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NEIL CHURCHILL, Power and Representation in Byzantium: The Forging of the Macedonian Dynasty (Studies in Byzantine Cultural History). London – New York: Routledge 2024. 265 pp. – ISBN 978-1-003-25529-1

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NEIL CHURCHILL's is the fourth installment in the series *Studies in Byzantine Cultural History*, edited by MARGARET MULLETT, LIZ JAMES (supervisor of the author's PhD from which the present book derives), and JIM CROW. His is an ambitious project: CHURCHILL (thereafter NC) intends to describe the mechanisms by which imperial authority was asserted and legitimised during the reigns of the first Macedonian emperors, starting with Basil I, whose bloody murdering of Michael III in 867 represents the original sin for which all the dynasty members had to atone, and ending with the death of Constantine VII in 959. NC bases his analysis mainly on images and works of art (either actually preserved or just described by contemporary authors), which is his main field of expertise, but he also refers to textual sources in order to round up his picture of the representation of imperial power at the time. I will first briefly consider the structure of his book and summarize its content, then proceed to make some comments on his methodology and results.

In the introduction (pp. 1–18), NC summarizes the main points and focuses of his research, which examines power and legitimacy through a study of literary sources and art objects. The working hypothesis is that not only chance, but a distinct visual identity and propaganda secured the permanence of the Macedonian dynasty. The author studies chronologically the three first generations of Macedonian emperors and two occasions when the dynasty's survival was threatened, namely Zoe's regency and the reign of the Lakapenids. The volume's purpose is summarized on pp. 4–7. There are some references to previous studies on art and politics under the Macedonians on pp. 7–10, where the enduring impact of ANDRÉ GRABAR's research is emphasized. On pp. 10–18, NC develops the idea of the relation of art to power in the period, or, to put it differently, the construction of power through art. Some statements appear questionable, as for instance: 'I hope to explore the extent to which imagery can also tell us something about the individual behind the mask' (p. 14). A brief note on the sources (p. 18) is too short to provide orientation in methodological problems.

Chapter 1, 'Basil I: Usurping power' (pp. 19–53), starts with a short review of the literary sources (pp. 19–23). Then the author proceeds to explore how Basil, who had gained the throne by violence, sought to get away with the murder of his predecessor Michael III. On pp. 23–33, NC reflects why Basil adopted for his gold solidi the image of the standing emperor, which had not been used since Justinian II, thus departing from the previous iconography of Michael III's coins where only the busts of emperors were depicted. On pp. 33-53, the author deals with the images of heavenly crowning preserved in the David ivory casket (Rome, Palazzo Venezia) and the Paris Gregory manuscript (BnF, Grec 510) and speculates about the symbolism of both objects. Perhaps the author puts here too much emphasis on the connection of Basil I with the Biblical David: Davidic references were not exclusive to this emperor. NC rejects the relation of the David casket with a marriage, as frequently assumed, although his arguments are not compelling. As for the Paris Gregory, it was probably Photios, not Basil, who was responsible for this symbolic crowning of the emperor by archangel Gabriel. NC stresses that the manuscript was part of a private gift exchange among a few persons (p. 49), although he also remarks that the image 'implicitly established a key role for the patriarch in legitimizing imperial authority', as Photios was the one who obtained God's blessing for the emperor (p. 51). Nothing is said of the legitimacy that Basil gained from the forged genealogy written by Photios.

In chapter 2, 'Laying foundations: Basil's building work' (pp. 54-80), NC describes the buildings renewed or erected by Basil (following mainly the *Vita Basilii*), without providing many new insights and mainly commenting upon their date, with special focus, as is to be expected, on the *Nea Ekklesia*. The location of many of these buildings in the imperial Palace is, as known, a debated issue, and a PhD defended recently by Alfredo Calahorra Bartolomé has questioned previous maps and presented a new distribution that will surely contribute to a better understanding of the ceremonies of the Palace and the symbolism of its buildings.[1] Calahorra Bartolomé's study is a thorough and masterful combination of iconography, architectural remains, and literary sources, the kind of approach that would have been necessary in the present chapter.

Chapter 3, 'From emperor to dynasty: Family and succession' (pp. 81–100), surveys representations of the imperial family, either preserved in

1. A. Calahorra Bartolomé, Keleusate: Arquitectura, arte y ceremonia en el gran palacio de Constantinopla. Ph.D. tesis, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, 2023.

manuscripts (such as in the Paris Gregory, pp. 82–88) and coins (pp. 93–97), or described in the sources, with *Vita Basilii* being again used as the main text (pp. 88–93). The selected evidence is commented upon by the author and connected with historical events. Thus, for instance, NC explains that Leo and Alexander being depicted in the Paris Gregory along with their mother and on a smaller scale has to do with tensions and uncertainties at the court about Leo's role as heir to the throne after the death of Basil's elder son Constantine (p. 85).

In chapter 4, 'Leo VI: Continuity and change' (pp. 101–127), NC considers Leo's accession, the evolution of his iconography, and his architectural patronage. The author bases his analysis on coins (pp. 102–110, 112–114), seals, an ivory sceptre or comb from Berlin (pp. 110–112, see also below pp. 152–154), the *Patria* (notes 81, 96, 101), and the narthex of Hagia Sophia (pp. 119–127), but also refers to texts written by Leo himself, viz., his homilies, orations, hymns, and military manuals. Leo's Novels are occasionally used (Novel 52 is mentioned on p. 103, Novels 12–13, on p. 116). Leo's buildings (e.g. Saint Lazarus) and their connection with the emperor's philanthropy are dealt with on pp. 115–119.

Except for the final pages 150–158, most of the considerations in chapter 5, 'Leo VI: Power contested' (pp. 128–158), refer to the reign of Basil I and even to the preceding period. They seem to be a sort of unmotivated flash-back. Even so, this chapter is one of the most innovative of the whole book. The conflict between patriarch and emperor is first summarized (pp. 128–131), then illuminated with an analysis of art depicting patriarchs after the defeat of iconoclasm (pp. 131–136) in places such as the Chrysotriklinos (representing πλησίον the ἄναξ and the πρόεδρος, perhaps Michael III and Photios?), the Sekreton of Hagia Sophia (where Methodios, Germanos, Tarasios, and Nikephoros were portrayed) and its north tympanon (with an image of Methodios). On pp. 136–149, based on LESLIE BRUBAKER's groundbreaking study,[2] the Paris Gregory is now analysed as a product of patriarchal art. NC focuses on illuminations that praise the emperor through images from the Old Testament, particularly of David (pp. 139–143). On pp. 143–149, the connections of Photios with the Paris Gregory and ideas of Photios on imperial power are generically explored, though without a clear argument. On pp. 149–158, the 'signs of spiritual power in imperial

2. L. BRUBAKER, Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus. Cambridge 1999, p. 413. This much-used book is wrongly presented in NC's final bibliography as a collective volume edited by Brubaker.

art' are examined through an ivory sceptre now in Berlin (pp. 152–154, see also above pp. 110–112); a votive crown in Saint Mark's basilica (pp. 151–152), and the description of a palace bath house by Leo Choirosphaktes (pp. 150–151). Further literary evidence from Leo's own works would have been necessary to reach definitive conclusions.

In chapter 6, 'Alexander: Idler or innovator' (pp. 159–178), NC surveys the many innovations introduced by Alexander in the numismatic iconography of his short reign. Among other things, Alexander was the first emperor to depict a biblical figure crowning the emperor on a gold solidus, and to use the term αὐτοκράτωρ on silver *miliaresia*. Furthermore, Alexander's mosaic portrait in the north gallery of Hagia Sophia is revisited; possible reasons are considered behind its location in a dark niche high up on the edge of a vault in the north gallery, perhaps the same place where patriarch Nicholas judged five bishops opposing the emperor (p. 175). NC closes this chapter with considerations about the exceptionality of Alexander's reign, who succeeded his brother (something with scarce precedents) and had no children as heirs.

In chapter 7, 'Dynasty destabilised: The regency of Zoe' (pp. 179–192), NC centres again on gold coins and seals that he explains against the historical background provided by the literary sources in order to reconstruct Zoe's efforts on behalf of her son Constantine at preserving the continuity of the Macedonian dynasty. NC pays great attention to the first gold coins of Zoe's reign, depicting Constantine and Zoe along with the Virgin holding a medallion of Christ on the obverse. An image would have been advisable, in order to know whether Christ was set in a medallion or we have here rather a bust of the young Christ with a cruciform nimbus over her chest. A parallel is to be found in an issue of 1042 depicting Theodora and Zoe with the Virgin and Christ as a child (BZC.1956.11).

The first part of chapter 8, 'Dynasty under threat: Romanos I and the Lekapenoi' (pp. 193–214), deals again with coin issues by Romanos, who speedy appropriated the image of the divine selection of the emperor that the Macedonians had slowly developed over the previous forty years. NC discusses the chronology of the gold issues, which is entangled (pp. 197–199) but in which Constantine VII appears to have been soon excluded (921) in favour of Romanos's older son Christopher. More naturalistic portraits in copper and silver issues are also briefly approached (pp. 199–200). After dealing with the symbolism of imperial gifts (pp. 200–203), the buildings constructed by Romanos are discussed, with special attention

to the Myrelaion, which was used as a burial place for the emperor and his family (pp. 204–206). It was, however, Constantine VII who took advantage of Romanos's absence from the reception of the holy Mandylion in Constantinople in 944, shortly before Romanos's deposition by his sons (pp. 206–207). The complex issue of Romanos's succession and the hierarchy of his co-emperors is summarily dealt with at the end of the chapter (pp. 207–214).

The final chapter 9, 'Constantine VII and the re-invention of the dynasty' (pp. 215–240), starts with a brief characterization of Constantine VII (pp. 215–218) and continues with surveying his coinage (the title αὐτοκράτωρ appeared first on gold coins during his reign) and his activities as patron of the arts and crafts (as recorded mainly in Book VI of Theophanes Continuatus, pp. 218—222 of IMMANUEL BEKKER's edition). Ivories, a reliquary of the True Cross, and the Paris Psalter (BnF, Grec 139) are interpreted in connection with the patronage and pious foundations of Constantine and Basil Parakoimomenos (pp. 222–230). Unlike his Macedonian forebears, Constantine emphasised not only the imagery of divine blessing, but lineage and his status as porphyrogennetos, 'born in the purple' (pp. 230–235). A few words are said about ceremonial and its use, for instance to impress foreign ambassadors, taking the report of Liudprand of Cremona and the *Book of Ceremonies* as a basis (pp. 235–238). The chapter closes with two pages where the author reflects on how Constantine paved the way for the succession by his son Romanos II, who however did not pay attention to his own image on coins (pp. 238–240).

In his short final summary (pp. 241–246, without any reference to previous pages), the author concludes – and I agree – that 'the art of the early Macedonian emperors certainly featured considerable innovations and was capable of conveying powerful messages with great clarity but it was more unsystematic, adaptive and inconsistent than is sometimes recognised' (p. 242) and 'imagery was episodic and not as systematic as propaganda' (p. 244). Beyond that, NC just recapitulates some of the most important emphases made in his book (with the image of the heavenly crowning playing a central role) but in a narrative form that does not easily allow one to detect the main issues at stake.

Throughout the book, NC erratically combines his analysis of coins and other artifacts with considerations taken from literary sources. Imperial imagery, especially divine crowning of emperors (true Leitmotiv of the volume), is obviously central to the narrative, but the author frequently

accumulates data and bits of information which do not have any significant relevance to his topic and only serve to characterize the period. There is no in-depth analysis of the main pieces of evidence, particularly coins. NC just speculates on the symbolism of some figures or titles, and tends to accept or discard arguments on the basis of sheer probability.

These methodological problems are partly caused by the fact that NC barely knows Greek and appears to consult his sources almost exclusively in English translations – obviously, when such translations were at hand. This limitation predetermines his selection of texts and, for instance, the very limited use made of Leo's Novels, which are rarely quoted (despite being the most evident source for the representation of imperial authority) because they are only available in the French translation of Alphonse Dain and Pierre Noailles (1944). The author's difficulty in reading and understanding Greek would not have been so evident if he had not repeatedly reproduced in Greek the original passages he is commenting upon and provided them with English translations, mostly taken from other authors. Most of these quotes contain serious errors that clearly prove that NC does not even correctly identify the text he is quoting. Let us consider in some detail three cases in chapters 2 and 3.

On p. 34, NC copies the inscription on the lid of the David ivory casket, now in Palazzo Venezia in Rome, as follows:

ΧΡΙΣΤΕVΛΟΓΗΤΟΝ ΔΕΣΠΟΤWΝ ΣΥΝΩΡΙΔΑ ΔΥΛΗ ΕVΝWΡΙΣ ΠΡΟΣΚVΝΕΙ ΚΑΤ ΑΣΙΑΝ

The transcription uses Latin W and V for the Greek majuscules Ω and Υ. NC rightly writes Y in ΔΥΛΗ but here an omicron is lacking (δούλη). He also appears not to identify the letter Ξ, that is transcribed either as Σ (ΣΥΝΩΡΙΔΑ, ΑΣΙΑΝ) or as Ε (ΕVΝWΡΙΣ). Moreover, NC does not mention that the inscription is in fact a two-verse metrical epigram. If we preserve the original majuscules, it should be transcribed as follows:

ΧΡΙΣΤΕΥΛΟΓΗΤΟΝ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΩΝ ΞΥΝΩΡΙΔΑ:
ΔΟΥΛΗ ΞΥΝΩΡΙΣ ΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΕΙ ΚΑΤ'ΑΞΙΑΝ

If, however, we follow the usual conventions for editing Greek, the text is to be printed in minuscules with the corresponding accents and breathings that are lacking in the original inscription:

χριστευλόγητον δεσπότων ξυνωρίδα
δούλη ξυνωρὶς προσκυνεῖ κατ᾽ἀξίαν.

We see now that the translation provided by NC does not correspond to the transcribed Greek:

O Christ bless the imperial couple: the couple, your servants, duly make obeisance to you.

The correct translation of the passage should instead be:

The couple of servants adore, as they should,
the imperial couple, which is blessed by Christ.

The meaning is completely different, for the anonymous couple of donors, who are depicted in the lid below the emperor and empress, are now the 'servants' of the imperial couple they adore, whereas in NC's translation they do not appear at all, and the imperial couple is twice presented as 'servant' of Christ. The fact that the Greek text quoted does not match the translation is perhaps to be explained by the fact that the author took the text from a recent edition and the translation from a different study. For the translation NC only refers to an article of HENRY MAGUIRE,[3] but not to one by ANTHONY CUTLER and NIKOS OIKONOMIDES (immediately preceding MAGUIRE's contribution in the same journal), where the right reading is provided.[4] NC does not refer to ANDREAS RHOBY's corpus, which reproduces the Greek text with a correct German translation.[5] A recent publication on the casket by GIOVANNI GASBARRI, which appeared too late to be consulted by NC, provides more clues for interpreting the object and its inscriptions.[6]

Orthographical errors (use of V and W for Y and Ω) also appear in other quotes at pp. 45, 84, and 111–112. So, for instance, the inscription in the frame surrounding a miniature on f. Cv in Par. gr. 510 is also printed (p. 45) in majuscules, without accents and punctuation (with W instead of Ω) and not identified as a verse epigram. Now, NC does not even say that the inscription is hardly readable in its beginning, so that only two words

3. H. MAGUIRE, The Art of Comparing in Byzantium. Art Bulletin 70.1 (1988) pp. 88–103, here p. 89.

4. A. CUTLER – N. OIKONOMIDES, An Imperial Byzantine Casket and Its Fate at a Humanist's Hands. Art Bulletin 70.1 (1988) pp. 77–87, here pp. 82–83. This article is, however, mentioned by NC at the following page 35 (n. 77) in relation to the interpretation of the casket.

5. A. RHOBY, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 2). Vienna 2010, p. 335.

6. G. GASBARRI, A King, a Priest, and (Maybe) an Idol: The David Casket and Its Afterlife in Rome. Arte medievale 13 (2023) pp. 89–101, here n. 6 on pp. 99–100, explaining the textual problem at the beginning of the first verse.

of the first verse (of four) have been identified in the recent edition by ANDREAS RHOBY.[7] The fragmentary condition of text obviously affects its interpretation:

Τὸ […] ἐμφανῶς [……]
νίκην κατ᾽ ἐχθρῶν Ἠλίας ὑπογράφει.
ὁ Γαβριὴλ δε τὴν χαρὰν προμηνύων
Βασίλειε στέφει σε κόσμου προστάτην.

A further proof of the carelessness of the author and his ignorance of Greek is found at p. 61 where he quotes an inscription 'in the *north* tympanon of Hagia Sophia':

ἔργον ἀμίμητον χρόνος ἠπείλησεν λύσειν·
εἴργεται ἡμετέρης διὰ φροντίδος· ἀλλὰ ἄνοιξον
οἶκον, ἄναξ ὕψιστε, ὅπου χρόνος οὐκ ἐγγίζει.

He provides the following translation of this text, taken from an article of CYRIL MANGO and ERNEST HAWKINS on the mosaics of Hagia Sophia:[8]

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 salvation.

NC, once more, does not identify the text as a verse epigram, one of the four that were once inscribed on both tympana of Hagia Sophia. Neither is he aware that only a few letters of the original inscriptions in the tympana were preserved, and that the complete text, transmitted in three manuscripts, was first edited by SILVIO GIUSEPPE MERCATI who identified its source.[9] But the main problem now lies in the translation provided by NC (the one he comments upon in the following lines), which does not correspond to this Greek text but to another epigram of the set of four that was initially placed in the *south* tympanon:

7. A. RHOBY, Ausgewählte byzantinische Epigramme in illuminierten Handschriften (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 4). Vienna 2018, pp. 138–140. More letters are clearly readable in the now digitized online version of the manuscript, with a θ that probably refers to θεός. An epithet of Gabriel (such as ὁ τὸν θεὸν εὐαγγελισάμενος or something similar) was probably written.

8. C.A. MANGO – E.J.W. HAWKINS, The Mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istambul: The Church Fathers in the North Tympanon. Dumbarton Oaks Papers 26 (1972) pp. 1–41, at pp. 39–40.

9. S. G. MERCATI, Sulle iscrizioni di Santa Sofia. Bessarione 26 (1922) pp. 200–218.

Πατρὸς ἀκηράτου υἱὲ ἀκήρατε, τῷδε σῷ οἴκῳ,
ὄμματι καλῷ τῶν περάτων, χρόνος ἤγαγε πῆμα·
ἡ θεραπεία τὴν θεραπείαν ψυχῆς οἴσει.

It is evident that NC completely misunderstood the Greek, for the mismatch between text and translation immediately jumps to the eye. But how did this blatant error come about? The four epigrams in the tympanon of Hagia Sophia were first edited, as already said, by MERCATI and, more recently, by ANDREAS RHOBY, who translated them into German and gave them the now current reference numbers M10–M11 (for the two in south tympanon) and M12–M13 (for the two in north tympanon).[10] NC did not use neither of these two editions but just copied MERCATI's text re-edited in the aforesaid article of MANGO and HAWKINS, which he quotes in a footnote. The reason why NC referred to this article is that MANGO and HAWKINS accompanied the Greek text with an English translation, the one he reproduces and comments in his book. Their Greek text of M10–M11 is printed at the bottom of p. 39 and is followed by the Greek text of M12–M13 at the top of p. 40. Immediately thereafter (still on p. 40), a translation of the four epigrams in English is provided. Since p. 40 is the only one referred to by NC, it appears that he took the first epigram reproduced at the top of p. 40 (M12) as the first Greek epigram of the ensuing English translation of all the four, which obviously started with M10.

Similar errors are to be found in many other Greek passages reproduced and translated in the book, especially whenever NC does not rely on a previous English translation, but also when he uses previous English translations as a guide but appears not to be able to match them with the corresponding Greek text. I just give a quick overview, without entering in further details: εἰκόν instead of εἰκών (p. 2); *akakion* instead of *akakia* (ἡ ἀκακία) (pp. 14, 170–171); the phrase πατρίκιος Λέων καὶ στρατηγὸς τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν ὁ Κρατερός καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν is translated on p. 39 as 'Leo the patrician and *strategos* of the Anatolikoi, the *krateros* and the *strategos* of the theme of Kappadokia', no use being apparently made of the recent edition by GILBERT DAGRON and BERNARD FLUSIN (with a French translation) with its discussion of Leo Krateros's identity; the verses copied on p. 62 are wrongly translated; only part of the Greek text on p. 67 is translated into English; the last sentence of the Greek text on p. 70 has only acute accents; on p. 72 the *Nea Ekklesia* is quoted in

10. A. RHOBY, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 1). Vienna 2009, pp. 398–401.

Greek using the accusative without any reason; the beginning of quoted Greek texts (e.g. pp. 74, 88) or, alternatively, their end (e.g. pp. 125, 147) are not translated into English; on p. 142, the inscription on f. 143v of the Paris Gregory is directly taken from BRUBAKER's study of the manuscript (without reference to the folio), which explains the use of both Y and Ω majuscules for the first time (see also pp. 226 and 228, where both letters are again correctly used), but this does not preclude further errors (K[YPIO]C is now copied as K[YPIO]K); καὶ ἔπι δὲ ἐξ ἁγίου κατηκητηρίου appears on p. 153 instead of καὶ ἔπιδε ἐξ ἁγίου κατοικητηρίου, what leads NC to translate twice with 'upon' an inexistent ἐπί; errors, particularly in accents and breathings, abound in the two Greek passages on p. 181 (see for instance ἐκράτει, ταῦτα, φαῦλον) and p. 245; βασιλεῖς ὑμᾶς κηρύττει is translated on p. 224 in the singular as 'proclaims you emperor'; on p. 228, the lines of the Greek text have been wrongly placed… Last but not least, despite the abundant use of coins, practically no coin legend is ever quoted in the book (except for p. 187), perhaps because the combined use of Latin and Greek letters in them puzzled NC.

These errors do not just betray ignorance of Greek and question NC's ensuing interpretation of sources. They also cast serious doubts on the methodology by which NC approached the sources and selected the passages relevant for his study. Moreover, NC's analysis tends to depart quickly from the specific wording of a given passage (we need not expect from him any philological examination of the sources) and enter the realm of speculation, making connections with other texts by means of references taken from the secondary literature. On the other hand, when objects are concerned, he usually describes them briefly, then focuses on some detail or issue that attracted his attention, and finally draws conclusions on the basis of likelihood, occasionally referring to other texts for comparison. A few examples will illustrate this:

On pp. 23–33, NC reflects on why Basil adopted for his gold solidi the image of a standing emperor, departing from Michael III's numismatic iconography, where only the busts of emperors were shown. Both Michael II and Basil I were responsible for the assassination of their predecessors, but Basil's coinage represented a departure from that of his predecessor, while Michael II's marked a continuity with the coinage of Leo V. As NC suggests, Basil I wanted to stress his physical strength with the new full-length standing image and at the same time tried to dissociate himself from his predecessor's reign: 'the reminder of Basil's partnership with Michael III would have been inconvenient' (p. 29). However, if Michael

II's coinage adopted the iconography of his murdered predecessor 'because continuity could be evidence of order and legitimate power' (p. 28), why did this sense of continuity not play any role for Basil who, instead, 'sought to denigrate Michael (III)'s character immediately after his murder' (p. 29)? Did not Michael II also murder his predecessor Leo V? NC seems not to be aware of the contradiction, as his arguments are rather muddled. I think the answer is to be found in the civil war that had already started when Leo V was murdered in 820: because Michael II continued to represent the imperial power at the capital against the rebel Thomas the Slav who besieged Constantinople with the support of Arab troops, the message of the continuity was vital for rallying the support of the Constantinopolitan elite behind the new emperor.

In chapter 2, NC reviews Basil's building campaigns. He occasionally questions the *Vita Basilii*'s reliability, for instance when he asks himself: 'Does the *Vita Basilii* present just a rhetorical façade, rather than a historical record?' (p. 57). In fact, the dichotomy is not pertinent, for the work was both things, as the author himself admits some pages later. NC could have avoided speculation on this point, for this belongs to the basic understanding of Byzantine literature. In fact, he fails to ask the right question: why did the *Vita Basilii* include so detailed a list of buildings if the text was supposed to belong to historiography or to biography? The answer is certainly the influence of Prokopios's model, who wrote a universal history including both military matters and buildings.[11] Prokopios was very popular at the time of Constantine VII, when his works were copied and annotated in order to include their most relevant passages in the *Excerpta Historica*. Buildings were also listed in Books III and VI of the Theophanes Continuatus for the reign of Theophilos and the final enkomion of Constantine VII. NC seems not to be aware of any parallels and precedents for this emphasis on buildings; consequently, his interpretation of the *Vita Basilii*'s building dossier remains unfounded.

On p. 96, NC proceeds in a similar manner and uses sheer logic in order to explain the chronology of coinage. According to him, when Basil issued coins for his dead son Constantine (allegedly in 882, three years after the latter's demise), he had no dynastic reason to follow the example of Theophilos, who issued coins for himself and his dead father Michael II during most of his reign. He thinks that 'if the coin (with Constantine and

11. Juan Signes Codoñer, 'One History… in Several Instalments: Dating and Genre in Procopius' Works. Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici 54 (2017) pp. 3–26.

Eudokia) was commemorative… it must have had personal rather than political motivation and could have been a memorial to a dead wife and son'. I would say that this argument, logical as it may appear, is not valid, for coins were never issued out of mere personal motivation. Certainly, to date the coin before the death of Constantine, not necessarily linking it with the victorious campaign of 878–879 but with the definitive promotion of his son as heir, poses the problem of the depiction of Eudokia, who died after Constantine, for she is absent from most of the coins of Basil's first regnal years, where he is usually depicted with his son alone. I would just say that we do not have enough evidence to explain the appearance of Eudokia in a small issue of coins, but this alone should not lead us to date this issue after Eudokia's death.

On pp. 122–123, when dealing with the mosaic of a kneeling emperor in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, NC affirms that it is unlikely that the image represents the humiliation of a monarch, even a sinful one, because humility before Christ was considered normal among all Christians. However, we could immediately argue, the choice of this specific (and unparalleled) pose for a ruler, specially at the entrance of the sacred space of the Church, could not but be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the limits of imperial power. Many other options were available to the artist, who could have represented the emperor as donor or protector of the Church of the city, as Constantine the Great or Justinian were represented in a mosaic of the vestibule later, in the 10th century, during the reign of Basil II. Furthermore, NC, after briefly considering the problem of the identity of the kneeling emperor (Basil I or Leo VI?) solves the dilemma by imaginatively concluding that the monarch depicted in the narthex was not a specific person but a 'generic emperor', although he provides no parallels for this assumption. The facial features are, in any case, very close to Leo's coins, as NC admits (p. 125). Moreover, NC argues on p. 126 that 'at least some contemporary viewers of this generic emperor would have seen in it the figure of Leo'. It seems nonsensical to represent a 'generic emperor' kneeling at the narthex with traits very similar to the reigning one, for this would obviously not be correctly interpreted by the viewers. If a 'generic emperor' was to be depicted, then the available option was to choose one of the past, who could act a symbol of the imperial power, as Constantine the Great or Justinian in the mosaic we have just mentioned.

The famous tenth-century Byzantine votive crown in Saint Mark's church is shortly mentioned on pp. 151–152 as a symbol of imperial power, for Leo was represented on it in an enamelled medallion supposedly placed oppo-

site an image of Christ, as if Leo were the thirteenth apostle. However, this medallion with Christ is actually lost and, of the original 14 enamels, only those with Leo and six (NC says seven) other saints and apostles are currently preserved, so that any interpretation seems hazardous at present. An article written by STEFANIA GEREVENI already 10 years ago and unknown to NC, shed abundant light into the original composition of this famous crown.[12] GEREVENI demonstrated, basing on a description made in 1801 by JACOPO MORELLI, a scholar and director of Venice's Biblioteca Marciana, that originally nine enamels were preserved out of the fourteen (including two more, of Peter and Mathew), but that a restauration that took probably place in 1836 removed two of them and assembled the rest on the front side of the crown, putting Mark in a central position. His place was originally a different one, probably with Christ at the centre and Leo and other saints surrounding him.

I close this review with two examples of minor issues, just to show the small problems caused by interpreting the sources without paying due attention to the literary context or the exact wording of a text. On p. 59, NC mentions that the siege of Syracuse by the Saracens could not be adequately confronted because the sailors of the navy were engaged in building the *Nea Ekklesia*. The source is the *Logothete Chronicle* 132.77–78 (edited by STEFAN WAHLGREN):

ἀσχολουμένων δὲ τῶν πλοΐμων ἐν τοῖς κτίσμασι καὶ ἐκχοϊσμοῖς τῆς Νέας ἐκκλησίας.

This is just a transitional phrase to connect this episode with the foregoing one; in fact, an identical phrase appears ibid. 133.238–239, referring to a similar situation during the reign of Leo VI, when the Arabs put Tauromenion under siege while the sailors were engaged in the building of the church and monastery of Saint Lazarus:

ἀσχολουμένου δὲ τοῦ στόλου εἰς τὰ κτίσματα τῶν τοιούτων ἐκκλησιῶν (also preserved in Leo 18b of *ThCont* VI).

Therefore, the alleged criticism of Basil's building activities must be reconsidered.

The second example has to do with a supposed alliance or planned marriage between Zoe and Leo Phokas, allegedly mentioned in Book VI of *Theophanes Continuatus*, to which the author refers in pp. 189–190 (notes

12. S. GEREVENI, The Grotto of the Virgin in San Marco: Artistic Reuse and Cultural Identity in Medieval Venice. Gesta 53.2 (2014) pp. 197–220.

68 and 74 referring to the same chapter 11, pp. 390–391 in IMMANUEL BEKKER's edition). However, no mention is made in the text of such an alliance: it would make no sense, for it was Constantine parakoimomenos the one who was conspiring against Constantine VII to promote his own relative Leo Phokas as emperor. Obviously, Zoe was not interested in deposing her own son (as for instance was the case of Eirene and Constantine VI). Further examples could be given of the risks of taking information provided by the sources at face value or without attentive reading.

NC's bibliography consists mostly of studies published in English. Less than 30 titles in French are listed at the end of the volume, and the German studies quoted amount only to 10, essential German reference works being conspicuously ignored. So, for instance, the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* coordinated by RALPH-JOHANNES LILIE (Part II deals with the period of 867–1025), or the *Regesten* of FRANZ DÖLGER (updated by ANDREAS MÜLLER), which are the basis for any reference to persons, embassies, or documents, were not used. As already stated, NC does not appear to know ANDREAS RHOBY's edition of the verse epigrams he repeatedly quotes and comments. In Chapter 8, NC neither mentions nor uses the detailed and masterful study of OTTO KRESTEN (who recently passed away) and ANDREAS MÜLLER on the Lakapenid emperors (Romanos II and his sons) and their promotion to the imperial status.[13] This invalidates most of the considerations made in the chapter. French, Italian, or German translations, including GILBERT DAGRON's and BERNARD FLUSIN's recent edition of *De Ceremoniis* for the *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, are neither cited nor used.

Since neglect of non-English studies has become common in Anglo-Saxon academic circles, it must be stressed that one cannot just work with English bibliography. Research is progressing in many countries and in different languages; all relevant bibliography must be consulted if one aspires to not just write popularising works but produce proper research (even if the dividing line between the two is increasingly blurred).

A final remark about citing Spanish scholars is perhaps not out of place here. Just as one is aware that surnames precede proper names in Chinese, that Russian have patronymics, and that an author can be either female or male (even if their gender is not always evident: see the Leslies

13. O. KRESTEN – A. MÜLLER, Samtherrschaft. Legitimationsprinzip und kaiserlicher Urkundentitel in Byzanz in der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts. Vienna 1995.

and Camerons), one should know that Spaniards have two family names – although we increasingly avoid using the second one in academic publications or join both with a hyphen in an attempt not to confuse those foreign scholars who tend to retain just the second surname (the mother's) and take the first one (the father's family name) as a middle name. I think that an educated person should be used to other ways of naming. In the present volume I am wrongly referred to by my second surname, which has been misprinted on two occasions (Co**n**doñer at p. 156, note 134; Co**r**doñer at p. 103, note 11) and rendered correctly on a third one and in the final bibliography (J.**S**. Codoñer at p. 103: n. 11 and p. 251). I should have been cited as Signes Codoñer and listed in the bibliography under the letter S. My colleague PATRICIA VARONA CODESO is rightly listed under V, because she places a hyphen between her two surnames (something we do not do in Spain or in Spanish publications, for this turns the two surnames into a single compound one, so that a second surname is then to be expected), but unfortunately her second surname is again wrongly quoted as Varona-C**a**deso. We are the only two Spaniards cited, each one with a single publication – in English. Our works in Spanish (including monographs) are not considered, even though they are actually more relevant to NC's topic.

It is a real pity that the great effort and enthusiasm invested by NC in a subject of which he is undoubtedly very fond, has come to such a bad end. The usual controls and internal reviews have failed in this case. They could have prevented blatant errors, as well as misinterpretations and overinterpretations that arose from neglecting an important and significant part of previous research in languages other than English – not to speak about the author's ignorance of Greek. NEIL CHURCHILL could have produced a series of interesting articles for scholarly journals (no single contribution by him is cited in the bibliography) before venturing into a full-scale monograph on a demanding topic, where expectations are high and the risks great.

Keywords

Byzantine imperial iconography; *Kaisertum*; Macedonian emperors; divine crowning; dynastic legitimacy