realistic description. It was expected that successful emperors would leave their imprint on the face of Constantinople. Does the *Vita Basilii* present a façade, rather than a historical record? A case can certainly be made that the *Vita Basilii* is a work of the imagination. The text is highly rhetorical, full of the language of rejuvenation and renewal. The *Vita Basilii* claimed that Basil

⁵¹¹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapters 76 - 94.

⁵¹² J. Elsner, 'The rhetoric of buildings in the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius' in L. James (ed), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, (Cambridge, 2007), pp 33-57.

renovated most of the holiest sites in Constantinople: Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Holy Apostles and churches associated with Constantine the Great like St. Mokios as well as those named for important holy figures, the Virgin and John the Baptist. It also included chapels dedicated to iconophile martyrs and sites associated with Basil's own history, such as the monastery of St. Diomedes, where he spent his first night in the city, and several chapels dedicated to Elijah. Not only this, the text also provides a comprehensive geographical coverage inside the walls of Constantinople: from the Golden Gate in the North-West to the Petrion in the East along the length of the Mese and down to the Great Palace complex in the South. A purely rhetorical account of Basil's legacy may well have wanted to present just such a comprehensive account of the emperor's accomplishments. Indeed, Ousterhout has argued that the *Vita Basilii* may replace the actual order of ninth-century Byzantium with a symbolic order of Basil's legend-building.⁵¹³ Kazhdan has argued instead that the panegyric is a much more contemporary document, strongly influenced by tenth-century problems and concerns.⁵¹⁴ Constantine VII had an interest in promoting his grandfather's reputation, as he faced challenges to the throne from Romanos Lekapenos and his sons. Romanos was famed for his efforts in philanthropy, building many hospitals, hospices and homes for the sick and elderly.⁵¹⁵ By praising Basil's record, Constantine VII may have sought to have used his lineage to surpass Romanos.

There are certainly hints of exaggeration in the *Vita Basilii*. For example, the text claimed that Basil ordered the creation of the image of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia.⁵¹⁶ In fact, this was inaugurated in April 867 while Michael III and Basil were co-emperors and was probably commissioned while Michael was sole

⁵¹³ Ousterhout, 'Reconstructing Constantinople,' p 129.

⁵¹⁴ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, p 143.

⁵¹⁵ Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 118.

⁵¹⁶ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 79, p 267.

ruler.⁵¹⁷ The *Vita* also claimed that Basil ordered the construction of the Mangana Palace.⁵¹⁸ There does seem to have been a significant building on this site earlier in the century, yet it is not known if Basil built a palace anew or renovated an existing building. Yet these would have been understandable errors for an author to make in the late 940s, two generations after the events they describe. Furthermore, the literal truth of the *Vita* may not have mattered as much to tenth-century Byzantines, who may have been more interested in stories and personalities. Studies of historical writing about travel suggest that authenticity may not have been as important as narrative to medieval writers and listeners.⁵¹⁹ The surviving descriptions from *The Patria* and by later Russian visitors bear this out trend, relating stories about people and incidents associated with icons and buildings much more frequently than offering descriptions.⁵²⁰ These texts recounted contemporary narratives about monuments: Leo VI, for example, was named in several of these accounts as the author of works he did not commission, such as a description of three bronze serpents in the Hippodrome, seemingly because their mythical quality had blurred with his reputation for wisdom.⁵²¹

It is possible, therefore, to be dismissive of the *Vita Basilii* as a description of Basil's building record. Yet such an approach is unnecessarily cautious, for a number of reasons. First, the claims being made have a narrative plausibility. The *Vita* recorded new buildings at the Church of Mother of God at Sigma, the Churches of Stephen in Aureliania and John the Precursor at Strobilaia and shrines to Herperos and Zoe, Nazarios and Mokios. It is likely that new churches were built in Basil's reign. One surviving example is now the Atik Mustafa Pasa

⁵¹⁷ Photios, Homily 17. Edited by S. Aristarches, 'Εκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, *Second Series, Vol II* (Istanbul, 1886), pp 177 - 198. Translated by Mango, *Art of Byzantine Empire*, pp 187-190.

⁵¹⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 91, pp 298-299.

⁵¹⁹ See for instance M. Sturgis, *When In Rome: 2000 years of Roman sightseeing*, (London, 2011).

⁵²⁰ Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, *passim*.

⁵²¹ Described by Alexander the Clerk in Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, p 164.

Camii, a modest cross-in-square church which shows that constructions of the period were not always lavish or expensive.⁵²² There are many more examples of renovation in the *Vita* than outright new construction, such as new roofs, buttresses and walls as well as the removal of secular buildings abutting on churches. This all suggests the balance of the work favoured renovation rather than construction, which is inherently more plausible given the time and resources involved. There are reasons why repairs would have been necessary. Chronicles recorded a number of earthquakes in Constantinople during the 860s and the consequential damage would have made refurbishment essential. In at least three cases Basil is recorded as rebuilding churches after they were damaged by earthquakes.⁵²³ The altar of the Church of St Mokios was also described by the *Vita Basilii* as having been damaged by rubble, which is consistent with earthquake damage.⁵²⁴ Furthermore, the claims made by the *Vita Basilii* do not always stretch belief or appear reductive from an extended metaphor. For example, the text asserts that Basil repaired the western arch of Hagia Sophia, which had deteriorated and replaced a wooden roof with stone vaulting at the Church at the Portico of Domninos. These are not the kind of grand claims that might be expected from a purely panegyric document. Indeed, it seems quite possible, as Ševčenko concluded, that the author of the *Vita* had access to a written list of buildings improved by Basil which he fleshed out by personal observation.⁵²⁵ Moreover, if the *Vita Basilii* was purely a rhetorical construct, it might be expected to mention more of the central religious sites of Constantinople, especially those associated with its defence. Yet neither the Church at Blachernae nor the monastery at Hodegetria, two

⁵²² Freely and Cakmak, *Byzantine Monuments*, pp 172-174.

⁵²³ St Anna: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 81, pp 268-271; Pêgê: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 80, pp 268-269; Sigma: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 80, pp 268-269; Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 39. See below, p 161.

⁵²⁴ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 81, pp 268-269.

⁵²⁵ *Vita Basilii*, p 33.

important sites dedicated to the Virgin, are mentioned in the *Vita Basilii*.⁵²⁶ Given the inclusion of so many other holy sites, these seem unlikely lacunae if the document was rhetorical.

Furthermore, the *Vita*'s claims that Basil was a renovator of churches are consistent with other, earlier sources. An anonymous poem dated to the ninth century, which has been attributed to Photios, suggests that Basil sought to ornament churches and fill them with precious objects and relics.⁵²⁷ This text seems to describe an emperor who filled more churches with mosaics, ornaments and relics than built new ones, and it is corroboration for the *Vita Basilii*'s claims that Basil made churches and monasteries more beautiful and gave patronage to holy sites. Leo VI, in his funeral oration for his father, referred unambiguously to Basil as a builder: 'The houses, both holy and imperial, some constructed from scratch, others in need of repair, were embellished incomparably greater than they had been before. He alone managed to do more than had been the ambition of all his predecessors'.⁵²⁸ Archaeological evidence may offer some support for this. Leo reported that Basil was responsible for renovations at the monastery of St. Diomedes and bricks have been unearthed naming Basil and Saint Diomedes, which seem to date from Basil's reign. Basil's record as a builder was also used to criticise him, suggesting it was genuine. The chronicler Georgios Monachos attacked Basil's decision to enlist sailors on construction work at a time when Syracuse was under siege, arguing that the emperor had got his priorities

⁵²⁶ Both were significant sites in Macedonian times. The Empress Theophano had retired to Blachernae, where she died in 893: *Leo Grammaticus*, PG 108, 1101. Caesar Bardas was reported visiting the church at Hodegetria and praying to the Virgin: *Genesios*, Book 4, Chapter 20.

⁵²⁷ Lines 151 - 158 of the poem in Markopoulos, 'An anonymous laudatory poem,' p 231. The relevant lines of the poem are set out and discussed below, p 160, n660.

⁵²⁸ οἰκων ὧν μὲν ἔκ βαθρων οἰκοδομαί, ὧν δὲ ἐπισκευῆς ἡξιωμένων πρὸς κάλλος μεταποίησις τοῦ πρόσθεν οὐδ' ὅσον εἰπεῖν ἀσύγκριτον, ὅσοι τε ἱεροὶ καὶ ὅσοι βασιλεῦσιν ἀνάκεινται, τοσούτοις ἐπαρκέσας μόνος, ὅσοις οἱ προλαβόντες ὁμοῦ πάντες τὸ φιλότιμον ἐνεδείξαντο. Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre,' p 60, line 2 - p 62, line 2. My translation.

wrong.⁵²⁹ The incident is interesting in confirming that Basil was believed by some to have given too high a priority to construction work.

In conclusion, the *Vita Basilii* must be treated with caution but it should not be dismissed as a source. Basil was certainly responsible for the New Church and probably built and renovated a number of other religious and palace sites during his 19 year reign. This may have been for pragmatic reasons, including the need to repair earthquake damage and the desire to renovate churches in the new Orthodox style.

Basil's Building Programme

The New Imperial Church

The New Church was undoubtedly Basil's most substantial new construction, built on part of the Great Palace site and consecrated in 880.⁵³⁰ It was dedicated to Christ, Mary, the Archangel Gabriel, the Prophet Elijah and Saint Nicholas, which suggests that it could have been set out in a cruciform shape with five domes and four corner chapels.⁵³¹ The church was memorably described by the *Vita Basilii* as 'like a bride decked out and adorned with pearls and gold and gleaming silver'.⁵³² There are two reasonably detailed descriptions of the New Church: the *Vita Basilii* and an account left by Harun-ibn-Yahya, which Vasiliev dated to

⁵²⁹ *Georgius Monachus*, PG 110, 759; 843, lines 3-9. Tobias rejected this criticism and concluded that Basil had been prevented by other means from sending assistance, Tobias, *Basil I*, p 194.

⁵³⁰ It lay inside the wall of the Great Palace near the Sea Gate. Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 63.

⁵³¹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 84, pp 274-275; Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 377; R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, (Yale, 1965), pp 355-6. S. Curcic, 'Architectural reconsideration of the Nea Ekklesia' in *Byzantine Studies, Conference Abstracts, Papers 6*, (1980), pp 11-12. H. Buchwald, 'Sardis Church E - a preliminary report,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 26, (1977), pp 265-299. Michael soon replaced Gabriel as one of the dedicatees.

⁵³² ὃν ὡς νύμφην ὠραϊσμένην καὶ περικεκοσμημένην μαργάροις τε καὶ χρυσῷ καὶ ἀργύρου λαμπρότασιν *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 83, lines 15-17.

around 900.⁵³³ In addition, Liudprand later mentioned that the New Church had a clock tower which struck the hour.⁵³⁴ These sources say surprisingly little about the inside of the church and its decorations.⁵³⁵ Harun-ibn-Yahya mentioned a large imperial box, a sanctuary screen and altar but without describing them.⁵³⁶ The *Vita Basilii* only indicated that the stone floor imitated the beauty and colours of the peacock, a feature that was obscured by a covering of carpets donated by Basil's sponsor Danelis.⁵³⁷ The portico also contained a painting representing the struggles of the martyrs.⁵³⁸ The *Vita Basilii* says nothing more about the interior, other than it contained 'the most beautiful things assembled from everywhere' adding that the glories of the building 'are better seen than heard about to be believed', a common rhetorical flourish.⁵³⁹ By the tenth-century, a portrait of Basil was on display inside the church, an object of court ritual on the feast day commemorating its dedication.⁵⁴⁰ The *Book of Ceremonies* described the service after which emperors would stop and light candles in front of the portrait of Basil, which appears to have been near a small oratory close to the section of the church reserved for women.⁵⁴¹ Images inside churches showed individuals in the presence of Christ and as having been blessed by him.⁵⁴² This

⁵³³ Harun-ibn-Yahya: Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, pp 382-389. The dating is discussed on pp 381-382. Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' pp 63-64, considered whether discrepancies between the two sources suggest that Harun was describing a different church but concluded that his report may well be of the New Church, recalled from memory at a distance. Nevertheless, in Magdalino's opinion the *Vita Basilii* was a more accurate source.

⁵³⁴ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Chapter 34. This might have been original or a later addition.

⁵³⁵ This contrasts with Procopius' description of Hagia Sophia, which went into much more detail about the interior. Procopius, *Buildings*, I, i. The author of the *Vita Basilii* appears to have been affected more by the New Church's splendour than by its design.

⁵³⁶ Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, p386.

⁵³⁷ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 76, p 260.

⁵³⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 86, p 278.

⁵³⁹ τὰ πανταχόθεν συνέδραμεν κάλλιστα, ἃ τοῖς ὁρῶσι μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἀκούουσιν οἶδε τυγχάνειν πιστά *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 83, lines 14-15.

⁵⁴⁰ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book I, Chapter 19, p 118

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² James, 'Building and rebuilding,' p 50.

was in keeping with the dominant idea of divine blessing popular at Basil's court.⁵⁴³

In addition to the mosaic, there is evidence from tenth-century chronicles that a statue associated with Basil was erected inside the foundations of the church.⁵⁴⁴ The evidence is not easy to interpret. Both Leo Grammaticus and Georgius Monachos referred to it.⁵⁴⁵ Leo reported that '[the emperor] commanded that his great royal name be carved into the base of a statue of Solomon and placed in the foundations of the New Church.'⁵⁴⁶ Both chroniclers were more interested in recounting a story about the serpent on the statue's bronze staff than they were in describing the object itself, however, and the wording of their reports is capable of different interpretations. Janin believed that this statue was of Basil.⁵⁴⁷ Majeska thought it was of Solomon, altered to look like Basil.⁵⁴⁸ Mango believed that a statue of Solomon had been melted down and moulded into one of Basil.⁵⁴⁹ It is even possible that this was the freestanding statue seen by Stephen of Novgorod in one of the chapels, which he took to be a figure of Christ.⁵⁵⁰

Imperial statues were not themselves rare. Statuary had been one of the ways that Roman Emperors had depicted their power and Basil may have wanted to follow that tradition. Over 80 examples from Constantinople are known from textual sources, alongside many others from the provinces, yet most are from

⁵⁴³ See Chapter 2, in particular the discussion of the image of divine crowning.

⁵⁴⁴ ἐν τοῖς θεμελίοις. *Leo Grammaticus*, PG 108, 472.

⁵⁴⁵ *Leo Grammaticus*, PG 108, 472; *Georgius Monachos*, PG 109, 843-844.

⁵⁴⁶ καὶ τὴν στήλην Σολομῶντος ἐν τῇ βασιλικῇ οὔσῃ μεγίστη κατεάξας προσέταξεν ἐπ' ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἐκτυπωθῆναι καὶ τεθῆναι κατωθεν ἐν τοῖς θεμελίοις τῆς αὐτῆς νέας *Leo Grammaticus*, PG 108, 472. My translation.

⁵⁴⁷ Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 374.

⁵⁴⁸ Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, p 249.

⁵⁴⁹ Mango, *Brazen House*, p 50.

⁵⁵⁰ Stephen of Novgorod in Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, pp 36-38.

the early Byzantine centuries.⁵⁵¹ It was highly unusual, however, for an imperial statue to be located inside a church. It is possible that the inscription mentioned by Leo Grammaticus was the only association with Basil, a limited designation in order, perhaps, to avoid allegations of impiety. This may have been why there was apparent confusion among the chroniclers over whether the state represented Solomon, Basil or even Christ. This was not the only occasion on which Basil came near to crossing the boundaries of acceptable representation. The apparent disregard for religious propriety inherent in erecting a statue to himself inside a church recalls his earlier use of the *Emperor of Emperors* title on a gold solidus of 868.⁵⁵²

The statue certainly seems to have been part of an attempt to compare Basil with Solomon. Photios had described Basil as a New Solomon in his own lifetime.⁵⁵³ Furthermore, the Magnaura Palace, which the *Vita Basilii* claimed was constructed by Basil, was reported by the *Book of Ceremonies* to have contained the throne of Solomon.⁵⁵⁴ This object might have been acquired after Basil's reign but there is a possibility that it was set up at the time the palace was constructed. Interestingly, the description of the New Church in the *Vita Basilii* is about as long proportionally as the description of Solomon's Temple in the Book of Kings, which may have been a deliberate comparison or perhaps an unconscious parallel.⁵⁵⁵ It seems likely that underpinning the comparison was a degree of competition over Basil and Solomon's status as builders. This is implied by an eleventh-century source which included a possibly apocryphal anecdote about Basil and the New Church. It reported that Basil had written to Rabbi

⁵⁵¹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 16. Grabar suggested that the only surviving example of imperial statuary was the fourth-century Barletta statue, from Bari. Other examples have survived, however, such as a fourth-century bronze head of Constantine the Great now in the National Museum, Belgrade. Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*, p 55.

⁵⁵² See Chapter 2, p 93.

⁵⁵³ Photios, PG 102, 582-584.

⁵⁵⁴ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book 2, Chapter 15.

⁵⁵⁵ *Vita Basilii*, Chapters 83-86, pp 272-283. *1 Kings* 5,5 - 6,38.

Shefatiya to debate whether the Temple in Jerusalem or Hagia Sophia had been more expensive to build. The Rabbi concluded that David and Solomon spent more. Dagron argued in favour of the story's plausibility, noting that other contemporary sources, including Photios, testify to Basil's enjoyment of debate.⁵⁵⁶ Whether the incident is genuine or spurious, it seems likely that Basil knew about Solomon's Temple. The Book of Chronicles was explicit that it had cost 100,000 talents of gold, 1,000,000 of silver and bronze and iron 'beyond weighing' to build.⁵⁵⁷ Basil may have felt the construction put him on a par with Justinian and Solomon. The New Church was not as large as Justinian's, but Basil may have believed it was more magnificent, with more impressive relics. Furthermore, two kings had been needed to complete the Temple: David had raised the sum and Solomon completed the construction. Basil had both found the money to build the New Church and erected it during his own lifetime.

The imperial sponsorship of the New Church seems to have been especially prominent in the minds of contemporary Byzantines. Hagia Sophia was known simply as 'the Great Church'; Basil's construction was known, certainly by 899, as the 'New Imperial Church.'⁵⁵⁸ Tenth-century chroniclers suggest that Basil named it the New Church on its consecration.⁵⁵⁹ Both of these descriptions, 'New' and 'Imperial', are worth examining. As Magdalino has pointed out, 'new' for the Byzantines seems to have implied imitation and meant 'improved'.⁵⁶⁰ The epithet may have meant that Basil had exceeded the achievements of another church, perhaps Hagia Sophia. However, Janin believed that the term was simply meant to distinguish the church from a neighbouring church, which was also dedicated

⁵⁵⁶ Dagron, *Constantinople Imaginaire*, pp 307-9.

⁵⁵⁷ 1 Chronicles 22, 14.

⁵⁵⁸ Νέαν Βασιλικὴν ἐκκλησίαν. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 76, line 2. The *Vita Euthymii* usually called it the New Church but on one occasion called it the Great Church of the Palace: τοῦ μεγάλου τῶν βασιλειῶν ναοῦ *Vita Euthymii*, p 70, line 32.

⁵⁵⁹ Georgius Monachos, PG 109, 845. τοῦ βασιλέως λῶρον φορέσαντος καὶ χρήματα πολλὰ δόντος καὶ Νέαν αὐτὴν ἐπονομάσαντος.

⁵⁶⁰ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' pp 52-55.

to Christ.⁵⁶¹ The term 'Imperial' is equally significant. Although this was not a private chapel, it had a strong personal association with Basil, through dedications, relics and portraits, and hence had a distinct dynastic character.⁵⁶²

The Old Testament identity forged by the New Church went further than its links with Solomon. In fact, Magdalino has suggested that its lack of New Testament relics was 'remarkable'.⁵⁶³ Instead, it boasted important relics associated with the prophet kings. These included the horn used by Samuel to anoint David, a theme discussed in Chapter 2.⁵⁶⁴ It also contained Abraham's table and Elijah's sheepskin coat.⁵⁶⁵ Elijah was another Old Testament figure associated with Basil who was given prominence in the New Church. According to the *Book of Ceremonies*, Elijah's coat was venerated on the prophet's feast day before the imperial party went on to light candles in front of the image of Basil.⁵⁶⁶ Elijah was one of five dedicatees of the church and was one of two figures shown presenting Basil with the crown and labarum in the Paris Gregory, which was probably commissioned for the New Church's consecration. Elijah played an important part in Basil's personal legend. According to the later *Vita Basilii*, Elijah had prophesied that Basil would become emperor and encouraged his mother to send him to Constantinople.⁵⁶⁷ Magdalino has described the emphasis on Elijah in feast days as one of the most striking aspects of Macedonian rule.⁵⁶⁸ It seems likely that the dedication and relics associated with the New Church were intended to associate Basil with the stories of kings and emperors of the

⁵⁶¹ Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 374.

⁵⁶² Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 61.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, p 57.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p 58.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp 57-58.

⁵⁶⁶ *Book of Ceremonies*, Book I, Chapter 19, p 118.

⁵⁶⁷ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 8, pp 32-33.

⁵⁶⁸ Magdalino, 'Feast of the Prophet Elijah,' p 193.

past, in a manner adopted originally by some of the iconoclast emperors.⁵⁶⁹ It was certainly a contrast with Michael III, who filled his chapel to the Theotokos with relics of the passion of Christ.⁵⁷⁰ Basil may have believed that this Biblical comparison would have given him the stature and prestige that were missing from his familial lineage as well as help consolidate his divine legitimacy.

The interior of the New Church, therefore, was a powerful expression of Basil's imperial stature and character. The outside of the church also made a strong impression on visitors and pilgrims for hundreds of years after its construction. Harun-ibn-Yahya indicated that the church had ten doors and four courtyards, suggesting it occupied a considerable amount of space.⁵⁷¹ Other buildings had to be cleared to make way for it.⁵⁷² Its construction took over space previously used for the activities of the Green faction, a clear assertion of imperial power.⁵⁷³ Marble, columns and mosaics were apparently taken from Justinian's mausoleum at the church of the Holy Apostles for decorations.⁵⁷⁴ The church also appears to have had a school associated with it as well as a bath house and an open area for games.⁵⁷⁵

The northern fountain, according to the *Vita Basilii*, contained bronze images of cocks, goats and rams.⁵⁷⁶ This may be the same fountain described by Harun-ibn-Yahya with spouts in the forms of a lamb, bull, cock, lion, lioness, wolf,

⁵⁶⁹ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' pp 56-60.

⁵⁷⁰ Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 235.

⁵⁷¹ Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, p 386.

⁵⁷² The New Church was constructed on the site of the old playing fields and houses were razed down to make space for a replacement field. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 86, p 281.

⁵⁷³ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 90, p 298.

⁵⁷⁴ *Theophanes Continuatos*, PG 109, 373. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 374.

⁵⁷⁵ Evidence for the bath house is in *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 90, pp 296-297. Magdalino suggested there may also have been a school on the site, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 63.

⁵⁷⁶ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 85, p 278.

partridge, peacock, horse, elephant and angel.⁵⁷⁷ The southern fountain, according to the *Vita Basilii*, was in the form of a pine-cone surrounded by serpents.⁵⁷⁸ These images appear to have specific Christian interpretations. The peacock, for example, was used in Byzantine art to depict eternal life.⁵⁷⁹ The serpent meant different things to the Byzantines but in a religious context it stood as a symbol of wisdom.⁵⁸⁰ It seems that Basil's design sought to imitate the Garden of Eden, particularly the use of animal motifs in both the New Church and the neighbouring garden, called the *Mesokepion*, which was constructed next to it. Rollason has argued that royal parks could be ideological statements about the similarity of the palace and the heavenly kingdom as well as representing the king's power over the land.⁵⁸¹ As well as the design, the *Vita* provides a hint of the way this exterior space was used, describing how one fountain contained 'cups which in former days wine used to spout up from below, providing drink and welcome to passers-by'.⁵⁸² Harun ibn Yahya reported that the fountains were filled with 10,000 jugs of wine on feast days.⁵⁸³ It is possible that these spaces were not fully utilised in Basil's own reign. Auzépy concluded that a full programme of displays and processions was not developed on this site until the tenth-century.⁵⁸⁴ It is not clear to what extent the New Church and its surroundings were accessible to the inhabitants of Constantinople. Attempts to

⁵⁷⁷ Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et Arabes*, p 386.

⁵⁷⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 85, pp 276-278.

⁵⁷⁹ F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archaeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie*, (Paris, 1937); cols 1075-97. See also E. Maguire and H Maguire, *Other Icons: art and power in Byzantine secular culture*, (Princeton, 2007), p 60.

⁵⁸⁰ Serpents were also shown without any symbolic significance, for example in images depicting their use in entertainment or simply copied from older mosaics as decorative effects. Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1920.

⁵⁸¹ D. Rollason, 'Forests, parks, palaces and the power of place in Early Medieval Kingship' in *Early Medieval Europe* 20.4, (2012), pp 428-449.

⁵⁸² ἔνθα καὶ κύλικες ὀρώνται, περὶ ἃς τότε οἶνος ἀνέβλυζεν κάτωθεν τοὺς παριόντας ποτίζων καὶ δεξιούμενος. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 85, lines 23-24.

⁵⁸³ Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, p 386.

⁵⁸⁴ M.F. Auzépy 'Les déplacements de l'empereur dans la ville et ses environs, VIIIe - Xe siècles' in C. Mango and G. Dagron (eds), *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, (Aldershot, 1995).

recreate the Great Palace site have been described as ‘highly conjectural’.⁵⁸⁵ The New Church site in particular has proved difficult to understand, containing private and semi-private buildings like a bath house, school and gardens as well as more open public areas where games were played. Magdalino concluded that its status was ‘ambivalent’.⁵⁸⁶ It seems likely that the New Church and its courtyards and gardens would have been open to the elites of Constantinople but the wider population may not have got closer than the Chalke Gate.

The New Church was clearly an expensive and high-prestige project, which must have occupied a great deal of Basil’s time, energy and resources. Why did Basil do it? Emperors built for different reasons, both political and spiritual.⁵⁸⁷ On the one hand, major constructions would have served temporal purposes, such as demonstrating the power, resources and manpower available to a successful emperor. Prestigious buildings were expected to reflect well on their patrons. Sudjic has argued that almost all political leaders have used architects for such political ends.⁵⁸⁸ Cormack believed that emperors were in as strong a position to promote their public image as any leader in the twentieth-century and successful ones understood the need to put on a good public face.⁵⁸⁹ They would have been motivated, he argued, by a desire to overshadow earlier emperors in their achievement and could dictate how the resources of the state were deployed to that end. There may have been an element of conspicuous consumption involved, with rare marbles being brought long distances to enhance the emperor’s prestige.⁵⁹⁰ It has been suggested that Basil was trying to construct a palace and church complex that would rival the nearby Hagia Sophia, Hippodrome, Basilica

⁵⁸⁵ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 869.

⁵⁸⁶ Magdalino, ‘New Ekklesia,’ p 62.

⁵⁸⁷ Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, Chapter 5.

⁵⁸⁸ Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex*, p 10.

⁵⁸⁹ Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, p 179.

⁵⁹⁰ Helms, *The Kingly Craft*.

and Zeuzippos.⁵⁹¹ Constructing a new church in such an impressive site would have demonstrated God's favour and created expectations of successful rule.⁵⁹²

There may have been more personal and spiritual motivations too. By building a new church, Basil would have been exhibiting the proper virtues of Christian rule.⁵⁹³ The dedication of churches and monasteries would have been a public display of piety and philanthropy, qualities which were expected of emperors. In addition, by associating their image with new or restored religious foundations, emperors could make public their intimacy with God. To that extent, building work could help emperors 'purchase paradise'.⁵⁹⁴ The Byzantines believed that the passage to Heaven of an orthodox ruler could be delayed by punishments for sins committed in life. These delays could be shortened or abolished through pious work, such as the renovation of churches and monasteries. Such work was greatly aided if prayers were said in perpetuity for the emperor in those refurbished institutions. The idea that the New Church was built to atone for the murder of Michael III cannot therefore be ruled out. Liudprand of Cremona claimed that this was the motive, but Liudprand was hostile to the Byzantines and may have invented the claim.⁵⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is possible that this story was circulating in Constantinople in the mid tenth-century, which suggests that it may have been one way that contemporary Byzantines perceived the new construction. Any or all of these may have played a part in Basil's motives for building the New Imperial Church, but he left no direct testimony. All told, the New Church was deliberately designed to promote Basil's authority and make a clear statement about the grandeur of his rule. It was very much an 'Imperial' Church, promoting the imperial image and reinforcing strong associations, at least for the elites of court, between Basil and the Old Testament kings. It seems

⁵⁹¹ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 63.

⁵⁹² James, 'Building and rebuilding' pp 50-65.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, p 50-51

⁵⁹⁴ Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, p 212.

⁵⁹⁵ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 1, Chapter 10.

likely that Basil sought to promote a comparison between himself and Solomon, through his role as founder, his selection of relics and the statue placed in the foundations of the Church. The New Church does not support Grabar's thesis that imperial authority became subjugated to religion. Neither does it clearly support Dagron's thesis for the sacralisation of imperial rule. Instead, the New Church demonstrates that Basil articulated imperial power in terms of Old Testament kings. The scale and magnificence of the construction surely gave the impression that this was a successful emperor, making a mark on the city of Constantinople that was an equal of the greatest rulers in Byzantium's history.

Prestige for the Imperial Family

The New Church was designed to promote Basil's own personal authority as a worthy successor to the Old Testament kings David and Solomon. In addition, Basil used architecture to magnify the prestige of his imperial family, both through its seemingly illustrious lineage and through the magnificence of its contemporary achievements.

This was most obvious from Basil's decision to re-open Constantine's Mausoleum in the Church of the Holy Apostles, so that his son, Constantine, could be buried there in 879. This was the first new burial in the Mausoleum since Anastasius in 518.⁵⁹⁶ Eudokia and eventually Basil himself were buried there too, as the Mausoleum became the burial site of the most prominent members of Basil's family.⁵⁹⁷ The Church of the Holy Apostles was one of the most famous historical and religious sites of the Empire, housing the remains of Timothy and Luke as well as those of Constantine himself.⁵⁹⁸ It has been suggested that Basil sought to

⁵⁹⁶ P. Grierson et al, 'The tombs and obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042)' in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, (1962), pp 26-27. In the Amorian period, emperors had been buried in Justinian's Mausoleum, which was now full.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p 57. Leo was buried there in 912 and Alexander (in Basil's tomb) in 913; Grierson et al, 'Tombs and obits,' p 28.

⁵⁹⁸ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 940.

promote a cult for his dead son Constantine.⁵⁹⁹ This is on the grounds of a claim made by Niketas, the biographer of Patriarch Ignatios, that Photios sought to make Constantine a saint in order to please Basil.⁶⁰⁰ This seems unlikely. The *Life of Ignatios* was highly critical of Photios and the allegation seems designed to discredit him. It is more plausible that the reopening of Constantine's Mausoleum for the dead young Constantine is likely to have been perceived by Byzantines as a direct claim to Constantine the Great's legacy.

Basil also created a burial site for other members of his family who did not hold imperial office at Petrion, near Constantinople's Iron Gate, where Basil either founded or expanded the monastery and nunnery of St Euphemia.⁶⁰¹ Pangalo, his mother, was buried here, as were his brothers Marianos and Sembatios, his sister Anastasia and two daughters, Anna and Helena.⁶⁰² It seems that Basil had placed some of his daughters into the nunnery at Petrion.⁶⁰³ Basil's intent may have been to remove the risk to his rule and succession that could have been posed by a marriage but also, presumably, to house his daughters in some comfort and prestige. This is supported by the fact that he built a bath-house on the site and resided there himself for a time in 879, which demonstrates that Petrion was more than a frugal monastic foundation.⁶⁰⁴ The monastery continued to serve a

⁵⁹⁹ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p 202.

⁶⁰⁰ Nicetas David, *Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, p 131.

⁶⁰¹ *The Patria*, Book 3, 186. Kazhdan, *ODB*, pp 1643.

⁶⁰² Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 135. Grierson et al. reported a slightly different tradition, via the *Catalogus Sepulchorum*, that those buried at Petrion included Basil's mother, two brothers and three daughters, with another daughter buried at St. Michael Promotou. Grierson et al. 'Tombs and obits' p 27.

⁶⁰³ *The Patria*, Book 3, 186. Not necessarily all his daughters, as is sometimes supposed. Some editions of the *Vita Basilii* also suggest that Basil had a son-in-law, Christopher, who joined him on campaign, meaning that one of his daughters must have married. See Vogt, *Basile 1er*, p 59 n5. Tougher has dismissed this, however, arguing that Christopher was Basil's brother-in-law. Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 228.

⁶⁰⁴ Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 134.

similar purpose for the dynasty in future years, with Leo's wife, Empress Zoe Karbonopsina, also confined there by Romanos Lekapenos.⁶⁰⁵

Basil may have used powers of patronage of monastic institutions to forge his own personal legend. For example, Basil's relationship with the monastery of St. Diomedes, by the Golden Gate, may indicate that he encouraged the story of a prophesy at the monastery which revealed Basil as a future emperor. This legend had been related by Leo, in his funeral oration for his father.⁶⁰⁶ It was later repeated by the *Vita Basilii*.⁶⁰⁷ Archaeological evidence shows that Basil did indeed have a direct personal link with the saint. Bricks have been unearthed naming Basil and Saint Diomedes, which seem to date from Basil's reign.⁶⁰⁸ Leo confirmed that Basil was responsible for renovations at the monastery.⁶⁰⁹ Basil also chose the neighbouring Golden Gate for one of his triumphal entries into the city, following his successful campaign against Germanica and Adata.⁶¹⁰ It seems probable that Basil cultivated an association with the monastery during his lifetime and it is conceivable that Basil himself started or encouraged tales of the prophesy at St. Diomedes, which symbolised his divine selection.

The prestige of the imperial family would have been enhanced by Basil's improvements to palace sites in and around Constantinople, which would have provided evidence of divine blessing and reinforced perceptions of imperial power. If the *Vita Basilii* is accurate, a significant effort went into improving palace buildings and their amenities. On the Great Palace site, Basil is said by the *Vita Basilii* to have constructed the Kainourgion Palace, the *Pentakoubouklon*

⁶⁰⁵ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 2228.

⁶⁰⁶ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre' p 51.

⁶⁰⁷ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 9, pp 34-39

⁶⁰⁸ A. Van Millingen, *Constantinople: the walls of the city and the adjoining historical sites*, (London, 1899), p 265.

⁶⁰⁹ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre,' p 53.

⁶¹⁰ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p 154.

and a residence known as ‘The Eagle’ as well as several palace chapels and a bath-house.⁶¹¹ Together these new buildings must have significantly changed the site and established Basil as a powerful emperor in his own right for the elites of Empire who could have accessed these buildings and ordinary people who would have seen them from afar. The grandeur of his palaces would surely have marked the extent of his journey from provincial poverty, which would have been further evidence, for Byzantines, of God’s blessing.

At Pêgê, for example, a sanctuary to the Virgin located opposite the Silivri Gate, Basil built a country residence, with trees and water.⁶¹² At Hiereia, a summer palace in a suburb of Constantinople on a peninsular opposite Chalcedon, Basil built another chapel to Elijah.⁶¹³ This was the location for Basil’s triumphant return from victory over the Arabs in Silesia in 875. He also repaired the water supply to the Hieriea palace complex, probably to enable the palace gardens to flourish.⁶¹⁴ Basil may have constructed the Mangana Palace, which lay south-east of the Great Palace by the Bosphorus. This was a substantial site by the tenth-century: the *Vita Basilii* reported that receptions for foreign leaders were held there.⁶¹⁵ Liudprand was received there in impressive style by Constantine VII.⁶¹⁶ Was this a new build by Basil? There is some evidence that an older mansion stood on this site at the time of Michael Rhangabe (811-13) and another source indicates that Patriarch Ignatios retired to a house at Mangana in 858 before being later recalled by Basil.⁶¹⁷ The word ‘oikos’ used in the *Vita Basilii* could well mean a sizeable house rather than a palace and it is possible that Basil

⁶¹¹ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 870.

⁶¹² *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 91, p 298. Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1616.

⁶¹³ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 92, p 300.

⁶¹⁴ J. Crow, J. Bardill and R. Bayliss, *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople*, (Oxford, 2008), p 237.

⁶¹⁵ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 74, p 254.

⁶¹⁶ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Chapter 5, p 153.

⁶¹⁷ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1283 for example suggested that Basil added to the property rather than constructing it.

restored an older building on this site rather than constructing a new palace there.⁶¹⁸ However, some historians and archaeologists argue that there are good grounds for believing that Basil did indeed build a new palace on this site to become his primary place of residence. Demangel and Mamboury, in their study of the Mangana quarter, argued that Basil realised a plan first developed by the Isaurian emperors for this part of the city.⁶¹⁹ This was, they believed, the core of the grand palace with five floors later described by Anna Comnena.⁶²⁰

Little is known about the decoration of these palatial buildings, apart from the mosaics at the Kainourgion Palace, which are considered in Chapters 1 and 4. The image of an eagle appears to have been used a number of times in the exterior spaces. The *Vita Basilii* described a courtyard on the Great Palace site with rivers of Thessalian stone surrounding four eagles made of different colours.⁶²¹ In religious settings, the eagle could signify Christ, God protecting his children or the four Evangelists.⁶²² In secular settings, such as here, the eagle may have represented the emperor. The *Vita Basilii* also related a prophecy in which Basil was overshadowed in his cradle by an eagle's wing, suggesting he was destined for the throne.⁶²³ This was an echo of an older legend about the emperor Marcian, another emperor who worked his way up from poverty to take the imperial crown, signified by the arrival of an eagle.⁶²⁴ The four eagles in the palace courtyard may have indicated that the emperor's power stretched into every corner of the world. This was not the only reference to an eagle on the

⁶¹⁸ Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, p 132.

⁶¹⁹ R. Demangel and E. Mamboury, *Le Quartier de Manges et la Première Région de Constantinople*, (Paris, 1939), pp 39-47.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid*, p 39 n5. The authors also argued that we do not know what building existed on this site before Basil built his palace there.

⁶²¹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, p 290.

⁶²² Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, pp 60-62.

⁶²³ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 669.

⁶²⁴ R. Scott, 'From propaganda to history: the Byzantine stories of Theodosius' apple and Marcian's eagle' in R. Macrides (ed), *History as Literature in Byzantium*, (Aldershot, 2010).

Great Palace site: there was also a building called the Eagle, although no further information is given.⁶²⁵ It may have been located close to this site.

It is not particularly unexpected that a new emperor should build himself luxurious gardens, baths and mansions, although this information does undermine the *Vita*'s claims that Michael III ran down the Imperial Treasury. Nevertheless, they must have appeared magnificent to visitors, especially in their use of exotic and precious building materials. The descriptions of the jewels, marbles and precious objects in Basil's buildings are classic examples of conspicuous consumption. What the author of the *Vita* brought to view above all else was the quality, rarity and richness of the raw materials erected in Basil's name. Indeed, this is all that is said about an unnamed chapel on the Great Palace site near the Church of Elijah: 'those who have not seen its sumptuous and exceeding [riches] will find them unbelievable, so vast have been the quantities of silver and gold and the multitude of precious stones and pearls expended on its decoration. For its entire pavement consists of plaques of wrought silver with niello inlays, exhibiting the perfection of the goldsmith's craft.'⁶²⁶ This continues in similar vein for several more sentences, ending with the phrase that the capitals are 'covered everywhere with the whole array of the wealth of India,' a phrase which makes explicit the prestige which was associated with precious objects brought from a distance.⁶²⁷ Helms has observed that this was one of the ways kings articulated their power, in a manner which was difficult for rivals to emulate.⁶²⁸ Simply, the Byzantine emperor was able to draw on links of trade and patronage which were not open to most medieval rulers. The author of the *Vita* was not alone. This may have been why Harun-ibn-Yayha was confounded by the

⁶²⁵ τὴν Ἄετοῦ. *Vita Basiliii*, Chapter 90, line 11.

⁶²⁶ οὐ τὸ πολυτελὲς καὶ ὑπέρτιμον τοῖς οὐκ ἰδοῦσιν ἄπιστον νομισθὴ σεται. τοσοῦτος ἄργυρος καὶ χρυσὸς καὶ (λίθων) τιμίων καὶ μαργάρων πληθὺς ἐν τῇ τούτου περιβολῇ καταβέβληται. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔδαφος ἅπαν ἐξ ἀργύρου σφυρηλάτου καὶ στιβαροῦ μετ' ἐγκαύσεως, τὸ τῶν χρυσοχόων ἀκριβὲς τῆς τέχνης ἐπιδεικνυμένος, κατεσκευάσται, οἱ δ' ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἐξ εὐωνύμων τοῖ(χοι) ἄργυρον ἄφθονον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπικείμενον ἔχουσι *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 87, lines 27-34.

⁶²⁷ τὸν πλοῦτον πάντα τὸν ἐξ Ἰνδῶν περικεχυμένον *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 87, lines 39-40.

⁶²⁸ Helms, *The Kingly Craft*.

scale of the courtyards surrounding the palace buildings and the richness of their design.⁶²⁹

Demonstrating Imperial Philanthropy

It is likely that the Palaces sites were accessible only to the few. Alongside this conspicuous consumption, however, Basil seems also to have improved facilities for the poor, old and sick. The *Vita Basilii* reported that Basil built many hospitals and homes for the aged as well as almshouses and inns but treats the subject succinctly and gives little specific detail.⁶³⁰ Theophanes Continuatos went into more detail, for example citing the construction and endowment of a hospice near St Michael's monastery.⁶³¹ The *Vita* was more tangible in its claim that Basil endowed the *Ta Tzerou* shrine and enabled it to increase its charity to the poor.⁶³² Philanthropy was one of the virtues expected of emperors in their imitation of Christ and the evidence suggests that Basil was seen to live up to it. It was, for example, a quality Basil himself emphasised in his advice to Leo.⁶³³ In these documents, many of which were probably written on Basil's behalf by Photios, the emperor advised his son that the most important methods of education were holy scripture and benevolent works.⁶³⁴ He advised Leo to give to those in need and be merciful to widows and orphans. Philanthropy was a dominant theme of public pronouncements and laws in the latter years of Basil's

⁶²⁹ Harun-ibn-Yahya in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*.

⁶³⁰ καὶ ἄλλους δὲ ἱεροὺς οἴκους ἀμφὶ τοὺς ἑκατὸν περὶ τὴν Πόλιν ἀνέστησεν πτωχοτροφεῖα τε καὶ ξενῶνας ἐκαινούργησεν καὶ τῶν παλαιωθέντων πλεῖστα ἀνενεώσατο νοσοκομεῖα καὶ γηρωκομεῖα καὶ μοναστέρια *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 93, lines 24-27. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, defined these terms as follows: πτωχοτροφεῖα as 'houses for the poor' p 257; ξενῶνας as 'hospices' p 185; γηρωκομεῖα as 'homes for the aged' p 222; and νοσοκομεῖα as homes for the sick, p 163.

⁶³¹ *Theophanes Continuatos*, PG 109, 339. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 195.

⁶³² *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 93, pp 304-305.

⁶³³ Basil, *Paranesis* to Leo, PG 107, col xxi-lx. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 135. Kahzdan, *ODB*, p 1649.

⁶³⁴ Basil, *Paranesis* to Leo, PG 107, col xxi-lx. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*.

reign. In the *Epanogoge*, philanthropy was central to good rule: ‘The emperor is an upright overseer of the laws, a common good to all subjects...His purpose is to be beneficent to all and therefore he is called benefactor. Once the emperor loses his virtue of benevolence, he adulterates his imperial character....The emperor must interpret the laws humanely and when dealing with dubious questions the manner of interpretation must be philanthropic’⁶³⁵ Basil was also said to have expressed anxiety about the tax burden on the poor and the accumulation of land by wealthy families.⁶³⁶ When he became emperor, Basil distributed coins to the city’s poor and Eudokia, Constantine and Leo also made private gifts.⁶³⁷ The references to Basil’s philanthropy in the *Vita Basilii* are therefore very much in keeping with the claims Basil made - or those made on his behalf - in documents issued while the emperor was alive.

The likelihood is that Basil took care to win the allegiance of different sections of the population. *The Patria* noted that Basil had removed flies and mosquitoes from the *Ta Tzerou* shrine, so that they would no longer trouble the inhabitants.⁶³⁸ He also built a shrine for the benefit of the market traders, which gave them some protection from the weather.⁶³⁹ Basil patronised other civic institutions too, restoring a building near the Chalke used as a court of justice.⁶⁴⁰ Magdalino has suggested that this demonstrated a concern to be seen to be running a fair fiscal regime.⁶⁴¹ Basil’s repairs to the water system at Hieria may

⁶³⁵ Βασιγεύς ἔστιν ἔννομος ἐπιστασία, κοινὸν ἀγαθὸν πᾶσι τοῖς ὑπηκόοις....Τέλος τῷ βασιλεῖ τὸ εὐεργετεῖν, διὸ καὶ εὐεργέτης λέγεται, καὶ ἡνίκα τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἐξατονήση, δοχεῖ κιβδηλεύειν κατὰ τοὺς παλαιοὺς τὸν βασιλικὸν χαρακτήρα....φιλαγάθως δεῖ τοὺς νόμους ἐρμηνεύειν τὸν βασιλέα ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ἀμφιβόλοις τὴν φιλόχαλον φιλάνθρωπον ἐρμηνείαν προσιέμεθα. *Epanogoge* Title 2, lines 1-8. Translation by Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 51.

⁶³⁶ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 99, pp 320 - 324.

⁶³⁷ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 29, pp 112-114.

⁶³⁸ *The Patria*, Book 3, sections 24 and 200.

⁶³⁹ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 93, p 302.

⁶⁴⁰ For the court of justice, see Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, p 34.

⁶⁴¹ P. Magdalino ‘Justice and finance in the Byzantine State’ in Laiou and Simon *Law and Society in Byzantium*, p 99.

have benefited nearby residents as well as the palace.⁶⁴² It seems probable that Basil himself made it a priority to achieve popularity with the urban population of Constantinople, by making a virtue of his own poor origins and by protecting the poor, the sick and the aged. He may even have sided on occasion with the poor against the power of officialdom.⁶⁴³ A new emperor could be vulnerable to the citizenry, in case of a challenge to the throne, who might side with his rival.⁶⁴⁴ Although philanthropy seems to have influenced Basil's building work, it is notable for its absence from his visual imagery. Perhaps philanthropy was primarily a virtue to communicate to the population of Constantinople, whilst other virtues were preferred for the elites who frequented the palace.

Imperial Renewal?

The language of the *Vita Basilii* is often of rejuvenation. It reported churches restored after being 'withered by old age'⁶⁴⁵ or 'wrinkled.'⁶⁴⁶ Petriion was described as being 'about to give up the ghost' when Basil restored it.⁶⁴⁷ Common adjectives to describe the results of renovation include 'beautiful' and 'blooming.'⁶⁴⁸

It has been claimed that the *Vita Basilii* was attempting to describe the renewal of Constantinople in a classical tradition based on Augustus' renewal of Rome. According to Jenkins, the *Vita Basilii* depicted the emperor as the refounder of the Roman State, drawing on earlier writers such as Isocrates, Plutarch and

⁶⁴² *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 92, p 300.

⁶⁴³ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 99, p 320.

⁶⁴⁴ See introduction, p 16.

⁶⁴⁵ τῇ παλαιότητι κατερικνωμένον ἰδὼν καινουργεῖ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 81, line 13.

⁶⁴⁶ ρυτιδας. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 80, line 4.

⁶⁴⁷ ὥσπερ λειποψυχοῦντα ἀνέρωσε καὶ περιφανῶς (ἀν)εκτήσατο. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 82, line 4.

⁶⁴⁸ εὐπρεπεῖς and νεουργόν. *Vita Basilii*, passim, in Chapters 79, 80, 81.

Polybius, and using imperial signs like the eagle.⁶⁴⁹ Alexander believed that although renewal was always a key part of Byzantine imperial ideology, it reached an apogee in the *Vita Basilii*.⁶⁵⁰ Augustus had claimed to have restored 82 temples in Rome - a similar scale to Basil's achievement.⁶⁵¹ Yet it is not clear that Basil would have known the *Res Gestae*, as Latin works were less likely to be read in Greek-speaking Constantinople. Although Photios was extremely well-read, Christian rulership interested Photios more than classical models, as is clear from his reading notes and letter to Boris, the Bulgar Khan.⁶⁵² It seems likely, therefore, that the language of the *Vita Basilii* may be more revealing about tenth-century attitudes towards Basil and the Macedonian House. Kazhdan downplayed the classical influences on the *Vita* and saw the panegyric as a much more contemporary document, strongly influenced by tenth-century problems and concerns.⁶⁵³

The rhetoric of renewal and rejuvenation was not invented by the *Vita Basilii*, however. The idea that Basil renewed Constantinople was promulgated by Leo, whose funeral oration for his father claimed that he brought about 'a golden age'.⁶⁵⁴ Although this was a conventional form of praise in a highly rhetorical document, Leo was explicit that Basil had renewed and embellished churches, monasteries and palaces.⁶⁵⁵ Although the *Vita Basilii* focused tightly on Constantinople and its surroundings, there is evidence that construction took place in other parts of the Empire too. Cormack noted an increase in building activity in Greece during Basil's reign, suggesting that renewal was a theme in

⁶⁴⁹ Jenkins, 'The classical background.'

⁶⁵⁰ Alexander, 'The strength of capital.'

⁶⁵¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, Chapter 20, p 81.

⁶⁵² White and Berrigan, *The Patriarch and the Prince*; Wilson, *Bibliotheca*, p 8.

⁶⁵³ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, p 143.

⁶⁵⁴ χρυσᾷ ἔτη ἡ παλαιότης. *Ibid*, p 58, line 27. My translation.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p 60, line 24 - p 62, line 2.

the provinces too.⁶⁵⁶ There is no doubt that architecture was for the early Macedonians themselves proof that Basil's accession was the start of a glorious period for Byzantium.

The language of rejuvenation must help explain why Basil earned a reputation as a builder. It seems highly likely that the language of embellishment and rejuvenation used by Leo and the *Vita Basilii* referred to the restoration of figurative images. Basil's reign coincided with the high point of the restoration of figurative images after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. By the beginning of Leo's reign, four decades had passed in which churches and monasteries had been decorated with new imagery. The allegedly impious and impecunious Michael III could not be credited with any of this achievement. The idea that Basil reaped praise due to his predecessor is perfectly illustrated in one passage in the *Vita Basilii*, which claimed that Basil was responsible for the image of the Virgin in the apse at Hagia Sophia.⁶⁵⁷ This image was in fact commemorated by Photios in a sermon delivered in front of Michael III, whilst Basil was junior emperor.⁶⁵⁸ In the tenth-century, Basil may, in fact, have been credited by his supporters with all renovations that occurred over four decades after 848.

There are, in fact, contemporary sources which credit Basil with just this kind of rejuvenation. Firstly, an inscription in the north tympanum of Hagia Sophia, which has been dated to the 870s or 880s, records a restoration by an emperor: 'O eternal son of the eternal father, unto this thy house - the beautiful eye of the universe - time has brought misfortune. Its cure will provide spiritual

⁶⁵⁶ Cormack 'Away from the centre,' p 153. The *Vita Basilii* was only interested in Constantinople. Only six religious buildings mentioned by name were at a distance outside of the city and most of these were close by, at five sites: Hebdomon, Rhegion, Sosthenion, the bridge over Barbysos and the Straits heading to Euxine.

⁶⁵⁷ καθ' ἣν καὶ τὴν τῆς Θεομήτορος εἰκόνα τὸν ἄσπορον υἱὸν ἐπωλένιον φέρουσιν ἀνιστόρησεν. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 79, lines 5-7.

⁶⁵⁸ Photios, Homily 17. Aristarches, 'Εκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, *Second Series, Vol II*, pp 177 - 198. Translated by Mango, Homilies of Photios, pp 286-296.

salvation'.⁶⁵⁹ If this genuinely records the sentiments of Basil, then it demonstrates that the emperor was repairing damage done by time and believed this would confer spiritual benefits. Secondly, an anonymous poem, dating from Basil's reign, described the emperor 'protecting the divine things of the sanctuaries, beauties beaming with divine light more excellent than mortals. Both uninterrupted feasting in pure-flowing channels, surpassing not only all things seen in due time but also higher than all worldly things. For what manner of place does he not fill with the gifts of the god-seeing Lord Basil.'⁶⁶⁰ New mosaics, of Christ, Virgin or Apostles, would have been considered 'divine things' and 'beauties beaming with divine light'. Basil would have been praised - quite literally as 'God-seeing' - for making such 'gifts' beyond mortal achievements, winning merit for eternity not just on earth. The metaphors used in the poem are very similar to those used in the ninth-century to describe the return of figurative images. In Photios' 10th Homily, for example, the patriarch described the beauties of the decorations inside the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos, in the Great Palace.⁶⁶¹ In his 17th Homily, about the image of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia, Photios specifically said that the loss of figurative images had deprived the Church of beauty.⁶⁶² The Iconoclasts, he argued, had stripped the Church of

⁶⁵⁹ Ἔργον αμιμητον χρόνος ἡπειλησεν λύσειν εἵργεται ἡμετέρης διὰ φροντίδος ἀλλὰ ἄνοιξον οἶκον, ἄναξ ὕψιστε, ὅπου χρόνος οὐκ ἐγγίζει. Translation by C. Mango and E. Hawkins, 'the mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: the church fathers in the north tympanum,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26, (1972), p 40.

⁶⁶⁰ προξενοῦν τὰ Θεῖα τῶν ἀνακτόρων
 κάλλη θεαυγῇ τῶν βροτῶν ὑπέρτερα
 εὐωχίαν τε τὴν διηνεκεστάτην
 ἀκηράτοις ἴκουσαν ἐν διεξόδοις
 κρείττω τε πάντων ὠραῖσμων ὀρωμένων
 καὶ τῶν ἀπάντων κοσμικῶν ἀνωτέραν
 ποῖος τάπος γὰρ οὐ γέμει δωρημάτων
 τῶν τοῦ Θεόπου δεσπότου Βασιλείου

Lines 151-158 of an anonymous poem, published by Markopoulos, 'An anonymous laudatory poem' p 231. My translation.

⁶⁶¹ Photios, Homily 10. Edited by P. Lambeck, *CSHB*, pp 194-202. Translated by Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp 185-186.

⁶⁶² Photios, Homily 17, Aristarches, 'Εκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, *Second Series, Vol II*, pp 177 - 198. Translated by Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p 187.

ornaments and in so doing inflicted wounds on her.⁶⁶³ As well as winning credit for work commissioned by Michael III, Basil was almost certainly praised for work conducted in his own reign, regardless of whether he was personally involved. Emperors were often credited with improvements made by others during their reigns. This is illustrated by a source from Leo's reign. According to the *De Sacris Aedibus Deiparae ad Fontem*, Leo VI attended the dedication of the church of St. Anne at Pêgê out of friendship for the *oikonomos* of the monastery involved, who had led the renovations. The text, however, claimed that Leo laid the foundations, made the church beautiful and adorned the porch, all of which may have been the responsibility not of the emperor but of the monastery itself.⁶⁶⁴

There is another, more prosaic, explanation for the apparent energy of Basil's building activity. On 8 January 869, less than 18 months after Basil became senior emperor, Constantinople was rocked by a devastating earthquake. Many churches, including Hagia Sophia, were damaged and some destroyed.⁶⁶⁵ This earthquake is acknowledged in the *Vita Basilii*: the Church at Pêgê, the Church of the Mother of God called Sigma and the Church of St. Mokios were all damaged.⁶⁶⁶ It is likely that contemporary Byzantines would have seen this natural phenomenon as an expression of divine displeasure. *The Patria* was composed over a century later in around 989 - 990. However, its author clearly linked Basil's murder of Michael III with this 'frightful and extraordinary'

⁶⁶³ In one letter from his exile, Epistle 112, dated c. 870, Photios sought to take credit for the renovation and construction of churches. He claimed that since his exile, churches had been abandoned or destroyed. L. Westerink (ed), *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani, Epistulae et Amphilochia*, Vol 1, (1983), 150-151. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 226, n124 and p 237, n180.

⁶⁶⁴ *De Sacris Aedibus Deiparae ad Fontem*. Edited by Palmé, *Acta Sanctorum*, third edition, pp 878-889. Translated by Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp 205-6

⁶⁶⁵ *Vita Basilii*, Chapters 79, 80, 81. *The Patria*, Book 3, 182. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, Chapter 6, Section 41.

⁶⁶⁶ St Anna: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 81, pp 268-271; Pêgê: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 80, pp 268-269; Sigma: *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 80, pp 268-269; St. Mokios, *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 81, pp 268-269. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 39.

event.⁶⁶⁷ Berger noted that although *The Patria* is inexact as a historical record, it is much more reliable as a source for the popular attitudes of the inhabitants of Constantinople.⁶⁶⁸ Byzantines might blame emperors for natural disasters and once divine favour was lost, it would reap destruction on city and people as well as emperor. Earthquakes were one of the divine signs most closely interpreted by Byzantines.⁶⁶⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, the loss of divine blessing would remove imperial authority, legitimising a challenge to the throne. Earthquakes would be carefully scrutinised, therefore, for signs of divine displeasure and it seems probable that Basil's renovations were designed to counter the notion that his bloody accession signified divine anger at the manner of his coming to power. This kind of renewal, from rubble rather than Iconoclasm, appears to be the view taken by Byzantine posterity. In addition to *The Patria*, when John Skylitzes wrote his *Synopsis* in the late eleventh-century he linked Basil's renovations to the earthquake rather than any intention of imperial renewal.⁶⁷⁰

Leo's Building Programme

Emperor as Spiritual Authority

Leo's building work was on a lesser scale compared to his father but although many of the sources for Leo's building work are short, single references, some are more personal than surviving sources are about Basil. Sometimes texts reflect imperial intention in Leo's own words, at other times they highlight Leo's relationships with his friends, family and advisers.

⁶⁶⁷ μετὰ δὲ τῆς ἔτης σεισμοῦ φοβεροῦ καὶ ἐξαισιου γεγονότος εἰς τὴν αὐτοκρατοριαν Βασιλείου μετὰ τὸ ἀναιρεθῆναι Μιχαήλ, συνεπτῶθη ὁ ναὸς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ Κυριακῇ, μνήμῃ τοῦ ἁγίου Πολυεύκτου. *The Patria*, Book 3, 182.

⁶⁶⁸ *The Patria*, pp xvii - xviii.

⁶⁶⁹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, p 185. G. Dagron, 'Quand la terre tremble...' in *Travaux et Memoires* 8, (1981), pp 87-103.

⁶⁷⁰ John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, Chapter 6, Section 41.

For example, Leo ordered the construction of the Church of St. Demetrios, which contained figurative images of Christ supported by angels and saints.⁶⁷¹ The *Book of Ceremonies* adds the information that the court met here at least twice a year, including the eve of Palm Sunday, when Leo held receptions and distributed palm leaves and silver crosses to dignitaries.⁶⁷² The fact that Leo had built and decorated the church must have reinforced the emperor's standing as a patron and source of social status among those who assembled there on those occasions. Leo also built a monastery at Psamathia for Euthymios, his spiritual father and later patriarch.⁶⁷³ The *Vita Basilii* credits him with a chapel to Barbara, although this was distinct from the church which housed the martyr's remains.⁶⁷⁴ Leo also gave gifts to churches, such as an altar cloth for Hagia Sophia.⁶⁷⁵ Some of Leo's building was born of necessity, like Basil's, with fire more often the culprit, rather than earthquake. The *Patria* recorded that Leo rebuilt the Church of St Stephen, which had burned down.⁶⁷⁶ Leo rededicated another damaged church, St. Thomas, which he said had burned down after licentious behaviour inside.⁶⁷⁷

The sources provide more explicit evidence for Leo's association with the building work of figures at his court. The emperor dedicated a church built by his close adviser Stylianos Zaoutzes, which contained scenes of prophets and kings in the drum of the dome.⁶⁷⁸ He also dedicated the Church of the Theotokos of

⁶⁷¹ Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ πανυγηρικοὶ λόγοι. Leo, Homily 19. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Halkin (ed), *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 538.

⁶⁷² *Book of Ceremonies*, Book I, Chapter 31, p 170.

⁶⁷³ *Vita Euthymii*, p 30, line 7; p 32, line 19.

⁶⁷⁴ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 90, p 295. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, pp 61-62

⁶⁷⁵ Leo, Homily 35. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 236. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1930.

⁶⁷⁶ *The Patria*, Book 3, 96.

⁶⁷⁷ Leo, Homily 32. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 236-237. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1843

⁶⁷⁸ Leo, Homily 37. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 242-245. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 880.

Libos, which was built by Constantine Lips, one of his officials, in 907 along with a convent and hospice for travellers. Part of this building survives as the Fenari Isa Camii, in the centre of Istanbul.⁶⁷⁹

One of the most important constructions in Leo's reign was the church and monastery of St. Lazarus, on the northern fringe of the Great Palace site in Constantinople. This appears to have been built in around 900 and involved the use of workmen from the navy.⁶⁸⁰ Leo arranged for some important relics to be transferred there, notably those of Lazarus from Cyprus and Mary Magdalene, from Ephesus.⁶⁸¹ Leo and Alexander bore these relics on their shoulders, before they were interred in a silver casket in the chapel, an example of imperial stagecraft in a building built by an emperor.⁶⁸² Leo appears to have dedicated the church himself.⁶⁸³ This is noteworthy as it demonstrates a different focus from Basil. Whilst Basil had collected relics associated with Old Testament figures like Solomon and Elijah, Leo's focus was more on the New Testament and figures around Jesus.⁶⁸⁴ Whilst Basil left church dedications to his patriarch, Leo conducted them himself. Leo's actions were perhaps reflected among the images of Lazarus constructed on the dome of the Church built by Zaoutzes, his adviser.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁷⁹ Freely and Cakmak, *Byzantine Monuments*, pp 174-178. Theophanes Continuatus reported that the Church of the Theotokos of Libos was dedicated by Leo, PG 109, 408; Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 318.

⁶⁸⁰ The *Vita Euthymii* referred to this as being newly built in 901. *Vita Euthymii*, 63, 18-20. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 309. Its construction is also noted in *The Patria*, Book 3, 209.

⁶⁸¹ *The Patria*, Book 4, 35.

⁶⁸² *Ibid*, p 222. This derives from a fourteenth-century sermon by Nikephoros Kallistos, 'Sermon on St. Mary Magdalene,' PG 147, 539-576.

⁶⁸³ This homily is lost but reference to it by Arethas survives. Arethas, Opus 59, in L. Westerink, *Arethae Scripta Minora II*, (1972), 15.2-5. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 26.

⁶⁸⁴ See Chapter 5.

⁶⁸⁵ Leo, Homily 37. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 242-245. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 880.

It is notable from Leo's dedications that he had a great deal of respect for some of the artists who had worked on them. He praised their decisions, such as the choice of simple paving stone used for the Church of the Monastery of Kauleas.⁶⁸⁶ He also speculated about their intentions, for example by contemplating the design of the Christ Pantokrator at the Church built by Zaoutzes, which was the first known example of its kind in Constantinople.⁶⁸⁷ Leo's words demonstrate that he was sufficiently knowledgeable and interested to converse with artists and would have been capable of influencing and interpreting their designs.

The primary sources that cover the reigns of Basil and Leo are more explicit about Leo's philanthropy than they were about Basil's. Leo founded a hostel for the aged near Kyphe and visited it on Good Fridays to distribute alms, another example of imperial stagecraft intended for the population of Constantinople.⁶⁸⁸ He made laws to maintain hospitals, orphanages and old-age homes and generate revenue for them.⁶⁸⁹ He also had a stone cistern built at the Constantine bath for the use of the poor.⁶⁹⁰ The emperor's sense of duty may have involved some self-interest. Tougher has noted that the monastery Leo founded at St Lazarus was for eunuchs and suggested that Leo favoured the administrative role of eunuchs, in part to curtail the power of the aristocracy.⁶⁹¹

Leo's philanthropic intentions survive in his own words. In one homily, for example, he declared that 'let us rule not with haughtiness and arrogance but with fatherly love as if guiding our children, the weaker ones in as much as we

⁶⁸⁶ Leo, Homily 31. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 240-242. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1843.

⁶⁸⁷ Leo, Homily 37. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 242-245. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 880.

⁶⁸⁸ *Theophanes Continuatus*, PG 109, 370

⁶⁸⁹ Novel 12 and Novel 13. Edited by S. Troianos, *Οι Νεαρές Λέοντος του Σοφού: Προλεγόμενα, χείμενο, απόδοση στη νεοελληνική, ευρετήρια και επίμετρο*, (Athens, 2007). Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 116.

⁶⁹⁰ Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, p 243.

⁶⁹¹ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 202.

are powerful, those who are wronged in as much as we are their helpers, the poor in as much as we are adequately provided.’⁶⁹² These statements seem very close to those expressed by Photios on Basil’s behalf and demonstrate that although Leo and Photios may have believed different things about the extent of imperial power, they both thought that the wellbeing of the people of Byzantium was a goal of rule.

Perhaps the most prominent imperial philanthropist was Leo’s first wife, the empress Theophano, who was credited with giving her possessions to the poor and to widows and with endowing several homes and hospitals.⁶⁹³ Empresses were often important founders of churches and monasteries in their own right. Not only did this give empresses a chance to establish a reputation for piety and philanthropy, it also allowed them a chance to make a public display of their wealth and standing.⁶⁹⁴ In fact, Theophano’s record contrasts surprisingly with that of her mother-in-law, Eudokia. James has noted that building empresses tended to be associated with emperors who built.⁶⁹⁵ Basil was clearly a major builder and yet no claims were made about Eudokia’s own foundations. This may simply reflect a bias in the way that imperial achievements were recorded, especially after the passage of a few decades. It may also increase the suspicion that by the tenth-century, Basil himself was given credit for almost all of the construction work that occurred in his reign, regardless of who was actually responsible.

There is less suggestion that Leo pursued conspicuous consumption at his palaces. Basil may have been more active than Leo, yet Leo he did make

⁶⁹² μὴ ἐν ὑψηλοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἀλαζονείᾳ καταδυναστεύοντες ἀλλ’ ἐν σπλάγχνοις πατρικοῖς ὡς τέκνων προιστάμενοι, τῶν ἀδυνατοτέρων ὡς δυνατοί, τῶν ἀδικουμένων ὡς βοηθοί, τῶν πτωχῶν ὡς ἱκανοὶ ἐν τῷ ζῆν Leo, Homily 35. Translation by Antonopolou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 75. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1930.

⁶⁹³ Kurtz, ‘Theophano die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.’

⁶⁹⁴ James, ‘Making a name,’ pp 63-72.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p 64.

improvements, such as a bath-house on the Great Palace site near to the New Church.⁶⁹⁶ This is known from an ekphrasis by Leo Choirosphaktes, one of Leo's courtiers.⁶⁹⁷ Elements of this imagery which may have been intended to associate Leo with the Apostles will be considered in Chapter 5 (alongside similar imagery from a sceptre and a votive crown). Alongside those Apostolic images, however, the bath-house depicted an emperor holding a sword and an empress strewing flowers alongside river gods. There were also scenes of animals, including fishes, a songbird, snake, lion, crane as well as a tree of life and flowers of many colours.⁶⁹⁸ Byzantines were ambivalent about depictions of nature. It was difficult to tell when the fruits of paradise turned into the deceptions of the Fall of Man.⁶⁹⁹ Whether or not this scene may have been intended to compare the Palace with Eden, it seems at least that the imagery in the bath-house was encouraging its visitors to take pleasure in the delights of nature.

Constructing an Imperial Cult?

Leo did not build on as grand a scale as his father. Yet there is one direction in which it seems that Leo may have gone further: his attempt to dedicate churches to at least one of his wives, Theophano and possibly also Zoe Zaoutzaina. One of Leo's most significant new constructions was the Church of All Saints, built adjacent to the Church of Holy Apostles. According to *The Patria*, Leo took material from St Stephen's Church to re-use in All Saints, but the source is not explicit about whether this was building fabric, church artifacts or relics.⁷⁰⁰ It does, however, say that the church contained 'memorials of the holy apostles' but this was probably a corruption in the text, referring to relics in the Holy

⁶⁹⁶ Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 63.

⁶⁹⁷ Magdalino, 'The bath of Leo the Wise.' See Introduction, p 41.

⁶⁹⁸ Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*, pp 122-123

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p 166.

⁷⁰⁰ θαυματουργίαν καὶ ἀγιότητα.....θαυματουργοῦ. *The Patria*, Book 3, 209.

Apostles church itself.⁷⁰¹ Most significantly, this church was initially dedicated to the sanctity of Leo's first wife Theophano, who died in about 893. This was the first time in recent memory that an emperor had tried to sanctify a member of the imperial family, if we discount Nicetas' claim that Photios sought to sanctify Basil's son Constantine, on grounds of the overt hostility Nicetas felt for the former patriarch.⁷⁰² Leo's motivations are not particularly clear. His marriage with Theophano had not been successful. Their one child had died, Leo had taken a mistress, whom he later married, and his behaviour was criticized by Euthymios.⁷⁰³ Theophano was certainly seen by contemporaries as a holy figure and a hagiography was written shortly after her death. The Byzantines credited the empress with 'wonderworking,' 'holiness' and 'miracle-working' and Leo may have been striving to benefit from her reputation.⁷⁰⁴ After objections from bishops, however, Leo had to back down and the church was renamed All Saints, at which point the empress' body may have been reburied in Constantine's mausoleum in the Holy Apostles.⁷⁰⁵ The incident demonstrates that the bishops could exercise a veto against the emperor within church affairs.

This may not have been a unique act by Leo. In 900, he may have built a church to St Zoe in honour of his second wife Zoe Zaoutzaina.⁷⁰⁶ Tougher suggests that the chroniclers may have been mistaken about this.⁷⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Leo's actions show that he may have seen the imperial family as being in a special, privileged

⁷⁰¹ Downey suggested that this phrase refers to the memorials of the emperors in Justinian's mausoleum. The confusion appears to stem in part from the fact that Constantine VII also built an oratory to Theophano inside the Church of Holy Apostles. Downey, 'The Church of All Saints.'

⁷⁰² See above p 149.

⁷⁰³ *Vita Euthymii*, p 40, lines 18ff. Tougher, *Leo VI*, pp 138-140.

⁷⁰⁴ *The Patria*, Book 3, 209. Janin, *Églises et Monastères*, p 254. Kurtz, 'Theophano die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.'

⁷⁰⁵ Downey, 'The Church of All Saints,' pp 206-207.

⁷⁰⁶ *Leo Grammaticus* PG 108, 274; *Theophanes Continuatus*, PG 109, 364. L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: women and power in Byzantium, AD 527 - 1204*, (2011), p 113.

⁷⁰⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p145.

relationship with God and conceived of the imperial office in a much more spiritual way than his father. A third act, again for one of his wives, suggest another factor was at play. Leo also wanted his third wife Eudokia, who died in 900, to be buried at the Monastery of Lazaros, but this was prevented by the abbot, ostensibly over an argument about her being buried at Easter, on a holy day.⁷⁰⁸ The account of the incident in the *Vita Euthymiii* presents Leo as something of an impetuous, wilful character who believed his rule was law, not one who laid careful plans but one who would attempt to get his way regardless of ritual tradition. In that context, these incidents together suggest not that Leo was seeking to sanctify imperial figures as much as trying to exercise personal control over church affairs such as the naming of saints, the dedication of churches and the organisation of funerals. He was an emperor who expected to get his own way, although his will could be thwarted.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that building work contributed to a sense of imperial prestige and reputation in Byzantium. This is clear from the fact that the *Vita Basilii* dedicated 19 chapters to Basil's building work, compared to 15 chapters on his military campaigns in the East. Both Basil and Leo founded churches, restored monasteries and built institutions for the poor, sick and aged. To a large extent, their actions conformed to what was expected of them as emperors. Nevertheless, there were differences in each emperor's activity.

⁷⁰⁸ *Vita Euthymii*, p 62, line 19. Eudokia died over Easter. She was not buried at St. Lazaros in the end but in the imperial mausoleum at the Church of Holy Apostles.

Only Basil was responsible for a major new construction, the New Church, which occupied considerable resources of time, labour and money. This was soon known as the New Imperial Church and it was indeed imperial, allowing Basil to link the site closely to his own person and conception of power, through his choice of saints, relics and imagery. Basil appears to have been inspired by the Old Testament Kings, perhaps modelling himself on Solomon the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem. The creation of this Church was a direct expression of imperial power over the Green faction and the navy but it did not seek to sanctify the imperial family nor was it a retreat of imperial iconography in the face of religious authority, as Grabar has suggested. Rather, religious imagery was co-opted for imperial purposes. Basil also probably expanded his palace sites with new facilities, which would have added to the prestige with which the emperor was viewed by the elites of Constantinople, as well as by foreign ambassadors. His initial motivation, however, might have been defensive. The earthquake of 869 could have threatened his legitimacy by undermining his claim to divine blessing. Basil's early renovations may therefore have been intended to banish such an idea before it gained hold.

Both Basil and Leo patronised institutions for the poor, sick and aged. Basil's reasons do not survive in his own words, like they do for Leo, but it seems likely that the two emperors genuinely believed that it was their duty to look after those in need. However, Basil's support for other public institutions such as the market, together with his public distribution of alms, may suggest that he was seeking to build popularity with the city's inhabitants. This may have been part of a strategy to defend his position on the throne.

Leo was a less prolific builder, although he used architecture and the art inside buildings to express his own sense of imperial mission and convey a sense of his own spiritual authority. Leo may have made an attempt to use architecture to sanctify or commemorate members of his imperial family, yet ultimately his actions suggest authoritarianism rather than caesaropapism. More significantly,

Leo's renovations at Pêgê are further evidence of his association with the Virgin, standing alongside his adoption of her image on his coins and on his sceptre. Rather than moulding himself in the image of the Old Testament kings, as his father had done, Leo presented himself as a spiritual leader, perhaps more in the tradition of the Apostles, an association which shall be explored further.

The early Macedonian period was indeed a time of renewal but this meant different things at different times to different people. Initially, I have argued, Basil was credited with the restoration of figurative images in churches and monasteries which had gathered pace in his reign. He also undertook restoration work after earthquakes had damaged a number of churches, monasteries and palace sites. The rhetoric of renewal was present in sermons by Photios, who promoted Basil as a champion of Orthodoxy as much for his own interests as for Basil's own reputation. However, the rhetoric of renewal was soon co-opted by the imperial family. Leo sought to present Basil's reign as a fresh start and golden age, symbolised, most of all, by the New Imperial Church. The *Vita Basilii* systematised the many discrete restorations, embellishments and improvements which had taken place in the fabric of Constantinople over many decades under the traditional rhetoric of renewal. His purpose, however, was probably to compare the Macedonian House and its founder favourably with the family's rival, Romanos Lekapenos. Nevertheless, the author of the *Vita Basilii* appears to have been more impressed with the richness, wealth and global reach of the emperor than he was with his spiritual example or authority. Just as emperors probably had multiple and possibly conflicting motivations for investing in building work, so too the reception of their constructions was mixed and multi-dimensional. Yet the development of Basil's posthumous reputation as a builder demonstrates the central role played by architecture in the construction of imperial power.

Part Two

Power Relations

Chapter 4

Images of the Emperor and His Family

The first section of this thesis examined ways in which images of imperial power were constructed through portraits, iconography and architecture. This second section explores what artistic images can reveal about the power dynamics which existed between the emperor and other figures of authority. This analysis begins by considering the relationship between the emperor and other members of the imperial family.

Imperial art often presented emperors along with other figures. Most commonly, he was shown alongside junior emperors; sometimes with the empress; occasionally with other children who had not gained official rank. Often these juxtapositions chart the imperial lifecourse, as children were born, promoted or denoted as successors. Images, therefore, reflected gradations of the imperial hierarchy at the point they were made, indicating how power in Byzantium was derived from or compared with the power of the emperor himself. The imperial family could also represent a threat. In Byzantine history, almost all successful coups against emperors came from relations.⁷⁰⁹

I will consider ‘power relations’ in two parts. First, I will look at the ways in which members of the imperial family appeared and disappeared on coins and seals, using the substantial Dumbarton Oaks and Fogg Museum of Art collections. Formal changes in imperial status are most obvious from the depiction of the hierarchy on coins and seals and the appearance of members of the imperial family - or their disappearance - indicated patterns of growing or waning

⁷⁰⁹ M. Herlong, ‘Kingship and social mobility in Byzantium, 717-959,’ PhD thesis, Washington DC, 1986.

influence at Constantinople. Although the arrangement of imperial figures followed largely conventional patterns, the findings can be unexpected and this dimension has often been overlooked in studies of imperial politics. In the second part, images from mosaics and manuscripts are considered which depicted the emperor with other members of his family. These include images of Basil, Eudokia and junior emperors Leo and Alexander from the Paris Gregory as well as textual descriptions of family portraits from the Kainourgion Palace at Constantinople. These were unusual in including not only empress Eudokia but also all of Basil's children, his daughters as well as his sons.⁷¹⁰

Relational Power on Coins and Seals

Relational Power Under Basil

What can be observed about the imperial hierarchy under Basil I? Table 7 shows which imperial figures appeared on coins from his reign.⁷¹¹ The first two columns shows the likely year of production and classification. The next two show which figures were in office at the time (as senior or junior emperors) and whose image actually appeared on coins. Table 8 provides the same information for seals.⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 27. There are few surviving examples of imperial family images but rarest are those with daughters as well as sons. However, Grabar thought that family images may have been more common than the few surviving examples now indicate.

⁷¹¹ Drawn from Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, pp 487-506.

⁷¹² Drawn from Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, pp 82-91.

TABLE 7: Coin Types with Imperial Figures in Basil I's Reign.

Year	Coin Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
868	Gold Class I	Basil (senior)	Basil
868 - 879	Gold Class II	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior)	Basil Constantine
879	Gold Fractional	Basil (senior) Leo (junior) Alexander (junior)	Basil Leo Alexander
882	Gold Fractional	Basil (senior) Leo (junior) Alexander (junior)	Basil Constantine Eudokia
868 - 879	Silver	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior)	-
868 - 879	Copper Class I	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) (Leo from 870)	Basil Constantine
868 - 879	Copper Class II	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) (Leo from 870)	Basil Constantine
870 - 879	Copper Class III	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) Leo (junior)	Basil Constantine Leo
870 - 879	Copper Class IV	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) Leo (junior)	Basil Constantine Leo
879 - 886	Copper Class V	Basil (senior) Leo (junior) Alexander (junior)	Basil

TABLE 8: Seal Types with Imperial Figures in Basil I's Reign.

Year	Seal Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
868	Rare	Basil (senior)	Basil
869 - 879	Common	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) Leo (junior)	Basil Constantine
870 - 879	Rare	Basil (senior) Constantine (junior) Leo (junior)	Basil Constantine Leo

The coin data suggest that Basil's official imagery reflected two or three phases in terms of power dynamics within the imperial household. In what may have been a first phase after Basil became senior emperor in 867, the emperor was presented alone, without mention of his sons. Shortly afterwards, however, Basil was presented alongside Constantine, his oldest son and chosen heir.

Constantine, who was born between 859 and 864 and was made a junior emperor in 868, was promoted on coins and seals for a decade before he died in 879.⁷¹³ In the final phase, for the remaining seven years of the reign, Basil was largely depicted alone. None of his other sons, Leo, Stephen or Alexander, was given the prominence afforded to Constantine earlier in the reign. A similar pattern can be seen in the images on Basil's seals. At first Basil appeared alone, as he did on his gold coins. He was then depicted alongside Constantine, again following the pattern on his coins. For a decade after 870, Basil, Constantine and Leo were depicted together on seals, although none have survived with an image of Alexander. This mirrors the imagery on copper but not gold coinage.

Different denominations of coins appear to have served different purposes. For example, a contrast can be observed between the main issues of gold coins and the fractional gold, issued for ceremonial purposes. Constantine was the only figure to appear with Basil on Class II gold coins, which were in widespread

⁷¹³ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 46. Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 498.

circulation from 868 until at least the end of the reign.⁷¹⁴ Leo, Alexander and Eudokia, by contrast, only appeared on fractional gold coins issued in 879 and 882, presumably for ceremonial purposes, the first of these marking, perhaps, Alexander's elevation to imperial status in 879.

The promotion of Constantine on Basil's Class II solidus from 868 demonstrates how gold coinage was often used as a tangible signal of the intended passage of power. Constantine was still young (between the ages of four and nine) when his image was first displayed on the gold coinage, so Basil acted quickly to signify Constantine's status. Emperors could not take their choice of successor for granted. Bury has observed that the succession was elective, in theory at least, requiring nomination by senior emperor and acclamation by senate, church and army.⁷¹⁵ Leo III, (717-741), was the first emperor to strengthen the claims of his son by putting his image on the reverse of his coins.⁷¹⁶ This was a course of action taken by founders of other dynasties. For example, Michael II (820-829), the first Amorian, issued coins with the image of his son Theophilos from the first months of his reign.⁷¹⁷ Basil, however, went further than previous emperors by including Constantine on silver and copper too.⁷¹⁸ This may have reflected Basil's anxiety about his own hold on power and not just the succession. Having a son eligible for the throne would have been a sign of divine blessing, a contrast with the childless Michael III and an indication of dynastic strength.

⁷¹⁴ Leo did not initially mint new gold coins, so this type of solidus would have been in circulation well into the next reign. See below.

⁷¹⁵ Bury, *Constitution*, pp 13-15. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, p 270.

⁷¹⁶ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, p 170

⁷¹⁷ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 394.

⁷¹⁸ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 478. It is also worth noting that the extent of Basil's minting activity from 868 undermines claims in the *Vita Basilii* that the Treasury was depleted when Basil assumed sole power from Michael III, suggesting that Michael's profligacy was exaggerated or unfounded.

The way coins were distributed emphasised the senior emperor's role as the fount of patronage for members of the elite. Gold and silver passed from the hands of the emperor to his leading officials on major festivals, such as Easter. Liudprand observed such a ceremony in 950, which may have been similar to those which had occurred in earlier reigns.⁷¹⁹ Large sums of money changed hands. The marshal of the palace, he observed, 'carried off his money not in his hands but on his shoulders'.⁷²⁰ Others, less senior, received pounds of gold coins according to their rank, starting with 24 pounds for the most senior officials after the marshal.⁷²¹ Those receiving lower sums got them from the chamberlain, suggesting that aspects of the ceremony deliberately focused on the relationship between the emperor and his most senior subjects. The distribution of coins also enabled the emperor to express his virtue on occasions when they were given out to the poor, such as after Basil's succession to the throne.⁷²²

Including or excluding a member of the imperial family from a coin or seal would have been an unambiguous message to the nobles, officials and generals of the Empire. A visual presence on a coin could denote imperial favour, authority to act on behalf of the emperor and seniority for the succession. Appearance on a gold solidus, minted for wide commercial use rather than ceremonial purposes, indicated selection to inherit the throne. Appearance on copper coins or seals indicated present but not necessarily future power. Omission from coins or seals, by contrast, would imply an individual was of more marginal significance. Only those sons with the rank of junior emperor appeared on coins or seals. Other members of Basil's family, such as his son Stephen and his daughters, did not appear at all. Basil was more rigorous than some previous emperors in excluding

⁷¹⁹ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Book 6, Chapter 10.

⁷²⁰ '*Rector comus chi non in minibus sed in humerus posits sunt numismata.*' *Ibid.* Translation by F. Wright.

⁷²¹ Liudprand specifies that payment was in gold coins: '*numismatorum aureorum*'. *Ibid.*

⁷²² Theophanes Continuatos, *Chronographia*, CHSB, 256-257. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, p 135.

members of his wider family from the coinage. Theophilos, for example, had depicted three daughters alongside the Empress Theodora on a gold solidus from the 830s.⁷²³ Basil, by contrast, never depicted his daughters on his coinage. The circumstances were different: Theophilos' coin was issued at a period in which the emperor had no surviving male heir. Nevertheless, the elevation of a daughter might come at the risk of promoting her husband, who could become a rival. Basil avoided that danger, by confining at least some of his daughters in a nunnery and excluding them from his public imagery.⁷²⁴

The coinage does not appear to reflect the power and influence of the empress. Eudokia was not depicted on anything beyond a single, ceremonial gold coin, an experience she shared with Empress Theodora whilst her husband, Theophilos, was on the throne. This does not reflect Eudokia's likely influence at Basil's court. Eudokia died before Basil, and so never had a period of Regency. Theodora's status on the coinage only changed on her husband's death in 842, when she became Regent for the child emperor Michael III.⁷²⁵ During such periods in which the emperor was too young to rule, the empress was often depicted more prominently on the coinage.⁷²⁶ While their husbands were alive, it was rare for empresses to feature. On the whole, Byzantine coinage does not appear to be much of a guide to the stature and power of empresses.⁷²⁷ A different impression might be obtained from other media, such as manuscripts and mosaics, as we shall see.

⁷²³ The Class IV gold solidus from the late 830s, which was probably issued for his daughter's elevation as *Augusta*. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 407-408.

⁷²⁴ See p 150 n 602 and 603.

⁷²⁵ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 461-463. During her Regency, Theodora appeared with Michael III and his sister Thekla on a Class I gold solidus from 842-843 (Figure 15a and b below) and with Michael III on a Class II gold solidus from 843-856. Michael III was depicted alone after 856.

⁷²⁶ A similar phenomenon happened after Alexander's death in 913, when Zoe and Constantine VII were depicted on a Class I gold solidus from 914 and a Class II gold solidus from 914-919. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, pp 541-542.

⁷²⁷ The Empress Irene was, of course, a special case.

Having so clearly expressed his choice of Constantine for the succession between 868 - 879, the obvious question is why Basil gave no indication of his choice thereafter? For Basil appears to have abandoned his strategy of using the coinage to influence the succession when Constantine died in 879. From this point and for the final seven years of the reign, there were no more gold or silver issues. On the copper coins which were minted during these years, Basil appeared alone, even though Leo and Alexander were both co-emperors throughout this time. The imagery in this final period of the reign contrasts strongly with the earlier period in which coins and seals clearly portrayed Constantine as Basil's heir.

A number of explanations are possible. There may simply have been enough coins in circulation in the latter years of the reign and no need to issue more after 879. Perhaps there was not enough gold in the Imperial Treasury. This seems unlikely. The wars Basil fought and the construction of the New Church must have depleted the Treasury, but his military victories must have yielded riches too. A lack of gold does not explain why Leo and Alexander were omitted from copper coins issued during the 880s. More significantly, Basil's earlier pattern of minting demonstrated that he used coins for propaganda purposes. Basil made a clear and persistent effort for the first part of his reign to use coins and seals to promote Constantine as his chosen successor. Why would he not make such efforts when the point of succession was becoming a nearer reality?

It is unlikely that Basil felt so secure in a Macedonian succession after 879 that propaganda appeared unnecessary. The internal and external rivalries in the 880s were just as acute as they had been in the 870s. For example, Basil faced a plot by John Kourkouas and 65 other senators in March 886 and from 882 - 886 Byzantium faced regular challenge from the Emirs of Tarsus. Could Basil's failure to promote Leo instead be evidence that Basil doubted that he was Leo's natural father? This seems unlikely too. The appearance of Leo alongside Constantine on copper coins between 870 and 879 is a strong argument against the idea that Leo

was Michael III's son. If Basil had really believed this, as later chronicles claimed, it is unlikely that he would have promoted Leo ahead of Alexander. Alexander was born around 870 and although he was a child when Constantine died, he was old enough to be set in line for the throne. The dead Constantine had been a similar age when he was promoted by Basil and Leo's son, the future Constantine VII, was made co-emperor at the age of just three.⁷²⁸ Leo's inclusion on coins for the decade after 870 seems to be strong evidence to support Tougher's conclusion that Basil treated Leo as if he were his own son.⁷²⁹

The most likely explanation for Basil's failure to promote an heir on his coinage was that after 879 he was undecided about which son to back for the succession. In his final years, each of Basil's sons might have seemed a threat to the ageing emperor. Leo was imprisoned, probably between 883 - 886, after falling out with his father, who suspected him of involvement in a plot against his life.⁷³⁰ Whether or not Leo was involved with conspirators against Basil, he does appear to have accepted some of the blame for the events that led to his imprisonment.⁷³¹ Nevertheless, Leo's imprisonment does not explain Leo's omission from coins issued between 879 - 883, when he must have been the presumed choice for heir. And if Basil did turn against Leo in 883, why did he not promote Alexander into Leo's place? It is possible that after 879 Basil may have questioned the temperament, loyalty and ability of both Leo and Alexander and been uncertain who to back. He might have been asserting his authority against a perceived threat or he might have been biding his time, before making a choice over Leo or Alexander. This hesitation would surely have been destabilising for the imperial

⁷²⁸ Alexander's year of birth is given as c 870 in Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 56. Given that Constantine VII was crowned co-emperor at the age of three, it is possible that Basil could have elevated Alexander over Leo, had he wished to do so after 879. Leo, of course, would have been a crucial four years older, making his candidacy more credible.

⁷²⁹ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 48.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid*, p 35.

⁷³¹ Homily 34. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 234.

succession. In marginalising Leo and Alexander, Basil would have been treating his younger sons in a similar way that he himself had been treated by Michael III. On that occasion, in 866 when Basil was junior emperor, Michael had sidelined his colleague by excluding him from the gold coinage, even though the childless Michael had no other heir. According to the chronicles loyal to the Macedonians, Michael was playing a dangerous game with Basil, seeking to push him aside and promote other favourites.⁷³² If this is true, and it seems quite plausible, then repeating that strategy could have been hazardous to Basil's regime. His very refusal to promote Leo publicly as his heir may have left Leo questioning Basil's intentions and prone to joining an attempted coup, which might have eventually materialised and led to Basil's death. Indeed, Arabic Chroniclers believed that all three of Basil's sons were ultimately involved in his assassination in 886.⁷³³

Whether Basil was uncertain about Leo or distrustful of him, it is evident from imperial imagery that Basil had enjoyed a particularly close attachment to his oldest son, Constantine. This can be witnessed from a gold ceremonial coin issued in 882 (Figure 3b).⁷³⁴ This featured Constantine and Eudokia and is believed to have been issued after Eudokia's death in 882, when Constantine would have been dead for three years.⁷³⁵ Emperors did occasionally issue commemorative coins but they usually had a political message. Theophilos, for example, issued a coin depicting his dead father Michael II and his dead son Constantine (Figure 14b) and continued to do so for a decade until his next son, the future Michael III, was born in 840 (after which Theophilos and Michael were

⁷³² *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 25.

⁷³³ Tabari, Year 273 (886 - 887) in Vasiliev, *Byzance et Arabes*, p 10. This interpretation was disputed by other sources. The *Vita Theopano*, for example, noted that Basil had died of old age: Kurtz, 'Theophano die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI' p 14, lines 3-4. It would, however, have been very unlikely for a contemporary hagiographer to have accused Leo of patricide.

⁷³⁴ Chapter 1, p 59.

⁷³⁵ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, Part 2, p 481. Grierson rejected on stylistic grounds the idea that this coin was struck for Eudokia's coronation.

depicted together on new gold coins).⁷³⁶ Brubaker and Haldon have suggested that Theophilos' coin was intentionally dynastic in nature, reflecting the emperor's imperial parentage and displaying three generations of imperial authority at a point when the throne was in practice quite weak, without an heir.⁷³⁷



Figure 14a and b: Gold Solidus of Theophilos (Obverse), with Michael II and Constantine (Reverse), Class III, 830-840, from a Private Collection.⁷³⁸ With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com.

Basil's commemorative coin from 882 is not obviously dynastic in purpose. Basil did not have imperial lineage to claim for himself and although Eudokia had imperial connections as a member of the Martiniakoi family, these were not strong enough to augment Basil's claim to the throne. It was in any event unusual to feature an empress on coins, certainly one who had just died. Yet the strangest choice was the depiction of Constantine, who had been dead for three years when the coin was minted. Grierson pointed out that there was no obvious precedent for what to do when an heir died before his father.⁷³⁹ The difference, of course, between Theophilos and Basil is that Basil had other surviving sons, which Theophilos did not. Theophilos returned to the depiction of his chosen heir

⁷³⁶ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 409, p 428.

⁷³⁷ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, pp 433-4.

⁷³⁸ <http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/theophilus/sb1653.1.jpg> (viewed August 2015).

⁷³⁹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 409

as soon as Michael III was born. Basil did not do so. Instead, the 882 coin appears to have been a personal memorial to a dead wife and son. This was likely to have been a ceremonial coin, issued for a purpose no longer known, perhaps Eudokia's burial. Rather than making a claim on the future, Basil was here looking back to the past, in quite a personal way, lamenting the loss of a wife and son. The *Vita Basilii* recorded that Basil was 'inconsolable' after Constantine's death, although the text adds that he quickly regained control over his grief.⁷⁴⁰ The 882 coin, issued so long after Constantine's death, implies that Basil did not recover so quickly and allowed a power vacuum to emerge at court. Basil's late coinage expresses that power vacuum, with the emperor striking a solitary figure with no reference to his sons or wider family.

In conclusion, Basil's coinage is revealing about the power dynamics at his court. It shows that Basil promoted Constantine soon after his succession, to consolidate his own grip on power. However, neither Leo nor Alexander filled the role played by Constantine after he died in 879. For the final period of the reign, there was something of a power vacuum around Basil, as he failed to use the coinage to express his choice for the succession.

Relational Power Under Leo

The imperial imagery on Leo's coins inevitably followed a different pattern from his father's because his family circumstances were different. When Basil became emperor, he had a number of young children including four boys. Leo, at the time of his accession, had no son. The first son to live beyond infancy was the future Constantine VII, born in 908. There was, however, another figure of imperial rank, for on Leo's succession Alexander was the serving co-emperor. Tables 9 and 10 display which imperial figures appeared on Leo's coins and seals

⁷⁴⁰ πένθος ἀμύθητον καταλιπὼν τῷ πατρί. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 98, lines 14-15.

respectively.⁷⁴¹ The data show that despite being junior emperor throughout the reign, Alexander was not depicted on any gold or named on any silver coins and appeared on only one out of three copper issues, which were probably minted early in the reign.⁷⁴² Leo's coins and seals are also an exclusively male preserve. None of the empresses were depicted and none of his daughters.⁷⁴³

TABLE 9: Coin Types with Imperial Figures in Leo VI's Reign

Year	Coin Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
886 - 908	Gold Class I	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior)	Leo
908 - 912	Gold Class II	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior)	Leo Constantine
886 - 908	Silver Class I	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior)	Leo (inscription)
908 - 912	Silver Class II	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior)	Leo and Constantine (inscriptions)
Uncertain	Copper Class I	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior) ?	Leo
Uncertain	Copper Class II	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior)?	Leo Alexander
Uncertain	Copper Class III	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior)?	Leo

⁷⁴¹ Drawn from Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, pp 512-522 and Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, pp 91-93.

⁷⁴² Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 510.

⁷⁴³ Leo had a daughter, Eudokia, with Theophano, who died before 895 and another daughter, Anna, who was born in 899 or 900 and later betrothed to Louis of Provence. Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 148.

TABLE 10: Seal Types with Imperial Figures in Leo VI's Reign

Year	Seal Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
Uncertain	Rare	Leo (senior) Alexander (junior) Constantine (junior) depending on date	Leo Alexander

Alexander's omission from most coins in the early years of the reign contrasted with recent Byzantine practice. When Michael III became emperor in 842, for example, his coins continued to depict his sister, Thekla, until 843 and his mother Theodora until 856 (Figure 15a and b).⁷⁴⁴ Michael was still a child at the time, however, making Theodora and Thekla more powerful figures (the coin is unusual for depicting Michael as a smaller figure than his sister). By contrast, Leo was an adult when he came to the throne and did not need the extra authority of Alexander to govern.



Figure 15a and b: Gold Solidus of Theodora (Obverse), with Michael III and Thekla (Reverse), Class I, 842-843, from a Private Collection.⁷⁴⁵ With permission of wildwinds.com and cngcoins.com.

⁷⁴⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 461ff. Initially Theodora was on the obverse. After about 843, Christ was depicted on the obverse, with Michael and Theodora on the reverse.

⁷⁴⁵ http://wildwinds.com/coins/byz/michael_III/sb1686.jpg (viewed August 2015).

Leo's treatment of Alexander on his coinage implies that Leo never saw his brother as much of a colleague, let alone a possible successor. The appearance of a co-emperor on gold coinage would have indicated that he was heir to the throne. Alexander was indeed the next in line when Leo ascended the throne, but this was not a claim that Leo seems to have wanted to promote, for Alexander's image only appeared on copper coins. Leo appeared alone on the Class I Gold Solidus from the first part of his reign, although the relative rarity of this coin means that it might have been minted for a ceremonial purpose. Once Constantine VII was born, Leo issued new gold and silver coins which promoted the claims of his son.

The marginalisation of Alexander on Leo's coins could suggest something about the relationship between Leo and Alexander. The *Vita Euthymii* reported that this was poor, even while Basil was alive.⁷⁴⁶ Leo may have considered removing Alexander as his son's guardian. On the other hand, several contemporary sources show that Leo acknowledged Alexander as his junior partner in government.⁷⁴⁷ Both Leo and Alexander were mentioned in some of Leo's Novels, for example.⁷⁴⁸ Alexander continued to be depicted on imperial seals, demonstrating that he continued to exercise power (Figure 16b).⁷⁴⁹ Although few have survived, they all feature Alexander as well as Leo. Leo eventually passed on power to Alexander and Constantine together.

⁷⁴⁶ For example *Vita Euthymii*, p 4, line 20 and p 54, line 22.

⁷⁴⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 221.

⁷⁴⁸ Eg. Novels 116 and 118. J. Codoner, 'The Corpus of Leo's Novels: some suggestions concerning their date and promulgation,' [academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu/2151786/The_corpus_of_Leo_s_Novels), http://www.academia.edu/2151786/The_corpus_of_Leo_s_Novels. Some suggestions concerning their date and promulgation (Viewed July, 2015).

⁷⁴⁹ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, pp 91-93.



Figure 16a and b: Seal of Leo VI, depicting both Leo and Alexander, unknown date, Obverse and Reverse, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.⁷⁵⁰

On reflection, Alexander's exclusion from Leo's gold and silver coinage is not especially surprising. Most emperors promoted their sons and heirs on their coins and Alexander's power would have been diminished once Constantine was born. Leo was simply biding his time until he had an heir. His wariness of relations was not unusual for the times.⁷⁵¹ This may explain why Leo was content for most gold coins in circulation early in his reign to depict his father Basil and dead brother Constantine.⁷⁵² Once he had an heir, Leo acted quickly. Constantine was depicted on gold and silver coins from the age of three until the end of the reign.⁷⁵³ It appears that no new copper coins were issued. Leo's strategy seems to have been to put Constantine's image (and name, for the silver type) before the elites of Empire, especially in Constantinople. He was not concerned to use copper to achieve a wider distribution that would have included more of the populace.

The fact that Leo appears alone on his coins but with Alexander on his seals suggests that seals served a different purpose and denoted present authority but

⁷⁵⁰ Accession number: BZS.1955.1.4298 <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4298> (viewed August 2015).

⁷⁵¹ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 230.

⁷⁵² Grierson suggested that the rare Class I gold solidus featuring the Virgin was a ceremonial issue, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, p 508. The most recent major gold issue would therefore have been Basil and Constantine, *ibid.* p 487.

⁷⁵³ Constantine was born in 905. Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 502.

without a future claim to the throne. Imperial correspondence and documents would have been validated by the imperial seal.⁷⁵⁴ The image would have represented the authority of the figure who sent the communication, indicating that decisions had the authority of both imperial figures.⁷⁵⁵ Alexander would have needed to appear on seals in order to fulfil his duties as co-emperor, however significant they were. His authority was needed in legal and administrative decisions being made at court. The fact that Constantine's image does not appear on surviving seals may be an accident of survival or may be because as a young child he did not issue documents in his own name which required a seal.

What is most unusual, perhaps, is that Leo appears not to have issued gold coins in any number at the start of his reign. This may have been a matter of policy. Novel 52, probably issued by Leo between 891 and 899, sets out the emperor's views on coinage.⁷⁵⁶ In it, he claimed that previous emperors have caused much suffering among the poor, merchants and farming classes by not allowing coins issued by their predecessors to remain legal tender. A shortage of coin would have had the effect of reducing agricultural prices, as food staples would have been used to pay taxes and acquire goods instead. Instead, Leo promised that every kind of gold coin would retain its value. Leo's restraint in the issue of new gold coins contrasts strikingly with his brother Alexander, who, as we shall see, issued several new types of gold and silver. The contrast could have been purely the effect of monetary needs. Yet it seems more likely that the coinage reflected different imperial strategies. Leo appears to have felt more secure than Alexander when he took the throne, did not need his brother's authority to bolster his legitimacy and could afford to wait until his son was born to start

⁷⁵⁴ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, p 1.

⁷⁵⁵ H. Kruse, *Studien Zur Offiziellen Geltung des Kaiserbildes im Römischen Reiche*, (Paderborn, 1934); T. Pekary, *Das Römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft*, (Berlin, 1985).

⁷⁵⁶ Hendy, *Monetary Economy*, pp 302-3. The dating of Leo's Novels is disputed. Novel 52 was addressed to Stylianos Zaoutzes and Cordonier argued that it probably dates from his term of office as βασιλειοπάτωρ, 891 - 899: 'The corpus of Leo's Novels,' pp 19-20.

using coins for their propaganda value. His justification for not issuing gold coins also demonstrates that he sought authority based on his virtues as a ruler.

In conclusion, Leo's coinage was dynastic in a strictly narrow sense: the priority was the immediate claim to the succession and not the future of the dynasty as a whole. Leo's exclusion of Alexander did not imply that the brothers had a bad relationship: merely that Alexander was not the intended heir. Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that Leo was content to wait until his son was born before issuing significant numbers of gold coins. He appears to have been less concerned about his public image on his succession than either his father or brother. This may have reflected a confidence in his power over others at court.

Relational Power Under Alexander

Alexander's coins are important and unusual in a number of respects. Their iconographic significance was examined in Chapter 2. This chapter focuses on what they reveal about relational power during his short reign. Tables 11 and 12 set out the imperial figures who appeared in Alexander's coins and seals.⁷⁵⁷

TABLE 11: Coin Types with Imperial Figures in Alexander's Reign

Year	Coin Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
912 - 913	Gold Class I	Alexander (senior) Constantine (junior)	Alexander
912 - 913	Gold Class II	Alexander (senior) Constantine (junior)	Alexander
912 - 913	Silver	Alexander (senior) Constantine (junior)	Alexander

⁷⁵⁷ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 2*, pp 524-525. Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, pp 93-94.

TABLE 12: Seal Types with Imperial Figures in Alexander's Reign

Year	Seal Type	Names of all emperors in office at the time	Imperial figures depicted
912 - 913	Rare and damaged	Alexander (senior) Constantine (junior)	Alexander (Constantine)

Alexander's coins promoted only Alexander. In Alexander's gold coinage, the emperor appeared alone, in bust and as a standing figure being crowned by a saint or holy figure (Figure 12b).⁷⁵⁸ The silver coinage did not have an image of Alexander but contained an inscription, referring to the emperor as *Autokrator*, the term used for a single emperor, not a senior one. Of Alexander's new coins, none depicted Constantine. Indeed, Alexander marginalised Constantine in his coins at least as assertively as he himself had been marginalised by Leo in the years after 886 (although no copper coins survive to make a direct comparison possible).⁷⁵⁹ Constantine was only seven when Leo died in 912 and Alexander became senior emperor. Alexander, however, was childless, as Leo had been at the start of his reign, and so had no heir of his own to position for the succession. Leo's son Constantine, therefore, remained the heir-apparent. When he died, it seems that Leo had no better choice than to leave his brother as Constantine's guardian and hope that he would eventually succeed to the throne.⁷⁶⁰

Alexander's had choices about how to treat Constantine in his coin imagery. If he had followed Leo's wishes, he would have depicted Constantine on the coinage alongside him. If he had followed Leo's own example, however, he would have waited until he himself had an heir before issuing any new gold or silver coins. This would have required him to allow existing gold coins, featuring Leo and Constantine, to continue to circulate. Alexander, it seems, was not prepared to

⁷⁵⁸ Chapter 2, p 121, The crowning motif was explored in Chapter 2.

⁷⁵⁹ Alexander had only appeared on Leo's early copper coins. It is possible that Alexander only minted gold and silver coins.

⁷⁶⁰ Tougher, *Leo VI*, pp 231-232.

do this, issuing gold and silver coins immediately in his own name. He may have been determined to promote his own image but he may also have wanted to marginalise Constantine or perceived him as a potential threat. This must throw into doubt the idea that Alexander was ill when he came to the throne.⁷⁶¹ If Alexander was doubtful of his strength, he might have been expected to allow Leo and Constantine's old coins to continue in circulation or mint new ones with himself and his nephew. That might have felt to Alexander like he was more junior to Constantine, however, a stop-gap candidate while Constantine grew up, an idea that his use of the term *autokrator* may have been intended to exclude.

In fact, Alexander's position had little precedent. It was very unusual in Byzantium for an emperor to be succeeded by his brother. The last occasion this had happened was beyond living memory. Heraklonas succeeded his brother Constantine III in 641, but died the following year, when his nephew, Constans II, succeeded him. Unlike Alexander, Heraklonas did not try to marginalise Constans after his brother's death but promoted him to junior emperor in 641.⁷⁶² In the ninth-century, Michael I Rangabe took over from his brother-in-law Staurakios in 811 but abdicated himself in 813.⁷⁶³ No coins of Staurakios are known.⁷⁶⁴ There would therefore have been little obvious precedent for Alexander and his goldsmiths to draw on. Alexander or his officials in effect made their own decisions in the circumstances and those revolved around the emperor, with no thought to the succession. It is worth noting in this context that the Macedonian Dynasty was more vulnerable at this point than it had been in recent decades. It should not be forgotten that Constantine's legitimacy was not beyond question, given the circumstances of his parents' marriage. By marginalising Constantine,

⁷⁶¹ Karlin-Hayter, 'Emperor Alexander's bad name,' p 590. This is based on Leo and the bishops' predictions of Alexander's death in *Vita Euthymii*.

⁷⁶² Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 918.

⁷⁶³ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1362.

⁷⁶⁴ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 362.

Alexander was putting a Macedonian succession at risk, just as his father Basil had in the last seven years of his reign.

Once again, the pattern on seals was different. Figure 17 shows the only surviving seal from this period from the Dumbarton Oaks and Fogg Museum collections. This solitary, damaged, example makes generalisation impossible. However, the fact that Alexander appears in the left half of the seal leaves a space on the right half, which could only have been filled with an image of Constantine. This seems to confirm the earlier suggestion that coins and seals followed different rules. Whilst Constantine was marginalised on coins, he continued to hold authority in his own right, in administrative and legal affairs. He might have been relegated in influence and was not presented as a future heir but he was still a figure of some practical power.



Figure 17a and b: Seal of Alexander, damaged, with Alexander and a second figure, (now missing), 912-913. Obverse and Reverse, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.⁷⁶⁵

In conclusion, Alexander behaved in a similar way to his brother but in quite different circumstances dynastically. Leo had been childless and had waited some years before having a male heir. During that time he had been content to marginalise his brother Alexander. So in turn, Alexander might have believed he had time to secure a son and heir for the succession, without regard to

⁷⁶⁵ Accession number: BZS.1955.1.4296 <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4296> (viewed August 2015).

Constantine VII's claim. Whilst Leo was content to wait until he had a son before minting most of his gold coins, however, Alexander was much more proactive. As a result, Constantine's marginalisation was more visible: his exclusion from the coinage would have been noticed and could have jeopardised his position, as the son of a disputed marriage. At the time, Alexander may have given little thought to the future. The extent of his minting activity suggests that the emperor was busy asserting his authority at a time of uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity. The emperor's immediate concern was in establishing his own power and authority, upon his succession, which required proactive image-making on the highest status coins. His efforts certainly bear no relation to Alexander's subsequent image as a lazy, indulgent ruler with no interest in government.⁷⁶⁶

Images of the Macedonian Imperial Family

Having considered images on coins, the analysis will now extend to depictions of the imperial family on other works of art. Surviving depictions of the imperial family in Byzantium are generally rare, outside coins.⁷⁶⁷ However, a number of examples are known involving Basil and his family. Two such images, depicting Basil, Eudokia and their children, from a Kainourgion Palace bedchamber were recorded in the *Vita Basilii*.⁷⁶⁸ Eudokia, Leo and Alexander also appear in a miniature from the Paris Gregory (PLATE 2).

The family images from the Paris Gregory only depicted those members of the imperial family with official imperial roles: Basil, Eudokia and junior emperors Leo and Alexander. The portraits are shared between two folios. On facing pages, Basil is shown flanked by Gabriel and Elijah and Eudokia appears alongside Leo and Alexander. Stephen, intended for the church, is not present and nor are any

⁷⁶⁶ Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, p 59.

⁷⁶⁷ Grabar, *L'Empereur*.

⁷⁶⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, pp 292-295.

of the daughters. The imperial children were depicted as adults, even though they would have been a lot younger.⁷⁶⁹ Leo would have been a young man of about thirteen to sixteen and Alexander a child of about nine to twelve.⁷⁷⁰ The fact that they are shown as smaller adults, simply reflects the fact that they were junior emperors. Both wear the chlamys, signs of newly conferred power. Alexander would have been elevated to junior imperial status at around the time this manuscript was made. These are public bodies on display.

Depictions of the imperial family were influenced by conventional notions of hierarchy.⁷⁷¹ From the evidence of coins, it is apparent that in the early Macedonian period, where there were two figures, the more important was placed on the left as the image is viewed; if three were represented, the most important position was in the middle. Seniority was also represented by size as well as position, with the more important figures depicted larger. In Basil's seals, for example, Basil's figure is larger than Constantine's, reflecting his seniority (Figure 18).⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁹ Hennessy, *Images of Children*, p 148.

⁷⁷⁰ Based on a date for the Paris Gregory of 879 - 882.

⁷⁷¹ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 110-112.

⁷⁷² Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, pp 83-90.



Figure 18: Seal of Basil I, showing Basil I and Constantine, 869-879, Reverse, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC.⁷⁷³

In the images from the Paris Gregory, Basil is accorded the greatest status, placed alongside a prophet and an archangel and wearing the *loros*, sign of a senior emperor (PLATE 1). Eudokia occupies the second most prestigious position, in the centre between her sons, who are also smaller than she (PLATE 2). The inscription running around the edges of this image reinforces the importance of Eudokia, both as Basil's empress and as the mother of sons who were expected to inherit the throne: 'Basil, Emperor of the Romans, precedes you, the well-branched vineyard bearing the grapes of the empire, the gentle *despotes*. With them you shine forth, light-bearing Eudokia'.⁷⁷⁴ It is notable that Eudokia is named, whilst the imperial sons are not.

Minute gradations of power are visible in these images, which suggest that the emphasis given to Eudokia was intentional. Subtle differences, for example, are visible in the number of pearls worn by Leo and Alexander. Leo has one more

⁷⁷³ Accession number BZS.1951.31.5.42 <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.42> (viewed August 2015).

⁷⁷⁴ ΕΥΚΛΗΜΑΤΟΥΣΑΝ ΑΜΠΕΛΟΝ ΣΕ ΤΟΥ ΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ ΒΟΤΡΥΣ ΦΕΡΟΥΣΑΝ ΤΟΥΣ ΓΑΛΗΝΟΥΣ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΑΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΣ ΠΡΟΗΞΕ ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ ΑΝΑΞ ΜΕΘΩΝ ΠΡΟΛΑΜΠΕΙΣ ΕΥΔΟΚΙΑ ΦΩΣΦΟΡΟΣ. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'Portraits of Basil I', p21 n 10. Translation Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 162.

than his brother, reflecting his more senior status. It is surprising, perhaps, that Leo was depicted lower in the hierarchy than Eudokia. Heir-apparent after Constantine's death, it might, have been expected that he be given greater prominence in the design. Eudokia's elevation was not unprecedented. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Theodora was depicted on the obverse of some gold coins, whilst Michael III was on the reverse with his sister, Thekla, who was also shown larger than Michael.⁷⁷⁵ But Michael was a young child at the time and Theodora was Regent. Leo was significantly older when the Paris Gregory was created. Leo's dead brother Constantine had featured on Basil's coins and seals from as early as 868, when he was younger than Leo in the Paris Gregory portrait.⁷⁷⁶

The difference in hierarchy in the Paris Gregory may simply reflect nuances in the design of coins and manuscripts. It may have been intended to give Eudokia prominence and indeed the Paris Gregory is notable for the number of female figures depicted.⁷⁷⁷ The image certainly indicates the importance of the empress, something also apparent in the Kainourgion Palace mosaics, which will be considered shortly. Hennessy has suggested that the decision to depict Leo and Alexander with their mother, rather than their father, may indicate the boys' close relationship with Eudokia and tension with Basil.⁷⁷⁸ This is a fascinating theory but it seems more likely that the design of the Paris Gregory was inevitable if the main intent in depicting Basil was to show his divine favour: there was simply no room to depict the co-emperors alongside Gabriel and Elijah. It seems more likely, therefore, that the imperial hierarchy in the Paris Gregory reflected the state of affairs at court at the time. The manuscript was produced after Constantine's death in 879 but before Eudokia's in 882, and

⁷⁷⁵ See Figure 15b.

⁷⁷⁶ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 498 concluded that Constantine was between four and nine when he became junior emperor

⁷⁷⁷ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 404.

⁷⁷⁸ Hennessy, *Images of Children*, p 148.

before Leo was imprisoned by his father (probably between 883 and 886). It was probably designed only months after Constantine died. There seems no reason why Photios, who had been Leo's tutor, would hold back from indicating Leo's status as heir. The fact that the opportunity to depict Leo with any prominence was passed over in the design suggests that such an act would not have been favoured by Basil. This is further evidence, to set alongside Basil's failure to depict Leo as heir on his coins, that there was simply a lack of clarity about the intended succession when the image was made. This seems to have been a moment of uncertainty at court.

Grabar has described the Paris Gregory image as 'unabashedly dynastic'.⁷⁷⁹ On reflection, this seems an over-simplification. The image is indeed dynastic, in its emphasis on Basil's family. However, its depiction of the imperial hierarchy does not conform to expectation. The image was made at a point when the imperial hierarchy was in confusion. The heir had died and his successor had not yet been clearly designated. Leo's status in the imagery is under-defined, given his likely expectations at the time. Although these images express the imperial hierarchy, they also demonstrate its potential instability.

The family portraits from the Paris Gregory are the only ones which have survived from this time. However, other images are known from textual sources to have been created in the Kainourgion Palace.⁷⁸⁰ The first image was described as a 'delight....showing the emperor, creator of the building and his spouse Eudokia enthroned....and crowned with diadems.'⁷⁸¹ The text went on to say that 'the children shared by the couple are depicted all around the chamber as if they were bright stars: they too are resplendent in imperial robes and diadems'.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁹ Grabar, *L'Empereur*, p 116.

⁷⁸⁰ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89. See introduction.

⁷⁸¹ ἔνθρονον δεικνύσα τὸν τοῦ ἔργου δημιουργὸν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ τὴν σύζυγον εὐδοκίαν στολαῖς κεκοσμημένους βασιλικαῖς καὶ ταινιουμένους τοῖς στέμμασιν. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 42-44.

⁷⁸² οἱ δὲ κοινοὶ παῖδες ὡς ἀστέρες λαμπροὶ τοῦ δόμου πέρις ἱστόρηνται, ταῖς βασιλείοις καὶ αὐτοὶ στολαῖς καὶ τοῖς στέμμασι καταγλαΐζόμενοι. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 44-46.

The inclusion of Eudokia suggests that the mosaic dates from before Eudokia's death in 882. Eudokia appears to have been given prominence in the centre of the imagery, alongside Basil and once again with greater precedence than the heir to the throne, who was not named by the author of the *Vita Basilii*.

The *Vita* was explicit that both male and female children were depicted and this gives the image its greatest significance. If all of the children were included in the mosaic, a literal interpretation of the text, the image would include as many as eight: Leo, Stephen, Alexander, Anna, Helena, Maria, Anastasia and possibly Constantine. The fact that the daughters do appear makes the Kainourgion mosaic the fullest representation of the imperial family in Macedonian imperial art. There are earlier examples of an emperor and an empress shown together but the only examples cited by Grabar of an emperor surrounded by his whole family in the whole of Byzantine imperial art are later, notably the Barberini Psalter (Vatican Gr. 372, 11th Century) and a Louvre manuscript (BN Ms. Gr. 1402), featuring Manuel Paleologos, his wife and children.⁷⁸³

The Kainourgion mosaic image is very different from the way members of the imperial family were depicted on Basil's coins, which only included sons with titles. This suggests that imperial imagery worked differently in mosaics and on coins. Whilst the coinage focused narrowly on the emperor and his junior colleagues, mosaics and manuscripts could reflect a different perspective on power, which recognised in particular the role played by the empress, within the family and at court. The size of Basil's family helped to reinforce Basil's authority, contrasting with the childless Michael III and suggesting that Basil had God's blessing. The image also suggests achievement and personal success, the ascent from poverty to the peak of power. This success is signified in a particular way on this mosaic. Traditionally, emperors would hold objects like the *globus cruciger* or *akakia*.⁷⁸⁴ When Leo and Alexander were depicted with Eudokia in the

⁷⁸³ A Grabar, *L'Empereur*, pp 27-28.

⁷⁸⁴ See Chapter 2.

Paris Gregory, for example, they were shown with the *globus cruciger*, a symbol of temporal power. However, in the Kaingourgion Palace mosaic the children instead held codices: the male children ‘books containing the Holy Commandments that they have been brought up to obey’ and the female children ‘books containing divine laws’.⁷⁸⁵ This demonstrates that learning was an important sign of power for Basil. This was part of a wider effort of imperial image-making. Basil appears to have modelled his own kingship on Solomon, at least as the builder of the New Church.⁷⁸⁶ Two texts by Basil for Leo demonstrate that he also reared Leo to be a φιλόσοφος.⁷⁸⁷ Tougher argued that Basil had planned Leo’s image as a wise ruler, in the manner of Solomon, to match his own image as David.⁷⁸⁸ This effort did not stop with Leo. The *Vita* specifically noted that ‘the artist seems to have sought to indicate that not only the male but also the female offspring had been instructed in Holy Writ and were not unfamiliar with Divine Wisdom, furthermore that even if, because of the unsettled circumstances of his life, he who had begotten them did not at first have much commerce with letters, he nevertheless saw to it that all of his offspring would acquire their share of wisdom’.⁷⁸⁹

In Basil’s court, the written word was a sign of authority and legitimacy. Perhaps significantly, one image from the Paris Gregory shows a book itself enthroned (PLATE 4), an image which will be explored in Chapter 5.⁷⁹⁰ It is not clear who would have seen these portraits. The function of the mosaic’s location is not

⁷⁸⁵ αὐτὸ βίβλους τινὰς κατέχον ὁρᾶται νόμων θείων. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 48-49.

⁷⁸⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁷⁸⁷ Basil I, *Paraenesis* to Leo. PG 107, cols xxi-lx

⁷⁸⁸ Tougher, ‘Wisdom of Leo VI’, p 176.

⁷⁸⁹ Βουλομένου δεῖξαι τοῦ τεχνίτου τυχὸν ὥς οὐ μόνον ἡ ἄρρην γονή, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ θῆλεια τὰ ἱερὰ μεμύηται γράμματα καὶ τῆς θείας σοφίας οὐκ. ἔστιν ἀμέτοχος καί, κἂν ὁ φυτοσπόρος τούτων οὐκ ἔσχευεν ἐξ ἀρχῆς οἰκείως πρὸς γράμματα διὰ τὴν βιωτικὴν περιπέτειαν, ἀλλ’ οὐκ τοὺς οἰκείους ἀπαντας βλαστοὺς ἐν μετοχῇ σοφίας πεποίηκεν. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 50-55.

⁷⁹⁰ Folio 355r depicting the Council of 381 Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, Fig 36. See Chapter 5, p 219.

known. It might have been used only by the imperial family but could have been used for private meetings or even occasions of state. It seems likely that the space was accessible by officials of the Palace, Church and army and possibly by ambassadors. The two mosaics of Basil's family seem complementary images to the scene of triumph which state unambiguously that Basil was blessed by Christ and as a consequence victorious.

Looking back on this mosaic from the perspective of the tenth-century, when the *Vita Basilii* was composed, it is worth reflecting that the description was composed at a time when some contemporary chroniclers were claiming that Basil did not father his older children.⁷⁹¹ It is possible to read the *Vita Basilii* as a refutation of this idea, for the children are explicitly said to be those Basil and Eudokia had had together. Mango suggested that this form of wording was a deliberate attempt to address the rumour.⁷⁹² The key word - *κοινοί* - appears at the start of the sentence as transcribed by Migne and Ševčenko, which gives it added emphasis in English. However, Greek texts placed emphasis in later parts of sentences and the word itself may simply imply the sense of 'kindred' children of the imperial household. If that had been the intention, however, it is perhaps surprising that Leo was not named. If the *Vita* was seeking to challenge doubts about Leo's paternity, the author might have taken the opportunity to name him as the link between Constantine VII, who commissioned the *Vita* and Basil, founder of the Dynasty.

The second image of Basil's family from the Kainourgion Palace, also described by the *Vita Basilii*, may or may not have been linked to the first. This image depicted 'the emperor of glorious memory himself, his spouse and all their children: they shine like stars in the heavens, stretch out their hands towards God and the life-giving sign of the cross as much as to exclaim; 'All that is good

⁷⁹¹ For example Georgios Monarchos, 835. For discussion of Leo's parentage see Tougher, *Leo VI*, Chapter 2.

⁷⁹² Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p 198 n 73.

and pleasing to God has been accomplished and achieved in the days of our rule through this victorious symbol'.⁷⁹³ The cosmic metaphor of stars revolving around a sun or a moon was traditional and underscored the political theology of the Byzantine state, in which the emperor was God's representative on earth, charged with a holy mission on behalf of his people.⁷⁹⁴ A direct comparison was being drawn between heavenly court and imperial court. In this scene, we have an emperor and his family in direct communion with God, the cross itself a symbol of imperial victory since the time of Constantine the Great. Basil's achievements are directly linked to divine approval in the most direct and powerful manner. The message was unambiguous that a challenge to Basil would be a challenge to God and to the health of the Byzantine State.

On the ceiling of the bedchamber there were two inscriptions, expressed in the form of prayers which it claimed to report almost literally.⁷⁹⁵ The first was by Basil and Eudokia: 'We thank Thee, O supremely good God and King of Kings for having surrounded us with children who are thankful for the magnificence of Thy wondrous deeds. Preserve them within the bounds of Thy will and may none of them transgress any part of Thy Commandments, so that we may be grateful to Thy goodness for this as well'.⁷⁹⁶ The mention of transgression is interesting for Leo fell foul of Basil after transgressing in his marriage, taking a mistress whilst still married to Thephano.⁷⁹⁷ In that instance, Basil set himself up as a judge of his son's conduct and seemed quick to believe accusations against Leo and act,

⁷⁹³ περὶ ὃν ὡς ἄστρα κατ'οὐρανὸν Θεάσῃ ἐκλάμποντα αὐτόν τε τὸν ἀοίδιμον βασιλέα καὶ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων πάντων τὴν σύνευνον, πρὸς τε Θεὸν καὶ τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ζωοποιὸν σημεῖον τὰς χεῖρας ἐπαίροντας καὶ τοῦτο μονονουχὶ βοῶντας ὅτι `διὰ τοῦδε τοῦ νικοποιοῦ συμβόλου πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ φίλον Θεῷ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ἡμετέρας βασιλείας διαπέπρακται καὶ κατῴρωθται *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 62-67.

⁷⁹⁴ Alexander, 'The strength of Empire,' p 348.

⁷⁹⁵ λέξεως. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, line 71.

⁷⁹⁶ εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι θεὲ ὑπεράγαθε καὶ βασιλεῦ τῶν βασιλευόντων, ὅτι περιέστησας ἡμῖν τέκνα εὐχαριστοῦντα τῇ μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ τῶν θαυμασίων σου. ἀλλὰ φύλαξον αὐτὰ ἐν τῷ θελήματί σου, μή τις αὐτῶν παραδράμῃ τι τῶν σῶν ἐντολῶν ἵνα καὶ ἐν τούτῳ εὐχαρί στῶμεν τῇ σῇ ἀγαθότητι *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 71-76.

⁷⁹⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 35.

with physical violence, in judgement against him.⁷⁹⁸ There is no reason to think that the inscription relates to this incident or anything like it but it may highlight an autocratic aspect to Basil's character and family relations. The wording may also suggest that Basil placed a high value on filial piety which would have been ironic if Leo was indeed involved in his father's murder.⁷⁹⁹ The probability, of course, is that the author was simply indicating that Basil inculcated in his children an obedience to God's law.

The second prayer is expressed in the voices of the imperial children: 'We are thankful to Thee, O Word of God, for having raised our father from Davidic poverty and having anointed him with the unction of Thy Holy Ghost. Preserve him and our mother by Thy hand and deem them and ourselves worthy of Thy heavenly Kingdom'.⁸⁰⁰ The reference to Davidic poverty is interesting, highlighting what had become by the mid-tenth century a part of Basil's legend.⁸⁰¹ The *Vita Basilii* gives little factual information about Basil's childhood. His parents are not named, his exploits in exile are not mentioned and the incidents described are prophetic. In short, Basil's origins and childhood are concealed in mystery. Adontz, in his study of Basil's origins, suggested that the reality was quite different to the myth.⁸⁰² Rather than gaining his riches through Danielis, for example, Adontz concluded that Basil came from a rich family with funds in Macedonia, but suggested that the *Vita Basilii* chose not to mention these family connections, nor his service in Macedonia before coming to

⁷⁹⁸ *Vita Euthymii*, 41, 1-3. Leo is reported to have told Euthymios that Basil refused to listen to his defence against the accusation, seized Leo by the hair and beat him until he bled.

⁷⁹⁹ See p 181 above.

⁸⁰⁰ εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, Λόγε τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅτι ἐκ πτωχείας Δαυιτικῆς ἀνύψας τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν καὶ ἔχρισας αὐτὸν τῷ χρίσματι τοῦ ἁγίου σου πνεύματος. ἀλλὰ φύλαξον αὐτὸν τῇ χειρὶ σου σὺν τῇ τεκούσῃ ἡμῶν ἀξιῶν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἡμᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου σου βασιλείας. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, lines 77-81.

⁸⁰¹ Ševčenko indicated that there is a possible alternative translation: 'We are thankful to Thee, O Word of God, for having raised our father from poverty to speak with David' *Vita Basilii*, p 295. He thought this less likely.

⁸⁰² Adontz, 'L'age et L'origine,' p 486.

Michael's court, either because Constantine VII did not know the details or because he was perpetuating Basil's legend. Genesios too suggested that Basil's parents were 'of no small repute.'⁸⁰³ Although it is impossible to know for sure, Adontz' account of a provincial young man rising through connections and patronage is more plausible than the legendary story of Basil's miraculous rise from poverty and bondage. This suggests that someone was guilty of some re-inventing of history.

How would these inventions have aided perceptions of Basil's power? First of all, the downplaying of Basil's parents helped focus attention on Basil himself, as a divinely chosen figure who had made his own way to the throne and founded a dynasty.⁸⁰⁴ Furthermore, by airbrushing Basil's parents out of the story, Photios' invented genealogy for Basil may have seemed more plausible. Photios had claimed that Basil was descended from Tiridates, the king of Armenia, which Nicetas David clearly felt was incredible.⁸⁰⁵ This had involved re-arranging and inventing Basil's family tree, an act which had won Basil's approval and been later endorsed by Leo.⁸⁰⁶ Although Basil's parents were buried in a new family mausoleum at Petrion, it is notable that they were not named in the *Vita Basilii*, suggesting they had become an inconvenience in the promotion of Basil's origins.

The author of the *Vita Basilii* clearly believed that Basil's early poverty enhanced his reputation. This could have been a convenient way of presenting aspects of Basil's character, such as his illiteracy and provincial origins, which may otherwise have been scorned by court figures. However, there seems no doubt that Macedonian propaganda saw Basil's poverty as a positive to celebrate and not a negative to explain or hide. Leo, for example, said of his father that his

⁸⁰³ Genesios, Chapter 24, p 95.

⁸⁰⁴ Adontz, 'L'age et L'origine,' p 480.

⁸⁰⁵ Nicetas David, *Life of Ignatius*, p 118.

⁸⁰⁶ Vogt and Hausherr, 'Oraison funèbre,' p 44, lines 23-24.

early life had been like that of ‘the multitude’.⁸⁰⁷ The *Vita Basilii*, in its emphasis on justice and philanthropy, praises Basil as an emperor in touch with the people, their lives and needs. This was very much a part of the way Basil saw his own rule, as we saw in Chapter 3.⁸⁰⁸ Some historians have argued that Basil was philanthropic entirely for self-interest.⁸⁰⁹ It seems likely that Basil had a mixture of motivations, both noble and selfish. From an art history perspective, however, it is interesting that there is no visual representation of Basil’s philanthropy, even though it appears to have been an important part of his public image. Even when Basil is compared to a Biblical figure like Joseph in the Paris Gregory, the opportunity to praise his good deeds was not taken. The reasons why will be explored in the final chapter.

Conclusions

Art historians have often concluded that Macedonian imperial imagery was highly dynastic in character but this description accentuates one characteristic of the surviving art at the expense of the short-term realities of power politics.⁸¹⁰ It is no surprise to find official imperial imagery signifying the promotion of sons to imperial rank or relegating brothers to the political sidelines once an heir was born. Nevertheless, images of the Macedonian imperial family also demonstrate the ebb and flow of power during and between individual reigns.

Junior emperors were nominated and crowned by the senior emperor, appearing on the coinage.⁸¹¹ Imperial children’s careers were shaped from an early age: Basil cultivated Constantine but not his other sons for the throne and Stephen for

⁸⁰⁷ τὸ πλῆθος. Vogt and Hausherr, ‘Oraison funèbre,’ p 46, lines 8-11. My translation.

⁸⁰⁸ Chapter 3, from p 155.

⁸⁰⁹ Contestelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy*, pp 134-135.

⁸¹⁰ For example Grabar, *L’Empereur*, p 116, Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 406.

⁸¹¹ See Chapter 2.

the church. Sons could fall out of favour too, as Leo did for a time with Basil, disappearing from the coinage and being perhaps subtly demoted in the Paris Gregory. Sometimes, family relationships undermined dynastic causes: in his final years, Basil did not promote any of his surviving sons as his successor. Alexander ignored the claims of Constantine VII in choosing to be depicted alone. On both of these occasions, Basil and Alexander acted in ways which were self-interested and not dynastic.

The family itself could be an expression of power but it could also be a threat. After the childless Michael III, Basil's large family was an obvious sign of God's favour and blessing, and that may have been why the emperor had it depicted more than once in his new palace in Constantinople. Having four adult sons may also have expressed a vigour and dynamism about Basil's court and his family's grasp on the institutions of power. Daughters could make strategic marriages or be shut away in convents to avoid marriage alliances which might threaten imperial power. The inclusion of Basil's daughters in the Kainourgion Palace mosaics, holding scrolls, demonstrated both the piety and learning of the imperial family but also the extent of Basil's rise from humble, provincial origins. Eudokia also appears to have been given some prominence in art sited within the Imperial Palace, suggesting that she was a powerful figure at court. However, she barely appeared on the coinage, which under the Macedonians was an almost exclusively male preserve. Despite the important role played by the imperial family in Macedonian imagery, the progressive veil that was cast over Basil's own parents demonstrate that family could be an inconvenience as well as a blessing. Prominence was increasingly given to the myth of Basil's poverty, at the expense of his parents, whose names went unreported. Basil appears to have been extremely careful not to allow any of his family, with the exception of Constantine, a prominent public image on his coinage that might rival his own. And there is no evidence that Leo depicted any of his wives or daughters on his art, despite his dedication to the cult of his pious first wife Theophano.

In the final reality, Basil, Leo and Alexander had very different family circumstances, which left them pursuing different goals, which are visible in their art. Imagery of the imperial family under the early Macedonian emperors was more changeable than might be expected, highlighting private qualities and emotions as well as the carefully crafted public image. Once again, differences are as important as similarities between individual emperors, as each adapted imagery to his own needs and interests.

Chapter 5

Emperors and Patriarchs

Outside the family, the early Macedonian period was important for the power dynamics between two of the most powerful figures in Constantinople: the emperor and the patriarch. Not only were the personal relationships complex and changeable but this was also a time in which an ideological divide may have existed between palace and patriarchate about the extent and limits of imperial power.⁸¹² The relationship mattered because the patriarch was an important source of moral authority, who could provide sanction for imperial decisions or legitimise resistance against them. Leo felt this most keenly when the patriarch refused to support his planned fourth marriage, jeopardising the potential succession of Leo's son, Constantine.

This chapter explores the power dynamics between emperor and patriarch through a number of works of art. The first half provides an analysis of art involving patriarchs, starting with the depiction of a patriarch alongside the emperor Michael III in the Chrysotriklinos throne room in the Imperial Palace. It goes on to examine a series of four patriarchal portraits from the *Sekreton* at Hagia Sophia, which probably date from the decade after 867, when either Photios or Ignatios was patriarch and a portrait of Methodios from the north tympanum, which has been dated to 870s or 880s.⁸¹³ Two patriarchal seals

⁸¹² The *Epanagoge* has been interpreted as a statement of 'diarchy' in which emperor and patriarch have distinct and separate roles. See below for more analysis.

⁸¹³ Cormack and Hawkins, 'The rooms above the south-west vestibule' pp 235-240. C. Mango and E. Hawkins, 'The mosaics of St. Sophia of Istanbul: the church fathers in the north tympanum,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26, (1972), pp 1-41.

produced for Photios and depicting the Virgin Mary are next considered.⁸¹⁴ Finally, the Paris Gregory is considered as an example of patriarchal art. Although the illustrations within the Paris Gregory are now acknowledged to articulate aspects of imperial power, this chapter re-considers the extent to which the imagery conformed to Basil's self-image or expressed alternative ideas from a patriarchal perspective.

The second half of the chapter then goes on to consider the imperial perspective. It has already been demonstrated that the emergence of the crowning motif under Basil tacitly acknowledged the part played by the patriarch in determining the legitimacy of an emperor.⁸¹⁵ This analysis is extended to consider whether Basil, Leo or Alexander made any claims to spiritual or ecclesiastical authority in their art which might have been considered to overlap or clash with the patriarchal role. It does this by examining signs of power. Chapter 2 has already observed that Basil's public image revolved around his strength and military achievement. This chapter considers other signs of his power, such as his use of the throne motif and explores the implications of his preference for Old Testament imagery. It concludes that there were few, if any, occasions on which Basil used explicit signs of spiritual power. Leo's art, by contrast, was quite different. Three objects are considered: the ivory sceptre now in Berlin, a votive crown, now in San Marco, Venice and a poem describing Leo's Palace bath house. All appear to place the emperor alongside the Apostles, in what seems a direct expression of spiritual authority. Alexander's art appears to revert to the pattern established by his father.

It is important to note that power dynamics between emperor and patriarch were in a constant process of change and renewal. Photios may have initially criticised Basil's murder of Michael III but later acted to enhance the new emperor's

⁸¹⁴ Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, p 205.

⁸¹⁵ See Chapter 2.

reputation.⁸¹⁶ Basil initially dismissed Photios as patriarch but later welcomed him back and allowed him a prominent role in government.⁸¹⁷ Leo, by contrast, sought to put allies and relatives on the patriarchal throne who he expected to be accommodating to his wishes.⁸¹⁸ Nevertheless, Leo's uncanonical fourth marriage emboldened his patriarch Nikolas into public opposition until his dismissal, when the criticisms were renewed by his successor, Euthymios.⁸¹⁹ Alexander proceeded to restore Nikolas to the patriarchal throne and worked with him to replace a number of bishops, as part of his wider efforts at changing his officials.⁸²⁰

Underpinning these changing personal relationships, however, it is possible that there were also deep divisions about the nature of power. This was the period in which the theory of the diarchy between emperor and patriarch was set out by Photios in his contributions to the *Epanagoge*. Here, Photios described the respective powers of emperor and patriarch, with the former being primarily a legal authority and the latter the living image of Christ.⁸²¹ Some historians have seen this as simply rhetoric on the part of Photios.⁸²² Others have believed it to be fundamental to the understanding of the changing nature of imperial power.⁸²³ The division of imperial and patriarchal power set out in the *Epanagoge*

⁸¹⁶ Photios was a relative of Michael III and criticised the murder, Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 70. Photios' efforts to promote Basil's lineage and win the favour of Basil were described by Niketas David, *Life of Ignatius*, p 119.

⁸¹⁷ Tougher, *Leo VI*, p 71. Tougher concluded that Basil was 'dominated' by Photios after 877.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 82. Leo appointed his brother Stephen to be patriarch at the age of 19. Subsequent appointments included Antony Kauleas (an ally of Stylianos Zaotzes), Nikolas (a friend) and Euthymios (his spiritual father).

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 159-163.

⁸²⁰ *Vita Euthymii*, pp 114-117.

⁸²¹ Barker, *Social and Political Thought*, pp 89-97.

⁸²² Nicol, 'Byzantine political thought,' p 56, who described Photios' letter to Boris as 'a genre of literature rather than of thought.'

⁸²³ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp 229-235.

was certainly not shared by Leo, who saw his own power being both pastoral and temporal. Leo's ideas appear closer to the concept of 'caesaropapism', in which the emperor held both temporal and spiritual power. This difference may have been a factor behind Leo's dismissal of Photios soon after taking the throne. The question for this chapter is whether imperial or patriarchal art supports the existence of ideological differences of this kind, or any other.

Patriarchal art in mid ninth-century

Patriarchs were depicted in a number of works of art in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy, although it seems to have been rare for emperors and patriarchs to be represented together. Grabar included no occasions on which this occurred in his overview of imperial art.⁸²⁴ Yet there was a prominent image, not much before Basil's reign, in which the two figures did appear, near images of Christ and Mary, in the principal throne room of the Great Palace, known as the Chrysotriklinos. The emperor and patriarch in question were probably Michael III and Photios.⁸²⁵ No description of the two figures is given in the tenth-century epigram which is the source for this image, although emperor and patriarch were described as partners in defeating Iconoclasm: 'the sovereign and the bishop are depicted close by along with their collaborators....and all around the building stand angels, apostles, martyrs, priests'.⁸²⁶ Photios was probably patriarch when the image was created and certainly presented himself as a champion of Orthodoxy, having suffered persecution from Iconoclast.⁸²⁷ Michael III was emperor when Orthodoxy was re-established in 843 but was only three

⁸²⁴ Surprisingly Grabar did not consider the Chrysotriklinos mosaics in *L'Empereur*,

⁸²⁵ See introduction, p 28.

⁸²⁶ ἄναξ δὲ καὶ πρόεδρος ὡς πλανοτρόποι σὺν τοῖς συνεργοῖς ἱστοροῦνται πλησίον. κύκλῳ δὲ παντὸς οἷα φρουροὶ τοῦ δόμον νόες, μαθηταί, μάρτυρες, θρηπόλοι. Henderson (ed), *The Greek Anthology*, Epigram 106, pp 67-68.

⁸²⁷ Photios' father Sergios had been punished and he and his family had their property confiscated and were exiled. Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, p 395.

years old at the time and it had been his mother, Theodora, who had been instrumental in bringing back figurative images. So although the Chrysotriklinos image appears to have presented the triumph as a partnership between emperor and patriarch, Photios was the only one of the two who could claim to have been personally involved. It seems likely that this gave him a degree of moral authority, in comparison with the emperor. Photios was a veteran of the struggles, whose voice would have commanded authority. Michael, by contrast, was a member of the first generation to grow up in the newly Orthodox environment.⁸²⁸

According to the epigram, the image depicted not only emperor and patriarch but also other collaborators, suggesting that it depicted other bishops or earlier patriarchs. This image appears therefore to have afforded a significant role to church figures and might have given the strong impression that Michael had acted on the advice of these church leaders. Although Photios in his homilies credited the emperor with the restoration of images, he clearly believed that imperial power had been abused for illegitimate ends and that a powerful role had been played by the bishops in resistance. Photios dedicated a homily to the restoration of images, delivered in the presence of Michael III and Basil, which denounced Iconoclast emperors as imposters.⁸²⁹ In another homily, Photios argued that to oppose Orthodox bishops was to be on the side of the devil.⁸³⁰ In the case of Iconoclasm, Photios clearly believed that the patriarch could judge the emperor.

⁸²⁸ The later blackening of Michael III's reputation by Basil may have further augmented Photios' prestige as a representative of Orthodoxy, as Michael could not be given credit for supporting the restoration of figurative imagery.

⁸²⁹ Photios, Homily 17. Edited by S. Aristarches, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, Second Series, Vol II*, pp 177 - 198. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 286.

⁸³⁰ Photios, Homily 10. Edited by P. Lambeck, *CShB*, pp 194-202. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 239.

This idea is visible in a series of images in the *Sekreton* at Hagia Sophia of four patriarchs who played a part in the Iconoclast struggles. Here, they were depicted alongside the Apostles and other martyrs as well as Constantine I.⁸³¹ The patriarchs depicted were Germanos (715-730), Tarasios (784-806), Nikephoros (806-815) and Methodios (843-847). Tarasios was associated with the end of the first period of iconoclasm and Methodios helped bring about the end of the second. Germanos, Nikephoros and Methodios had reputations as spiritual authorities who had challenged the ideas behind Iconoclasm. All were venerated in the ninth-century. Germanos was recognised as a saint in 787. The remains of Nikephoros were re-interred by Methodios in the Church of Holy Apostles and venerated there by emperors.⁸³² Lives of Saints Nikephoros and Tarasios were written by Ignatios the Deacon (770-845).⁸³³

A number of these figures had challenged emperors. Methodios had been persecuted under Theophilos and appears to have been beaten; Germanos was deposed by Leo III; Nikephoros was deposed and exiled by Leo V.⁸³⁴ The most significant image in the *Sekreton* may have been Methodios, who was visibly depicted as a victim of persecution, with a bandage around his head, denoting a broken jaw. His bandages, marking his battle scars for the cause of Orthodoxy, may even have become a sign to identify this particular patriarch. Not only did Methodios bear his wounds with pride, he seems to have done so almost defiantly. The image strongly suggests that the persecution Methodios suffered and the wounds he bore added significantly to the power, authority and recognition he and future Orthodox patriarchs enjoyed. Intriguingly, the image is matched by a metaphor Photios used in a homily in 867 to describe the face of

⁸³¹ Cormack and Hawkins, 'The rooms above the south-west vestibule,' pp 226-231.

⁸³² P. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: ecclesiastical policy and image worship in the Byzantine Empire*, (Oxford, 1958)

⁸³³ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 984, p 2011.

⁸³⁴ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1355. Haldon and Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, p 397.

Hagia Sophia still bearing the scars and wounds from Iconoclasm, explicitly in reproof of the Isaurian emperors.⁸³⁵ The image of Methodios may well have been placed in the *Sekreton* to inspire future patriarchs. In his homily on the restoration of images, Photios explicitly stated that people who see images of resistance to Iconoclasm would be more inspired to emulate them than those who simply heard the stories being told.⁸³⁶ Suffering was a source of power in the years after the defeat of Iconoclasm.

It has been argued that Photios and other church leaders exaggerated or even invented the persecutions suffered by church leaders in the second period of Iconoclasm, in a desire to find martyrs for their cause.⁸³⁷ Photios had personal motivations. He was related to Tarasios, the patriarch who presided over the Council which restored the veneration of images in 787.⁸³⁸ Furthermore, Photios' father, Sergios, had been writing a critical history of the reign and policies of Michael II when he was arrested.⁸³⁹ To some extent, therefore, the struggle against Iconoclasm was, in part, a resistance to the power of the emperor, albeit ones considered impious. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the images of Iconophile patriarchs who had resisted impious imperial authority were displayed in a room used to entertain the emperor himself on certain feast days.⁸⁴⁰ The image of Methodios might have been a reminder to both emperor and patriarchs alike that imperial authority could over time and in certain circumstances be defeated.

⁸³⁵ Homily 10. Lambeck, *CSHB*, pp 194-202. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 188.

⁸³⁶ Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 189

⁸³⁷ Haldon and Brubaker suggested that some of the persecution was actually an invention of the iconophiles, including Photios, as an act of deliberate propaganda: *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, pp 399-403.

⁸³⁸ C. Mango, 'The liquidation of iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios' in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm: papers given at the ninth spring symposium of Byzantine studies*, (Birmingham, 1977), pp 133-140.

⁸³⁹ Haldon and Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, p 395.

⁸⁴⁰ Cormack and Hawkins, 'The rooms above the south-west vestibule,' p 248.

Cormack and Hawkins have dated the *Sekreton* mosaics to the decade after 867, when either Photios (858-867) or Ignatios (867 - 877) was patriarch, so there is only a possibility that Photios commissioned the images. However, a similar image of Methodios, with bandaged head, was constructed in the north tympanum in the 870s or 880s, probably under the direction of Photios.⁸⁴¹ It would be fair to conclude from these images that the Triumph of Orthodoxy had generated a certain confidence within the highest reaches of the church in the depiction of patriarchal power. The scars of Iconoclasm were being used or possibly even invented as a sign of piety and a source of moral authority in a context in which the fault lay squarely with impious emperors. The message would have been that to retain legitimate power, emperors had to stay Orthodox, for which they needed the guidance of their patriarch. This was the context for Basil's accession to the throne.

Patriarchal art appears to have been quite dynamic and innovative in the mid-ninth century. Photios was the first figure to depict the Virgin on his seals, for example.⁸⁴² Two types of his seals featured Mary, although they cannot be dated precisely to either of his patriarchal reigns. The inscription included a call for the Virgin to help Photios.⁸⁴³ This was at least 20 years before Leo depicted the Virgin on his coins.⁸⁴⁴ This contrasts with the restoration of images of Christ, which probably appeared on imperial coins before patriarchal seals.⁸⁴⁵ The early adoption of Mary by Photios may support Cormack's observation that this patriarch was an active propagandist who was confident in expressing his ideas

⁸⁴¹ Mango and Hawkins, 'The church fathers in the north tympanum,' p 38.

⁸⁴² Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, p 205.

⁸⁴³ Θεοτοκε βοηθει τω σω δουλω Φωτιω. *Ibid*, p 205.

⁸⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, p 113.

⁸⁴⁵ The bust of Christ was probably restored to gold coins in 843, according to Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 456. Ignatios depicted Christ on his seals from 847. Nesbitt, *Byzantine Seals*, p 204.

visually.⁸⁴⁶ Certainly it shows that Photios was not only a victim of Iconoclast persecution, but also a driving force in the restoration of figurative imagery. He did not wait to take his cue from the emperor, but established his own iconography.

The Paris Gregory as a product of patriarchal art

For three decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy, therefore, patriarchal art was dynamic and assertive. This provides an important context in which to consider the miniatures in the Paris Gregory. This, too, was probably a product of patriarchal art.⁸⁴⁷ Its images function as imperial panegyric but they may also say more about attitudes towards the emperor of the people who commissioned and designed it. It is questionable whether this imagery does indeed present Basil in the 'the best possible light' as Brubaker has claimed.⁸⁴⁸

The images in the Paris Gregory told stories about imperial power through the use of analogies, with memorable scenes from the lives of Biblical and historical figures. This is a familiar aspect of Byzantine rhetoric. Stories in Byzantium were not relayed as a sequential narrative that we understand today but rather around a series of *topoi*, each meant to demonstrate a lesson to be drawn.⁸⁴⁹ The art of rhetoric was to arrange arguments to most persuasive effect, with material selected and shaped to tell a particular story.⁸⁵⁰

There is no doubt that some of the imagery functions as straightforward panegyric. Brubaker has demonstrated how Basil was compared to Constantine,

⁸⁴⁶ Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, Chapter 4.

⁸⁴⁷ See introduction, p 30-32.

⁸⁴⁸ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 200.

⁸⁴⁹ E. Bourbouhakis and I. Nilsson 'Byzantine narrative: the forms of storytelling,' in L. James (ed), *A Companion to Byzantium*, (London, 2010), pp 263-274.

⁸⁵⁰ M. Whitby, 'Rhetorical questions,' in James (ed), *Companion*, pp 239-250.

Samson, Joshua and Joseph, amongst others.⁸⁵¹ Yet an analysis of the selection of analogies and scenes depicted suggests that praise for Basil was selective and occasionally muted. Basil was more likely to be praised for his physical strength and agility than for his wisdom. For example, a number of images in the Paris Gregory appear to use allegory in recognition of Basil's horsemanship.⁸⁵² Brubaker has suggested that these were intended as references to Basil's own skills with horses.⁸⁵³ The *Vita Basilii* claimed that Basil first came to notice in the imperial stables, where he had tamed a wild horse.⁸⁵⁴ Other allegories appear to emphasise Basil's physical strength. Strong parallels were drawn between Basil and Samson. The manuscript included images of Samson slaying the 1,000 Philistines; drinking water from the jawbone now kept as a relic in the New Church; Delilah cutting Samson's hair; Samson bound and led away and then blinded; Samson between two pillars about to bring down the house of Philistines. The selection of these scenes appears to highlight aspects of the life of Basil: his strength and favour by God, his trials and his courage in the face of adversity. By contrast, Solomon was depicted only once in the surviving miniatures, in a scene of the judgement of Solomon.⁸⁵⁵ Solomon would have been an obvious choice if the artists of the Paris Gregory had wanted to illustrate Basil's wisdom. Basil appears to have regarded himself as a match for Solomon: the emperor had placed the throne of Solomon in the Magnaura Palace, refashioned a statue of Solomon in his own name in the foundations of the New Church and taken an interest in Solomon's Temple as an inspiration for the New Church.⁸⁵⁶ Solomon was clearly regarded as a model for emperors during Basil's

⁸⁵¹ Brubaker demonstrated how Basil was compared to a new Constantine in *Vision and Meaning*, pp 150-155; Samson pp 179-184; Joshua pp 193-200 and Joseph pp 173-179.

⁸⁵² Horses are prominent in illustrations on folios 409v, 424v, 435v, 440r.

⁸⁵³ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 349.

⁸⁵⁴ *Vita Basilli*, Chapter 13, pp 50-52.

⁸⁵⁵ Folio 215v.

⁸⁵⁶ See Chapter 3. Also Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 204.

reign, being mentioned in Basil's Exhortations for Leo, as well as the *Prooimion* of the *Procheiron*, a legal handbook dating from the 870s.⁸⁵⁷ Yet the analogy was largely overlooked by the artists of the Paris Gregory. This was an instance in which imperial propaganda was not mirrored in the Paris Gregory.

It might be objected that the Paris Gregory did not fully articulate Basil's self-image because it was intended as a gift for his sons.⁸⁵⁸ If so, it might have sought to illustrate kingship with examples from the childhood and early adulthood of Biblical and historical figures. This may be evident from the story of Joseph. Folio 69v contains a whole page of images of Joseph which are drawn from Genesis. The emphasis was very much on Joseph's struggles before he came to a position of power. He was depicted being lowered into a well; sold to passing merchants and taken to Egypt and bought by Potiphar. He was also shown fleeing Potiphar's wife, before his imprisonment. Curiously, the imagery contains what Brubaker has described as the most extensive betrayal scenes in Byzantine art.⁸⁵⁹ Brubaker has suggested that these scenes mirrored events from Basil's own life. The *Vita Basilii*, recounts that as a child, Basil and his parents were captured by the Bulgarians and taken into exile, from which he returned as a young adult.⁸⁶⁰ He was also a foreigner, like Joseph, who was destined to rule and overcame great odds to do so. These scenes seem suggestive of Basil's own life.

The Joseph images do, therefore, act as an allegory for Basil. Yet their significance, arguably, lies in what is missing. The traditional structure of Byzantine rhetoric included scenes of birth, physical characteristics, upbringing,

⁸⁵⁷ A. Schmink *Studien zu Mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern*, (Frankfurt, 1986); Tougher 'The wisdom of Leo VI'; A. Schmink, 'Frommigkeit ziere das werk: zu datierung der 60 buchener Leons VI,' in *Subseciva Groningana* 3, (1989), pp 79-114.

⁸⁵⁸ Hennessy made this argument in *Images of Children*, p 151.

⁸⁵⁹ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 178.

⁸⁶⁰ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 4, pp 18-22.

virtues and deeds in war and peace.⁸⁶¹ In the Paris Gregory, three scenes are omitted which are important elements of the Biblical story: Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dream; distributing grain during the famine; and being reunited with his brothers. The scene of Joseph distributing grain would, surely, have been a good illustration of Basil's philanthropy and concern for the poor, which were important parts of his rhetoric and record as a builder.⁸⁶² Instead and unconventionally, the Paris Gregory omits topoi showing Joseph as a just ruler or which display his moral qualities. This omission is particularly striking because Photios was clearly aware of the importance of Joseph as an example of good rule. Indeed, in the notes Photios made about Philo's history, Joseph is introduced explicitly as a story about the wise exercise of affairs of state.⁸⁶³ Philo concentrated on Joseph's qualities to rule: his skills as a shepherd of men; his ability to adapt his character to different political ends; his persuasion, virtue and excellence of disposition and his skill in the management of a household.⁸⁶⁴ The core characteristics desirable in a good ruler, argued Philo, were the administration of impartial justice, the ability to ignore flattery, the desire to encourage improvement in those around him, and the determination to act in the best interests of his subjects. Joseph's story is an example of good rule and Philo's text is a mirror for princes. Yet none of this was taken up by whoever designed Joseph's topoi for the Paris Gregory. These omissions cannot be explained by the idea that the Paris Gregory was intended to educate the young co-emperors. Stories of great kings would have been used to educate the young. Basil was reported to have studied the Bible and history for lessons of wise rule.⁸⁶⁵ Photios too was clearly alert to what lessons could be learnt from a study of past rulers. In the *Bibliotheca*, Photios draws attention to texts which

⁸⁶¹ Maguire, 'The art of comparing,' pp 88-89.

⁸⁶² Chapter 3, from p 155.

⁸⁶³ Wilson (ed), *Bibliotheca*, pp 122-123

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁵ *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 72, pp 246-248.

illuminate the characteristics of rulers like Cyrus (mentioned by Ctesias and Herodotus), Alexander (mentioned by Kephalion), Constantine (described by Eusebius) and Justinian (in Procopius).⁸⁶⁶ Photios himself cited the example of great kings as an example to living rulers.⁸⁶⁷ By selectively depicting Joseph's story, the design of the topoi may have been intended to stress Joseph's triumph over adversity because it was pertinent to Basil's own providential rise to power: his poverty, exile and personal qualities of resilience and determination. It may also have conveyed a message to Basil, or to the young princes, that power was a trial of character which needed to be overcome through learnt standards of behaviour, studied virtue and wise counsel.

The most striking omission from the Paris Gregory is the obvious parallel that might have been drawn between Basil and David. The images of David relate much less of David's life than other works of art from a similar period in the ninth-century.⁸⁶⁸ Only two images of David survive from the Paris Gregory compared with 21 from the *Sacra Parallela* and 13 from the David Casket (Table 13 below). Admittedly these are not directly comparable objects: the David Casket and Paris Gregory have panegyric intent, the *Sacra Parallela* is a religious manuscript. Two are manuscripts, one is a work of ivory. Yet there are similarities between the items. All were probably produced in Constantinople and all three demonstrate how ninth-century Byzantine artists articulated the life of David. The *Sacra Parallela* is particularly interesting because its artists are believed to have focused its narrative sequences around the scenes they were most familiar with.⁸⁶⁹ The manuscript is therefore good evidence for the Biblical

⁸⁶⁶ Wilson (ed), *Bibliotheca*, pp 42, 45ff, 54ff, 132-133, 145.

⁸⁶⁷ White and Berrigan, *The Patriarch and the Prince*, p 79.

⁸⁶⁸ David featured on folios 143v and 174v in the Paris Gregory. The *Sacra Parallela* dates from the ninth-century, although there is some disagreement about its origins. Weitzmann argued that the manuscript was produced in Palestine in first half of ninth-century but Brubaker dated it from third quarter of ninth-century, with an origin in Constantinople. K. Weitzmann *The Miniatures of the Sacra Parallela*, (Princeton, 1979), pp 20-25. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 25.

⁸⁶⁹ Brubaker, 'Byzantine culture in the ninth-century: an introduction' in Brubaker (ed), *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century*, pp 68-71.

stories which were best known to ninth-century manuscript artists. The selections and omissions by the artists of all three works are therefore interesting and potentially revealing.

The treatment of David in the Paris Gregory is illuminating. David was an important element of Basil's own self-image. Basil appears to have been compared to David in the Kainourgion mosaics.⁸⁷⁰ A letter has survived, from Basil's court to Photios in about 873, requesting information on the anointing of David.⁸⁷¹ Basil acquired Samuel's horn, which had anointed David, for the New Church.⁸⁷² Put together, this suggests a pattern originating from Basil himself. Of the three objects, the David Casket is most like a work of propaganda. Rather than mirroring the Biblical story, it seems to present a carefully designed narrative. Maguire has suggested that the casket displays a classical rhetorical structure, based on the model recommended by Menander, in which the subject's birth is followed by physical characteristics, upbringing, virtues and achievements.⁸⁷³ The David scenes on the casket follow this formula quite closely, even including David's birth which is not described in the Bible. It focuses very much on David's qualities and achievements - his physical prowess and defeat of Goliath and his mercy towards Saul. It omits the ambiguous or challenging aspects of the narrative: David's struggles with Absalom, his encounter with Bathsheba, his sin and penitence and his death. Instead, it ends with David's coronation, a high-point of his career but not part of the Biblical story. This is David re-imagined as a Byzantine emperor. These topoi appear to closely reflect Basil's life: his auspicious origins, physical prowess and bravery,

⁸⁷⁰ See introduction, p 34.

⁸⁷¹ L. Westerink (ed), *Photii Epistulae et Amphilochia II*, (1984).

⁸⁷² Magdalino, 'Nea Ekklesia,' p 58.

⁸⁷³ Maguire, 'The art of comparing,' pp 88-89.

Table 13: Schema for David narratives		
Paris Gregory	Sacra Parallela	David Casket
		Birth
		David with parents
		As shepherd with flock
		David kills a lion
Anointing	Anointing	Anointing
		Plays harp for Saul
	Instructed by Saul	
	Fights Goliath	Fights Goliath
	With Goliath's head	With Goliath's head
		Saul gives daughter in marriage
	David's wife assists escape	David's wife assists escape
	Jonathan and David embrace	
		Ahimelech helps David
	David shows Saul that he might have killed him	David shows Saul that he might have killed him
	David sends messenger to Nabal	
	Abigail presents gifts	
	David's grief at Saul's death	
		David crowned king
	Ark carried to Jerusalem	
	David sees Bathsheba bathing	
	David and Nathan	
	David hears child has died	
	Counselor joins Absalom	
	Ziba presents David with gifts	
	David hears of Absalom's death	
	David returns to Jerusalem	
	God's choice of misfortunes	
	Bathsheba meets David on sickbed	
Penitence of David	Penitence of David	

his victories and mercy and his triumph to the throne.⁸⁷⁴

The David Casket illustrates what we might expect from a conventional work of panegyric. Ninth-century artists were certainly familiar with David's story, as demonstrated by the *Sacra Parallela*, which included many key scenes. Yet the appearance of David in the Paris Gregory is cursory, with only two scenes. It is possible that this was by accident and not design, for the Paris Gregory does not survive complete. Brubaker notes that 12 or 13 folios are missing from 464 which have survived, together with an unknown number from the end of the text.⁸⁷⁵ However, the two images which have survived are in isolated scenes, whilst other figures like Joseph appear in extended topoi on the same page. The strong likelihood, therefore, was that David did not feature strongly in the design. If Photios was behind the manuscript, the omission is surprising, given that Photios made extensive use of David in other contexts. In his homilies, which date to his first patriarchate, Photios frequently referred to David the psalmist and prophet, quoting his words to elaborate his arguments. In Homily 18, for example, Photios drew a direct parallel between David, Michael and Basil the co-emperors. While David had freed his people from servitude, Michael and Basil had defeated heresy and achieved a lasting peace.⁸⁷⁶ For some reason, Photios appears not to have made the comparison between Basil and David in the pages of the Paris Gregory.

The evidence therefore suggests that although the Paris Gregory is a work of imperial panegyric, it nevertheless offers an incomplete tribute to Basil, praising some qualities like his strength and omitting other qualities, such as wisdom and justice. Indeed, the Paris Gregory appears to be commenting on Basil's exercise

⁸⁷⁴ Maguire has suggested that the conflict between David and Saul on the casket was meant to re-enact the clash between Basil and Michael III. If so, it seems designed to depict Basil in a good light, as Saul is shown to be the aggressor and David is shown offering mercy. This mirrors the account we are later given in the *Vita Basilii*, that Basil was fearful for his life and acted to protect himself and to save the throne and Empire from the whims of a despicable ruler. *Ibid*, pp 91-92.

⁸⁷⁵ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 3.

⁸⁷⁶ Photios, Homily 18. Translated by Mango, *Homilies of Photius*, p 314.

of power or even qualifying it. Scholarship on the rhetoric of panegyric suggests that it can serve multiple purposes in this way. Rundle has shown that although panegyric was often intended to flatter, it could also convey exhortations to particular imperial virtues as well as contain hidden criticisms and subtle warnings.⁸⁷⁷ Rundle was writing about Renaissance kingship but similar observations have also been made about earlier periods. Plutarch - a model for Photios and later panegyricists - offered critical opinion as well as praise.⁸⁷⁸ Kazhdan commented that Byzantines could conceal criticisms of imperial power beneath flattery.⁸⁷⁹

The effect of the downscaling of the David story is to place a strong emphasis on the two scenes which were illustrated. These were David's anointing by Saul and his penitence. The anointing image was considered in Chapter 2, in the context of the emergence of the visual image of divine selection in Macedonian imperial art. This was an important development which signified Basil's divine blessing and legitimacy. From the perspective of patriarchal art, the emerging imagery of anointing also gave a prominent role to the patriarch (as it was not possible to depict Michael III as the figure who had elevated Basil to the throne). Visually, the prophet or patriarch was the conduit through which God's will was made visible.

The scene of David's penitence in the Paris Gregory is unusual and there is a case for viewing this as a deliberate analogy for Basil. David is shown in imperial diadem and *chlamys* on his knees before the prophet Nathan, confessing his sins and asking for forgiveness, whilst behind him an angel looks down approvingly. There is an inscription with dialogue between David and Nathan. 'I have sinned

⁸⁷⁷ Rundle, 'Not so much praise as precept,' pp 162-3.

⁸⁷⁸ R. Waterfield, *Plutarch, Greek Lives*, (London, 2008).

⁸⁷⁹ A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: an introduction to modern Byzantine studies* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), p 157. See also E. Jeffreys, *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (London, 2003)

against the Lord' admits David, to which Nathan replies 'and the lord has put away thy sin'.⁸⁸⁰ The scene is dominant on a verso page, in the right half of the top register. The inscriptions, as Brubaker noted, are unusually vivid, highlighting David's confession and Nathan's assurance of God's forgiveness.⁸⁸¹ The focus is firmly on confession and forgiveness and neither David's sin nor Nathan's rebuke are set out at all, in contrast to the *Sacra Parallela* which illustrates both. It appears that the image is emphasising the power of repentance to restore God's favour. David's repentance had wiped away his sin and restored his divine mission.⁸⁸² The central message of repentance and forgiveness is delivered more clearly and simply than it is in the *Sacra Parallela* and might well imply an analogy with Basil. Indeed, the appearance of a heavenly figure recalls the archangel on the scene of heavenly crowning, yet on this occasion there is no doubt that the prophet himself articulates divine judgement. This may tell us something about how Photios saw Basil and how indeed he might have seen himself too in the role of Nathan. If Basil was a sinner, forgiveness would follow from repentance and Photios was the man who could assure Basil that he was forgiven. This appears to be a role Basil was prepared to afford his patriarch. He is recorded to have said at the eighth Ecumenical Council in 869-870 that he saw no shame in prostrating himself to the Church and the spiritual fathers.⁸⁸³

It is possible that Photios regarded these scenes as the most important and relevant parts of the analogy with Basil. They would have recognized Basil's divine selection and legitimacy but also his sin. The implied message would have been that Basil only retained his legitimate power because of his penitence. The patriarch, moreover, was a restraining influence on imperial power. This is in

⁸⁸⁰ ΗΜΑΡΤΙΚΑ Κ[ΥΡΙ]Ω. ΚΑΙ Κ[ΥΡΙ]Ω Κ ΑΦΗΛΕ[Ν] ΤΟ ΑΜΑΡΤΗΜΑ ΚΟΥ. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 413.

⁸⁸¹ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, p 193.

⁸⁸² Photios, Homily 1. Edited by Aristarches, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἀλήθεια, Series I, Vol II*, pp 407-416. Translated by Mango, *The Homilies of Photius*, p 50.

⁸⁸³ Mansi XVI, col 94, 356.

keeping with the idea that legitimate power in Byzantium was about rationalising and moralising the tendency to violence.⁸⁸⁴ Good counsel helped emperors achieve the right balance. Photios' thoughts on legitimate power can be explored in more detail, thanks to the survival of a letter to Khan Boris of Bulgaria, which dates from 865 or 866 and is recognizable as an early example of 'mirrors for princes'.⁸⁸⁵ This sets out the obligations and duties of a good ruler.⁸⁸⁶ Photios argued that excellent rule was concerned with the welfare of those who are ruled.⁸⁸⁷ Furthermore, the good will of the people was more important than weapons, courage of generalship.⁸⁸⁸ Many of these themes were also addressed in the *Exhortations*, which may have been crafted by Photios and issued in Basil's name for the benefit of the future Leo VI.⁸⁸⁹ For example, the *Exhortations* claim that those who permit injustice are more culpable than those who commit it, a sentiment also found in Photios' letter to Boris.⁸⁹⁰

One of Photios' most frequent themes in the letter to Khan Boris is the importance of good counsel: how it should precede every action; how difficulties can be prevented through good counsel and how counsel can accomplish with one attempt what the hands of many could not achieve with many attempts.⁸⁹¹ This idea is given emphasis in the Paris Gregory, through the full page depiction of a third historical Byzantine emperor (other than Constantine and Justinian). This

⁸⁸⁴ Dagron, 'Lawful society and legitimate power,' p 30.

⁸⁸⁵ White and Berrigan, *The Patriarch and the Prince*.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp 66, 76. It was remarkably timeless in its recognition of the importance of the arts of political persuasion, including advice on the speed of speaking, the importance of personal appearance and authenticity, communicating to be understood and the political significance of events.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp 64, 73 and 68.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p 77.

⁸⁸⁹ Basil I, *Paraenesis to Leo* and *Second Paraenesis*. Edited by J.P. Migne, PG 107, pp xxi-lx.

⁸⁹⁰ Basil I, *Paraenesis*, PG 107, p xlv. Vogt, *Basile 1er*, p 128.

⁸⁹¹ White and Berrigan, *The Patriarch and the Prince*, pp 65-7, 76.

was Theodosios (379 - 395), the emperor contemporary with Gregory of Nazianzus who had presided over the church council which condemned Arianism.⁸⁹² Folio 355r depicted the emperor at the Church Council of 381 (PLATE 4). Theodosios was shown centre stage among the participants of the Council and dominating the scene is an elaborate throne, on which there was a scroll. A second scroll is shown on the altar in the background. The scene is intriguing because of its unexpected prominence, as no council is mentioned in the accompanying text.⁸⁹³ Brubaker has explained the scene as a justification for the positions Photios had taken at the Council of 867.⁸⁹⁴ Yet it seems likely that the scene had a wider resonance, even if this was through inference. Imperial decisions, according to this image, must be guided by scripture. And the patriarch was the arbitrator of scripture. Another historical subtext might also have been present for Byzantines. For Theodosios was an emperor who had been publicly rebuked and forced to perform penance by a bishop, Ambrose, after his massacre of thousands at Thessalonike in 390.⁸⁹⁵ Ambrose had been President at the Council of 381 and would have been one of the unnamed bishops in the illustration. Altogether, this image appears to be an assertive illustration of patriarchal authority.

It appears, therefore, that at the heart of Photios' idea of legitimate power was a robust relationship between the two leading figures of state, the emperor and the patriarch. This idea is illustrated or implied in many of the Paris Gregory miniatures, especially in its depiction of prophets: Nathan, who had admonished David for murdering Uriah and taking his wife;⁸⁹⁶ Elijah, who had condemned

⁸⁹² Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 2051.

⁸⁹³ Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, pp 210-212.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp 211 - 214.

⁸⁹⁵ Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 76.

⁸⁹⁶ 2 Samuel 12.

Ahab's heresy;⁸⁹⁷ Isaiah, who had criticised Hezekiah for revealing his treasures to the Babylonians;⁸⁹⁸ Ambrose and Theodosios over Thessalonike. This repetition of King and Prophet may be close to a visual expression of the concept of diarchy, the formal separation of powers between the emperor and patriarch. In the *Epanogoge*, prepared around 886, Photios set out distinct roles for each role, claiming that 'as the constitution of the state consists, like man, of parts and members, the greatest and most necessary parts are the emperor and the patriarch. Wherefore the peace and felicity of subjects in body and soul depend upon the agreement and concord of the kingship and the priesthood in all things'.⁸⁹⁹ Photios went on to describe the patriarch as a living image of Christ, a teacher who must be indifferent to all men, whatever their rank.⁹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the patriarch should not be afraid to speak the truth before kings.⁹⁰¹ This appears to have been in keeping with the image of patriarchs like Methodios who had resisted the Iconoclasm inspired by contemporary emperors, in the manner of the Old Testament prophets.

Photios' ideas about legitimate power being maintained through the relationship between the emperor and patriarch appear especially relevant for Basil. First, although Basil's family origins were probably not as poor as the *Vita Basilii* later

⁸⁹⁷ 1 Kings.

⁸⁹⁸ Isaiah 39; 1-2.

⁸⁹⁹ τῆς πολιτείας ἐκ μέρων καὶ μόριων ἀνάλογως τῶν ἀνθρώπων συνισταμένης, τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ἀναγκαιότατα μέρη βασιλὺς ἐστὶ καὶ πατριάρχης. Διὸ καὶ ἡ κατὰ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα τῶν ὑπηκωνεῖρην καὶ εὐδαιμονία βασιλείας ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχιερωσύνης ἐν πασὶν ὁμόφροσύνῃ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ. *Epanagoge*, Titulus III 8. Edited by Z. Von Lingenthal, *Collectio Librorum Juris Graeco-Romane Ineditorum*, (Leipzig, 1852), p 67. English translation by Barker, *Social and Political Thought*, pp 92.

⁹⁰⁰ *Epanagoge*, Titulus III, 1; 4.

⁹⁰¹ *Epanagoge*, Titulus III, 4.

made out, he probably did not learn to read well until he became emperor.⁹⁰² The gift of the Paris Gregory was therefore symbolic. This was probably presented by a patriarch of renowned learning to an emperor of limited literacy who saw books as a sign of power, as demonstrated by the Kainourgion mosaics, in which Basil's children were depicted with scrolls.⁹⁰³ Appadurai has suggested that objects may possess an exchange value over and above their utility value.⁹⁰⁴ Photios' central role in Basil's government is underlined by his choice of gift. If true power lay in scripture, Basil must require an interpreter. That man was the patriarch.

Second, Photios' idea were particularly significant for emperors who had gained the throne through usurpation, as Basil had done. Usurpers to the throne needed to demonstrate divine blessing through their behaviour.⁹⁰⁵ Unmerited usurpations, the Byzantines believed, would be punished.⁹⁰⁶ In a later period Michael IV, for example, was said to have been struck by epilepsy after the murder of Romanos III.⁹⁰⁷ Legitimate power was characterised by philanthropy, mercy, justice and work in the common interest. The absence of those qualities, by contrast, would denote a tyrant. The patriarch, especially one acting in the

⁹⁰² The *Vita Basilii* states that Basil had 'not been intimate with letters' in his youth but implies that he learned to read histories after he came to the throne. *κἄν ὁ φυτοσπόρος τούτων οὐκ ἔσχεν ἐξ ἀρχῆς οἰκείως πρὸς γράμματα διὰ τὴν βιωτικὴν περιπέτειαν*, *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 89, line 53; *καὶ νῦν μὲν στρατηγῶν τε καὶ αὐτοκρατόρων ἀνδρῶν ἦθη καὶ βίους καὶ μεταχειρίσεις πραγμάτων καὶ πολεμικοὺς ἀγῶνας διηρυνᾶτο, καὶ ἀνασκοπῶν, τὰ κράτιστα τούτων καὶ ἐπαινοῦμε*. *Vita Basilii*, Chapter 72, lines 10-13. Tobias assessed the evidence for Basil's origins in *Basil I*, pp 11-24. He concluded that Basil originally spoke Armenian but later learned to speak and then read Greek.

⁹⁰³ For Photios' reputation, see White and Berrigan, *Patriarch and Prince*, p 15. For Kainourgion mosaics, see introduction, p 32.

⁹⁰⁴ A. Appadurai, 'Commodities and the politics of value,' in A. Appadurai (ed), *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp 3-63.

⁹⁰⁵ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, p 184.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p 181.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p 181. Kazhdan, *ODB*, p 1365.

tradition of Nathan or Methodios, would have seen himself as being in a powerful position to determine whether imperial authority was ultimately legitimate.

To an extent, therefore, patriarchal art from the 850s to 880s took strength from a period when Orthodox patriarchs had struggled against Iconoclast emperors, or at least how ninth-century bishops believed they had struggled. Bishops like Photios may have seen themselves in the tradition of Old Testament prophets and it was perhaps this perspective which influenced Basil's interest and adoption of Old Testament models, for example within the New Church. This does not appear to have caused any difficulties in the relationship between Basil and Photios, at either a practical or ideological level. Leo, however, appears to have had a different conception of kingship from Basil, which contradicted some of the sentiments expressed by Photios in the *Epanagoge*.

Signs of Spiritual Power in Imperial Art

Patriarchal art displayed a level of self-confidence and assertiveness in the reigns of Michael III and Basil and had a subtlety which allowed it to articulate qualifications of imperial authority and rule. To what extent did the ideas about legitimate power expressed in patriarchal art conflict with the Macedonian emperors' own beliefs about their role? This section considers the iconography of Basil, Leo and Alexander and whether it was compatible with the assertive strain in patriarchal art.

It has already been established that imperial art under Basil implicitly provided an important symbolic role for the patriarch. As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, it was under Basil that the idea of anointing began to be represented visually. The act of anointing required a spiritual figure, whether that was Gabriel, Elijah or Christ himself, to convey the divine blessing. Furthermore, Basil's preference for Old Testament analogies like David and Solomon drew on Biblical stories that involved some of the most powerful prophets and spiritual advisers to kings. To a

large extent, therefore, Basil's art provided the room for the more assertive patriarchal art modelled on figures like Methodios. This section takes the analysis further by considering whether there was any competition between emperor and patriarch for moral and spiritual authority. It should be noted that it is not possible to make a straightforward distinction between temporal and spiritual power in Byzantium.⁹⁰⁸ The emperor was considered to possess both.⁹⁰⁹ Theology was not exclusively the domain of the clergy.⁹¹⁰ Instead, Byzantines made a distinction between inner wisdom (the domain of faith) and outer wisdom (the domain of philosophy).⁹¹¹ Emperor and patriarch might be expected to clash if they were both making claims for power over matters of inner wisdom.

A review of Table 1 demonstrates that Basil adopted no overt signs of inner wisdom in his art.⁹¹² Basil did use Christian symbols, such as the cross, but these tended either to denote his legitimacy or to be assimilated for dynastic purposes. For example, the cross was used in the Kainourgion mosaics as a sign of blessing for Basil's family and the Macedonian succession. Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrated that it was much more common for Basil to be associated with physical qualities, such as strength, agility and military success. Another example of this phenomenon is Basil's use of the throne. This was one of his more ubiquitous motifs, appearing on coins and in mosaics. First of all, Basil's coins depicted Christ enthroned rather than in profile.⁹¹³ Next, this was mirrored with Basil and Constantine being depicted on thrones.

⁹⁰⁸ A. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: the Church, AD 681 - 1071*, (Crestwood, New York, 2007), p 161.

⁹⁰⁹ More of a distinction between temporal and spiritual authority was made in the contemporary west. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, pp 222-266. Dvornik, *Byzantine Political Philosophy*, Volume 2.

⁹¹⁰ S. Runciman, *The Eastern Schism*, (Oxford, 1955), p 7.

⁹¹¹ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, p 160.

⁹¹² Chapter 2, p 92.

⁹¹³ These gold coins became known as *senzata*, after the Greek word for throne. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, p 476.

Some scholars have seen the throne as a religious motif. Cutler, for example, suggested that imperial art depicted a 'notional throne' which was intended to act as a visual code for an Orpheus element in Christ.⁹¹⁴ This seems unnecessarily complex. It seems much more likely that a throne would have been understood simply as a sign of power. Basil's innovation was to explicitly match images of Christ and emperor enthroned, on gold and copper coins respectively, suggesting that the imperial court was a mirror image of the divine hierarchy in heaven.⁹¹⁵ The imagery on Basil's coins may have originated in the design of the Chrysotriklinos throne room at the Imperial Palace, where the imperial throne stood under a mosaic of Christ enthroned.⁹¹⁶ By depicting Christ enthroned, Basil would have been using a sign of imperial power to express Christ's divine authority, possibly in the expectation that this imperial Christ would have accentuated the emperor's own status. The imperial throne was designed to impress and awe visitors. Liudprand gave an account of being received by the emperor in a throne room, which may be relevant to Basil's reign. While Liudprand performed proskynesis before Constantine VII, the imperial throne rose dramatically and unexpectedly towards the ceiling.⁹¹⁷ Such imperial stagecraft appears to have been introduced by Theophilos and may therefore have been practiced at Basil's court.⁹¹⁸ The effect would have been to elevate the emperor towards Christ, in the presence of his subjects and ambassadors, impressing them with technological superiority and earthly supremacy in the eyes of God.

⁹¹⁴ Cutler, *Transfigurations*, pp 5-30.

⁹¹⁵ H. Maguire, 'The heavenly court,' pp 247-258.

⁹¹⁶ Grierson, *Byzantine Coins, Part 1*, pp 115, 154. It is possible that the succession of different designs for the throne was the result of a period of increasing artistic quality. Basil's coins were generally of poorer workmanship than those of his successors, with figures shown out of proportion, lines more crudely drawn and gestures uncertain or incomplete. For example, it is not clear on one copper coin from 870 - 879 whether Basil is raising his hand in blessing or holding an *akakia*. If so, the actual throne could have looked like the lyre-backed throne from later coin images, with the early square-backed throne a more primitive execution of the image.

⁹¹⁷ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, Chapter 5.

⁹¹⁸ Trilling, 'Daedalus and the nightingale,' p 226.

By using the throne as a sign of power in this way, Basil was making no claim for the character of his rule and none to the possession of inner wisdom or influence over religious affairs. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that Basil's art made any claims to spiritual power. Instead, his iconography emphasised physical power and divine legitimacy. Basil's art therefore suggests that there was at least a degree of symbiosis between imperial and the assertive patriarchal art which emphasised the importance of the relationship between emperor and the head of the church. This symbiosis was compatible with Grabar's observation of a religious drift in imperial art in the ninth-century. This may, however, reflect the fact that imperial art sought above all to depict the legitimacy of Basil as emperor and not claim spiritual authority. This was not so much a retreat by imperial art as a particular focus on legitimacy.

If there was such a symbiosis between an assertive patriarchal art and the imperial self-image in the 870s and the early 880s, it does not appear to have continued under Basil's successor Leo. Three objects require examination: an ivory sceptre, now in Berlin; a votive crown, now in Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice and the description of a Palace bath-house contained in a poem by Leo Choiosphaktes, a high-ranking official and diplomat at Leo's court. All appear to have laid claims to spiritual authority for the emperor.

The first object to consider is the imagery of Leo's bath-house, on the site of the Great Palace near the New Church. An ekphrasis about the bath survives in a poem by Leo Choiosphaktes.⁹¹⁹ This is admittedly ambiguous. Mango though the iconography was much older than the ninth-century and argued that there was no connection with Leo.⁹²⁰ Others, including Magdalino, have concluded that the art was the work of Leo. Within the imagery, there was a central decoration of a serpent set alongside personified river gods. It is possible to view this as a

⁹¹⁹ Magdalino, 'The bath of Leo the Wise,' pp 116-117

⁹²⁰ Mango, 'The Palace of Marina.'

Christian allegory in which the scene was the New Eden, the four river gods representatons of the Evangelists and the serpent the emperor, Leo.⁹²¹ If true, this would have significant as a statement of imperial power. This scene was very different from Basil's imagery, in which power was often mediated by a divine figure such as Gabriel or Elijah. Here, the emperor was himself in the position of Christ, alongside the four Evengelists. Nevertheless, such an interpretation involves a degree of speculation, as the iconography cannot be dated securely and other interpretations of the serpent and river gods are possible. Yet regardless of the date of the imagery in the bath-house, the poem very clearly praises Leo's spiritual wisdom. One verse, for example, reads: 'let the revolving axis of heaven rejoice that Leo perceives the unalterable threads of the bearers of heaven'.⁹²² Another instructs: 'Reject all babble of false words; Leo has now gathered all rhetorical eloquence'.⁹²³ These words suggest that Leo was believed by at least one of his officials to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Whilst it is not possible to securely date the bath-house, it seems highly probable that the votive crown, now in San Marco, Venice, dates from Leo's reign.⁹²⁴ This thin diadem originally included 14 enamelled medallions containing images of figures. Seven have survived, which depict the emperor Leo and seven Apostles and Evangelists: Paul, Andrew, Mark, Bartholomew, Luke and James. Leo is named in an inscription and wears a *loros* and crown. Six enamels are missing, one of which is believed to have been Christ, placed at the opposite side of the

⁹²¹ Magdalino, 'The bath of Leo the Wise,' pp 104-105.

⁹²² Πῶλος ὁ κυκλοφόρος γῆθ' ὅτι Λέων
ἄτροπα φωτοόρων νήματα δέρκει.
Translated by Magdalino, *ibid*, p 117, lines 85-86.

⁹²³ Πευδαλέων ἐπέων ρίψατε λέσχην
τεχνικῶν νῦν λογίων δράξατο Λέων.
Ibid, p 117, lines 67-68.

⁹²⁴ Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco*, pp 117-122. The votive crown was assembled at a later date into the Virgin of the Grotto. Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*, p 123, p 396.

crown to Leo. Above the crown are two of an original three silver-gilt peacocks, which may have symbolised immortality and eternal life.⁹²⁵

The crown was not designed to be worn but could have been an offering to a church and may have been placed by a mosaic on the wall, with pearls or jewels hanging from rings on its base. Antony of Novgorod described seeing just such a votive crown at Hagia Sophia.⁹²⁶ Murano and Grabar have suggested that the item was a gift to Church San Zaccaria in Venice, although this is speculation.⁹²⁷ Such objects were likely to have been official gifts, rather than direct commissions by the emperor, so it cannot be assumed that Leo influenced the design or ever saw the object.⁹²⁸ Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that imagery would have been produced without Leo's tacit blessing. Chapter 3 demonstrated that Leo was thoughtful about the process of artistic representation.⁹²⁹ The association of Leo with the Apostles and Evangelists must have reflected imperial ideology and depicted the emperor the way he wanted to be seen. The association seems unambiguously to be a claim for spiritual authority, of a kind never made by Basil.

This was a not an isolated example. A third example of Leo's neo-Apostolic imagery comes from an ivory sceptre from the Museum fur Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin.⁹³⁰ Only part of the object has survived but there are carvings on all four

⁹²⁵ Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, p 60. Peacocks also featured in the design for the courtyard of Basil's New Church, see Chapter 3, p 145.

⁹²⁶ Buckton, *Treasury of San Marco*, p 121.

⁹²⁷ M. Murano and A. Grabar, *Les Trésors de Venise: la basilique de Saint-Marc et son trésor, le Palais Ducal, les galeries de L'Academie, l'architecture et les monuments de Venise*, (Geneva, 1963).

⁹²⁸ R. Cormack 'But is it art?' in J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds), *Byzantine Diplomacy: papers from the twenty-fourth spring symposium of Byzantine studies*, (Aldershot, 1992), pp 219-236.

⁹²⁹ Chapter 3, p 165.

⁹³⁰ Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium*, p 127. The case for considering this object a sceptre is considered in the introduction.

sides, with each figure placed in an architectural setting suggesting a major church. The front of the object shows Christ in the middle with Peter and Paul on each side. On the back, the Virgin Mary is in the centre, placing a jewel or pearl into the crown worn by the emperor, on the left, with Gabriel to the right. Both Leo and Gabriel wear the *loros* and carry an orb and sceptre. This object has some similarities with the image of Basil being crowned in the Paris Gregory. Both depict Gabriel, for example. Yet once again, Leo is depicted alongside New Testament figures: Christ and Mary, Peter and Paul. The emperor is depicted as one of the Apostles and not a prophet king in the Old Testament mode.

The sceptre is linked to Leo by its inscriptions. Two mention an emperor Leo. The main inscription on the ivory, spread over back and front arches, reads ‘Lord in your power the emperor Leo will rejoice and in your salvation he will exult exceedingly’.⁹³¹ The inscription on the front lintel reads ‘By the prayers of the disciples, Lord, help your servant’ while the one on the back lintel says ‘Strive, prosper and reign lord Leo’.⁹³² Corrigan has suggested that the inscriptions were drawn from Psalms 20 and 44 and were meant to represent Pentecost, the occasion on which the Holy Spirit descended to the Apostles.⁹³³ A prayer has survived from the *Euchologion*, which incorporates ideas from both psalms and refers to both the crown and sceptre.⁹³⁴ The descent of the Holy Spirit is described in the Book of Acts: ‘And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound

⁹³¹ Arches inscription: Κ[ύρι]Ε ΕΝ ΤΗ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΙ ΤΩ ΕΝΦΡΑΝΘΗΤΕΙ ΛΕΩΝ Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. ΚΑΙ ΕΠΙ ΤΩ ΚΩΤΗΡΙΩ ΤΩ ΑΓΑΛΛΙΑΣΕΤΑΙ ΤΟ ΔΡΑ

⁹³² Lintel inscription: ΛΙΤΑΙΣ ΦΟΙΤΗΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ [ή]ΓΟΝ ΤΩ ΔΟΥΛΩ. ΕΝΤΕΙΝΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΕΒΟΔΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΕ ΛΕΩΝ ΑΝΑΞ.

⁹³³ Psalms 20:2 and 44:5. Corrigan, ‘Ivory sceptre,’ pp 409-413.

⁹³⁴ καὶ ἐπὶ δὲ ἐξ ἁγίου κατηχητηρίου σου καὶ τὸν πιστὸν σου δούλον τὸν δεῖνα, ὃν εὐδόκησας καταστήσαι βασιλέα ἐπὶ τὸ ἔθνος σου τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ περιποιήσω τῷ τιμίῳ αἵματι τοῦ μονογενὲς υἱοῦ σου Υἱοῦ χρίσαι καταξιώσον τῷ ἐλαίῳ τῆς ἀγαλλιάσεως ἐνδύσον αὐτὸν δύναμιν ἐξ ὕψους ἐπιθεῖς ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ στέφανον ἐκ λίθου τιμίου χάρισαι αὐτῷ μακρότητα ἡμερῶν. ὁδὸς ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ σκῆπτρου σωτηρίας. ἐνίδρυσον αὐτὸν τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς δικαιοσύνης, J. Goar (ed) *Euchologion Sive Rituale Graecorum* (1730) 726f quoted in Corrigan, ‘Ivory sceptre,’ p 410 n15.

from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance'.⁹³⁵ The imagery on the sceptre seems to indicate very clearly that Leo was gifted wisdom by Mary, which he then used in the manner of the Apostles to speak the word of God to all the nations. The language strongly recalls the phrasing of Leo Choirosphaktes, whose poem praised Leo's eloquence which overcame the babble of false words.

This is very much how Leo saw his own authority. In one of his homilies, delivered at Pentecost, Leo compared his words to the language of the Apostles and invited the Holy Spirit to fill his own mouth.⁹³⁶ In so doing, Leo was indicating that he spoke God's word directly and was fulfilling a similar role to the Apostles. In his homilies, Leo put himself not the patriarch in the position of Christ's representative on earth, acting as spiritual instructor to his subjects as well as secular power: 'reward me by granting that in this life I guide with knowledge the flock entrusted to me, O thou who has acquired pastoral knowledge to the highest degree' he asks in one homily.⁹³⁷ 'May thou by thy guidance support my rational mind...leading and managing with me the people over whom thou has granted me authority' he prays in another.⁹³⁸ Leo chose to re-dedicate the church of St Thomas the Apostle on his own birthday rather than on the feast day of the saint himself.⁹³⁹ For Leo, the emperor himself was in direct line of authority from Christ, given pastoral as well as temporal powers. If the emperor was Christ's

⁹³⁵ Acts 2:1-6.

⁹³⁶ Homily 6. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 215-220.

⁹³⁷ οὐν μὲν τὸ πιστευθὲν ποιμνιον ὁδηγεῖν ἐπιστημόνως διδούς, ὁ πάντων μάλιστα τὴν ποιμαντικὴν ἐπιστήμην συνειλοχώς. Leo, Homilies 9, 77. Translation by Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, p 73.

⁹³⁸ σὺ δ' ἡμῖν τῷ σῶ ἡγεμονικῶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν στηρίζεις...ἀγων σὺν ἡμῖν καὶ διέπων ὦν τὴν ἐπιστάσιαν ἐπέτρεπας. Leo Homilies 7, 47. Translation *ibid*, p 73.

⁹³⁹ Leo Homilies 32 and 33. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*.

vicar on earth, what role was left the patriarch? The office appears much diminished from the last decade of Basil's reign.

The context of Psalm 20, referred to in the sceptre's inscription, suggests that the blessing was linked with military success. In the Psalm, David was making a sacrifice before going to war. 'We will exult in thy salvation' says the Psalmist, 'and in the name of our God shall we be magnified: the Lord fulfil all thy petitions.' David has been anointed by God and is protected by him and God will bring victory. For David, read Leo. The king's pious character will help him overthrow his enemies, who only trusted in their own military might. The depiction of the emperor alongside Mary seems to match Leo's depiction of the Virgin on his coins, for Mary was the defender of Constantinople. Leo's spiritual approach contrasts with Basil, whose defense of Constantinople was physical, like the enemies in the Psalm.

This neo-Apostolic imagery contains elements of 'casaeropapism' or the idea that emperor had spiritual as well as temporal authority.⁹⁴⁰ Leo believed his authority stretched to all aspects of rule. His 67th novel, for example, abolished certain powers of the senate and claimed that everything now depended on the wisdom of the emperor.⁹⁴¹ It is clear from this analysis that Leo's perception of his authority was very different from Basil's. Basil sought to associate his rule with the Old Testament, allowing a prominent role for prophet figures. Leo, by contrast, placed himself in a Neo-Apostolic role, derived from Mary and the Holy Spirit, which gave no need for a mediator. Whilst Basil exercised military power but relied on his patriarch for spiritual guidance, Leo saw himself as a spiritual and moral authority which itself would bring military success. In essence, Basil sought to promote the legitimacy of his power, whilst Leo sought to represent the character of his authority. In this, Leo's art closely matched his words.

⁹⁴⁰ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*. Cameron, 'The construction of court ritual,' p 113.

⁹⁴¹ Leo. Novel 67. Barker, *Social and Political Thought*, pp 99-100.

It seems unsurprising in this context that Leo dismissed Photios, the author of the *Epanagoge*. Photios was a champion of the assertive patriarchal art of the mid ninth-century, in which Methodios was a holy defender of Orthodoxy against impious imperial power. Times had changed by the 880s. Leo was not looking back to Iconoclasm and had less need of the guidance of the patriarch. He was confident in his own knowledge and virtue to assume a much more active role in the spiritual lives of his subjects and believed that his wisdom and piety would protect Constantinople. This new relationship between emperor and patriarch is visible in the correspondence between Leo and his brother, Stephen, who Leo made patriarch at the young age of 19.⁹⁴² In these years, Leo actively involved himself in church affairs. A number of his laws were addressed directly to Stephen and concerned ecclesiastical matters, which earlier patriarchs might have considered matters for the church, such as church law, monastic rules and the precedence of bishops.⁹⁴³ One of the novels preserves a hint of the tone of discussion between Leo and his patriarch. In response to a concern raised by Stephen, Leo replies that ‘it would be more fitting that your Holiness’ opinion came from you rather than originating from me.’⁹⁴⁴ This demonstrates that Leo exerted influence on his younger sibling but sought to disguise it under a veil of deference. Photios was rarely so circumspect towards Basil on church matters, at least in the 880s.

It is not easy to extend this analysis of power dynamics between emperor and patriarch into the short reign of Alexander. Too little art survives to provide clues. However, it appears that Alexander reverted to the pattern used by his father, rather than follow the example of his brother. His depiction of John the Baptist on his gold coins may have been intended as a blessing and promise of

⁹⁴² Leo, Homily 22. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis*. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of Leo VI*, pp 245-246. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1898.

⁹⁴³ Novels 12 - 17 are addressed to Stephen: Cordonier, ‘The corpus of Leo’s Novels.’ Indeed, Church law is the main topic of Novels 2-17, 73, 75, 76, 79, 86, 87 and 88.

⁹⁴⁴ ἡ μὲν ἀξίωσις τῆς ὑμετέρας μαχαριότητος ὑφ’ ὑμῶν μᾶλλον δικαία προἔρχεσθαι ἢ ἡ παρ’ ἡμῶν τὴν γένεσιν λαβεῖν Novel 17. Cordonier, ‘The corpus of Leo’s Novels,’ p 31.

future success. Nevertheless, it reverts to the use of a prophet figure as adviser or mediator of imperial power, which had been a feature of Basil's iconography. Alexander did not place himself alongside the Apostles. His use of the crowning motif rather than neo-Apostolic imagery suggests that his concern was to stress his divine selection rather than his character. Historically it seems likely that Alexander's immediate concerns on becoming emperor were practical rather than ideological. Alexander worked closely with Patriarch Nikolos to remove certain bishops from their roles, as part of his wider overhaul of court officials.⁹⁴⁵ The emperor's focus appears to have been on securing allies and removing critics, rather than more spiritual matters.

Conclusions

It is tempting but misleading to consider imperial and patriarchal art as a form of dialectic, in which each side responded and commented on the ideas expressed by the other. This was not the case. However, imperial and patriarchal art present a series of spotlights on the respective role and authority of the holders of those offices as they themselves perceived it. The strongest of these spotlights are on the patriarchate between the 850s and 870s and on Leo's interpretation of his imperial authority from the 880s onwards. However, Basil's use of iconography provides insight into his conception of power in the late 860s and 870s.

A study of patriarchal art suggests that it was confident, proactive and assertive in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Patriarchs could claim to have played a major role in the resistance to Iconoclasm which had been propounded by impious emperors. The wounds they had incurred became signs of power that were proudly displayed in the *Sekretion*, where the patriarch entertained the emperor on feast days. It seems likely that this triumph over persecution was an important element of Photios' self-image. In this context, the Paris Gregory

⁹⁴⁵ *Vita Euthymii*, pp 116-117.

illustrations were more than simple panegyric. They departed from the emperor's rhetoric and iconography in ways which suggest a qualification or critique of imperial power, extolling the idea that legitimate power required sound counsel. This was achieved by a focus on Basil's physical power but not other kingly or spiritual virtues like justice or wisdom. Moreover, imperial authority and legitimacy are seen to derive from struggle, piety and repentance. This can be interpreted as a coded critique of power for two reasons. Firstly because it placed emphasis on the conditionality of power: divine blessing has been bestowed but can be taken away; sin requires repentance for legitimacy to be maintained. Just as David had his power reaffirmed thanks to his penitence, so Basil's legitimacy may have depended on repentance for the way he came to the throne. Second, the imagery qualified imperial power through the idea that struggle only succeeds with good counsel. The picture painted was not of the ideal ruler but of a sinner who has repented, a ruler with some but not every imperial virtue whose excesses needed restraint. This is very different from the black and white depictions of rule signified by Constantine and Julian in the same manuscript. The emperor's legitimate power rule was not inherent in his own person and character, therefore, but depended to an extent on his willingness to be counselled. The ultimate authority resides in scripture, which the Paris Gregory shows enthroned. As a gift for an emperor with limited literacy, it was obvious that divine will required an interpreter.

Ideas and their expression changed with time and personalities. In the 870s and 880s, Basil's art appears to have been compatible with Photios' notion of the diarchy. This does not imply that Basil agreed with his patriarch about the distinctive roles played by emperor and patriarch, although he may have done. It does suggest, however, that Basil's preferred self-image, built on the Old Testament Kings, allowed room for the patriarch to play a prominent, advisory role, in the manner of the Old Testament prophets. Basil does not appear to have competed with his patriarch for spiritual authority. Basil's imagery mostly used signs of temporal power and even presented Christ as an imperial figure. As a

result, there appears to have been a symbiosis between imperial and patriarchal power in the 870s and early 880s. This changed under Leo, who used New Testament allegories to depict his power, establishing a direct relationship between emperor and Mary. In particular, Leo's art sought to depict him in the company of the Apostles, suggesting that Leo saw his power in spiritual terms, with the emperor animated by the Holy Spirit and fulfilling Christ's mission on earth. As Leo's power was almost Apostolic, it allowed less room for the patriarch. The emperor himself was providing the spiritual leadership needed by his people.

*‘Thy throne shall be as the sun before Him and His eyes shall be looking towards thee and naught of harm shall touch thee, for He has chosen thee’.*⁹⁴⁶

Conclusion: Visual Propaganda and the Political Imaginary

This thesis set out to examine how the early Macedonian Emperors created and used visual propaganda to consolidate Basil I’s bloody seizure of power in 867, which inaugurated what appeared to later Byzantines, like Michael Psellos, a long and glorious period of their history.⁹⁴⁷ Psellos’ surprise that Basil’s Dynasty was so favoured suggests an assumption that usurpation would not flourish. Yet a sense that the Macedonian Emperors were divinely chosen helped protect them from their rivals. As Constantine VII put it, writing to his son in *De Administrando Imperio*, ‘Naught of harm shall touch thee, for He has chosen thee.’ Imperial art and rhetoric did not create this idea but certainly found powerful ways to express it from the beginning of Basil I’s reign.

Basil, Leo and Alexander all used visual imagery to shape perceptions of their power and help them achieve certain ends. Table 14 summarises some of the key findings from previous chapters. It indicates when each emperor was most active and innovative in their image-making; what claims to legitimacy they made; how the character of individual emperors was depicted, what kind of comparisons were drawn with Biblical and historical figures; what claims were made to temporal and spiritual authority and finally how each emperor tried to influence the succession. It demonstrates clearly that there were important differences in the imagery promoted in turn by Basil, Leo and Alexander.

⁹⁴⁶ ‘Ο θρόνος σου ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐναντίου αὐτοῦ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται βλέποντες ἐπὶ σε, καὶ οὐδὲν οὐ μὴ ἄψηται σου τῶν χαλεπῶν, καθότι αὐτός σε ἐξελέξατο. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, Proem, lines 33 - 35. Translation by R. Jenkins.

⁹⁴⁷ See Introduction, p 1, n 1.

TABLE 14: Characteristics of Imperial Art, 867 - 913

Themes	Basil	Leo	Alexander
Activity	Most active 868 - 879, when new to throne and promoting son Constantine. Inactive after 879 when Constantine died.	Inactive for first half of reign, following accession. Active after son Constantine promoted to junior emperor in 908.	Highly active from beginning of reign.
Innovation	Innovative in coinage in first year, 868, after which more adaptive in approach. Evidence of innovation among courtiers.	Innovative in 908, once son was born.	Highly innovative from start of reign, eg. in coinage.
Claim to legitimacy	Mostly claims to divine selection (motif of divine crowning).	Mostly claims to imperial character, such as piety, wisdom and spiritual authority, eg. coin image of emperor as an older man.	Mostly claims to divine selection, eg. image of divine crowning on gold coin.
Character	Suggestion of physical nature of power and military achievement, eg. on Kainourgion mosaics. Comparison with Old Testament Kings like David. Coinage commemorates dead wife and son.	Suggestion of wisdom, piety and spirituality. Association with Evangelists and Apostles, eg. on sceptre, Depiction of Mary may reflect her intervention with birth of son but may also reflect piety as source of defence of Constantinople.	Limited but extent of image-making demonstrates personal proactivity
Claims to temporal and spiritual authority	Strong focus on temporal power, through signs such as thrones and images of triumph. Little apparent focus on spiritual authority, beyond piety.	Limited focus on temporal power. Strong focus on spiritual authority, with Neo-Apostolic imagery, eg. on sceptre.	Focus on temporal authority, through signs such as globus on coins and mosaic. Little apparent focus on spiritual authority.
Claim to succession	Consistent promotion of son Constantine on gold coins until 879. No promotion of Leo or Alexander after 879.	Consistent promotion of son Constantine on gold coins after 908.	None made. Constantine VII sidelined on coinage.

Constructing Power

Basil, Leo and Alexander each reflected conventional notions of the *kaiseridee* in their art. However, there were important differences in the way that each emperor used imagery to shape perceptions of their power. This was especially notable at the beginning of each reign. Previous usurpers had used continuity in imagery to demonstrate their legitimacy. Basil's art at first looked different to his predecessors, for example his gold solidus from 868 depicting the emperor in full standing form, using the new title 'Emperor of Emperors' and adapting the image of Christ to one enthroned. This was Basil's most innovative phase. After this, his coinage became more standardized. The most important artistic innovation of the reign, the image of heavenly crowning, survives in art commissioned by other figures at court but not in official imagery from Basil's coins or seals. The impression is that although Basil was constructing his own myth, he was not directing its artistic expression. The impression is one of initial unplanned experimentation followed by more cautious image-making. Basil was more proactive in using architecture to communicate his power. The catalyst for Basil's programme of constructions and renovations may have been the earthquake of 869, which could have been interpreted by Byzantines as a sign of divine displeasure, necessitating proof of the emperor's legitimacy. This may have been one of Basil's motivations for investing so much time and resources in the construction of the New Church, which he may also have believed would raise his reputation alongside great figures like Solomon, Constantine and Justinian.

By contrast, Leo was content to wait a decade until the birth of his son before becoming proactive in promoting his own authority through official imagery on coins. For the first years of his reign, images of his father Basil and his older brother Constantine remained in circulation. Leo recognized the power of imagery. He admitted that he was creating an image for Basil and knew that images spoke louder than words. He acknowledged the role that artists played in making images, took an interest in their designs and probably presided over a

period of growing artistic confidence, with artists open to wider influences such as Arab coins. Leo's patience in waiting until the birth of a son before changing his imagery probably reflected a degree of confidence that Leo held in his power and authority. Alexander's brief reign is perhaps the most surprising of all. Reputed to be a lazy emperor who preferred hunting to affairs of state, Alexander is shown by his art to have been a proactive image-maker, who presided over several iconographic innovations and managed to display his image in Hagia Sophia within a year or so after his accession. Alexander appears to have been the first emperor to have incorporated the image of heavenly crowning into the official media of coins and his other artistic adaptations show that he was prepared to strike out on his own and not just follow the example of his predecessors. Indeed, it is Alexander who can best claim the title of innovator that Grabar ascribed to Basil.

Imperial art is also revealing about the character of each emperor's power. Basil's voice is the most mediated of all the Macedonian emperors, his thoughts and achievements being expressed via Photios or Leo or the author of the *Vita Basilii*. This is perhaps unsurprising for an emperor who supposedly could not himself write. Basil's imagery suggests that he was a man who drew his power primarily from his physical strength. He may have been capable of intimidating friend and foe alike and generating fear at court. His restoration of the imagery of triumph suggests that military success played an important part in his public image. Basil also influenced the development of the most important new artistic motif to emerge in these decades: the sign of an emperor being crowned by a heavenly figure. This image appeared in works produced by senior figures at court and not in official forms of imperial art like coins or seals. This suggests that there was a dominant rhetoric at court, about Michael III's corruption and Basil's divine selection, which artists turned into imagery. However, this process was adaptive and not directed systematically by anyone at court.

Leo's imagery expressed different ideas about imperial power. Rather than emphasise divine selection, it tends to suggest the character of the emperor's authority. One coin appears to promote Leo as a wise ruler, through signs of age and a longer beard, but this motif was not repeated. Leo's art is particularly distinctive for its Neo-Apostolic character. Leo was depicted alongside the Apostles in several works of art and his homilies make it clear that he believed he had a spiritual mission to his people. The major innovations of the reign occurred after Leo's son Constantine was made junior emperor in 908. Notably this included the depiction of the Virgin Mary on coins for the first time. Mary was the defender of Constantinople and the city was regularly threatened by Bulgars, Arabs and Rus during the reign. The choice of Mary may have been intended to demonstrate that a non-campaigning emperor like Leo could protect the city through his piety and relationship to God. It seems very likely, too, that there was a personal element too in the depiction of Mary on the coinage, as Leo's fourth wife Zoe seems to have appealed to Mary to help her have children. The coin was probably minted to mark Constantine VII's elevation as heir.

The mosaic of the emperor in the narthex of Hagia Sophia indicates how imperial imagery can be interpreted in quite different ways. This was almost certainly intended to be a generic image of an emperor, above the Imperial Door into the santum of the church. However, I have argued that it may have been based on Leo, after an incident which took place at that location, in which Leo kneeled before the patriarch in front of the Senate. Certainly the image has iconographic features in common with depictions of Leo and became associated with him in Byzantine times. Rather than an expression of humiliation, the image appears to express power through piety. Later Russian visitors interpreted the image as one of moral strength. It may have been erected during Zoe's regency as an act of spite against the patriarch.

Power Relations

Imperial art is revealing about the relationship between the emperor and others at court. The way that emperors sought to designate their successors through their imagery turns out not to be entirely predictable. Basil actively sought to promote his son Constantine to the succession from early in his reign. However, when Constantine died in 879 Basil made little if any effort to promote either of his remaining sons on his coins. Instead, Basil was content to appear on his own. This suggests that Basil may have been undecided about who to back or remained concerned about either son's suitability or loyalty. Imperial art reveals something of the power vacuum that existed at court between Constantine's death and the end of the reign. This was dangerous for Basil as it might have encouraged his sons to plot against him (which may, possibly, have led to his death).

The only claim Leo made for the succession was after the birth of his son Constantine. This was to be expected. Leo's marginalisation of Alexander during the first part of his reign was more questionable. This act was not unprecedented but Leo did not follow recent examples in which senior emperors had acknowledged other junior emperors at least until they had a son of their own. Rather, Alexander was marginalised in Leo's imagery in much the way that Basil had been marginalised at the end of Michael III's reign. This was likely to have fostered tension between the two brothers. More dangerously, Alexander chose not to promote his nephew Constantine in his art, presenting himself as sole ruler *Autokrator*, which he was not. As Alexander himself was childless, this left the succession vulnerable to a challenger, which is in fact what soon materialised, in the form of Romanos Lekapenos. Alexander's behaviour shows that the early Macedonians could act against dynastic interests. Alexander's proactive image-making should be seen alongside historical evidence that the emperor sought to make changes amongst the leading officials of Church and government. This suggests that Alexander inherited the throne determined to escape his brother's shadow and stamp his own authority on Constantinople. The scale of his activity

and the emphasis given to his divine selection on his gold coins suggests that Alexander may have anticipated or already encountered some opposition.

The early Macedonian period is also interesting, historically, because scholars have suggested that it may have witnessed one of the most important ideological divides in Byzantium, over the 'diarchy' between emperor and patriarch. The ideas set out by Photios in the *Epanagoge* have been seen as genuine political differences which were the Eastern equivalent of the distinction between Church and State but also as platitudes or empty rhetoric. I have argued that patriarchal art was confident and assertive in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The Paris Gregory can be seen in this tradition, qualifying imperial power by acts of omission and by emphasising the role of powerful prophets and spiritual advisers like Elijah, Nathan, Isaiah and Ambrose. Basil appears to have ignored these ideas or may simply have been comfortable enough with them in the last decade of his reign. His own imagery tended to signify temporal power, not spiritual authority. Basil's use of the throne as a sign of power was, for example, so extensive that one of his gold coins has become known by that name. I have suggested that a symbiosis may have developed between imperial art under Basil which focused on divine selection and a patriarchal art that was confident and assertive in the decades after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This may have been because Basil accepted the roles ascribed to emperor and patriarch in the *Epanagoge* or it may have been serendipity, with Basil's need for a spiritual figure to support his claims to divine appointment. This symbiosis was soon broken, for Leo had a very different conception of his authority, which included his possession of both inner and outer realms of wisdom. By presenting his rule as Neo-Apostolic, on his ivory sceptre and the votive crown, Leo outlined a sense of his own power that appears to have been incompatible with the ideas expressed in the Paris Gregory. It seems no surprise, therefore, that Photios was dismissed as patriarch by Leo. The art of these decades suggests that there were indeed ideological differences in Byzantium about the nature and limits of imperial power.

In conclusion, a close study of the art of Basil, Leo and Alexander validates much of the work undertaken by Grabar about the presentation of an idealized imperial image. Taking the long-view of imperial art, as Grabar did, offers vital perspectives. There were undoubtedly aspects of imperial art which remained unchanging and new directions often took decades or more to emerge. Nevertheless, this thesis has demonstrated that there were important differences between and even within individual reigns. Emperors constructed their power in different ways and power dynamics within the imperial household and between the emperor and patriarch changed with circumstance and perspective.

Although each of the early Macedonian emperors was, in their own way, an active propagandist, imperial art does not appear to have been deployed as a conscious visual strategy, matching the personal legends developed in writing such as the *Vita Basilii*. It was experimental rather than systemic, with motifs appearing and disappearing, images being adopted and adapted with little consistency in design or application. The image of heavenly crowning is a case in point. Each time this appeared, it was subtly different, not least in the identity of the figure conveying the blessing: Christ, Gabriel, Mary, John the Baptist. Rather than being given clear instructions or models to work from, artists or those who paid them may have been working towards the expression of an idea current at court: the idea of divine selection. It was only over a number of decades that this idea came to be expressed visually as Christ crowning the emperor. Rather than visual propaganda, it may make more sense, therefore, to consider imperial art as part of the 'political imaginary.' Images were often created for specific occasions, to be used in particular ceremonies between specific people. This is just as true of ceremonial gold coins as it is of the Paris Gregory or an object like Leo's ivory scepter. These works of art provide clues to the kind of impression of imperial power that was being sought. The Chrysotriklinos Throne Room provides a good example. The mosaics of Christ, emperor and patriarch did express important

ideas but they were observed in theatrical ceremonies which involved the emperor's throne rising above a subject performing proskynesis in front of him.

Previous studies were right to conclude that Macedonian imperial art strongly focused on the elites of Empire. It is clear that gold and silver coins were used much more actively than copper in disseminating the imperial image. Regional mints appear to have been consistently derivative, with no attempt at central control. Yet that does not mean that emperors felt their power was only threatened by the elites of Constantinople. The population of the city clearly played a key part in their imaginations too. No doubt a great deal of art from public places in Constantinople has been lost. Yet the evidence shows that emperors used architecture both to impress citizens and visitors alike but also to demonstrate their legitimacy, achievement and success. And when emperors were successful, Byzantines expected to share in that success.

It is impossible to know to what extent imperial art helped strengthen the Macedonian Dynasty against its rivals. However, the fact of divine selection became an increasingly strong focus of imperial art during the late ninth and early tenth-centuries. Each emperor justified that divine selection in different ways: Basil through military successes and prestigious building work; Leo through spirituality, piety and wisdom. Alexander's reputation might have been very different had he lived and been able to turn his active image-making into deeds. These successes would have had a cumulative effect, earning the Dynasty an appearance of success that its rivals could not instantly match, even if they borrowed some of the same tactics, such as adopting images of themselves being crowned by Christ. The achievements of imperial art might have been hesitant and subtle but they would have helped encourage assumptions of heredity to become stronger over time. The art of the early Macedonians contributed new ways to express ideas of legitimacy, authority and success, which built on previous dynasties' efforts to promote the images of their chosen successors,

creating the foundations for future generations of Byzantines to construct their own ideas of dynastic greatness.

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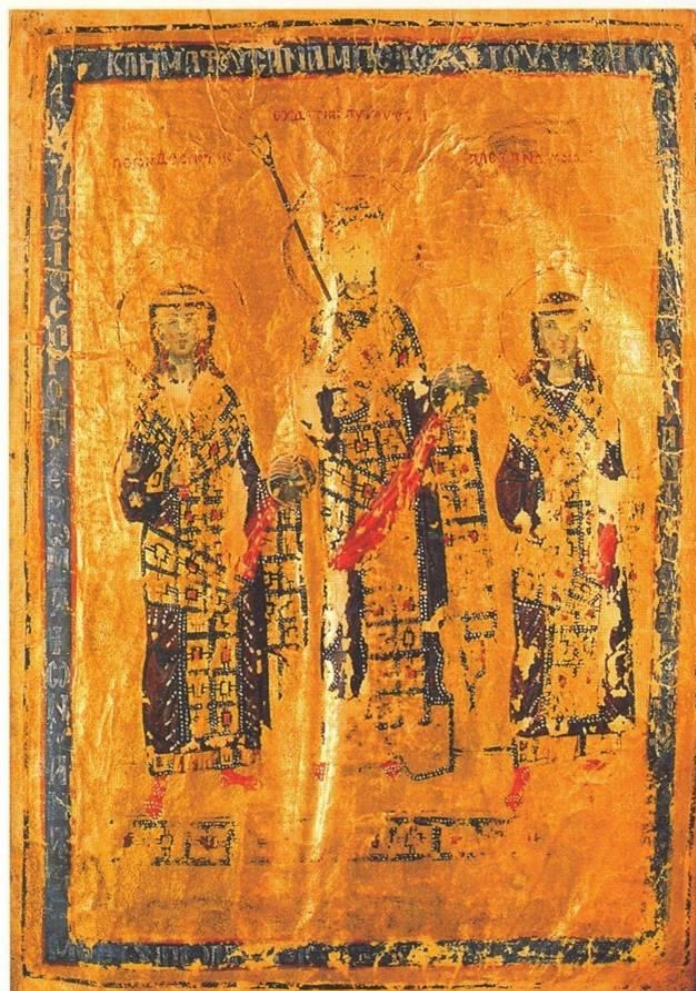
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Plate 1



*Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Folio Cv, Basil with Elijah and Gabriel
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris*

Plate 2



*Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Folio Br: Eudokia, Leo and Alexander.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.*

Plate 3



*Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Folio 174v: lower register, the anointing of David.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.*

Plate 4



*Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, BN Ms. Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Folio 355r: the Council of 381.
Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale.*

Plate 5



*Mosaic of an emperor before Christ, narthex, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
Photo: Neil Churchill*

Plate 6



Detail of emperor in narthex mosaic, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
Photo: Neil Churchill

Plate 7



*Location of mosaic of Emperor Alexander, North Gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Photo: Neil Churchill*

Plate 8



*Mosaic of Emperor Alexander, North Gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.
Photo: Neil Churchill*