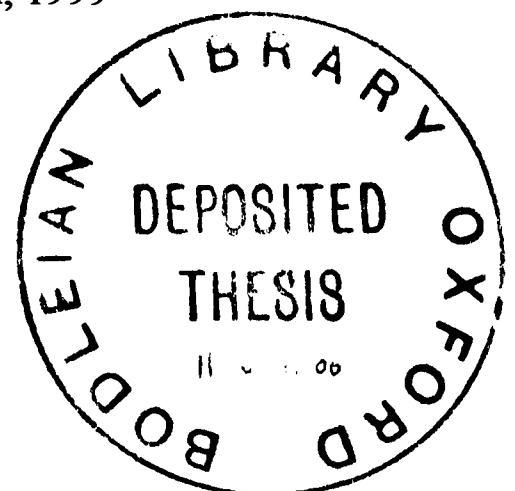


'Basil II and the Government of Empire (976-1025)'

Catherine J.Holmes

Faculty of Modern History

Thesis submitted for the Degree of D.Phil.
University of Oxford, Trinity Term, 1999



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Short Abstract

The reign of Basil II (976-1025) is widely accepted as the high point of medieval Byzantium. When the emperor died, imperial frontiers were at their most far-flung since the seventh century. Yet despite the territorial significance of Byzantium in this period, there is no comprehensive modern history of the reign. This thesis develops two important foundation stones for a new narrative history of Basil II: a better understanding of the relevant medieval historiography, and an analysis of the economic and administrative structures which underpinned contemporary political society. The first three chapters analyse the main Greek narrative account of the reign composed by John Skylitzes at the end of the eleventh century. The first chapter is a detailed textual study. The second chapter explores the literary, social and political contexts behind Skylitzes’ text. The third chapter compares Skylitzes’ coverage of Basil’s reign with the rest of the medieval historical record, and identifies a hitherto unacknowledged source in the Greek tradition. Read together, these chapters demonstrate how the demands of history writing in the later eleventh century conditioned Skylitzes’ narrative. In order to gain a more contemporary view of the reign, chapters four to six examine the economy and administration of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries. These chapters argue that from the middle of the tenth century onwards, the administration of the eastern half of the empire was predicated on an imperial desire to exploit increasing regional economic prosperity. However, successive emperors, most notably Basil II himself, recognised the substantial practical constraints on the penetration of imperial authority in the locality. As a result the administration of the Byzantine east was characterised by considerable flexibility, and was able to adapt with surprising ease to local conditions.

Long Abstract

The reign of Basil II (976-1025) is widely accepted as the apogee of medieval Byzantium. During the century before Basil came to the throne, the Byzantine empire had made substantial territorial gains on its eastern borders at the expense of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad. However, it was under Basil that the expansionist enterprise of tenth-century Byzantium reached its acme. In the east, the Christian Caucasian princedoms of Tao and Vaspurakan were annexed. In the west, Bulgaria was conquered in 1018. By the end of the reign, an expedition to Sicily was planned. In 1025, at the time of the emperor's death, imperial frontiers were at their most far-flung since the seventh century. Yet, the military and territorial success of Basil's reign proved to be ephemeral. Within fifty years of the emperor's death, Byzantium was on the point of disintegration, torn asunder by internal civil wars and battered by external foes. Positioned between the expansion of the tenth century and the fragility of the later eleventh, the significance of Basil's reign to any understanding of the history of medieval Byzantium in particular, and the Near East in general, could hardly be clearer. Yet, there has been no major study of this period by a modern historian since Gustave Schlumberger's extensive two-volume appraisal, *L'Épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle*, was published at the end of the nineteenth century. This thesis represents the preliminary stages in the composition of a new history of Basil's reign.

The principal deterrent to a modern analysis of the reign has been the problem of evidence. There is no contemporary appraisal of the whole reign in Greek. Coverage by later medieval Greek historians is meagre in quantity, and inconsistent in quality. Isolated references to the reign in literary materials outside the Greek historical record are difficult to interpret in the absence of a sustained Greek

narrative. Although contemporary historians located on the eastern periphery of the empire, writing in languages other than Greek, offer more reliable dated information than their Greek counterparts, large chronological periods of the reign and substantial geographical regions are almost entirely neglected by the historical record. To some extent the short comings of the written sources can be offset by archaeological, sigillographical and numismatic evidence. Yet, the material record, which is often so difficult to date, should not be used simply to plug geographical or chronological lacunae left gaping by the medieval historians.

The ultimate ambition of any fresh investigation into Basil's reign must be the development of a new narrative of the political, military and diplomatic history of the Byzantine empire in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Yet, the chronological difficulties inherent in the primary sources mean that such a narrative cannot simply be constructed by synthesising the extant written materials and adding occasional details from the material record. Such an approach runs the risk of replicating the chronological and geographical lacunae of the medieval historians, and is unlikely to improve substantially on Schlumberger's analysis of the reign. Instead, a convincing narrative needs to be predicated on a better understanding of the extant literary evidence, and a strong sense of the structures which underpinned political society in medieval Byzantium. This thesis develops these two essential foundation stones to the construction of a new narrative. The first half of the thesis examines the main medieval Greek account of the reign in the light of the wider literary, social and political contexts in which it was written. The second half looks more directly at the economic and administrative structural bases to political power in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium by analysing a wide range of contemporary literary and material evidence from the eastern half of the empire.

The first three chapters of this thesis investigate the ‘Synopsis Historion’ of John Skylitzes. This long synoptic history, which was compiled towards the end of the eleventh century and covers the period 811 to 1057 (or 1079 in those versions of the text which contain the ‘Continuation’), contains the earliest and longest connected narrative of the reign of Basil II in Greek. At the very beginning of the first chapter of the dissertation, the importance of Skylitzes’ testimony to any understanding of the reign of Basil II is considered in general terms. The discussion summarises the contents of Skylitzes’ coverage of the reign, stressing the extent to which the first half of the account is dominated by the civil wars waged by the generals Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas between 976 and 989, and the second half by Basil’s campaigns in Bulgaria. The text’s many geographical and chronological confusions and lacunae are highlighted. The chapter then argues that it is impossible to approach Skylitzes’ coverage of this period simply by trying to amplify or verify his information and interpretation with material from other medieval historians. Instead of attempting to assess Skylitzes’ coverage of Basil’s reign on a fact by fact basis, the modern historian of this period should try to understand the principles of selection, presentation and interpretation which underpin Skylitzes’ text. Such an approach requires a more profound understanding of how Skylitzes’ coverage of Basil’s reign relates to the text of the ‘Synopsis Historion’ as a whole, and of the literary, social and political contexts behind the author’s compilation. It is this relationship between authorship, text and context, which lies at the heart of the first three chapters of this thesis.

Having outlined the analytical approach which frames discussion of the ‘Synopsis Historion’ within the thesis, the first chapter goes on to summarise the small body of existing Skylitzes’ scholarship. It outlines past research into the manuscript history of the ‘Synopsis Historion’, Skylitzes’ biography, and the author’s source

materials and working methods. However, given the extremely limited ambition and scope of much of the secondary literature, the chapter quickly moves on to a detailed and original textual analysis of Skylitzes' use and abuse of source materials. Since none of Skylitzes' underlying sources for Basil's reign survive, this analysis involves moving backwards through the 'Synopsis Historion' to the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), and comparing Skylitzes' testimony for this earlier tenth-century period with that of his principal source, Theophanes Continuatus. Through this comparative process, Skylitzes' working methods and treatment of source materials are elucidated. It becomes clear that while Skylitzes copies the root narrative closely, he makes several significant alterations to both the content and the structure of the underlying text. Some alternations are unwitting copying errors, others are more deliberate, the result of conscious intervention. Two elements of Skylitzes' reshaping of Theophanes Continuatus' text are particularly striking. First, his devoted attention to the careers of leading members of the Byzantine political elite; and second, his tendency to describe administrative and military matters through the use of a homogenised short hand which renders the meaning of the underlying text opaque. At the end of the first chapter, it is argued that many of the distinctive features visible in Skylitzes' coverage of the reign of Romanos, are also to be found in his treatment of Basil's reign. Particularly conspicuous is his deployment of a stereotypical military vocabulary to describe the civil wars waged by Phokas and Skleros and Basil's campaigns in the Balkans.

The second chapter of the dissertation sets the discussion of author and text developed in the previous chapter in the broader literary, social and political contexts of the later eleventh century, the period when Skylitzes wrote the 'Synopsis Historion'. By assessing textual evidence in the light of Skylitzes' career as a senior civil servant within the imperial government of the later eleventh

century, the chapter argues that the 'Synopsis Historion' was written for an elite Constantinopolitan audience at the court of the emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118). It also suggests that the conditions of internal and external political insecurity, which prevailed in the 1080s and 1090s, may explain the text's characteristic interest in the ancestors of the most important families of the later eleventh century, and its obsession with Balkan history. At the end of the chapter the implications of these later eleventh-century contexts for the text's treatment of Basil's reign are explored. Above all, it is argued that the text may overstate the significance of the hereditary aristocracy, while underestimating the role of the emperor, thus fundamentally misrepresenting the balance of power within the Byzantine body politic in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries.

In chapter three attention focuses more directly on the reign of Basil itself. The chapter takes as its subject matter the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas (976-989). Although most of Basil's reign is poorly covered in the medieval historical record, these insurrections represent an exceptional case, since they are described in detail by several historians both in Greek and in other languages. As a result, these revolts constitute the only period of Basil's reign when it is possible to compare Skylitzes' coverage with accounts presented by other historians. Such a comparison is the undertaking of this chapter. However, the purpose of this analysis is not to produce a new comprehensive narrative of the revolts themselves, but to learn more about the composition of Skylitzes' text. Thus, while the chapter is prefaced by a short narrative appraisal of the political history of the tenth century and a synopsis of the revolts themselves, its principal concern is to illustrate how literary genre shapes the historical record. Attention focuses most closely on the Greek accounts of John Skylitzes and Michael Psellos. A hitherto unacknowledged source, attributable to the general Bardas Skleros, is identified in the testimonies of

both Psellos and Skylitzes. However, it is argued that the Greek medieval historians' decision to utilise this source was driven more by the demands of history writing in the second half of the eleventh century, than by the accuracy of the source's presentation of the history of Basil's reign.

In order to gain a more accurate view of the structures and processes of power which underpinned Byzantine elite society during Basil's reign, the second half of this thesis looks behind the eleventh-century Greek historical record at more contemporary forms of evidence. At the heart of this investigation is the question of government in the eastern half of the empire. Given the long war of attrition between Byzantium and Bulgaria during Basil's reign, this decision to look east rather than west may seem unusual. However, in order to understand Balkan relations in this period, long-term economic, social, and political developments in the eastern half of the empire, the region where Byzantine military expansion had been at its most pronounced in the century before Basil's reign, must first be established. The fourth chapter sets the scene by outlining the geography and economy of the eastern half of the empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It begins with a general discussion of the relevant primary sources and an overview of modern ideas about the medieval Byzantine economy. It then outlines the relief, climate and communications of the Byzantine east. In more detail, it demonstrates that arable cultivation was possible throughout the eastern half of the empire, including much of the Anatolian plateau. The chapter argues that once Arab raiding activity ceased and Byzantine armies began to cross the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains in the second quarter of the tenth century, the whole of the Byzantine east experienced rapid economic growth. Trade was of fundamental importance to that expansion. However, the chapter emphasises that the Anatolian plateau lacked the demographic and capital resources necessary to inspire the economic recovery

of the eastern plateau and eastern frontier regions of the empire. Instead, these areas were revived by a heterodox, non Greek-speaking, non-Chalcedonian, and even non-Christian, population. This was a phenomenon encouraged by contemporary imperial authorities.

Chapters five and six deal more directly with the articulation of imperial authority in the eastern half of the empire by focusing on administration. Having stressed the importance of sigillographical evidence to any understanding of Byzantine administration, the first half of chapter five offers a background summary of administrative changes which took place in the decades before Basil came to power. It suggests that Byzantine conquests of regions east of the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains in the second and third quarters of the tenth century had two important ramifications for local government in the eastern half of the empire as a whole: the gradual demilitarising of the Anatolian provinces (or *themes*), and the development of a larger, centralised army. The second half of chapter five discusses administrative change in the Anatolian heartland of the Byzantine east during Basil's reign, arguing that long standing tenth-century trends of demilitarisation and centralisation continued. The most visible evidence of these developments was the appearance within the locality of increased numbers of civil officials appointed by Constantinople. The extent to which the principle underpinning local government shifted from the provision of defence to the exploitation of resources by a centralising, imperial authority is emphasised. However, the chapter argues that the exploitation of the Anatolian themes was probably concerned more with the indirect collection of taxes than with the direct management of imperially-owned, immovable assets. Despite Basil II's legislative onslaught against the most 'powerful' members of the political elite after the civil wars against Skleros and

Phokas, there is little sign that large swathes of land were confiscated from private ownership and transferred on a permanent basis to the control of the state.

Chapter six moves eastwards to those regions beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains which had been conquered in the fifty years before Basil's accession. Although the chapter is primarily concerned with how imperial authority was expressed in these newly conquered regions, this analysis is prefaced by a brief summary of the empire's dealings with its eastern neighbours, both Muslim and Christian, during the reign of Basil. The chapter then moves on to consider the military administration of the frontier. It argues against the idea that the later tenth-century administrative manual, the 'Escorial Taktikon', reflects the quotidian administration of the eastern frontier. Instead, by analysing each of the key border commands known as katepanates, the chapter argues that during the first half of Basil's reign military administration was typified by a series of *ad hoc* arrangements, which were constantly shaped and reshaped by political tensions within and outside the empire. Military administration only became more stable after a peace accord was reached with the Fatimids of Egypt in 1000. Nonetheless, flexibility remained a characteristic of frontier command as the administrative experience of the new katepanates of Iberia and Vaspurakan established in western Caucasia at the end of the reign proved. Finally, the chapter considers civil administration in these eastern regions, particularly in the former Muslim emirates. It concludes that during the first half of the reign, local intermediary figures supervised a quasi tribute relationship between Constantinople and the eastern periphery. Although this relationship became subject to greater central control in the second half of the reign, the fundamental tribute principle underpinning local administration remained unaltered.

The conclusion to this thesis summarises the major arguments developed during the dissertation as a whole. It also provides an outline of how future research into Basil's reign should progress. It suggests that the relationships between the emperor and other members of elite society should be analysed closely, above all those senior officials who were responsible for executing imperial authority on the ground. However, while the conclusion to this thesis acknowledges that such research has yet to be undertaken in detail, it presents a provisional picture of political relations during Basil's reign, suggesting that the key structural threat to the stability of the Byzantine state was the army. This problem, however, was substantially mitigated by the peace of 1000 with the Fatimids. With the cessation of a hostile threat from Egypt, Basil was able to divert Byzantine military energies away from the eastern frontier to the Balkans, a region where the field armies and their generals could be more closely supervised by the emperor himself.

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Transliteration

Greek names and place names are transliterated with ‘*k*’ and ‘*os*’, except in cases where a Latinate or Anglicised version is very familiar. Turkish place names follow current Turkish usage. Arabic names and place names follow a simplified version of the system used by the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden, 1960-). Armenian names and place names follow the spelling adopted by Robert Thomson in *History of the House of the Artsrunik* (Detroit, 1985); Georgian names and place names follow the spelling adopted by Thomson in *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford, 1996)

Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>Anatol Stud</i>	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Byzantion</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BHG</i>	F.Halkin, <i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , 3 vols. (Brussels 1957)
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bedi Kartlisa</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>Byz Forsch</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>Byz Slav</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>Cah Arch</i>	<i>Cahiers Archéologiques</i>
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
<i>DMA</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Middle Ages</i> , (ed.) J.R.Strayer (13 vols., New York, 1982-)
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , New Edition (Leiden, 1960-), Vols. I-IX, Supplement and Indices
<i>EEBS</i>	<i>Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
<i>MGH SS</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores</i>
<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , (ed.) A.Kazhdan <i>et al.</i> (3 vols., Oxford, 1991)

<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeco-Latina</i> , (ed.) J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857-66, 1880-1903)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> , (eds.) R. Graffin and F. Nau (Paris, 1930)
<i>REArm</i>	<i>Révue des Études Arméniennes</i> , New Series
<i>REB</i>	<i>Révue des Études Byzantines</i>
<i>SBS</i>	<i>Studies in Byzantine Sigillography</i> , (ed.) N. Oikonomides (4 vols., Washington, 1987-1995)
<i>TIB</i>	<i>Tabula Imperii Byzantini</i> : Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Vienna, 1976-1998)
<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>
<i>Viz Vrem</i>	<i>Vizantijskij Vremennik</i>
<i>ZRVI</i>	<i>Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta</i>

Introduction

The reign of Basil II (976-1025) is universally accepted as the apogee of medieval Byzantium. When Basil died in 1025 the boundaries of empire were at their most far-flung since the seventh century. Bulgaria had been conquered in 1018 after more than thirty years of attritional warfare. In Caucasia the Georgian principedom of Tao was annexed in 1000 and Armenian Vaspurakan absorbed in the final decade of the reign. Just before the emperor's death, attention had shifted to the Mediterranean and plans were afoot for the conquest of Sicily. Outside the territorial borders of the empire, Byzantine religious and cultural influence was extended by the conversion of Vladimir, prince of Kiev, to Orthodox Christianity in 988. Nor was expansion purely external. When Basil died his wealth was legendary: a labyrinthine treasury was rumoured to extend under the Great Palace where the booty of his numerous military campaigns was stored. So great indeed was his wealth that he remitted taxation for the final two years of his reign.¹ This success seems all the more remarkable given the highly inauspicious start to the reign. Between 976 and 989 Basil had faced two intense periods of civil war waged by the generals Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas. Basil himself suffered a humiliating military defeat against the Bulgarians in 986. The scale of Basil's recovery and his subsequent military conquests persuaded later medieval Byzantine writers to claim that he was the greatest emperor since Herakleios.² Yet Basil's golden legacy was relatively short-lived. Within thirty years of his death the empire began to fragment amid Turkish attacks in the east, and Norman and nomad raids in the west. By the early 1040s the empire once again became prone to *coups*

¹ Psellos (Michael): *Michel Psellos: Chronographie*, ed. E. Renauld (2 vols., Paris, 1926), i, 19-20; Skylitzes (John): *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin and New York, 1973), p.373

d'état. By the 1070s revolt became all out civil war as leading aristocratic dynasties struggled to capture Constantinople, often enlisting in their armies those external foes who were threatening the territorial integrity of the empire.

The importance of Basil's long reign to the internal and external history of the Byzantine empire could hardly be clearer. Yet, there has been no general chronologically-based overview of the political, military and diplomatic history of the reign since Gustave Schlumberger published his long analysis of this period in the final years of the last century.³ Furthermore, most regional narratives which contain detailed coverage of Basil's reign are also often antique. Gay's study of Byzantine southern Italy was published shortly after Schlumberger's analysis. Most surveys of Byzantine relations with Bulgaria during Basil's reign were written in the first half of this century.⁴ The only area to attract more substantial coverage in more recent times has been the eastern frontier and in particular relations with the empire's Muslim neighbours. Unfortunately, many of these analyses are either only partial or unpublished. Felix's study of the Byzantine relations with the Muslims begins in 1000 and thus omits the first half of Basil's reign.⁵ Forsyth's more general analysis of Byzantine relations with its eastern neighbours, both Muslim and

² Choniates (Michael): *Μιχαήλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα*, ed. S.P.Lampros (2 vols., Athens, 1880), ii, 354.

³ G.Schlumberger, *L'Épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle* (2 vols., Paris, 1896-1900), i, 327-777; ii, *passim*. Schlumberger was able to build on the work of V.R.Rozen, whose *Imperator Vasilij Bolgarobojca. Izvlechenija iz letopisi Jach-i Antiochijskago: the Emperor Basil Slayer of the Bulgarians, Extracts from the Chronicle of Jahja of Antioch* (St Petersburg, 1883; reprint London, 1972) had drawn attention to the fact that the chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id of Antioch contained a vast array of material relevant to the reign of Basil.

⁴ J.Gay, *L'Italie méridionale et l'empire byzantin depuis l'avènement de Basil I jusqu'à la prise de Bari par les Normands, 867-1071* (Paris, 1904), pp.324-429 for narrative coverage of southern Italy in Basil's reign. Subsequent analyses of later tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine southern Italy have usually been dedicated to the structures of administration and government: see for example, V.von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1967). S.Runciman, *History of the First Bulgarian Empire* (London, 1930), pp.219-257 contains some coverage of Basil's relations with Bulgaria; see also N.Adontz, 'Samuel l'arménien roi des Bulgares', in *Études arméno-byzantines* (Lisbon, 1965), pp.347-407. The only more recent publication to deal with Bulgaria in Basil's reign is W.Seibt, 'Untersuchungen zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte der "bulgarischen" Kometopulen', *Handes Amsorya* 89 (1975), pp.65-98.

Christian, is unpublished.⁶ Indeed, most recent published analyses of the history of Basil's reign have been narrow in compass. On the one hand detailed attention has been paid to some very specific chronological or topographical problems, such as the events surrounding the conversion to Christianity of Vladimir prince of Kiev.⁷ More common, however, is the format adopted by most text-book histories in which the reign is divided into two distinct temporal and geographical phases: first, thirteen years of internal civil unrest; second, an unbroken litany of overseas territorial conquests led by the emperor himself.⁸

Nonetheless, despite its relative neglect the reign has traditionally been accepted either as an important coda, or as a significant preface, to long-term changes within Byzantine political society. At one level Basil's reign has been typified as the culmination of a bitter struggle between tenth-century emperors and aristocrats for the land and manpower resources of the state. Basil's decision in 996 to strengthen existing legislation prohibiting the greater subjects of the empire, the *dunatoi* or "powerful", from seizing the lands of their poorer neighbours, has been interpreted as an attempt to prevent dismemberment of the empire by a would-be feudal aristocracy.⁹ Yet, while the reign has been seen as the finale to tenth-century centrifugal conflicts, it has also been interpreted as the beginning of a more

⁵ W.Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1981).

⁶ J.H.Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki' (Univ. of Michigan PhD. Thesis, 1977). Another unpublished doctoral thesis dealing with the eastern frontier during the reign of Basil is that of W.A.Farag, 'Byzantium and its Muslim Neighbours During the Reign of Basil II (976-1025)' (Univ. of Birmingham PhD. Thesis, 1979). I would like to thank Professor John Haldon for this reference.

⁷ See, for example, A.Poppe, 'The Political Background to the Baptism of the Rus', *DOP* 30 (1976), pp. 196-244; D.Obolensky, 'Cherson and the Conversion of the Rus: An Anti-Revisionist View', *BMGS* 13 (1989), pp.244-256 (see below, p.27, n.16)

⁸ See for example G.Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (trans. J.Hussey), 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1968), pp.298-315; W.Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, California, 1997), pp.513-33.

⁹ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp.305-7; idem, 'Agrarian Conditions in the Byzantine Empire in the Middle Ages', in M.Postan (ed.), *Cambridge Economic History of Europe Vol. 1, The Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1966), pp.216-221.

centripetal eleventh-century Byzantium, characterised by a greater political and administrative focus on Constantinople, and the ascendancy of a new urban and civilian aristocracy.¹⁰ More recently Jean-Claude Cheynet has suggested an alternative model of political action in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but one in which Basil's reign remains the crucial turning point. Cheynet argues that after the revolts of the early years of Basil's reign, aristocrats ceased to hold public office in regions where they were also estate owners, and instead exercised official command in areas where they had no landed interest. Put crudely, those who owned estates in the eastern half of the empire were appointed to serve the emperor in the west, and *vice versa*.¹¹ The net effect, however, of this geographical partition of private resources and public authority was that Constantinople, rather than the regions, became the political fulcrum of empire, with aristocrats increasingly choosing to be absentee landowners and relocating their households to the capital.¹²

Within these broad structural analyses of tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine political history there is, then, a general consensus that the reign of Basil marked a watershed in the nature of Byzantine government: in relationships within the political elite, between centre and periphery, capital and provinces. However, the mechanisms that helped to shape that change, if change there was, are less widely discussed. In fact the only historian who has ever offered a consistent explanation for such a transformation wrote in the mid-eleventh century. That historian was

¹⁰ H.Ahrweiler, 'Recherches sur la société byzantine au XI^e siècle: nouvelles hiérarchies et nouvelles solidarités', *TM* 6 (1976), pp.99-124; and in the same volume, N.Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XI^e siècle', pp.125-52. The implosion of the Byzantine empire in the second half of the eleventh century has sometimes been attributed to irreconcilable tensions between the new civilian elite based in Constantinople, and a more established military aristocracy based in the provinces: see for example S.P Vryonis, 'Byzantium: the Social Basis of Decline in the Eleventh Century', in *Byzantium: its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World* (Variorum, London 1971), number 2, pp.160-4.

¹¹ J.C.Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance* (Paris, 1990), pp.303-09, 333-36.

Michael Psellos who argued in the 'Chronographia' (his wide-ranging analysis of fourteen eleventh-century Byzantine emperors) that the revolts of the early years of Basil's reign caused the emperor to undergo such a profound alteration of character that he was turned from sybaritic dilettante to austere military man of steel. According to Psellos after the death of Phokas and the surrender of Skleros, Basil crushed the greater families of the empire, took public affairs into his own hands, appointed a series of low-born men as his subordinates, and led his armies in ceaseless campaigning on the frontiers.¹³ Although few historians today would explicitly identify the shifting sands of personality as the cause of deep-seated structural changes, Psellos' bipartite model of the reign, and his allegations that the emperor was able to re-engineer the government of the empire after the early revolts, have exercised a very significant, if unacknowledged influence, on many modern analyses of the reign.¹⁴

There are manifold reasons why modern scholarship has been reluctant to look more closely at the reign of Basil himself, accepting instead with minimal criticism the bipartite interpretation offered by Psellos. Paul Magdalino has suggested, for example, that Byzantinists have traditionally neglected the reigns of long-lived, powerful, warrior emperors such as Basil not only because they are reluctant to engage with narrative history, but also because they mistrust the odour of autocracy

¹² M. Angold (ed.), *Byzantine Aristocracy* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1984), p.3 stresses the extent to which Basil II encouraged the great families of the empire to move to Constantinople on a permanent basis.

¹³ Psellos, pp.4, 11, 18-22

¹⁴ M. Angold, for example, following the model established by Psellos, believes that Basil was a "complete autocrat" who created an idiosyncratic and personalised style of government which his eleventh-century imperial successors were unable to follow (*The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204* (London and New York, 1984), pp.4-5).

which hovers about their memory.¹⁵ However, in the case of Basil, more prosaic problems intervene, above all a paucity of contemporary historical narratives.

Despite the scale of the empire's territorial aggrandisement during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries, the reign of Basil is sparsely covered by medieval historians writing in Greek. Although Michael Psellos indicates that historians were at work during Basil's reign itself, the only extant contemporary account is that of Leo the Deacon.¹⁶ A member of the palace clergy during the first two decades of Basil's reign, Leo wrote a detailed history of the reigns of Nikephoros Phokas (963-9) and John Tzimiskes (969-76). To this he appended a short summary of the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Phokas (976-89), as well as an eye witness account of the emperor's disastrous expedition against Bulgaria in 986. However Leo's testimony, written after the mid-990s, terminated with the defeat of Phokas in 989.¹⁷ In these circumstances the short appraisal of Basil's reign composed by Michael Psellos in the third quarter of the eleventh century is the earliest extant account of the entire period from 976 to 1025. This brief account is to be found at the very beginning of Psellos' 'Chronographia', which is itself a much longer history of fourteen eleventh-century emperors extending from Basil II to Michael

¹⁵ P.Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4-13th Centuries* (Variorum/Aldershot, 1994), pp.1-2.

¹⁶ Leo the Deacon: *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae Libri Decem*, ed. C.B.Hase (CSHB, Bonn, 1828), pp.169-76. For references to other historians active during Basil's reign, see Psellos, p.4. One of these historians may have been Theodore of Sebasteia (see below, pp.43-45). It is possible that a chronicle of the reign of Basil II owned by the library of the monastery of St John, Patmos, was written by another historian working in the later tenth or early eleventh centuries. Mention of this chronicle is made in an unpublished early fourteenth-century manuscript (K.Snipes, 'The 'Chronographia' of Michael Psellos and the Textual Tradition and Transmission of the Byzantine Historians of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *ZRVI* 27-28 (1989), p.57).

¹⁷ The exact date when Leo wrote his history is not known. However, it is likely that he was writing after 995. Leo himself mentions that repairs to Hagia Sophia damaged in an earthquake took six years to complete. According to both Leo and Yahya ibn Sa'id this earthquake happened in 989 (Leo the Deacon, pp.175-6; Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, 'Histoire', ed. and trans. I.Kratchkovsky and A.Vasiliev, *PO* 23 (1932), p.429). The widespread belief among modern historians that Leo wrote some three years earlier c.992 is based on John Skylitzes' erroneous dating of the 989 earthquake to 986 (Skylitzes (John): *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I.Thurn (Berlin, 1973), pp.331-2.

VII (1071-78). However, while Psellos' assessment of the reign of Basil has exercised enormous influence in shaping medieval and modern interpretations of the emperor's personality and the nature of his government, his account is not a detailed or connected narrative of the political, diplomatic and military history of the entire reign. For example, although it contains some brief coverage of the revolts of Skleros and Phokas, it omits any mention of Basil's wars with Bulgaria.¹⁸

The first surviving narrative account of the reign is that of John Skylitzes compiled in the later eleventh century as part of a much longer historical synopsis.¹⁹ Yet, even Skylitzes' treatment is less than comprehensive. The first half of his testimony is dominated by the revolts of Skleros and Phokas, the second by Basil's campaigns in Bulgaria. As a result he has relatively little to say about events in Constantinople, the eastern frontier, Kiev or Italy. Moreover, his account contains many chronological confusions, particularly in relation to Bulgaria. Nor are these geographical lacunae or chronological difficulties eased by any subsequent historians writing in Greek. From John Zonaras onwards, most accounts represent a paraphrase or a fusion of the pre-existing testimonies of Skylitzes and Psellos.²⁰

Indeed, in order to amplify the political, diplomatic and military history of the reign of Basil from materials written in Greek, the historian is forced to collate references scattered in a variety of other literary deposits outside the historical

Among those historians who have used Skylitzes' reference to date Leo's historical writings is H.Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (2 vols., Munich, 1978), i, 368.

¹⁸ Psellos (Michael): edition and translation into French *Michel Psellos: Chronographie*, ed. E.Renaud (2 vols., Paris, 1926), i, 1-24 (see above, p.1, n.1). There is also a more recent edition with an Italian translation, *Michele Psello Imperatori di Bisanzio (Cronografia)*, ed. S.Impellizzeri and trans. S.Ronchey (2 vols., Rome, 1984), i, 8-40. However, since most modern historians continue to cite the Renaud rather than the Impellizzeri edition, I too have chosen to use Renaud for all references in this thesis.

¹⁹ Skylitzes (John): *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I.Thurn (*CFHB*, Berlin, 1973), pp.314-69 (see above, p.1, n.1)

record. Yet these references are scarce and rarely yield any firmly datable evidence. In the eastern half of the empire, Greek written materials pertinent to the long reign of Basil are limited to two anecdotes in the Miracles of Saint Eugenios of Trebizond, a single list of administrative offices (the 'Escorial Taktikon'), a handful of letters from Philetos Synadenos, the judge of Tarsos, and the general Nikephoros Ouranos, and a few chapters from Ouranos's own military manual.²¹ Further west, an anonymous later tenth-century military manual sheds some light on the strategies and tactics developed by Byzantine armies during warfare against the Bulgarians.²² Some miscellaneous reflections about Basil's reign and his campaigns in the Balkans are also recorded in the later eleventh-century advice book of Kekaumenos.²³ Further snippets of information about the revolts of the early years of Basil's reign and his dealings with the Balkans can be gleaned from a small number of documents in the archives of the monasteries on Mount Athos,²⁴ as well as from saints' lives which reflect on contemporary Greece and Macedonia. This hagiographical material includes the lives of Saint Nikon Metanoite of Sparta, Saint Athanasios founder of the Lavra monastery on Mount Athos, and Saint Phantinos the Younger, as well as a panegyric of Saint Photios of Thessalonika.²⁵ Apart from the testimony in Skylitzes little is known about the

²⁰ Zonaras (John): *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum Libri XIII-XVIII*, ed. T.Büttner-Wobst (CSHB, Bonn, 1897), iii, 538-569

²¹ For discussion of the written sources relating to the east of the empire see below, pp.110, 209-11

²² G.T.Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, 1985), pp.246-326. This military manual is often known as the 'Taktikon Vári' in honour of its first editor, R.Vári. Dennis chooses to call it 'Campaign Organisation and Tactics'.

²³ Kekaumenos: *Cecaumeni Consilia et Narrationes*, ed. and trans. G.Litavrin (Moscow, 1972)

²⁴ For example a document from the Lavra relates details of a Serbian embassy to Basil in 993: *Actes de Lavra I. Des origines à 1204*, Archives de l'Athos V, eds. P.Lemerle, A.Guillou, N.Svoronos, D.Papchyrssanthou (Paris, 1970), no.10.

²⁵ Saint Nikon: *The Life of St. Nikon*, ed. and trans. D.F.Sullivan (Brookline, Mass. 1987); Saint Athanasios: 'Vitae Duae Antiquae Sancti Athanasii Athonitae', ed. J.Noret, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 9 (Brepols-Turnhout, 1982). Saint Phantinos was born in Calabria in southern Italy, but spent part of his life in Thessalonika: *La vita di San Fantino il Giovane*, ed. and trans. E.Follieri (Brussels, 1993). Saint Photios was the spiritual advisor to Basil II during the emperor's Balkan campaigns (B.Crostini, 'The Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life', *B* 64 (1996), p.78). The panegyric celebrating his life was written by an anonymous author (*BHG* 1545). The existence of this text, contained in a manuscript from the Synodal Library in Moscow, was first signalled at the end of the

history of Bulgaria *after* Basil's conquest of 1018, although a series of *sigillia* produced before May 1020 give some idea of the ecclesiastical arrangements that followed annexation.²⁶

However, if references to the east and to the Balkans are rare, materials written in Greek concerned with relations with the west, the north and events in Constantinople are even scarcer. The letters of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada, the envoy who was sent to Italy to negotiate a marriage alliance between the Byzantine empire and the Ottonian emperor of Germany in the later 990s, shed light on a short period of diplomatic dealings with the west.²⁷ Byzantine reaction to closer affiliations with the Rus of Kiev is limited to references in the poems of John Geometres.²⁸ Meanwhile, only the life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, who spent most of his career in later tenth and early eleventh-century Constantinople, provides any sense of quotidian life among the civilian elite of the capital during the reign of Basil.²⁹ Finally, the imperial novels of 988 and 996 are the only non-narrative sources which reflect on the contemporary governance of the empire. The

nineteenth-century by B.G.Vasilievskij in *Žurnal Ministerstva Narodnago Prosveščeniija* (1886). Schlumberger cites occasional references from the panegyric, while noting the unedited state of the text (*L'Épopée byzantine*, i, 645-6; ii, pp.47-8). Today the text still appears to be unpublished in full. It is not well-known to scholars, and is rarely cited.

²⁶ *Regesten*: F.Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des öströmischen Reiches von 565-1453* (Munich/Berlin, 1924), pp.103-4; H.Gelzer, 'Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistumsverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche', *BZ* 2 (1893), pp.40-72; J.Zepos and P.Zepos, *Ius Graecoromanum* (8 vols., Athens, 1931), i, 272-3; P.Stephenson, *The Byzantine Frontier in the Balkans in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1995), p.7.

²⁷ Leo of Synada: *The Correspondence of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus*, ed. M.P.Vinson, (Washington D.C., 1985): letters 1-13 were written while Leo was in Italy and Germany in 997-8.

²⁸ Geometres (John), ed. J.A.Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca, E Codd. Manuscriptis Bibliothecae Regiae Parisiensis*, (4 Vols., Oxford, 1839-1841), iv, 282-83; Skylitzes, pp.282-3; Poppe, 'The Political Background', pp.214-17.

²⁹ Saint Symeon the New Theologian: 'Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949-1022) par Nicétas Stéthatos', ed. and trans. P.I.Hausherr, *Orientalia Christiana* 12 (Rome, 1928). J.McGuckin, 'Symeon the New Theologian and Byzantine Monasticism', in A.Bryer and M.Cunningham (eds.), *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism* (Variorum/Aldershot, 1996), pp.17-35 tries, with limited success, to find a social context for Saint Symeon among the aristocracy and bureaucracy attached to the imperial court in Basil's reign. See also B.Krivocheine, *Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)* (New York, 1986).

first of these imperial decrees, issued in 988, reversed earlier tenth-century prohibitions on the foundation of new monasteries; the second, promulgated in 996, strengthened existing tenth-century legislation that forbade the illegal seizure of the lands of the 'poor' by the 'powerful'. Yet even here problems arise, since it is likely that the first of these measures is a forgery, while the second has been subject to amendments later in the eleventh century.³⁰

Taken as a whole the greatest problem posed by the heterogeneous materials written in Greek which fall outside the boundaries of historical narrative, is less their insubstantial nature, and more the difficulty of finding the appropriate background contexts against which they should be interpreted. That is to say, while the narrative provided by the medieval Greek historians is so thin, it is difficult to know how or where to locate details from other written sources. Indeed, this absence of a viable narrative may be one reason why many of the literary sources described above have received such little attention from Byzantine literary scholars as well as from historians. This is an observation which may also explain the relative neglect of the artistic productions of Basil's court, such as the Psalter now found in Venice, which bears a frontispiece illustration of the emperor in military dress, and the illustrated *synaxarion*, known as the *Menologion* of Basil II.³¹

³⁰ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 259-72; N.Svoronos, 'Remarques sur la tradition du texte de la nouvelle de Basile II concernant les puissants', *Recueil des Travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines, Mélanges G.Ostrogorsky II* (Belgrade, 1964), pp.427-34

³¹ A lack of background narrative context is a problem that has affected E.McGeer's studies of the career and literary interests of Nikephoros Ouranos, M.Vinson's analysis of the correspondence and career of Leo of Synada, and A.Cutler's study of Basil's psalter: E.McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos', *DOP* 45 (1991), pp.129-40; Vinson, *The Correspondence of Leo*, *passim*; A.Cutler, 'The Psalter of Basil II', in *Imagery and Ideology in Byzantine Art* (Variorum/Aldershot, 1992), number III. Very little research has been published on the 'Menologion' since S.Der Nersessian, 'Remarks on the Date of the Menologium and the Psalter written for Basil II', *B* 15 (1940-1), pp.104-125 and I.Ševčenko, 'The Illuminators of the Menologium of Basil II', *DOP* 16 (1962), pp.243-276. As Barbara Crostini ('The Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life', pp.53-80) has so appositely pointed out, the other reason why the arts and literature of the later tenth and early eleventh-century have been so widely neglected, is the naïve belief on the part of many modern

In some senses the difficulties of distinguishing the chronological outlines of Basil's reign can be overcome by consulting the testimonies of historians writing in languages other than Greek. Greater chronological precision and a more sophisticated view of the Byzantine east, for example, can be gleaned from a variety of historians writing in Arabic, Armenian, Syriac and Georgian. Of particular significance are the contemporary histories of Yahya ibn Sa'id and Stephen of Taron. Yahya was a Christian Arab doctor who migrated to Antioch from Cairo during the second half of Basil's reign, a period when members of the indigenous Christian and Jewish administrative elite were persecuted by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim. The extant version of Yahya's chronicle begins in 937/8 and ends with the reign of Romanos III (1028-34). His historical writings not only display great chronological, patronymical and toponymical accuracy, but they also range across most of the contemporary Near East from Egypt to Syria, Iraq, Byzantium and various Christian Caucasian states. Moreover, as far as Basil's reign is concerned, Yahya's migration to Antioch allowed him to consult a variety of histories written in Greek which are no longer extant but which reflect on the internal history of Byzantium and, to a more limited extent, on Basil's warfare in Bulgaria. In addition, his use of local chronicle and hagiographical materials provides a unique view of events in Antioch during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries.³²

scholars that since Michael Psellos alleged that Basil himself had no interest in the arts, there were no arts at all.

³² Yahya: Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, 'Histoire'. ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, *PO* 23 (1932), pp.372-520, contains coverage from 976 to 1013/4 which is translated into French. From this date onwards there is no French translation, and one needs to consult in the Arabic original, Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, ed. L. Cheikho, *CSCO Scriptores Arabici*, Series 3, Vol. 7 (Paris/Beirut, 1909), pp.209-250. I would like to thank Feras Hamza of Wolfson College, Oxford, for translating excerpts from the Cheikho edition. All references in this thesis are taken either from the Kratchkovsky or Cheikho editions. The recent translation of Yahya's text into Italian appeared too late for me to be able to make all the necessary alterations to the references in this thesis (*Yahya al-Antaki Cronache dell'Egitto Fatimide e dell'Impero Bizantino 937-1033*, trans. B. Pirone (Bari, 1998)).

While the world chronicle of the Armenian Monophysite historian Stephen of Taron is less finely honed than the testimony of Yahya, it also contains an invaluable fusion of materials of significance for the history and prosopography of the reign of Basil.³³ Although its principal concern is with the domestic histories of various Christian Caucasian states in Armenia and Iberia (western Georgia), Stephen pays close attention to relations between these powers and the Byzantine empire. Furthermore, he displays particular interest in the fates of those individuals from Caucasia who entered Byzantine service during Basil's reign, many of whom fought in imperial campaigns in the Balkans. Moreover, although the extant version of Stephen's chronicle ends in 1004, a longer redaction of his historical writings was available to the later eleventh-century Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivert. Thus, the material included in Aristakes' account of Basil's wars against Georgia at the end of his reign is probably taken from the history of Stephen.³⁴

Apart from Yahya, Stephen and Aristakes, several other historians writing in languages other than Greek can also illuminate the history of the Byzantine east in Basil's reign. Some of these writers were near contemporaries such as Ibn Miskawayh at work in Buyid Baghdad,³⁵ Elias of Nisibis,³⁶ and a variety of

³³ Stephen of Taron: *Des Stephanos von Taron armenische Geschichte*, trans. H. Gelzer and A. Burckhardt (Leipzig, 1909), pp. 137-217.

³⁴ Aristakes Lastivert: *Récit des malheurs de la nation arménienne*, trans. M. Canard and H. Berbérien according to the edition and Russian translation by K. Yuzbashian (Brussels, 1973), pp. 2-26.

³⁵ Ibn Miskawayh: *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. and trans. H. Amedroz and D. Margoliouth (6 vols., Oxford, 1920-1), v, 424-5, 436-9. Ibn Miskawayh was a servant of the Buyid emir Adud ad Daula who ruled in Baghdad between 978 and 983 (see below, p. 110).

³⁶ Elias of Nisibis: *La chronographie de Mar Elie bar Sinaya, Métropolitain de Nisibe*, ed. and trans. L. J. Delaporte (Paris, 1910), pp. 134-142. This text composed in two columns, the first in Syriac and the second in Arabic, is mainly a short list of entries concerned with Mesopotamia under the rule of the Bedouin Uqalids. However, it was written by a contemporary and occasionally refers to events in Byzantium. It confirms, for example, that Basil annexed Bulgaria in 1018.

historians and hagiographers writing in Georgian.³⁷ In addition, the accounts of later chroniclers, such as the Armenian histories of Matthew of Edessa³⁸ and the continuator of Thomas Artsruni,³⁹ the Syriac accounts of Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus,⁴⁰ and the Arabic text of the Baghdad historian Abu Shudja al-Rudhrawari,⁴¹ contain some highly significant contemporary materials from the later tenth and early eleventh centuries.

Yet, while the eastern sources can add chronological backbone, shed light on the eastern frontier, and on rare occasions offer insights into the Balkans, it is striking that when they are aggregated with the Greek sources, large chronological and regional gaps are still very conspicuous within the overall political history of the reign. Thus, while many of the sources, both Greek and non-Greek, are liberal in their coverage of the civil wars of the first thirteen years of the reign led by Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, their treatment of events after 989 is much thinner.⁴² During the decade following the civil wars, the Armenian and Arabic records, above all Stephen of Taron and Yahya, reflect on relations with Fatimid Egypt and

³⁷ The 'Life of John and Euthymios', composed c. 1040, is perhaps the most valuable of the Georgian materials for the internal history of Byzantium (The Life of John and Euthymios: B. Martin-Hisard, 'La Vie de Jean et Euthyme: le statut du monastère des Ibères sur l'Athos', *REB* 49 (1991), pp. 67-142). Material composed by Sumbat Davitidze c. 1030 which is included in the much longer text of the Georgian Royal Annals, comments on relations between Byzantium, the Black Sea kingdom of Abasgia and various Caucasian princedoms (Georgian Royal Annals: R. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 274-285; S.H. Rapp, 'Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past' (Univ. of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 1997), pp. 492-3. See below, pp. 119-120, for further discussion of the Georgian materials.

³⁸ Matthew of Edessa: *Armenia and the Crusades in the Tenth to Twelfth centuries: the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. A.E. Dostorian (Lanham/New York/London, 1993), pp. 34-50.

³⁹ Thomas Artsruni: *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Detroit, 1985), pp. 368-71.

⁴⁰ Michael the Syrian: *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1169-99)*, ed. and trans. J.B. Chabot (Paris 1905-1910), pp. 132-146; Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, ed. and trans. E.A. Wallis Budge (London, 1932), pp. 175-189.

⁴¹ Al-Rudhrawari: *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. and trans. H. Amedroz and D. Margoliouth (6 vols., Oxford, 1920-1), vi, 6-7, 23-35, 115-119. For more on documents from Buyid Iraq relevant to the domestic and external history of Byzantium in Basil's reign, see below, p. 110, n. 4.

the northern Syrian client state of Aleppo, and on the absorption of the Iberian (Georgian) principality of Tao. Meanwhile, Skylitzes offers sporadic and confused coverage of warfare with the Bulgarians during the same period. Between the early 1000s and 1014 there is almost complete silence about Asia Minor, the east, the Balkans and Constantinople itself. Further west, a few dated references can be extracted from the testimonies of chroniclers writing in Latin, such as Lupus Protospatharius. Nonetheless, such chronicles tend to be very short and concerned predominantly with Byzantine Italy and relations with the Ottonian emperors of Germany rather than with events in the heartlands of the Byzantine empire.⁴³ The historiographical gloom elsewhere in the empire only begins to lift after 1014, when Yahya includes some very parochial material on relationships between Byzantium and Aleppo, and Skylitzes contains some detailed snapshots leading up to the annexation of Bulgaria. However, it is only at the very end of the reign that we find more sustained coverage. Many of the narrative sources comment on the absorption of the southern Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan (1019-21), Basil's campaigns against George of Abasgia and Iberia in 1021/2, and the contemporaneous revolt against imperial authority in central Anatolia led by Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias.⁴⁴

The obvious short comings of the primary written sources mean that the historian of Basil's reign cannot afford to ignore the material record of early medieval Byzantium. And here, indeed, there are real signs for hope. In the century which has passed since Schlumberger produced his analysis of the reign, many hundreds of lead seals and coins from the later tenth and early eleventh centuries have been

⁴² For coverage of the Skleros and Phokas revolts in the primary written sources see below, pp.109-110.

⁴³ Lupus Protospatharius, *MGH SS V*, pp.55-7.

⁴⁴ See below, pp.283-5

discovered, analysed and published. In more recent years archaeological excavations and surveys in many of the former provinces of the Byzantine empire have begun to expand in scale and ambition. Gradually scholars have begun to use this ever-expanding material archive to investigate the structures underpinning medieval Byzantine society. A series of recent studies about Byzantine administration, the army, and the economy, have illuminated the resource-base of the medieval Byzantine state.⁴⁵ Yet, in order to maximise the potential of the material archive the right questions must be asked of it. For example, it is unrealistic to expect material evidence, which so often cannot be dated accurately itself, to plug geographical or chronological lacunae in the written sources. Nor should the material record be asked to provide answers to very specific political, administrative or chronological problems about which the written texts are silent. Such inquiry will either fail through the lack of appropriate evidence, or will simply result in the highly selective use of material to support preconceived models. Instead, the material archive is likely to provide the greatest insight when it is used to provide long-term structural backdrops, against and within which, the existing narrative sources can then be examined.

The ultimate ambition of any investigation into the reign of Basil II must be to develop a new analytical narrative of the political, military and diplomatic history of the Byzantine empire in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries to replace Schlumberger's extremely old synthesis. Yet, in the time that has passed since Schlumberger wrote his account, no new substantial narrative source from the tenth or eleventh centuries has been uncovered by historians. In the absence of such a new contribution from the medieval historical record, it would be unwise to attempt to write the history of Basil's reign by simply synthesising the extant

⁴⁵ This secondary literature will be examined in more detail in chapters four to six.

written sources and adding ephemeral details from the material record. Such an undertaking is unlikely to expand significantly on Schlumberger's very competent, if old-fashioned, general narrative, or Forsyth's more recent and skilful reconstruction of relations with the eastern frontier. Instead, a new critical narrative of Basil's reign can only be constructed by turning the very limitations of the sources to best advantage. The historian of the reign must find new ways of analysing existing written sources, in particular the medieval historical record, while at the same time discovering how to integrate such texts with the material archive. Furthermore, in order to provide some analytical coherence to such a long reign, the ambition behind the reconstruction of political history must be expanded. The two-dimensional concatenation of personalities, battles, treaties, and coups described in the medieval sources, must be underpinned by a consideration of how political society worked in the context of the structures and resources of the empire, and in the face of the capacities and motivations of Byzantium's geographical neighbours. In other words central to any new analysis should be an understanding of how Byzantine government in all its senses, political, administrative, military and diplomatic, functioned.

My doctoral research has been shaped by many of the prescriptions outlined above. However, the thesis in which this research is presented does not represent the final analytical narrative of the whole of Basil's reign. Instead it amounts to six preliminary studies upon which such a narrative should be built. Yet, while the approach adopted and the evidence considered in each of these studies varies widely, each aims to contribute to a better understanding of the nature, changes and continuities in Byzantine government during Basil's reign. In all cases the approach employed has required an expansion of the canvas to a perspective wider than that of Basil's reign alone. Whether dealing with literary or material sources, the focus

of each analysis has extended chronologically beyond the reign of Basil himself. Moreover, while the principal concern of this thesis is with government *within* Byzantium, it is predicated on the understanding that the domestic history of the empire cannot be considered in isolation from relations with neighbouring peoples and states on the frontier and further afield.

Yet, while there has been broadening, there has also been narrowing, so that the project could be compatible with the time constraints of a doctoral thesis. The subject-matter of all six studies is predominantly secular, with less attention paid to the church, either in the capital, or in the provinces. Furthermore, the thesis concentrates mainly on the eastern half of the empire, that is to say Anatolia and the frontier regions beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains. Given Basil's conquest of Bulgaria and his sobriquet the "Bulgarslayer", the decision to look east may seem odd. However, the nature of Byzantine relations with Bulgaria will never be understood without first establishing the background of long-term economic, social, political and military developments in the eastern half of the empire both before and during Basil's reign. Geographically Anatolia and the eastern frontier regions formed the largest land mass within the Byzantine empire. The east was the area where Byzantine armies in the decades preceding Basil's reign had achieved their most significant territorial conquests. It was also here that the greatest aristocratic families held estates and exercised official command during the tenth century. More directly relevant to Basil's reign, it was from the eastern half of the empire that the revolts, led by Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, which punctuated the first thirteen years of Basil's reign, were launched. It was also in the east of the empire, in Cappadocia, that Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias rebelled at the very end of the reign in 1022.

The first three chapters of the thesis are concerned with the medieval historiography of Basil's reign. They are predicated on the understanding that the medieval historical record must be at the heart of the construction of any modern narrative of the reign. Although this record contains vast lacunae and serious flaws, it is the only source of evidence which offers a chronological spine to the reign and a series of explicit contemporary interpretations of the political history of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. As such, it cannot be circumvented. Yet, at the same time as acknowledging the centrality of the medieval historians to any understanding of Basil's reign, the first three chapters are predominantly concerned with the problem of how to utilise the medieval historical record in the construction of an analytical narrative, which allows us to move beyond Schlumberger's existing model. In examining this problem, these chapters argue that a new narrative cannot be constructed simply by comparing and contrasting information and interpretation from different historical accounts. Instead, they suggest that to get the most out of the historical record we need to consider the methods and motivations behind each medieval historian's presentation of the reign. These chapters argue that such a model of analysis requires investigating the surviving medieval narratives in two related ways: first, by looking directly at each text and assessing how its appraisal of Basil's reign relates to the wider narrative as a whole; and second by considering how each text is conditioned by the contemporary literary, social and political contexts in which it was written. This second approach is particularly relevant to the reign of Basil, since so many of the historical accounts which report on this period were composed at a much later date.

In the case of Basil's reign there are at least four historians whose narratives should be subjected to such rigorous analysis: Michael Psellos, John Skylitzes, Yahya ibn Sa'id and Stephen of Taron. Yet, such analysis is both difficult and time-

consuming, since it requires a detailed knowledge, not only of the entire text of each historian, but also of the very different background contexts against which they were composed. It is a task which is complicated further by the fact that relatively little sustained, modern scholarship has been dedicated to the texts of the historians in question. During the period when this thesis was being researched and compiled, the only accessible detailed study was Forsyth's unpublished Ph.D. appraisal of the chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id.⁴⁶ A comprehensive analysis of the 'Chronographia' of Michael Psellos by Anthony Kaldellis had yet to be published.⁴⁷ Thus, while it is an ambition of future research to look at all the major historical accounts of the reign of Basil II in their wider contexts, the three historiographical chapters of this thesis begin this in-depth appraisal by concentrating on just one historian: John Skylitzes, whose account is the first connected narrative of the entire reign written in Greek.

Since Skylitzes is not well-known to most historians of Byzantium, the first of these chapters begins by summarising the small body of scholarship which has been dedicated to the author and text of the 'Synopsis Historion'. It offers a resumé of existing research into the manuscripts of the 'Synopsis', Skylitzes' biography, and the author's working methods. The chapter then moves on to a detailed textually-based analysis of Skylitzes' use of source materials. At the end of the chapter, the principal implications of this analysis for Skylitzes' presentation of the Byzantine past including the reign of Basil are highlighted. The second chapter considers how the literary, social and political milieu in which Skylitzes was writing influences his text as a whole, and his coverage of the reign of Basil in particular. The third chapter focuses more directly on the reign of Basil itself. It takes as its raw subject

⁴⁶ Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', chapters 1-6 contain a detailed discussion of Yahya's sources and his place within the traditions of Arab and Byzantine historiography

matter the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas (976-89), that period of the reign which is covered in most detail by all the historians of Basil's reign including Skylitzes. It then compares Skylitzes' coverage of this period with the accounts presented by other historians. The purpose of this analysis, however, is not to produce a new, comprehensive narrative of the revolts themselves, but to learn more about the composition of the 'Synopsis Historion'. By comparing the various accounts of these rebellions, this analysis will suggest that a hitherto unacknowledged source, attributable to the general Bardas Skleros, underpins the first thirteen years of Skylitzes' account of the reign of Basil.

Taken together the first three chapters of this thesis will illustrate the extent to which Skylitzes' appraisal of the reign of Basil is shaped by the demands of history writing at the end of the eleventh century, demands which were not only social and literary in nature, but also political. These chapters will suggest that contemporary historiographical requirements compelled Skylitzes to take a retrospective view of the Byzantine past. In the case of Basil's reign Skylitzes' backward-looking perspective means that most attention is focused on the aristocratic families of the empire, and least on the person of the emperor himself. This anachronistic treatment can obscure a clear understanding of the nature of relations between the constituent members of the Byzantine political elite.

In order to discuss the nature of Byzantine government during the reign of Basil II, the historian needs to transcend the anachronisms of the representation of relations within the political elite offered by the later eleventh-century Greek historiographical tradition. Instead, if the relationships between the emperor and leading members of the elite during Basil's reign are to be meaningfully analysed,

⁴⁷ A.Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* (Leiden, 1999 forthcoming)

attention first needs to be paid to the structures and processes which underpinned contemporary political authority. The second half of this thesis, again arranged in three chapters, begins this structural analysis by looking at the economy and the administrative institutions and practices of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Although this study will draw upon the medieval historical accounts where appropriate, the material record, above all the lead seals, will be of crucial importance.

The principal question asked in these final three chapters is to what extent did Byzantine administrative structures and processes change in the course of Basil's reign? The scene is set in the fourth chapter which investigates the variables of geography, climate and economy both in Anatolia and in the eastern territories lying beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains. This chapter considers how economic expansion both facilitated and constrained administrative change. Chapters five and six deal with administration more directly. Chapter five begins with a synopsis of the background to administrative developments in the eastern half of the empire in the decades before Basil came to power, concentrating on the bureaucratic ramifications of military expansion during the second and third quarters of the tenth century. The second half of chapter five goes on to discuss administrative changes in the Anatolian heartland of the Byzantine east during Basil's reign itself, outlining the processes by which the locality was gradually demilitarised and penetrated by civil officials. Chapter six moves eastwards to those regions beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus which had been conquered shortly before Basil's accession. In this instance the flexibility of administrative practice will be stressed, and key continuities between imperial bureaucracy and the regimes which Byzantium replaced will be highlighted. Although it will be argued that there were crucial differences between administration in the Anatolian

heartland of Byzantine Asia Minor and on the eastern periphery, both chapters five and six will stress how bureaucratic practice in all regions was predicated on the imperial desire to extract maximum financial gain from the Byzantine provinces. However, it will be suggested that the penetration of the state into the locality may have been less heavy-handed than is sometimes believed.

Clearly the analysis undertaken in chapters four to six of this thesis can only partially illuminate the government of the Byzantine empire during the reign of Basil II. It will shed light on the abstract articulation of the authority of the emperor in the locality, but will not deal closely with the more practical issues of how that authority was used and abused by its executors. However, during the course of the second half of the thesis it will be argued that it is only once the structures behind imperial authority are established, that the complexities of the relationships between the public power of the state and the private power of the state's functionaries can be fully understood. While exploration of these more intricate relationships remain the ambition of future research, some preliminary findings are summarised in the conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter One

John Skylitzes: Author and Text

I. Introduction

The central importance of the ‘Synopsis Historion’ of John Skylitzes to any understanding of the political, military and diplomatic history of the Byzantine empire during the reign of Basil II cannot be overstated. Skylitzes’ appraisal written towards the end of the eleventh century is the first surviving connected narrative of the reign in Greek. It is the principal source for several of the most politically significant events of the reign, including the revolts of the generals Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, and the long war of attrition against the first Bulgarian empire. It is the primary source around which most later historians, both medieval and modern, have shaped their chronological presentations of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries.¹

Yet Skylitzes’ account also presents considerable problems to the historian of Basil’s reign. In the first place it is relatively late, composed nearly three-quarters of century after the emperor’s death. As a result it does not constitute an eye witness

¹ Those medieval historians who based their accounts on Skylitzes’ narrative include: Kedrenos (George): *Georgius Cedrenus*, ed. I. Bekker (CSHB, Bonn, 1938-9), ii, 416-480; Pseudo-Psellos: *Michaeli Pselli Historia Syntomos*, ed. and trans. W. Aerts (CFHB XXX, Berlin, 1990), pp.105-109; Zonaras (John): *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum Libri XIII-XVIII*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst (CSHB, Bonn, 1897), iii, 538-569; Manasses (Constantine): *Constantini Manassis Breviarum Chronicum*, ed. O. Lampsidis (CFHB XXXVI, Athens, 1996), pp.314-321; Glykas (Michael): *Annales (Biblos Chronike)*, ed. I. Bekker (CSHB, Bonn, 1836), pp.575-9. Skylitzes’ account also provides the main template for Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp.298-315; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine State and Society*, pp.513-33. Schlumberger (*L’Épopée byzantine*, i, 327-777, and ii, *passim*) adopts a more complex chronological structure which integrates the narrative outlines of both Skylitzes and Yahya ibn Sa’id. This is an approach also followed by M. Whittow in *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (Oxford, 1996), pp.358-90.

account of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Instead it is a fusion of the writings of other earlier historians. Thus, one of the most significant problems facing any student of the 'Synopsis' is establishing the relationship between Skylitzes' narrative and the different source materials which underpin it. Furthermore, the 'Synopsis' represents a highly abbreviated account of two-and-a-half centuries of the Byzantine past. All versions of Skylitzes' 'Synopsis Historion' run from 811 to 1057, and if the author of the 'Continuation' of Skylitzes ('Skylitzes Continuatus') can be identified with Skylitzes himself, the account continues to 1079.² A consequence of the abbreviated nature of Skylitzes' account is that the amount of text dedicated to individual reigns tends to be slim. Within the five hundred pages of Thurn's critical edition of the 'Synopsis', Basil's fifty-year reign is covered in only fifty-five pages.³

Another important consequence of the text's brevity is that its geographical and chronological coverage tends to be extremely uneven. In the case of Basil's reign, the first half of Skylitzes' account is dominated by the civil wars of the first thirteen years of the reign, and the second half by warfare against Bulgaria. As far as the first half of the reign is concerned, chapters one to ten (more than twenty percent of the forty-seven chapters Skylitzes dedicates to Basil) are concerned with the first three years of the reign and the revolt of the general Bardas Skleros (976-9).⁴ The next two chapters deviate briefly from the theme of internal revolt by dealing with warfare between Byzantium and Bulgaria in the first decade of the reign,

² The 'Continuation' of the 'Synopsis' has been published by E.T. Tsolakes (Skylitzes Continuatus: *Ἡ Συνέχεια τῆς χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη*, Ἐταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν (Thessalonika, 1968). For a summary of the arguments about whether Skylitzes Continuatus should be identified with Skylitzes himself see below, p.36, n.41. Because it is mutilated at the start the only manuscript of the main text of the 'Synopsis' (as opposed to the 'Continuation') which does not begin in 811 is U [Vindob Hist. Gr. 74]. This manuscript begins with the reign of Basil II (Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, p.xxvi)

³ Skylitzes (John): *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I.Thurn (Berlin, 1973) contains Skylitzes' narrative to 1057. The coverage of the reign of Basil is to be found between pages 314 and 369.

concentrating on Basil II's defeat in the Haimos mountains in 986 against the army of the Tsar Samuel.⁵ However, this deviation is short. Chapters fourteen to nineteen return to the theme of internal insurrection, and cover the second revolt of Bardas Skleros and the contemporaneous rebellion of Bardas Phokas, events which lasted a little over two years, between 987 and 989.⁶ With the death of Phokas and the surrender of Skleros, the second half of Skylitzes' testimony for the reign is almost exclusively concerned with the Bulgarian wars. Seventeen of the twenty-eight post-989 chapters are concerned with conflict in the Balkans.⁷ Meanwhile, most of those chapters dedicated to other matters are extremely short, often comprising little more than a handful of lines.⁸ Moreover, of the chapters dealing with Bulgaria, three-quarters are concerned with the period 1014 to 1018.⁹ There is very little material at all in Skylitzes' account which deals with the period between 1005 and 1014.

The net result of Skylitzes' twin focus on early internal strife and the final stages of warfare in the Balkans, is that large regions of the internal Byzantine world and the empire's relations with its neighbours are rarely touched upon. For example, Skylitzes' coverage of events within Constantinople itself is limited to short notices concerning natural disasters, the accessions and deaths of patriarchs, and occasional urban improvements, such as the rebuilding of Hagia Sophia after the earthquake of 989 and the restoration of the Aqueduct of Valens towards the end of the reign.¹⁰ After the emperor's victories over Skleros and Phokas in 989 political relations within the elite of the empire are treated brusquely. Basil II's novel against the 'powerful' is cited in the same short, undated chapter which deals with the

⁴ Skylitzes, pp.314-328

⁵ Ibid., pp.328-331

⁶ Ibid., pp.332-339

⁷ The Bulgarian testimony is to be found between pp.341-66 of Skylitzes' account of the reign (chapters 23 to 44).

⁸ For example chapter 33 dealing with the destruction of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by Fatimid forces in 1009 extends to only seven lines (Skylitzes, p.347).

⁹ All of chapters 35 to 44, bar chapter 39 (Skylitzes, pp.348-66)

emperor's decision to imprison Eustathios Maleinos, one of the rebels who supported Bardas Phokas in 987.¹¹ At the end of his account of the reign, Skylitzes includes a cursory survey of the 1022 revolt of Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias in Cappadocia.¹² Virtually no mention is made of Basil II's fiscal policy, beyond two short references to the emperor's imposition of a measure known as the *allelenguon*. The first reference notes that this decree, issued c.1002, ordered that the taxes of those 'poor' landowners who defaulted should be paid by their 'powerful' neighbours. The second reports that the emperor refused a request by the patriarch Sergios that the tax should be lifted after the end of the Bulgarian wars in 1018.¹³

Further afield, references to the empire's dealings with its neighbours, especially those outside the Balkans, are extremely cursory and confused. For example relations between the empire and its eastern neighbours from 990 to 1022 are described in a garbled account which is less than a page long.¹⁴ The surrender of the Armenian principedom of Vaspurakan in the final decade of the reign is to be found in a compressed chapter, which also contains a notice dealing with a joint Byzantino-Rus expedition against Cherson.¹⁵ More significantly, the events surrounding the alliance between Basil and Vladimir prince of Kiev in 988-9 are summarised in a two-line parenthesis inserted into Skylitzes' coverage of the revolt of Bardas Phokas. Skylitzes merely mentions that Basil's armies included Russian troops, which had been dispatched after the emperor had married his sister Anna to Vladimir *archon* of the Rus. Thus, no reference is made to the official conversion

¹⁰ Skylitzes, pp.331-2, 340-1, 347-8, 366, 369

¹¹ Ibid., p.340; for further discussion about the imprisonment of Eustathios Maleinos, see below, pp.259-60

¹² Ibid., pp.366-7

¹³ Ibid., pp.347, 365

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.339-40

¹⁵ Skylitzes, pp.354-5; see below, p.284, n.24 for the difficulties associated with using Skylitzes' testimony to date the surrender of Vaspurakan

of the Rus to orthodox Christianity which accompanied Basil and Vladimir's alliance, nor to the mysterious siege of Cherson conducted by the Rus after the agreement had been reached.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Skylitzes' coverage of Byzantine relations with western Europe is exiguous. A few lines inserted at the end of chapter thirty-four mention a revolt against imperial rule in southern Italy during the second decade of the eleventh century, organised by a local notable from Bari called Meles.¹⁷ Finally, just before Skylitzes reaches the end of his testimony of the reign, he refers to the advance expedition to Sicily led by the eunuch Orestes, which was intended to prepare the way for Basil's own invasion of the island, a campaign which was brought to a premature end by the emperor's death in 1025.¹⁸ Apart from these brief references, Skylitzes makes no reference at all to the empire's dealings with the Ottonian emperors of Germany, the early French Capetians or the Pope.

Yet, despite its obvious chronological and geographical deficiencies, Skylitzes' account of the reign of Basil II is the principal text with which the historian of

¹⁶ Ibid., p.336. Skylitzes' lack of interest in relations with the Rus is reflected in the accounts of other historians writing in Greek about Basil's reign. Neither Leo the Deacon nor Michael Psellos mention the conversion of the Rus. Leo the Deacon does not even refer to the participation of Russian troops within the imperial army during the Phokas revolt, while Psellos makes only a passing allusion to their presence (Leo the Deacon, pp.173-4; Psellos, p.9). For more details on the alliance struck between Basil and Vladimir in 988-9 one must turn to Yahya ibn Sa'id, Stephen of Taron, and the 'Russian Primary Chronicle' (Yahya ibn Sa'id, *PO* 23, pp.423-4; Stephen of Taron, p.211; *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*, ed. and trans. S.H.Cross and O.P.Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge (Mass.), 1953), pp.110-119). However, the uneven nature of the source materials makes it difficult to establish the chronology of all the principal events surrounding the Byzantino-Rus alliance. The accounts presented by Yahya and Stephen are brief, while the author of the much fuller story in the 'Primary Chronicle' was writing considerably later, in the early twelfth century. The motivation for the Rus attack on Cherson has proved particularly problematic to elicit from the sources. Poppe, 'The Political Background to the Baptism of the Rus', pp.196-244, believes that the Rus attacked Cherson in fulfilment of the military agreement with Basil II. He maintains that their attack was aimed against insurrectionists within Cherson who favoured the rebel Bardas Phokas. A more traditional reading is preferred by Obolensky, 'Cherson and the Conversion of the Rus', pp.244-256, who argues that Vladimir agreed to send Basil troops in return for a marriage with Anna and conversion to Christianity. Vladimir dispatched his troops to Byzantium but Basil failed to send his sister in return. As a result Vladimir attacked Cherson. The modern historiographical debates surrounding the conversion of the Rus are summarised in S.Franklin and J.Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.159-69

¹⁷ Skylitzes, p.348

Byzantine political and military history in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries must engage. How, then, is this engagement to be most profitably achieved? The most obvious way of approaching Basil's reign through Skylitzes' text is to compare the material in his account with information and interpretation contained in other written sources, independent of the 'Synopsis', which also report on the same period. As we shall see later in this chapter, this is an approach which has been fruitful in the investigations conducted by Jonathan Shepard into Skylitzes' post-Basil, mid- eleventh-century coverage.¹⁹ However, processes of detailed comparison offer fewer rewards for the reign of Basil itself. No substantial alternative histories covering the later tenth or early eleventh centuries composed in Greek survive against which Skylitzes' account of the reign as a whole can be assessed. Those appraisals of the reign written in other languages, such as the histories of Yahya ibn Sa'id and Stephen of Taron, tend to focus on the eastern frontier, a region which Skylitzes himself barely mentions.²⁰ Indeed, the only section of the reign where a direct comparison between Skylitzes' account and other historical narratives is possible is the first thirteen years of the reign, when the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas attract the attention of a variety of historians writing both in Greek and in other languages.²¹ Such a direct comparison will be undertaken in the third chapter of this thesis.

However, even if information and interpretation in Skylitzes' account of the first thirteen years of revolts can be compared with other historical records, how is the rest of his testimony for the later tenth and early eleventh centuries to be used as the basis for a wider understanding of the reign of Basil? In the first two chapters of this thesis it will be argued that the most fruitful method of approaching Skylitzes'

¹⁸ Ibid., p.368

¹⁹ See below, pp.45-8

²⁰ See above, pp.7, 11-14

treatment of Basil II lies less in trying to improve upon the testimony he transmits in the 'Synopsis' on a fact-by-fact basis, and more in understanding the principles of selection, presentation and interpretation which underpin his text. In this sense the key questions to be asked are: how and why does Skylitzes offer his reader this particular text? Behind these questions lies the explicit acknowledgement that all of the historical writing contained in Skylitzes' 'Synopsis' is conditioned to a greater or lesser extent by the fact that this material was recopied, reshaped and rewritten by Skylitzes himself in the later eleventh century. Thus, before the history of earlier periods described in Skylitzes' account, such as the reign of Basil II, can be meaningfully analysed, the impact of this later eleventh-century filter must first be considered.

Such a consideration demands investigation of a series of variables underpinning Skylitzes' composition. These include his working methods, his relationship with his sources, the genre within which he wrote, his competence as a historian, his purpose in writing and his anticipated audience. Investigation of such variables can proceed at two different but related levels: one which looks closely at the text itself; the other, which sets the text in its wider contemporary later eleventh-century contexts. The first chapter of this thesis is predominantly concerned with the first of these levels. It represents a detailed textual analysis of a small section of the 'Synopsis' designed to elucidate Skylitzes' working methods and his relationship to his underlying sources. On the basis of this textual comparison, some very preliminary suggestions are made at the end of the chapter about how the author's working methods and treatment of source material shape his coverage of the reign of Basil II. In chapter two this textual analysis will provide the basis for a broader

²¹ See above, p.13, and below, pp.109-110

discussion of how Skylitzes and his narrative relate to the wider literary, social, and indeed, political contexts of the period in which the ‘Synopsis’ was compiled.

Since Skylitzes’ text is often cited, but rarely studied in detail by modern scholars, the first chapter will be prefaced with a brief overview of the current state of Skylitzes’ scholarship, including a summary of recent research into the author’s own biography. Two additional caveats, however, need to be made explicit. Although reference to the ‘Continuation’ of Skylitzes’ testimony will be made where relevant, the principal engagement will be with the main 811-1057 section of the ‘Synopsis’. Since this thesis is predominantly concerned with the eastern half of the empire and political elites, the interpolations that pertain to western Bulgaria in manuscript U [Vindob Hist. Gr. 74] will not be examined in detail.²²

II. Overview of existing scholarship

i. Before Thurn’s critical edition

It is only in the past thirty years that John Skylitzes has come to be widely recognised as an independent historian. Before I.Thurn published a critical edition of the main body of the ‘Synopsis Historion’ (811 to 1057) in 1973 and E.T.Tsolakes produced an edition of the ‘Continuation’ (1057-79) in 1968, most modern scholars only had access to Skylitzes through the world chronicle of George Kedrenos. This text compiled in the later eleventh century and published in the Bonn Corpus edition of 1838/9 includes a verbatim copy of Skylitzes’ testimony from 811 to 1057.²³ The obscurity of the ‘Synopsis Historion’ was

²² See below, p.31

²³ John Skylitzes: *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I.Thurn (Berlin and New York, 1973) (see above, p.1, n.1); Skylitzes Continuatus: *Ἡ Συνέχεια τῆς χρονολογίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη*, ed. E.T.Tsolakes, *Ἐταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν* (Thessalonika, 1968); George Kedrenos: *Georgius Cedrenus*, ed. I.Bekker, (*CSHB*, Bonn, 1938-9), Vol. 2

reflected by a long-standing lack of scholarly interest in Skylitzes and his text. In general appraisals of Byzantine historiography Skylitzes was customarily identified as a world chronicler whose unsophisticated literary production was intended for an audience of credulous monks.²⁴ Further comment usually only came from those historians interested in the early history of Bulgaria. Attention in this case was focused on a fourteenth-century manuscript of the text, U [Vindob Hist. Gr. 74], which contains some information about the western Balkans during the reigns of Basil II and Michael IV not found in other manuscripts. This extra material was believed either to have been interpolated into the 'Synopsis' by the Macedonian bishop Michael of Devol in the early twelfth century, or to represent a fuller form of the 'Synopsis' closer to Skylitzes' original account.²⁵

It was only with the appearance of the critical editions of the main text and its 'Continuation' between 1968 and 1973 that the 'Synopsis' became the object of more urgent investigation. Since the early 1970s a small body of research has been published pertaining to Skylitzes' biography, his working methods, his sources, the manuscripts of his testimony, and his relationship with the author of the 'Continuation'. However, it should be stressed that few historians have displayed a sustained interest in Skylitzes despite the existence of the critical editions. For example, it is striking that Skylitzes and his text have not been as closely examined as the writers of other historical synopses in Greek, such as John Malalas or

²⁴ F.Hirsch, *Byzantinische Studien* (Leipzig, 1876), pp.358-76; K.Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinien bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches, (527-1453)*, (2 vols., New York, reprint 1970 of 1897 edition), i, 365-8; G.Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica, Die Byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker*, 2nd edition (Berlin, 1958), pp.335-41.

²⁵ The most sustained research was conducted by C.de Boor, 'Zu Johannes Skylitzes', *BZ* 13 (1904), pp.356-69 and 'Weiteres zur Chronik des Skylitzes', *BZ* 14 (1905), pp.409-467). His interests centred on the manuscripts of the text and the relationship between the 'Synopsis' and the 'Continuation'. The most detailed study of manuscript U was undertaken by B.Prokic, *Die Zusätze des Johannes Skylitzes* (Munich, 1906). H.Grégoire's view ('Du nouveau sur l'histoire bulgare-byzantine. Nicéas Pegonitès, vainqueur du roi Bulgare, Jean Vladislav', *B* 12 (1937), pp. 289-91) that manuscript U represented the fullest version of the 'Synopsis' has been challenged by J.Ferluga

Theophanes the Confessor.²⁶ A translation and commentary in French is promised, but has yet to appear in print.²⁷ Only the Madrid manuscript [M] attracts consistent attention in the secondary literature. As the only illustrated Byzantine history, the ‘Madrid Skylitzes’ is frequently discussed by art historians. Moreover, the fact that the manuscript was copied and illustrated in the mid-twelfth century outside the political borders of Byzantium in Norman southern Italy means that it constitutes invaluable evidence for the transmission of manuscripts between the empire and western Europe. Nonetheless, investigation into the ‘Madrid Skylitzes’ has tended to be narrowly focused: much attention has been paid to the visual imagery, little to the relationship between this manuscript and the other copies of the ‘Synopsis’. As a result, research into the ‘Madrid Skylitzes’ has not contributed greatly to a more general understanding of the production and dissemination of Skylitzes’ ‘Synopsis’ in the centuries after the text was written.²⁸

ii. Manuscript tradition

When I. Thurn published his critical edition the complicated manuscript history of the ‘Synopsis’ was finally elucidated. Thurn listed nine twelfth- to fourteenth-century manuscripts containing the narrative from 811 to 1057. Although he

(‘John Scylitzes and Michael of Devol’, *ZRVI* 10 (1967), pp.163-70). Ferluga supported the idea that Michael of Devol was responsible for the additional material in U.

²⁶ E. Jeffreys, R. Scott, B. Croke *et al.* (trans.), *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (Melbourne, 1986); E. Jeffreys *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990); C. Mango and R. Scott (trans.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997); E. Jeffreys (‘The Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers towards Ancient History’, *B* 49 (1979), pp.199-238) has discussed Malalas and Constantine Manasses; R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, ‘The Fourth Kingdom and the Rhetoric of Hellenism’, in P. Magdalino (ed.), *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London, 1992), pp.120-39) discusses eleventh- and twelfth-century synoptic historical writing, but only deals with Constantine Manasses, Michael Glykas and John Zonaras in detail. The standard summary of Skylitzes and the ‘Synopsis’ is found in H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, (2 vols., Munich, 1978), i, 389-93.

²⁷ In conversation with Bernard Flusin in September 1998 I learned that he is producing a translation. His colleague Jean-Claude Cheynet is working on a commentary.

²⁸ For example: I. Ševčenko, ‘Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Skylitzes’, *DOP* 23-4 (1969-70), pp.185-228; *idem.*, ‘The Madrid Manuscript of the Chronicle of Scylitzes in the Light of its New Dating’, in I. Hütter (ed.), *Byzanz und der Westen* (Vienna, 1984), pp.117-130; N. Wilson, ‘The Madrid Scylitzes’, *Scrittura e Civiltà* 2 (1978), pp.209-

acknowledged that later manuscripts also existed, it was from the medieval manuscripts that he compiled his edition.²⁹ Of the manuscripts in question, none is a contemporary autographed copy, although three [A, M, and O] are datable to the twelfth century and thus, as we shall see from the biographical discussion below, were copied within a century of the author's own lifetime.³⁰ Of the three twelfth-century manuscripts, A is probably the oldest.³¹ Thurn also suggested that the surviving medieval manuscripts fell into three main families: ACE, VBO, and MNU. It was to this final family that the version of the text contained in the world chronicle of Kedrenos was connected.³² Thurn also produced a summary of the interpolations to be found within the medieval manuscripts. Apart from registering the additional Bulgarian material in manuscript U, he drew attention to the insertions included in the other manuscripts, such as a eulogy to the emperor John Tzimiskes in the ACE family, and eleven poems describing the deaths of several tenth-century emperors in the Madrid Skylitzes.³³ Recently manuscript O, which was known to Thurn but which he had not seen for himself, was rediscovered in a museum at Ochrid in Macedonia. The fact that this manuscript also contains the 'Continuation' increases to five the number of manuscripts known to continue Skylitzes' testimony as far as 1079. Thurn himself had suggested that only four texts included the 'Continuation'.³⁴

19; A. Grabar and M. I. Manousacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid* (Venice, 1979)

²⁹ Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, pp. xx-xxviii: A (Vind. Hist. gr. 35); C (Coisl. 136); E (Scorial. T. III. 9); O (Achrid. 79); V (Vat. gr. 161); B (Ambr. C 279); M (Matr. II); N (Neap. III. B. 24); U (Vind Hist. gr. 74). In this elucidation of the manuscript history of the text Thurn built on the earlier work of de Boor, 'Zu Johannes Skylitzes' and 'Weiteres zur Chronik des Skylitzes'

³⁰ For evidence that Skylitzes was at work at the end of the eleventh century, see below, pp. 37-8

³¹ Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, p. xxiv assumed that the Madrid manuscript [M] should be dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. More recently Nigel Wilson ('The Madrid Scylitzes', pp. 209-219) has proved that it was probably copied in the mid-twelfth century. This view has gained support from Ševčenko, 'Madrid manuscript', pp. 117-130.

³² Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, p. xxvii

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. xxix-xxxii

iii. Skylitzes' biography

At the same time as critical editions of the 'Synopsis' and the 'Continuation' were published, several scholars were at work on the biography of John Skylitzes. By synthesising the research of various earlier generations of scholars, W.Seibt provided the most coherent model of Skylitzes' *curriculum vitae*.³⁵ Three sources of evidence were integral to his outline of Skylitzes' career: an array of prosopographical details presented in the title sequence to one of the manuscripts; circumstantial evidence contained in imperial and patriarchal documents of the later eleventh century; and allusions in other Byzantine historical writings to the compiler of the 'Synopsis'. Seibt began his analysis with the biographical information contained in the title at the head of the text in the oldest manuscript, A [Vind. Hist. gr. 35]: that the author of the 'Synopsis Historion' was John Skylitzes, *kouropalates*, and former [*megas*] *droungarios of the vigla*.³⁶ Turning to a variety of archival materials from the later eleventh century, Seibt argued that the John Skylitzes identified in the manuscript title to the 'Synopsis' was almost certainly the same person as John the Thrakesian, *kouropalates* and *megas droungarios of vigla*, who was involved in 1092 in a series of communications with the emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118) about marriage legislation.³⁷ Seibt saw the same John the Thrakesian behind the John *megas droungarios of the vigla* who was recorded as a participant at a patriarchal synod, also in 1092. Moving backwards in

³⁴ J.M. Olivier, 'Le "Scylitzès" d'Ochrid retrouvé', *BZ* 89 (1996), pp. 417-19; Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, pp. xxii discusses manuscript O. The other four manuscripts containing the 'Continuation' are A, V, B and U.

³⁵ Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, pp. vii-viii contains a very short biography of Skylitzes; see also S. Antoljak 'Wer könnte eigentlich Joannes Skylitzes sein?' *Acts of the 14th International Congress 1971*, (Bucharest, 1974), pp. 677-82; W. Seibt, 'Ioannes Skylitzes - Zur Person des Chronisten', *JÖB* 25 (1976), pp. 81-6

³⁶ The title sequence to the 'Synopsis' in manuscript A [Vind. Hist. gr. 35] has a lacuna where the word *megas* was once inscribed. In the title sequence contained in manuscript C [Coisl. 136] Skylitzes is also called the *megas droungarios* (Skylitzes, p. 3). The prefix *megas* was added to the office of *droungarios of the Vigla* in the second half of the eleventh-century (R. Guillard, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1967), ii, 573).

³⁷ For the memorandum (*hypomnesis*) sent by John and the reply (*lysis*) sent by the emperor see J. Zepos and P. Zepos, *Ius Graecoromanum*, i, 319-325.

time he identified John the Thrakesian at a slightly earlier stage in his career. According to a novel dated to June 1090 one John *proedros* and *droungarios* of the *vigla* was also *eparch* of Constantinople. Seibt believed this figure was John the Thrakesian before he was promoted to the title of *kouropalates*. Finally, Seibt suggested a *terminus post quem* for Skylitzes' appointment as *droungarios*. Since Nicholas Skleros was *droungarios* in 1084, Seibt concluded that Skylitzes' must have been appointed in the second half of the 1080s. Taking all these materials together, Seibt concluded that the author of the 'Synopsis Historion' was, by the 1090s, a high-ranking government official, who in his position as *mezas droungarios* of the *vigla*, occupied the most senior position within the Byzantine judiciary.³⁸

For Seibt the fact that other Byzantine historians knew the author of the 'Synopsis Historion' as John the Thrakesian was additional proof that the John Skylitzes cited in the manuscript title sequences was the same individual as John the Thrakesian, the high-ranking Komnenian official. One of these other historians was George Kedrenos, who referred to the synoptic historian John the Thrakesian in the preface to his own world chronicle. Since he copied the 'Synopsis' of Skylitzes verbatim into his own text, it can be safely assumed that Kedrenos equated John the Thrakesian with Skylitzes.³⁹ In addition, Seibt noticed that the twelfth-century synoptic historian John Zonaras also knew Skylitzes as the Thrakesian. In his coverage of the death of Isaac Komnenos, Zonaras mentions that one story of the emperor's demise is to be found in the testimony of the 'Thrakesian'. This particular story, that the emperor Isaac fell while hunting near Nikaia, proves to be

³⁸ Seibt, 'Zur Person', pp.81-3 and *Die Skleroi* (Vienna, 1976), pp.96-7. In the ninth and tenth centuries the occupant of the senior position at the *vigla* was the emperor's military chief of palace security. By the end of the eleventh century this official had become the senior judicial officer within the Byzantine empire (N.Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle', pp.133-4). Guiland (*Recherches*, ii, 573) lists the *droungarioi* of the *Vigla* during the latter part of the eleventh century but does not mention Skylitzes.

the account conveyed in the 'Continuation' of the 'Synopsis Historion'.⁴⁰ With this observation Seibt also provided the most convincing evidence that the author of the 811-1057 'Synopsis' was responsible for the composition of the 'Continuation' as well.⁴¹

Seibt's neat fusion of the manuscript title sequences, the evidence from the imperial and patriarchal documents, and the information conveyed by other Byzantine historians, was however, subject to one difficulty: George Kedrenos identified John the Thrakesian not as a *kouropalates*, but instead as a *protovestiaros*, a position which by the later eleventh century was almost always held by a member of the ruling imperial dynasty.⁴² Seibt's solution was to argue that Kedrenos had made a transcription error, and that rather than *protovestiaros* he meant to write *protovestes* or *protovestarches*. Armed with this emendation, Seibt suggested that John Skylitzes, also known as John the Thrakesian, wrote the main 811-1057 section of the 'Synopsis' in the 1070s when he held the relatively lowly title of *protovestarches* or *protovestes*. Shortly after this date his 811-1057 text was

³⁹ Kedrenos, i, 5

⁴⁰ Seibt, 'Zur Person', p.81.

⁴¹ Seibt's conclusion brought to an end a long-standing debate over the relationship between the two texts. The arguments *against* seeing a single author were first put by de Boor, 'Weiteres zur Chronik', pp.460-7. The case was restated by Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, pp.340-1. Moravcsik, argued that since Kedrenos, who copied Skylitzes so slavishly, only included the 811-1057 section of the 'Synopsis' in his text, the 'Continuation' must have been written by another author at a different time. Moravcsik saw support for the idea of different and later authorship for the 'Continuation' in the fact that Michael Attaleiates, whose 'Historia' was the principal source of the 'Continuation', was not named as one of Skylitzes' sources in the preface to the original 'Synopsis'. Tsolakes in Skylitzes Continuatus: *Ἡ Συνέχεια τῆς χρονιογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη*, pp.76-99, countered Moravcsik's case by arguing that the list of historians in the preface to the 'Synopsis' is not an exhaustive enumeration of Skylitzes' sources. He believed that the similarities in working methods, vocabulary, and phraseology between the two texts pointed to a common author. Back references within the 'Continuation' to events included in the main text of the 'Synopsis' and a concentration on Balkan and Italian matters in both compositions also suggested a single author. See also M. Hicks, 'The Life and Historical Writings of Michael Attaleiates' (Oxford Univ. M.Litt. thesis, 1987), pp.60-7. However, as J.Shepard 'A Suspected Source of Scylitzes' Synopsis Historiarum: the Great Catacalon Cecaumenus' *BMGS 16* (1992), pp.180-1 n.28 points out, it is Zonaras' reference to the 'Thrakesian' which provides the most convincing evidence that a single author wrote both the 'Synopsis' and the 'Continuation'.

⁴² Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', pp.129-30.

incorporated into the world chronicle of Kedrenos. By 1090 Skylitzes was *proedros, megas droungarios* of the *vigla* and *eparch*. Two years later he was a *kouropalates*. But by 1094-5 he had retired, since according to the list of participants at the Synod of Blachernai held in this year, the *megas droungarios* of the *vigla* was Nicholas Mermentolos rather than Skylitzes.⁴³ Seibt concluded that it was in his retirement in the later 1090s that Skylitzes added the 1057-79 ‘Continuation’ to the 811-1057 narrative he had compiled some twenty years earlier.

Since Seibt constructed his biography, some of his conclusions have been confirmed, others questioned. For instance the identification of John Skylitzes with John the Thrakesian is now certain. Attention has recently been drawn to the fact that an anonymous commentary on the twelfth-century canon lawyer Balsamon, explicitly names John Skylitzes as “the Thrakesian”.⁴⁴ However, in contradistinction to Seibt’s opinion, it now seems likely that the ‘Synopsis’ and ‘Continuation’ were not written at separate points in the 1070s and 1090s, but were, instead, composed at approximately the same time. This likelihood is raised by the fact that material from the same underlying source appears in both the ‘Synopsis’ and the ‘Continuation’. As we shall see shortly, Jonathan Shepard has suggested that one of the most important sources behind the mid-eleventh century narrative of Skylitzes’ ‘Synopsis’ was an encomiastic biography of the general Katakalon Kekaumenos.⁴⁵ It is clear that this panegyric biography not only informs the main text of the ‘Synopsis’ but also the ‘Continuation’. For example, in the

⁴³ While he held the position of *droungarios* of the *Vigla* Mermentolos was a regular correspondent of archbishop Theophylact of Ochrid (*Théophylacte d’Achrida Lettres*, ed. and trans. P.Gautier (CFHB XVI/2, Thessalonika, 1986), letters 25, 29, 33, 47, 76; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp.101, 103, 118, 121, 183, 271, 275.

⁴⁴ τοῦ τηρικαῦτα κουροπαλάτου καὶ μεγάλου δρουγγαρίου τῆς Βίγλας κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σκυλίτζη τοῦ καὶ Θρακησίου: V.Tiftixoglu, ‘Zur Genese der Kommentare des Balsamon’, in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium in the 12th Century* (Athens, 1991), pp.528-9. I am grateful to Paul Magdalino for this reference.

‘Continuation’ Skylitzes mentions that Katakalon was raised to the rank of *kouropalates* during the reign of Isaac Komnenos (1057-9). This detail must have its origins in the pro-Kekaumenos source since it is an allusion absent from the main source for the ‘Continuation’, the ‘Historia’ of Michael Attaleiates.⁴⁶ As far as the composition of the ‘Synopsis’ and its ‘Continuation’ is concerned, the fact that Skylitzes used the biography of Kekaumenos for the composition of both texts raises the possibility that he wrote both narratives within a short time of each other. Since the ‘Continuation’, which covers the period 1057 to 1079, must have been written after 1079, this would mean that the main 811-1057 body of the ‘Synopsis’ was also composed after 1079. In these circumstances, it makes most sense to see Skylitzes working on both sections of his text during the first half of the reign of Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118), possibly during the 1090s, either when he was still *megas droungarios* of the *vigla*, or shortly after he had retired from public office. Indeed, it is possible that the ‘Synopsis’ and the ‘Continuation’ were not composed as separate texts at all, but instead form part of one continuous synoptic history composed by Skylitzes in the last decade of the eleventh century.

Nonetheless, without additional circumstantial evidence from later eleventh and twelfth-century literary or sigillographical sources, little more can be added to Seibt’s biography of Skylitzes.⁴⁷ Moreover, it is unlikely that the main narratives of either the ‘Synopsis’ or the ‘Continuation’ will yield more information about the person of the author. Apart from the prosopographical nuggets contained in the title

⁴⁵ See below, p.47

⁴⁶ The reference in Skylitzes Continuatus to the promotion of Katakalon Kekaumenos is noted by A.Každan, ‘The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates’, in A.Každan and S.Franklin (eds.), *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Paris, 1984), p.66. However, Každan shows no awareness of the possibility that this reference might come from the Kekaumenos source identified by Shepard.

⁴⁷ It is possible that a seal in the Zacos collection may have belonged to Skylitzes. According to the Greek text, seal 504 belonged to a John *kouropalates* and *droungarios* of the *vigla* (G.Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, compiled by John Nesbitt (Berne, 1985), plate 51). It should be pointed out that the English description of the owner of this seal is printed by mistake with seal 508.

sequences, the text itself provides virtually no biographical data. The only hint of personal detail occurs in the preface where the author indicates that he was a contemporary of the historian Michael Psellos.⁴⁸ However, since the chronology of Psellos' career is uncertain, this reference does little more than confirm that Skylitzes was active in the second half of the eleventh century.⁴⁹ Yet such a dearth of biographical details in the text of the 'Synopsis' itself is not surprising. As a synoptic history, Skylitzes' text was an entirely derivative production, a synthesis wrought from other written testimonies. Little overt information about the career of the compiler can be expected from such a literary production, and modern scholarly attempts to amplify Skylitzes' biography by isolating biographical clues from within the text are not convincing. For example, it has been argued that a reference in the 'Continuation' to the Serb leader Bodin, who died in 1101, as if he were still alive, offers a *terminus ante quem* to Skylitzes' historical writings.⁵⁰ However, rather than demonstrating that Skylitzes was writing before 1101, this passage merely indicates that it was the author of Skylitzes' *source* who was active before this date. Comparable evidence from his coverage of the reign of Michael VI indicates that Skylitzes' most likely contribution to such an apparently biographical allusion was his verbatim copying of an underlying source rather than personal reflection. At one point in his testimony he copies the biography of Katakalon Kekaumenos so closely that he implies that Michael VI was still alive. In fact Michael VI died before August 1059. Quite clearly Skylitzes was not at work

⁴⁸ Skylitzes, p.4

⁴⁹ Having entered imperial service during the reign of Michael IV (1034-41), Psellos was still active in court circles in 1075. Although it is usually assumed that Psellos died during the later years of the reign of Michael VII (1071-8), there is some evidence to suggest that he was still alive in the final decade of the eleventh century (P.Gautier, 'Monodie inédite de Michel Psellos sur le basileus Andronic Doucas', *REB* 24 (1966), pp.153-164; A.Každan, 'An attempt at Hagio-Autobiography: the Pseudo-Life of "Saint" Psellos', *B* 53 (1983), pp.546-56).

⁵⁰ Antoljak, 'Johannes Skylitzes', p.679 following the example given by Tsolakes in Skylitzes Continuatus: *Ἡ Συνέχεια τῆς χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη*, pp.75-6.

before 1059; instead this reference indicates that it was his source, Katakalon Kekaumenos, who was writing before the death of Michael VI.⁵¹

iv. Skylitzes' sources and working methods

Given the difficulties of making further progress with a biography of Skylitzes, most scholars who have studied this historian since the publication of the critical edition of his text, have concentrated on Skylitzes' source materials, his working methods and the ways in which he used and abused his underlying texts. In the case of those sections of the 'Synopsis Historion' dealing with the ninth and early tenth centuries, many of Skylitzes' source materials are still extant; in the case of the second half of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh century virtually none of his sources survive. However, it should be stressed that modern scholarly investigations into Skylitzes' treatment of his underlying texts, whether extant or lost, are rare and usually very limited in ambition. For example, there is only one examination of Skylitzes' ninth- and early tenth-century testimony. Conducted by D.Polemis in 1975, this analysis was concerned with the rather narrow issue of why the earliest sections of Skylitzes' narrative contained patronymical information absent from his main sources, the Logothete, Genesios, and book six of the 'Continuation' of Theophanes, texts which are all still extant. Polemis concluded that these additions, often connected to the Argyros or Doukas families, did not reflect Skylitzes' access to alternative lost sources, but instead represented the author's flawed attempts to create internal coherence within his text. That is to say Skylitzes habitually extracted family names from one source and matched them with first names from another regardless of context.⁵²

⁵¹ Shepard, 'A Suspected Source', p.178; idem., 'Isaac Comnenus' Coronation Day', *Byz Slav* 38 (1977), p.24

Investigations of Skylitzes' tenth-century testimony have been equally short, limited in scope, and generally inconclusive. In one study Markopoulos considered the 'Synopsis' in relation to the widespread claim that Theodore Daphnopates, *protoasekretis* at the court of Romanos II (959-63), was the author of the 'Continuation' of Theophanes. This claim is of interest to the student of Skylitzes for two related reasons. First, because in the preface to the 'Synopsis' Skylitzes lists Theodore Daphnopates as one of his sources; second because Skylitzes clearly draws on material from book six of Theophanes Continuatus for his coverage of the pre-948 period. However, since Markopoulos could find no secure evidence to link Daphnopates to the 'Continuation' of Theophanes, he concluded that it was impossible to identify any solid relationship between the literary productions of Theodore Daphnopates and John Skylitzes.⁵³

In another short study by Frei, a different and more substantial relationship between Skylitzes and Theodore Daphnopates has been suggested. On the basis of a comparison between Skylitzes' text and a sermon by Daphnopates, Frei argued that Theodore Daphnopates was responsible *not* for the sixth book of Theophanes Continuatus, but instead for a lost history of the reigns of Constantine VII (945-59) and Romanos II (959-63) which was used much later by Skylitzes. His argument is based on certain similarities in narrative structure, vocabulary and word order between Skylitzes' account of the arrival of the relic of the hand of John the Baptist in Constantinople during his testimony of the reign of Constantine VII, and a homily composed by Theodore Daphnopates to celebrate the first anniversary of this event. It was Frei's belief that Daphnopates used his own speeches as primary sources in the compilation of a history, and that it was from this intermediate

⁵² D.Polemis, 'Some Cases of Erroneous Identification in the Chronicle of Scylitzes', *Byz Slav* 26 (1975), pp.74-81

Daphnopates history that Skylitzes in turn compiled his own testimony for the period 948-63.⁵⁴ However, the fact that Frei only dealt with one episode, covering less than six lines of Greek in Skylitzes' 'Synopsis', in which only the most general parallels of vocabulary and content with the sermon of Theodore Daphnopates are visible, leaves his conclusions open to doubt.

Nonetheless Frei's study of Skylitzes' mid-tenth century testimony highlights the more general problem with which the historian interested in post-948 sections of the 'Synopsis' has to wrestle, namely that none of the sources Skylitzes used in composing his mid-tenth to mid-eleventh century narrative survive. In these circumstances, students of the material in the 'Synopsis' covering the second third of the tenth and first quarter of the eleventh centuries have scoured the content and structure of the text in order to find hints of Skylitzes' "lost" sources. Skylitzes' rather schizophrenic analysis of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963-969), at one point favourable, at another violently hostile, has been explained by his employment of two contradictory sources: a pro-Phokas family history and an account antagonistic to the emperor. It has been suggested that this pro-Phokas family history may also underpin certain episodes within his coverage of the reign of John Tzimiskes (969-76) and the early years of Basil's reign, particularly on those occasions when the Phokas family are at the centre of the narrative. Arguments for the incidence of pro-Phokas material in Skylitzes' testimony for Basil's reign will be explored at greater length in chapter three of this thesis.⁵⁵

⁵³ A.Markopoulos, 'Théodore Daphnopatès et la Continuation de Théophane', *JÖB* 35 (1985), pp.171-82.

⁵⁴ P.Frei, 'Das Geschichtswerk des Theodoros Daphnopates als Quelle der *Synopsis Historiarum* des Johannes Skylitzes', in E.Plockinger (ed.), *Lebendige Altertumswissenschaft: Festgabe zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres von Herman Vetters* (Vienna, 1985), pp.348-53.

⁵⁵ The idea that pro- and anti -Phokas material was used by both Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes was first developed by M.Siuizumov, 'Ob istochnikakh Leva Dialona i Skilitsii', *Vizantiiskoe Obozrenie* 2 (1916), pp.106-66, and taken up by Každan *ODB*, iii, 1217 and 'Iz istorii vizantijskoj chronografii', *Viz Vrem* 20 (1961), pp.106-128. See also Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, pp.368, 390; see below pp.132-4

Meanwhile, another possible source has been identified for the reign of John Tzimiskes. It has been suggested that a war diary may have provided Skylitzes with material for his extensive descriptions of this emperor's campaign against the Rus in Bulgaria in 971. Skylitzes' testimony for this passage of warfare will be considered towards the end of the second chapter of this thesis.⁵⁶

As for Basil's reign, none of Skylitzes' underlying source materials survive. However, piecemeal evidence suggests that a lost history composed by Theodore of Sebasteia may have been one of the texts which underpinned Skylitzes' account. Like Theodore Daphnopates, Theodore of Sebasteia is named in the preface of the 'Synopsis' as one of Skylitzes' source materials.⁵⁷ However the only textual support from within the main narrative body of the 'Synopsis' to link Skylitzes to Theodore comes from a notice interpolated in manuscripts A and E. Here it is stated: "the one from Sebasteia says that Basil II was crowned as emperor on the eleventh day of the month of January."⁵⁸ Independent evidence that Theodore of Sebasteia composed a history of Basil's reign comes from the 'Peri Metatheseon', a twelfth-century treatise concerned with the translation of incumbent bishops to other dioceses. One version of this text claims that Agapios of Seleukeia Pieria

was moved to the patriarchate of Antioch during the reign of Basil Porphyrogenitus during the revolt of Skleros, as Theodore of Sebasteia wrote, he who composed the *chronikon biblion* of lord Basil Porphyrogenitos.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ S.McGrath, 'The Battles of Dorostolon (971): Rhetoric and Reality', in T.S.Miller and J.Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T.Dennis* (Washington, D.C. 1995), pp.152-64); see below, pp.94, 101, 104

⁵⁷ Skylitzes, p.4

⁵⁸ Skylitzes, p.313

⁵⁹ *Traité*: 'Le traité des transferts', ed. J.Darrouzès, *REB* 42 (1984), p.181. This entry contains erroneous information. Agapios was in fact bishop of Aleppo when he was translated to Antioch (Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.375-6). See below, pp.334-5. The 'Peri Metatheseon' contains another corrupt entry which refers to Agapios. This entry states that he was translated to Jerusalem rather than to Antioch (*Traité*, p.181).

Yet while these two allusions suggest that Theodore of Sebasteia composed a history about Basil II, they are too insubstantial to establish the nature of this text and its exact relationship to Skylitzes' own production.

In an article written just before his death in 1997 Panagiotakes argued that two miracle stories of Saint Eugenios of Trebizond compiled in the fourteenth century by John Lazaropoulos, but set during the revolt of Bardas Phokas (987-9) and Basil II's campaigns against the Iberians in 1021-2, contain material extracted from the lost eleventh-century history of Theodore of Sebasteia.⁶⁰ He noted that the miracle stories were prefaced with narrative passages of political history, some of which resembled passages in Skylitzes and the twelfth-century world chronicle of Zonaras, but others of which had no parallel with the testimonies of these historians. Thus, during the revolt of Phokas, the Eugenios Miracles mirror Skylitzes' and Zonaras' account of the deployment of rebel troops on the Asian side of the Bosphoros, but go on to include additional material about the emperor's plans to resupply the capital by sea from Trebizond, and the rebels' decision to raid the Pontus coast using an Iberian army.⁶¹ In the case of Basil's Iberian offensive of 1021-2, the Miracles allude to the emperor's decision to winter in Trebizond during a break in his campaign, information absent from the accounts of Skylitzes and Zonaras.⁶² The principal conclusion that Panagiotakes drew from his comparison of the various narratives was that Lazaropoulos, Skylitzes and Zonaras all drew on the

⁶⁰ N.M.Panagiotakes, 'Fragments of a Lost Eleventh-Century Byzantine Historical Work', in E.Jeffreys *et al.* (eds.), *Φιλέλλην, Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (London, 1996), pp.321-57.

⁶¹ Panagiotakes, ('Fragments', p.327) claims that this attack on the Pontus is not attested elsewhere. However, while this is true for the Greek evidence, Yahya ibn Sa'id mentions the alliance between the Phokas family and the Iberians in the east during the period 988/9. According to Yahya the Iberians defeated an imperial army led by Gregory Taronites which was on its way from Trebizond to the Euphrates frontier (Yahya, *PO* 23, p.424)

⁶² Pangiotakes, 'Fragments', p.330. Once again, although Panagiotakes is correct to say that no Greek source mentions Basil's residence in Trebizond, his presence in the city is recorded by a variety of eastern narratives: Yahya (Cheikho), p.240; Matthew of Edessa, p.46; the Georgian Royal

same underlying historical account for at least part of their coverage of the reign of Basil II. Yet, in identifying Theodore of Sebasteia as the author of this lost history, Panagiotakes provided no other supporting evidence apart from the fragile allusions to Theodore in Skylitzes' preface and the 'Peri Metatheseon' discussed above.

So flimsy is the evidence linking the lost history of Theodore of Sebasteia to the account of Basil's reign contained in the 'Synopsis', that it is unlikely that any greater understanding of Skylitzes' sources for Basil's reign will come from further investigation into the putative relationship between these two texts. In the third chapter of this thesis the question of Skylitzes' source materials for the reign of Basil II will be explored further, with discussion focusing on the likelihood that an encomium of the general Bardas Skleros underpins Skylitzes' coverage of the period 976-989. However, at this stage it is simply important to note the lack of sustained research into the source materials and working practices behind Skylitzes' testimony as a whole, and his narrative of Basil's reign in particular.

Indeed, it should be pointed out that the only substantial analysis of Skylitzes' working methods and treatment of source materials is that conducted by Jonathan Shepard in the course of a series of investigations into the 1028-1057 section of the 'Synopsis'. The context for Shepard's research was a series of rigorous examinations of Byzantine diplomatic relations with neighbouring powers during the mid-eleventh century, during which he compared Skylitzes' testimony, often the only account of the relevant events in Greek, with narratives composed in other languages. Partly through these inter-textual comparisons, and partly by looking at the internal structures of the 'Synopsis' itself, he then identified several key diagnostic elements integral to understanding how Skylitzes' text was composed.

Annals, p.283. The Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivert does not refer to Trebizond by name, but

His research is of particular interest to the historian of Basil's reign since it illustrates how Skylitzes' text can be approached when none of the underlying sources survive. Since Shepard's analysis has to be collated from several different articles, and since so many of the diagnostics he isolated are germane to the first three chapters of this thesis, the main points of his analysis and their implications for an understanding of the material in Basil's reign are summarised briefly here.⁶³

Some of Shepard's principal observations concern the overall structure of the 'Synopsis'. For example he notes the ubiquity of short generalised summaries of events which are often so compressed that they distort the continuity of the underlying narrative, elide events and telescope chronologies. Thus, Shepard observed that in a *précis* section relating to the Byzantine annexation of Ani in the early 1040s, Skylitzes implies that the Armenian prince Gagik departed for Constantinople at the same time as his principality was absorbed. In fact, he left more than two years later.⁶⁴ Similar confusions arise from summarising material found in Skylitzes' account of Basil's reign. For example in his discussion of Byzantine relations with the eastern frontier Skylitzes elides Basil's campaign of 999 against northern Syria, and his two separate expeditions against Iberia in 1000 and 1021/2, into a single offensive.⁶⁵ However, as Shepard notes, in contrast to these highly compressed passages, Skylitzes' text is also characterised by long detailed narratives which describe single episodes. In Skylitzes' eleventh-century coverage such episodes include the defence of Messina in Sicily in the early 1040s,

says that Basil wintered in Chaldia, the theme of which Trebizond was the capital (Aristakes, p.15).

⁶³ The Shepard articles in question are: 'John Mauropous, Leo Tornices and an Alleged Russian Army: the Chronology of the Pecheneg Crisis of 1048-9', *JÖB* 24 (1975), pp.61-79; 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition: Skylitzes' Testimony', *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 14-16 (1977-9), pp.145-159; 'Isaac Comnenus' Coronation Day', *Byz Slav* 38 (1977), pp.22-30; 'Skylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the Role of Catechon Cecaumenus', *REArm* (1975-6), pp.296-311; 'Byzantinorussica', *REB* 33 (1975), pp.211-225; 'A Suspected Source of Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*: the Great Catechon Cecaumenus', *BMGS* 16 (1992), pp.171-81.

⁶⁴ Shepard, 'Skylitzes on Armenia', pp.292-5

⁶⁵ Skylitzes, pp.339-40

the 1048 campaign against the Turks, the 1048-9 battles against the Pechenegs, and Isaac Komnenos' coup of 1057.⁶⁶ Similar examples are also visible in Skylitzes' treatment of the later tenth century. Nearly one third of Skylitzes' coverage of John Tzimiskes' reign is concerned with the siege of Dorostolon/Dristra (971) on the Lower Danube.⁶⁷ The cunning defence of Nikaia by Nikephoros Erotikos during the first Skleros revolt of Basil's reign, and Eumathios Daphnomeles' capture of the renegade Bulgarian general Ibatzes in the aftermath of the annexation of Bulgaria in 1018, are comparable episodes from Basil's reign.⁶⁸

In the process of tracing the internal structures of Skylitzes' text, Shepard also began to identify different genres of source material that underpinned his historical testimony. On the one hand he argued that some of the most vivid passages of narrative action were excerpted from contemporary panegyrics produced by senior commanders within the Byzantine army. One of these panegyric accounts was an apologetic pamphlet produced by associates of George Maniakes at the time of that general's revolt in 1043. More important, however, to the overall composition of Skylitzes' eleventh-century narrative was the encomiastic biography of the general Katakalon Kekaumenos. According to Shepard this forms the core of Skylitzes' coverage of the period between 1042 and 1057. Several of the distinguishing features of the *encomia* used by Skylitzes will be discussed in greater length in the third chapter, where it is argued that an apologetic text produced by the general Bardas Skleros underpins the coverage in the 'Synopsis' of the reign of Basil II.

However, Shepard also demonstrates that in addition to panegyric accounts Skylitzes used other sources. The proliferation of *annus mundi* and indiction dates

⁶⁶ Shepard, 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian expedition', pp.155-8; 'Skylitzes on Armenia', pp.270-79, 'A Suspected Source', pp.172-6.

⁶⁷ Skylitzes, pp.298-309

in the material between 1029 to 1043 suggested to Shepard that Skylitzes had access to a set of annals that consisted of short entries about politics, diplomacy and natural disasters. Shepard argued that it is possible that these annals were the source for some of the brief notices found at the end of Skylitzes' coverage of Basil II's reign, such as the description of Orestes' expedition to Sicily in 1025.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, as Shepard discovered, the principal implication of Skylitzes' use of materials such as annals that contained many dates, and panegyric laudations of senior generals that contained few, was that the overall chronology of the narrative could easily become disturbed. For example, during his coverage of Sicilian matters in the 1030s Skylitzes attempted to integrate an undated section of the Maniakes' encomium into an annalistic entry. As a result he implied that Maniakes was appointed to lead an expedition to Sicily in 1034-5. In fact, Maniakes only took up this position in 1037-8.⁷⁰ In view of such confusions in the 'Synopsis', Shepard concluded that where Skylitzes relies on a single source, his chronological and factual details are likely to be at their most trustworthy. But if the text has been synthesised from a mixture of materials inaccuracies may occur.

⁶⁸ Skylitzes, pp.323, 361-3

⁶⁹ Shepard, 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition', p.145. For Orestes' expedition see Skylitzes p.368. The existence of civic or court annals in medieval Byzantium is a matter debated among modern historians. It is clear that in the sixth century John Malalas used a series of civic annals from Antioch and Constantinople in his synoptic history. Such annals seem to have been used in the seventh-century 'Chronicon Paschale' and even by the Great Chronographer in the eighth century. (E.Jeffreys, 'Malalas' Sources', in E.Jeffreys *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990), pp.208-13; B.Croke, 'City Chronicles of Late Antiquity' in *Christian Chronicles and Byzantine History, Fifth-Sixth Centuries*, (Variorum/Aldershot 1992), number 4, p.193. However, after the eighth century there is little evidence to support the writing of either civic or monastic annals within Byzantium (C.Mango, 'The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12 (1988), pp.360-72). It is possible that accurately dated material entered the historical record through official bulletins contained in the imperial archives rather than through annals. Nonetheless, extant lists of imperial accessions, marriages, deaths and even important military campaigns, compiled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, suggest that authors such as Skylitzes could have had recourse to some primary materials rich in dates with which to supplement the narratives supplied by their main historical sources (Kleinchroniken: *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, ed. P Scheiner, (CFHB XII, 1-3, Vienna, 1975-9); Shepard, 'Isaac Comnenus' Coronation Day', pp.25-6).

⁷⁰ Shepard, 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian expedition', pp.146-7

III. Textual analysis: Skylitzes and Theophanes Continuatus

i. Method

Shepard's identification of the structural subdivisions within the 1028-57 section of the 'Synopsis' and the source materials used by Skylitzes, illuminates how the author's working methods and his competence as a synoptic historian shape his writing of the past. In the study of those periods of Byzantine history for which the 'Synopsis' is the only extant narrative source in Greek, such as the reign of Basil, these analytical tools are of exceptional interest. However, if we wish to consider how other dimensions of authorship, such as Skylitzes' own purpose in writing, his literary interests, his audience, and his own position within political society, influenced his treatment and interpretation of history, we need to look at both the text itself and the contexts in which it was produced in other ways. The second half of this chapter begins an examination of these wider authorial questions by looking in greater detail at the text itself. This investigation begins with a brief analysis of the preface, the section of a synoptic text in which the voice of the compiler is likely to be at its most audible. It then examines how the authorial intentions outlined in the preface are articulated in the main body of the text. Since Skylitzes' project involves the distillation of texts produced by other historians, the best way of examining how he meets the ambitions of his preface is to compare the main narrative of the 'Synopsis' with one of its sources. As none of Skylitzes' underlying materials from Basil's reign survive, an earlier section of the 'Synopsis' for which a known source is still extant will be analysed. Skylitzes' coverage of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), will be set against the narrative of his principal

source, the sixth book of the ‘Continuation’ of Theophanes. In its scope and detail this comparative study is, as far as I am aware, innovative.⁷¹

ii. *The preface to the ‘Synopsis Historion’*

The authorial voice that emerges in the preface of Skylitzes’ ‘Synopsis’ is concerned with two issues. First, why a synoptic, or shortened, history of recent times is necessary, and second, how that synoptic history should be written.⁷²

In the very first sentence of his preface Skylitzes presents his preferred model for the writing of synoptic history: the “*epitome* of history” compiled by George the Synkellos and Theophanes at the beginning of the ninth century. However, having identified his historiographical ideal, Skylitzes then goes on to explain why more recent historians have fallen short in their attempts to continue the work of the Synkellos and Theophanes. Some, such as Michael Psellos (described here by Skylitzes as the “*hypertimos* Psellos”) and the *didaskalos* Sikeliotes, have failed to deal with history in sufficient detail:

But having undertaken the task in a desultory way, they both lack accuracy, for they disregard very many of the more important events, and they are of no use to their successors, since they have merely made an enumeration of the emperors and indicated who took imperial office after whom, and nothing more.⁷³

⁷¹ A very limited comparison between Skylitzes Continuatus and its principal source the ‘Historia’ of Michael Attaleiates has been conducted by A.Každan (‘The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates’, in A.Každan and S.Franklin (eds.), *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Paris, 1984), pp.23-86). However, this investigation is predominantly concerned with the text of Attaleiates. There is little direct concentration on either the content, vocabulary, level of language or style of the ‘Continuation’ produced by Skylitzes, nor of the wider literary, intellectual or political contexts in which the author was writing.

⁷² The preface to the ‘Synopsis’ is to be found in Skylitzes, pp.3-4. A full translation is included in the appendix to this thesis.

⁷³ ἀλλὰ παρέργως ἀψάμενοι τοῦ ἔργου τῆς τε ἀκριβείας ἀποπεπτώκασι, τὰ πλείστα τῶν καιριωτέρων παρέντες, καὶ ἀνόνητοι τοῖς μετ’αὐτοὺς γεγόνασιν, ἀπαριθμησιν μόνην ποιησάμενοι τῶν βασιλέων καὶ διδάξαντες, τίς μετὰ τίνα τῶν σκήπτρων γέγονεν ἐγκρατής, καὶ πλεῖον οὐδέν (Skylitzes, p.3). It is usually argued that the historical writings of Michael Psellos to which Skylitzes applies this criticism are not

In other cases historians are criticised for bias and short sightedness:

....each [historian] had his own agenda, the one proclaiming praise of the emperor, the other a *psogos* of the patriarch, another the encomium of a friend..... They wrote histories at length of the things which happened during their times and shortly before: one sympathetically, another with hostility, another in search of approval, another as he had been ordered. Each composing their own history, and differing from one another in their narrations, they have filled the listeners with dizziness and confusion.⁷⁴

Some of these offenders are listed. They include those whose texts are still extant today, such as Joseph Genesios, as well as other historians whose compositions are now lost, such as Theodore of Sebasteia and Theodore Daphnopates.⁷⁵

Skylitzes then explains how he intends to fulfil his ambition of continuing Theophanes. His principal intention is to produce a synoptic account of history which gives “a very shortened account of the events in different times” following the death of the ninth-century emperor Nikephoros I. His source materials he identifies as the histories of the writers that he has just criticised for encomium and *psogos*. As for his working methods, Skylitzes reports that having read these

Psellos' long appraisal of fourteen emperors known as the 'Chronographia', but instead, the much shorter 'Historia Syntomos'. This second text is a list of Roman and Byzantine emperors extending from Romulus to Basil II. Attached to each emperor's entry is a very brief account of the principal events of his reign. Modern scholarly opinion is, however, divided on the issue of whether Psellos was responsible for the 'Historia Syntomos'. Snipes and Ljubarskij believe that he was, and it is to this text that Skylitzes refers in his preface. On the other hand Aerts, the editor of the critical edition, believes that the text was written by another eleventh-century author, possibly John Italos (K. Snipes, 'A newly discovered history of the Roman Emperors by Michael Psellos', *JÖB* 32.2 (1982), p.55; J.Ljubarskij, 'Some Notes on the Newly Discovered Historical Work by Psellos', pp.213-228; W.J.Aerts (Pseudo-Psellos: *Michaeli Pselli Historia Syntomos*, ed. and trans. W.J.Aerts (CFHB XXX, Berlin, 1990), pp.i-xxv). Turning from Psellos to Sikeliotēs, it should be noted that there is no extant Byzantine historical work by a *didaskalos* of this name. However, it is possible that Skylitzes is referring here to lost historical writings by John Sikeliotēs, a rhetorician active at the end of the tenth century. Sikeliotēs once made a speech (which is no longer extant) in the presence of Basil II at the Pikridion monastery near Constantinople (Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 45-6; ii, 476-7; *ODB*, ii, 1068)

⁷⁴ ... οικείαν ἕκαστος ὑπόθεσιν προστησάμενοι, ὁ μὲν ἔπαινον φέρε εἰπεῖν βασιλέως, ὁ δὲ ψόγον πατριάρχου, ἄτερος δὲ φίλου ἐγκώμιον..... ἀποτάδην γὰρ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς αὐτῶν χρόνους συνεχεθέντα, καὶ μικρὸν ἄνωθεν, ἱστορικῶς συγγραψάμενοι, καὶ ὁ μὲν συμπαθῶς, ὁ δ' ἀντιπαθῶς, ὁ δὲ καὶ κατὰ χάριν, ἄλλος δὲ καὶ ὡς προσετέτακτο, τὴν ἑαυτοῦ συνθεῖς ἱστορίαν καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀφηγήσει διαφερόμενοι ἰλιγγου καὶ ταραχῆς τοὺς ἀκροατὰς ἐμπεπλήκασιν (Skylitzes, p.4)

⁷⁵ See above, pp.41-4

histories, he then removed "that which was written in a state of emotion or in the search of approval", "disregarded differences and inconsistencies", "shaved off whatever we have found which is too close to legend", and ignored rhetoric. In his own opinion his final product is "a nourishment which is soft and finely ground in language". This literary fare he believes will be to the taste of his audience whom he divides into four categories: "those who love history"; those "who prefer that which is very easy to that which is more wearisome"; those "who are acquainted with histories"; and finally, those "who are not yet acquainted with histories".

iii. *The reign of Romanos Lekapenos*

Throughout his preface Skylitzes' self portrait is of the active architect of his narrative in full control of his underlying texts, rather than the passive copyist chained to his sources. However, when attention is turned to the main body of the narrative itself, the energetic statement of purpose conveyed by the preface at first appears to suffer an ignoble collapse. Initial impressions of Skylitzes' treatment of Theophanes Continuatus' account of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos suggest that our compiler is rarely more than a simple copyist and summariser.⁷⁶ In terms of content, Skylitzes follows the narrative structure of his root source very faithfully, only deviating once to insert a story about the deposition of the patriarch Tryphon.⁷⁷ In terms of language he often retains many of the phrases from the original account

⁷⁶ Coverage of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos is to be found in Skylitzes, (Thurn edition), pp.213-232; and *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I.Bekker (CSHB, Bonn, 1838), pp.398-435. Several small textual points confirm that Skylitzes' main source is the 'Continuation' of Theophanes rather than one of the many versions of the Logothete such as George the Monk Continuatus. First, Skylitzes includes a compressed version of a eulogy of the Kourkouas family and a notice about marital relations between the Lekapenoi and the Argyroi which are only found in Theophanes Continuatus (Skylitzes, pp.229-30; Theophanes Con., pp.426-9; Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.399). Second, Skylitzes mentions that Peter the emperor of Bulgaria suffered a revolt by his brother Michael: this too is discussed only by the 'Continuation' of Theophanes (Skylitzes, p.226; Theophanes Con., p.420). Finally, in the case of second marriage of Constantine, third son of Romanos Lekapenos, the wedding is recorded in all three texts, but Skylitzes follows Theophanes Continuatus in identifying the first name of the bride, Theophanu, and her family name, Mamantos, whereas the Logothete fails to record the bride's identity (Skylitzes, p.229; Theophanes Con., p.423; George the Monk Con., p.914).

⁷⁷ Skylitzes, pp.226-7

verbatim. A clear example of close verbal parallels occurs in his account of a Bulgarian victory near the palace of Pegai at the beginning of Romanos' reign. The appropriate passage from Skylitzes' account is cited here, with those phrases taken directly from Theophanes Continuatus underlined:

φεύγει μὲν ὁ ραίκτωρ Ἰωάννης, σφάττεται δὲ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ἀγωνιζόμενος Φωτεινὸς πατρικίος ὁ τοῦ Πλατύποδος υἱὸς καὶ ἄλλοι οὐκ ὀλίγοι. μόλις οὖν ὁ ραίκτωρ διασωθεὶς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν δρόμωνα. τοῦτο καὶ Ἀλέξιος ὁ δρουγγάριος ποιῆσαι βουληθεὶς, καὶ μὴ δυναθεὶς ἀνελθεῖν, ἐν τῇ τοῦ δρόμωνος ὑποβάθρῳ πεσὼν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ σὺν τῷ αὐτοῦ πρωτομανδάτῳ ἀπεπνίγη.⁷⁸

Furthermore, there is empirical evidence to suggest that in his role as a simple copyist Skylitzes was less than fully competent: several errors in his transmission of the original source can be identified. For example, when Skylitzes refers to the marriage agreements between the Lekapenoi and the Argyroi at the beginning of Romanos' reign, he misreads the information in Theophanes Continuatus and identifies Leo Argyros as the bridegroom of Agatha Lekapene. Theophanes Continuatus, however, makes it clear that it was Romanos, the son of Leo, who married the Lekapene.⁷⁹ Other mistakes in Skylitzes' coverage of Lekapenos' reign arise from the misreading of certain words. For example, although Theophanes Continuatus explains that rebels involved in the plot of Arsenios and Paul the *Manglabites* suffered a beating as part of their punishment, Skylitzes alleges that they were blinded. For the term *τυφθέντες* in Theophanes, Skylitzes appears to have

⁷⁸ Skylitzes, p.215; Theophanes Con., p.401. My translation of Skylitzes' text: *On the one hand the rector John fled, whereas the patrikios Photeinos the son of Platypodos, who was fighting for him, was killed as were several others. And so the rector having barely escaped, boarded the dromon (warship). And although Alexios, the admiral (droungarios) wanted to do the same thing, he was not able to climb up on the deck of the dromon; he fell into the sea and was drowned together with his protomandator.* Verbatim copying can also be observed in Skylitzes Continuatus' coverage of the second half of the eleventh century. As Shepard has pointed out Skylitzes often copies his underlying text so closely that he retains the first person singular voice of the root source (Shepard, 'Byzantinorussica', p.217)

⁷⁹ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.399; see also Polemis, 'Some Cases of Erroneous Identification', p.77

miscopied τυφλωθέντες.⁸⁰ Another single word error involves an accident in the forum, which according to Theophanes Continuatus resulted in the deaths of six men, but according to Skylitzes involved sixty deaths.⁸¹ In another instance Skylitzes seems to have read his source with undue haste, and thus attributed to two individuals the fate experienced by only one. In his report of Byzantine dealings with the emirate of Melitene Skylitzes suggests that friendly Byzantino-Arab relations broke down in 934 when both Arab leaders Apochaps and Aposalath died. However, Theophanes Continuatus makes it clear that although Apochaps and Aposalath had been involved in the original peace deal with the Byzantines, it was only Apochaps who died before the arrangement disintegrated.⁸² Skylitzes' most serious factual error concerns the misdating of the appointment of Romanos' son Theophylact as Patriarch of Constantinople after the deposition of Tryphon. Skylitzes records that this appointment happened in February of the second indiction; the original source records February the second of the sixth indiction.⁸³

Nonetheless, comparison of the 'Synopsis' and Theophanes Continuatus demonstrates that it is too simplistic on the basis of individual errors to claim that Skylitzes was an incompetent scholar. At the simple level of copying, for example, Skylitzes can achieve a high level of accuracy. In the case of the Arab leaders from Melitene, the names of Apochaps and Aposalath are both transcribed correctly.⁸⁴ Skylitzes is also diligent in his copying of the names of the conspirators involved in the multitudinous plots at the beginning of Lekapenos' reign. His only slip occurs in the case of the *magistros* Stephen who was exiled to the island of Antigone: he omits Theophanes Continuatus' statement that this malcontent was from

⁸⁰ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.399

⁸¹ Skylitzes, p.226; Theophanes Con., p.420

⁸² Skylitzes, p.224; Theophanes Con., p.416

⁸³ Skylitzes, p.227; Theophanes Con., p.422

⁸⁴ Shepard, 'Byzantinorussica', p.212, n.7 suggests that Skylitzes is usually accurate in his transmission of Russian names.

Kalomaria.⁸⁵ Equally Skylitzes usually transmits dates accurately. The error concerning the patriarch Theophylact is the only glaring mistake in the nineteen dates included in the 'Synopsis'. Furthermore, Skylitzes very rarely omits a date mentioned in Theophanes. An exception to this general rule is his failure to register the date of the second sea battle involving the Rus in 941 (September 10th).⁸⁶ More frequent than his complete failure to register a date are his omissions of the precise day when an event occurred. For example, although he records the month and indiction date when the Union of the Church was confirmed in the early part of Romanos' reign (July; eighth indiction), he omits the day (Sunday).⁸⁷

Taken as a whole such plentiful evidence for Skylitzes' faithful copying of content and vocabulary lends weight to the contention put forward by Thurn, the editor of the critical edition of the 'Synopsis', that Skylitzes is little more than a transcriber, who adheres so faithfully to his source material that it is impossible to attribute any idiosyncracies of grammar, style or vocabulary to him.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Skylitzes' closely-observed transcriptions may at some level appear to be compatible with established literary practices in later eleventh and twelfth century Byzantium. For example the mid twelfth-century synoptic historian John Zonaras explicitly states in the preface to his own literary production, that his narrative deliberately contains a conspicuous heterogeneity of language and tone because he wished to retain the varying styles of his different sources.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, although Skylitzes' narrative follows the narrative structure, word order and even vocabulary of his underlying text, it would be dangerous to assume

⁸⁵ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.398

⁸⁶ Skylitzes, pp. 229-30; Theophanes Con., p.425

⁸⁷ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.398.

⁸⁸ Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae*, p.viii; this view was also subsequently commended by N.Oikonomides in a review article of Thurn's critical edition, *BZ* 69 (1976) p.70.

that Skylitzes was merely a passive copyist and abbreviator whose testimony can be accepted as an accurate transmission of the materials he collates. Instead, further inspection of Skylitzes' treatment of Theophanes Continuatus' coverage of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos, reveals a number of subtle adaptations which when aggregated demonstrate that the compiler of the 'Synopsis' exercised an active authorial role. On some occasions Skylitzes' interventions are compatible with the intentions he outlines in his preface. On others his manipulations appear to deviate from his own statement of purpose. More important for the historian of medieval Byzantium Skylitzes' active authorship can impose serious distortions on the contents and interpretations of the underlying materials he transmits.⁹⁰

At the most basic of levels Skylitzes takes measures to ensure that his history is a synopsis rather than a simple copy. Thus, he sometimes elides two main verbal clauses from the underlying text into a single clause containing a main verb and a participle construction; the latter may take the form of a genitive absolute.⁹¹ His enthusiasm for abbreviation is most visible whenever he tries to combine so many phrases and sentences from the underlying source into a single unit that the meaning of his narrative becomes elusive. For example, on several occasions he combines several main verbs from the underlying text into a more elaborate single-verb sentence, with the result that a large slice of prose is expressed in a case other

⁸⁹ Zonaras (John): *Ioannis Zonarae Annales*, ed. M.Pinder (CSHB, Bonn, 1841), i, 8-9; Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 417.

⁹⁰ Useful comparisons can be drawn with the ninth-century synoptic historian Theophanes the Confessor. Although Theophanes usually follows the word order and phraseology of the texts which underpin his narrative very faithfully, he can make interventions of a very subtle order, sometimes involving no more than the insertion of single word, the omission of a phrase, or the repositioning of a date. Some of these alterations are accidental, however others are deliberate, undertaken with the purpose of altering the sense of the text (Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, pp.xcii-v).

⁹¹ For example Skylitzes uses two genitive absolutes to describe the defeat of the Arabs and the flight of Leo of Tripoli at the hands of the admiral (*droungarios*) John Radenos in the early 920s: ... ὁ Ῥαδενὸς κατονομαζόμενος αἰφνίδιον ἐπιφανεῖς ῥαδίως ἐτρέψατο, τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν σχεδὸν πάντων ἀνηρημένων, τοῦ δὲ Τριπολίτου μόνου φυγῆ τὴν σωτηρίαν πορισσαμένου (genitive absolutes underlined; Skylitzes, p.218); whereas Theophanes Continuatus uses two main verbs (underlined) to describe the actions of the Arabs and Leo:ὁ Ῥαδινὸς κατονομαζόμενος αἰφνιδίως ἐπέθετο αὐτῷ· καὶ

than the nominative. Thus, when Skylitzes decides to make the emperor the subject of a long sentence about the dismissal in 944 of John Kourkouas, the *domestikos* of the *scholai*, the subsequent description of the career and exploits of the general has to be rendered with several accusative participles; to add to the confusion Kourkouas is also to be found earlier in the sentence in the genitive case.⁹² A parallel example of the inclusion of long accusative clauses occurs in Skylitzes' account of the campaigns of the general and future emperor Nikephoros Phokas during the reign of Romanos II (959-63). Once again, because emperor Romanos occupies the nominative position, Nikephoros Phokas and his many military exploits against the Arabs have to be expressed in a very long accusative phrase.⁹³

Although Skylitzes' use of such complicated participle constructions fulfils his ambition to abbreviate his underlying texts, it is less clear how the obfuscation produced by such syntax enables the author to meet one of his other compositional injunctions, namely to write an account in easily digestible and "finely ground" prose. Indeed, his frequent inclusion of other sophisticated grammatical structures suggests that rather than simplifying his underlying text, Skylitzes was intent on elevating it. For example, when Skylitzes describes the military achievements of the general John Kourkouas, he advises the reader who wishes for more information to consult the biographical history written by the historian Manuel. Skylitzes expresses this command by using a third person singular imperative

.....θεοῦ συνεργία οἱ ὑπ' αὐτὸν τρέπονται Ἀγαρηνοί, μόλις δὲ μόνος ὁ Τριπολίτης φυγῇ διασώζεται (Theophanes Con., p.405)

⁹² Skylitzes, p.230: φθόνου δὲ κινήθέντος κατὰ τοῦ δομεστίκου τῶν σχολῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κουρκούα παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων βασιλέων (ἐβούλετο γὰρ Ῥωμανὸς ὁ Βασιλεὺς Εὐφροσύνην τὴν τοῦ δομεστίκου θυγατέρα νύμφην ἀγαγέσθαι τῷ οἰκείῳ ἐγγόνῳ Ῥωμανῷ (τῷ υἱῷ) τοῦ ἐσχάτου παιδὸς αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντίνου) ἠναγκάσθη τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτὸν παραλύσαι, ἐπὶ δυσὶ καὶ εἴκοσι χρόνοις καὶ μηνσὶν ἑπτὰ ἀδιαδόχως τὴν τοῦ δομεστίκου ἀρχὴν ἰθύναντα, καὶ πᾶσαν, ὡς εἶπεῖν, τὴν Συρίαν καταδραμόντα καὶ ταπεινώσαντα: the first two underlinings highlight Kourkouas in the genitive case; the last underlining indicates the long phrase in the accusative.

⁹³ Skylitzes, p.249: τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει Νικηφόρον μάγιστρον τὸν Φωκᾶν, δομέστικον ἤδη προβεβλημένον τῶν σχολῶν τῆς ἀνατολῆς παρὰ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ πολλὰ τρόπαια στήσαντα κατὰ τῶν ἐξῶν Σαρακηνῶν, καὶ τὸν τε τῆς Ταρσοῦ ἀμνηρᾶν Καραμῶνην καὶ Χαμβδᾶν τὸν τοῦ Χαλεπ καὶ τὸν Τριπόλεως

ζητησάτω (“let him seek”). In contrast, Theophanes Continuatus uses a simple third person plural verb to inform “those readers who wish to learn more” of Kourkouas' exploits that they will find the information they are seeking in the books of Manuel: εὐρήσουσιν (“they will find”).⁹⁴

On other occasions, rather than retaining a simple main verb, participle or infinitive, Skylitzes prefers to create a phrase involving a noun. Thus κατασκοπήσαι becomes ἐπὶ κατασκοπήν while ἐκστρατευσάντων becomes εἰσβολὴν ποιησαμένων.⁹⁵ In other instances Skylitzes elevates the register by interpreting a section of the underlying text with a high-style cliché. For example, both in his rewriting of Theophanes Continuatus, and elsewhere in his text, he sometimes replaces the simple identification of Hagia Sophia or the “Megale Ekklesia” with a more involved circumlocution: τῷ θείῳ τεμένει τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ σοφίας (“in the divine precinct of the Holy Wisdom”).⁹⁶ When he describes the coronations of members of the Lekapenoi family Skylitzes replaces Theophanes Continuatus' simple στέφεται (“he was crowned”: historic present) with the altogether more elaborate phrase ταινιωθεὶς τῷ βασιλικῷ διαδήματι (“having been bound with the imperial diadem”).⁹⁷ This too is a phrase that occurs in other parts of the ‘Synopsis’: the coronations of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes are described in very similar terms.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, such elevations or elaborations are not always consistent: at other times Skylitzes simplifies the language of his underlying source.⁹⁹ For example, he

⁹⁴ Ἰζήθ ὀλοσχερῶς ταπεινώσαντα, πέμπει κατὰ τῶν ἐν Κρήτῃ Σαρακηνῶν, πλῆθος ἐπιλέκτων στρατιωτῶν ἐπιδοὺς αὐτῷ καὶ στόλον κατηρτισμένον καλῶς: Nikephoros in the accusative case underlined.

⁹⁵ Skylitzes, p.230, Theophanes Con., pp.427-8.

⁹⁶ Skylitzes, p.214 and p.216; Theophanes Con., p.400 and p.402.

⁹⁷ Skylitzes, p.214; Theophanes Con., p.399; see also Skylitzes, p.270 for a similar example from the reign of Nikephoros Phokas

⁹⁸ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.398

⁹⁹ Skylitzes, pp.259, 286

⁹⁹ In a review article of Thurn's critical edition of *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, Cyril Mango reflects on the inconsistencies of Skylitzes' Attic prose (*JHS* 95 (1975), pp.304-5)

sometimes employs two main verbs where Theophanes uses a genitive absolute. On at least one occasion he replaces an optative with a simple main verb.¹⁰⁰

Skylitzes displays greater consistency in meeting some of the other intentions he outlines in the preface, in particular his desire to erase those hyperbolic elements which were "too close to legend", as well as those instances of excessive encomium. For example he excises completely the more elaborate antiquarian and ethnographic excurses of his core source. During his account of the maritime invasion of the Rus, Theophanes Continuatus digresses to explain the ethnic background of the Rus in 941 ("..... and they are called *Dromitai*, who originate from the race of the Franks"), the purpose of the Pharos lighthouse, and the classical background behind the re-naming of the Black Sea from the "unfortunate" "Kakoxeinos" to the "fortunate" "Euxeinos", a transformation which was wrought by Heracles' defeat of a band of local pirates.¹⁰¹ All of these grace notes are excluded by Skylitzes. Also omitted from Skylitzes' compilation is the moralising aside. After the victory of Symeon of Bulgaria's forces at Pegai in the early 920s, Theophanes Continuatus concludes his description of events with the reflection: "such is the terrible [consequence] of lack of planning and inexperience when it is in alliance with foolhardiness". This is a sentiment ignored by Skylitzes: he concludes his account of this military disaster with the burning of the Pegai palace.¹⁰²

Nonetheless, such sanitising interventions on the part of Skylitzes remain relatively rare, possibly because such high-style ornaments occur only occasionally in the text

¹⁰⁰ During the story of the revolt of Bardas Boilas, the *strategos* of Chaldia, Theophanes Continuatus informs the reader that the emperor forgave the poorer rebels and allowed them to go wherever they wanted: ὅπη βούλοιντο whereas Skylitzes renders this phrase as ὅπη βούλονται (Theophanes Con., p.404; Skylitzes p.217)

¹⁰¹ Theophanes Con., pp.423-4; Skylitzes, p.229

¹⁰² Theophanes Con., p.402; Skylitzes, p.215

of Theophanes himself. Much more conspicuous are Skylitzes' attempts to remove the excesses of encomium from the underlying text. At one level this operation merely involves stripping key personalities of superlative descriptions. For example, Skylitzes always removes the praise routinely applied in Theophanes Continuatus to Theophanes, the *protovestiaros* (later *parakoimomenos*) of the emperor Romanos.¹⁰³ In a similar fashion he removes references to the military bravery of the emir of Melitene.¹⁰⁴ Severe pruning is applied to the encomium of John Kourkouas. For instance while Theophanes alleges that Kourkouas, "... became unrivalled in matters of war, and established many great trophies, and extended the Roman boundaries and sacked very many Agarene cities", and makes reference to his "outstanding virtue", Skylitzes rather more drily comments that he "... overran and humbled, so it is said, the whole of Syria".¹⁰⁵

However, it is to the Lekapenoi themselves that Skylitzes applies the most systematic textual amputations and even rewritings. A relatively small-scale pruning is to be seen in Skylitzes' removal of a favourable reference to the horse-loving Patriarch, Theophylact, youngest son of the emperor Romanos.¹⁰⁶ At a more general level the inclination of Theophanes Continuatus to interpret the first half of the tenth century in the light of the family history, or perhaps the family tragedy, of the Lekapenoi is diminished. Thus, while Skylitzes follows Theophanes in recording the coronations of the sons of the emperor Romanos at the beginning of the reign, and also notes all the Lekapenoi marriages, he omits all mention of the family distress when Maria Lekapene departed for Bulgaria in 927 as the bride of

¹⁰³ Theophanes Con., p.423; Skylitzes, pp.228-9

¹⁰⁴ Skylitzes, p.224; Theophanes Con., p.416

¹⁰⁵ Skylitzes p.230, Theophanes Con. pp.426-9

¹⁰⁶ Theophanes Con., p.422; Skylitzes, p.228

the emperor Peter, or of their grief over the death of the eldest son Christopher in 931.¹⁰⁷

Most dramatic is Skylitzes' reshaping of the personality of Romanos Lekapenos. This recasting is achieved partly by the omission or dilution of the more panegyric features, and partly by some very selective rewriting. Conspicuous among the dilutions is Skylitzes' dramatic abbreviation of Theophanes Continuatus' descriptions of Romanos' charitable deeds. Thus, the forty-line eulogy of Romanos' good works during the winter of 927 in Theophanes Continuatus is reduced to six in Skylitzes' version.¹⁰⁸ Later in his text Skylitzes not only compresses another twenty-five line passage of encomium, which describes Romanos' generosity to various monastic and charitable institutions, to less than ten lines, but he also makes the additional suggestion that Romanos' motives were primarily conditioned by the need to atone for the sins of his past life, and that the main object of his interest was always the development of his own monastic foundation, the Myrelaion.¹⁰⁹

However, it is in the section dealing with Romanos' meeting with the Bulgarian leader Symeon in 924 that Skylitzes' reconditioning of the encomium of the emperor is at its most conspicuous. First, Skylitzes omits those elements in Theophanes Continuatus' account which contribute to an aura of sanctity. Although he mentions that Romanos entered the church of Blachernae before he met Symeon in order to pray and to put on the protective *omophorion* of the Virgin, he excises all references to Romanos weeping and imploring the Mother of God for her assistance.¹¹⁰ Later in the account of the meeting of the two leaders Skylitzes

¹⁰⁷ Reference to John of Bulgaria: Theophanes Con., p.419, Skylitzes, p.225; reference to Mary Lekapene's departure to Bulgaria: Theophanes Con., p.415, Skylitzes, p.224; reference to Christopher's death: Theophanes Con., p.420, Skylitzes, p.226

¹⁰⁸ Theophanes Con., pp.415-7; Skylitzes, p.225

¹⁰⁹ Theophanes Con., pp.429-30; Skylitzes, p.231

¹¹⁰ Skylitzes, p.219; Theophanes Con., pp.406-7

excludes all allusions to the bravery of Romanos.¹¹¹ It is in his concluding editorial comments about Romanos' encounter with Symeon, that Skylitzes' deviation from Theophanes Continuatus is at its most obvious. For where the original text maintains that Symeon went back to his camp praising, "...the intelligence and humility and appearance of bodily strength and ... dauntless spirit" [of the emperor], Skylitzes alleges that the Bulgarian leader returned to his associates and commented on the, "... moderation of the emperor and his lavishness and generosity in matters of money".¹¹² One explanation for Skylitzes' reshaping of Lekapenos' role could be that the compiler had access to anti-Lekapenos material, which he used to counter the rhetorical hyperbole of Theophanes Continuatus. However, given the extremely tight congruence between the narrative structures of the 'Synopsis' and the account of Theophanes Continuatus, it seems superfluous to suggest that Skylitzes draws on an alternative primary source. Instead his treatment of the Lekapenoi family is almost certainly the result of his own willingness to comment upon, reorder and reshape his core source using his own powers of interpretation.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that Skylitzes does not completely jettison the laudatory excesses of his underlying sources. The encomium of the bridegroom of Agatha Lekapene, a member of the Argyros family, is reduced in length in Skylitzes' version, but the essence of the praise of the protagonist's physical and intellectual merits is retained.¹¹³ Equally, although Skylitzes brutally curtails the list of the military activities of John Kourkouas, his brother Theophilos and his son Romanos, he retains all the information relating to the intra-familial links between

¹¹¹ Skylitzes, p.220; Theophanes Con., pp.407-8

¹¹² Theophanes Con., p.409, Skylitzes, p.221

¹¹³ Theophanes Continuatus says that the Argyros bride-groom was: *ἄνδρα ὄντα ὑπερώμιον, καὶ κάλλει σώματος καὶ ἰδέᾳ καὶ συνέσει καὶ μάλιστα τῇ ἐλεημοσύνῃ καὶ ἐπιδόσει καὶ τῇ ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀπλότῃτι κοσμούμενον* (Theophanes Con., p.399); this eulogy is shortened in Skylitzes to *ἄνδρα γενναῖον, καὶ κάλλει σώματος καὶ ἰδέᾳ ὑπερφέροντα, συνέσει τε καὶ φρονήσει κοσμούμενον* (Skylitzes, p.213)

the three Kourkouas commanders. Moreover, he even updates the text so that whereas Theophanes imparts the information that Theophilos was the grandfather of John Tzimiskes, “who became domestic of the schools under the emperor Nikephoros”, Skylitzes tells us that he was the grandfather of John Tzimiskes, “..... who was emperor after these things”.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, even if he dismisses or dilutes the more obvious passages of panegyric, Skylitzes cannot entirely escape the viewpoint of the original subject of the encomium. Thus, although he reshapes Theophanes Continuatus’ praise of Romanos Lekapenos and John Kourkouas, Skylitzes still has to accept the underlying source's identification of these two actors as the most important protagonists in the history of this period.

While omission and abbreviation comprise one dimension of Skylitzes' willingness to intervene in his underlying text, his active authorial role can also be detected within his *additions* to the coverage of Theophanes Continuatus. These additions usually take the form of brief link phrases designed to bring thematic or chronological order to the underlying material. At their most simple, such phrases can simply be used to sharpen the focus of the root text. During his abbreviated account of the Rus attack of 941, Skylitzes decides to retain the vivid depiction of the impalings and crucifixions inflicted by the Rus on the local inhabitants of the shores of Asia opposite Constantinople. However, in order to wrench his concise narrative back to the eventual and inevitable defeat of the Rus, he adds the phrase *ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν πρότερον* (“but these things happened before”) to refer to the depredations he has just listed; another link phrase is then required to indicate the resumption of the main story: *ὡς ἄνωθεν ἐρρέθη* (“as was said above”).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Skylitzes, p.230; Theophanes Con., p.428

Other link phrases have the additional purpose of trying to make sense of the structure of the source Skylitzes is processing. For example, at the end of the passage describing the marriage of Peter, Emperor of Bulgaria, to Maria Lekapene Skylitzes inserts the simple phrase: “and matters in the City came to an end in this way”.¹¹⁶ This phrase is intended as a pointer to the next episode in the text, namely Byzantine relations with Melitene, which certainly were *not* matters pertaining to the City, but instead took the reader out to the eastern frontier. Another one-line explanatory interpolation occurs in Skylitzes' account of the conspiracy of Bardas Boilas, the *strategos* of Chaldia. When Theophanes Continuatus reports on this revolt he offers no explanation as to why this episode is included in his text, but simply begins with the allegation of a plot. Skylitzes, in contrast, wishes to make explicit the fact that this revolt is mentioned at this point in the narrative because it represents yet another rebellion of the sort that peppered the early years of Romanos' reign. Therefore, at the beginning of the episode he adds the explanatory phrase: “another revolt happened against the emperor in Chaldia”.¹¹⁷

At a rather more interpretative level, Skylitzes makes additions to the text of Theophanes Continuatus which offer explanations for particular courses of action or individual motives. Distinction can be drawn between those additions that are made with no apparent reference to the underlying source, and those which try to make sense of Theophanes Continuatus. In a passage relating to Bulgarian attacks on the palace of Theodora and the Byzantine military riposte led by Saktikios, the commander of the *Exkoubitoi*, both categories of additional explanation can be identified. At the beginning of this passage Skylitzes explains that the reason why the palace of Theodora was burned was because nothing was in the way. This

¹¹⁵ Skylitzes, p.229; Theophanes Con., p.425. For a discussion of link phrases in synoptic history as signs of active editing see Jeffreys, *Studies in John Malalas*, p.21. On Skylitzes' fondness for such devices see Shepard 'Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition', pp.147-8

explanation has no apparent background justification in the text of Theophanes. In contrast, Saktikios' early success against the Bulgar camp is explained by the absence of most of the Bulgars, who were away raiding the surrounding countryside for supplies. While Theophanes Continuatus does not actually say that this was the case, Skylitzes' hypothesis is at least partially supported by the allegation of the underlying source that once the Bulgars heard of the assault of Saktikios they all returned to the camp.¹¹⁸ One might suggest that Skylitzes' treatment of Symeon's post-conference report in 924 on the qualities of Romanos is an explanatory addition in the same vein. For having alleged that Symeon was enormously impressed with the personal qualities of the emperor, Theophanes Continuatus goes on to highlight the largesse which Romanos displayed on Symeon's departure: "and so having embraced one another they parted, with the emperor having bestowed magnificent presents on Symeon". In these circumstances Skylitzes' decision to make Symeon stress the largesse rather than the virtue of Romanos seems perfectly justified.¹¹⁹

Yet, the reader of Skylitzes' should note that even the simplest tightening of the structure of the text to comply with thematic rigour may easily eliminate the deeper nuances of the core source. For example, we have already seen that in his treatment of the revolts, which plagued the early years of Lekapenos' reign, Skylitzes not only retains and accurately records the names of most of the conspirators listed by Theophanes Continuatus, but also alerts the reader's attention to the thematic integrity of these early passages by interpolating explanatory phrases. Yet, he also chooses to control the overwhelmingly large *dramatis personae* of his core source by selectively omitting certain minor personalities. Unfortunately this has the effect

¹¹⁶ Skylitzes, p.224

¹¹⁷ Skylitzes, p.217; Theophanes Con., p.404

¹¹⁸ Skylitzes, p.216; Theophanes Con., pp.402-3

of destroying fragile clues supplied in the underlying text about the workings of Byzantine high court politics in the early tenth century. For instance, in the case of the conspiracy of Arsenios and Paul the *Manglabites*, Skylitzes retains the names of the plotters but excises a minor character called Leo, the *anthropos* of Arsenios, who acted as an informer to the imperial authorities.¹²⁰ Not only does this omission mean that the reader of the 'Synopsis' is furnished with less information about the chiaroscuro of rumour, coup and counter-coup in the embryonic period of a key reign, it also deprives the narrative of vital information about the role of the elusive John the Rector and Mystikos. Theophanes Continuatus tells his reader that it was John who had originally recommended Leo to the emperor and secured his appointment in imperial service. In this scant information provided by Theophanes Continuatus, John the Rector emerges as a key political broker at court. Unfortunately Skylitzes' omission of a minor character such as Leo means that much less can be deduced about major figures such as John.¹²¹

One of the reasons why Skylitzes omits minor characters like Leo is because his prime concern is to focus the text more narrowly on the more prominent personnel of the narrative. This desire may also determine Skylitzes' enthusiasm for attributing additional personal details such as names, titles and offices, to the most important figures within the history, even where they are missing in the core source. Just as Polemis noted that Skylitzes was willing to insert patronymic details into his narrative with no support from his underlying texts in the course of his ninth- and early tenth-century coverage, evidence of a similar nature appears in his

¹¹⁹ See above, p.62

¹²⁰ The term 'anthropos' is ambiguous, but probably means client or retainer, rather than merely a servant.

¹²¹ Skylitzes, p.213; Theophanes Con., p.399. John the Rector fought against Symeon of Bulgaria early in Lekapenos' reign (see above, p.53), conducted a diplomatic mission to Bulgaria in 929, and plotted to restore Stephen Lekapenos to the throne after Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus deposed the Lekapenois in 944-5 (Guiland, *Recherches*, ii, 214).

treatment of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos.¹²² Alexander Každan noticed that Skylitzes is the first historian to record the family name Lekapenos in connection with Romanos I and his family. In Theophanes Continuatus he is simply called 'Romanos'; in other tenth-century literature, including the *De Administrando Imperio*, he is identified as 'Romanos the Elder'.¹²³ Further examples of Skylitzes' fondness for embellishing the personal details of the main characters in his narrative include awarding individuals titles, which cannot be corroborated from the root text of Theophanes Continuatus, nor indeed from other tenth-century sources such as the Logothete. Thus, the Arsenios mentioned above is for no apparent reason given the title of *patrikios* by Skylitzes. The same title is awarded to Bardas Boilas, the rebellious general (*strategos*) of Chaldia. During Byzantine military actions against Melitene, Melias, the leader of the Armenian troops, is given the additional label *magistros*.¹²⁴ The most likely explanation for Skylitzes' tendency to award titles out of thin air, is that he may have tried to grant officials the rank he believed they deserved on the basis of comparative evidence from elsewhere in the underlying text. Thus, Bardas Boilas is probably given the title *patrikios* because other *stratego*i during the reign of Romanos were described as having this title by Theophanes Continuatus: for example, Bardas Phokas is described by Theophanes during the invasion of the Rus in 941 as a former *strategos* with the title of *patrikios*.¹²⁵

Although Skylitzes' decision to award Boilas the title of *patrikios* appears to reflect his sensitive understanding of the administrative history of the empire in the early-to-mid tenth century, elsewhere his presentation of the administrative structure of empire imposes serious distortions. Thus, where Theophanes Continuatus refers to

¹²² See above, p.40

¹²³ A.Každan, 'The Formation of Byzantine Family Names in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Byz Slav* 58 (1997), p.90.

a certain Michael son of Myroleo as a *topoteretes*, a senior officer within the professional and centralised *tagmatic* army forces of the early tenth century, Skylitzes uses the rather generalised term *tagmatarchon*.¹²⁶ One suspects that Skylitzes' generalised phrase may either reflect his own ignorance of military and administrative structures in the early tenth century, or may be an attempt to make the intricacies of office-holding in the army during an earlier period of history accessible to his later eleventh-century audience. The idea that Skylitzes attempted to explain earlier periods of history by homogenising and generalising his administrative terminology would of course be germane to his wider project to provide a digestible account of history for a contemporary audience at the end of the eleventh century. Yet, it must be stressed that Skylitzes is not consistent in his attempts to render the offices of earlier periods comprehensible to himself or to his audience. For example, on another occasion he simply copies the office of *tourmarches*, the position held by a senior commander within the provincial thematic armies in the tenth century, without emendation.¹²⁷

One area in which Skylitzes' many reshapings of the text of Theophanes Continuatus can be seen working "in the round" is in his treatment of military material. Examination of this material also demonstrates why Skylitzes' processes of homogenisation and generalisation can make the 'Synopsis Historion' so difficult for subsequent historians to use. On the one hand the military material, in particular the narrative surrounding long-term campaigns and more complicated battle sequences, is routinely the victim of brutal compression or simple omission, with the result that the reader is deprived of tactical details and a sense of overall strategy. For example, Skylitzes so dramatically abbreviates Theophanes

¹²⁴ Skylitzes, pp.213, 217, 224; Theophanes Con., pp.399, 404, 416

¹²⁵ Theophanes Con., p.424

¹²⁶ Theophanes Con., p.400; Skylitzes, p.214

Continuatus' account of Byzantine action against the eastern emirate of Melitene in the later 920s and early 930s, that he provides no indication of the annual campaigns that were waged by imperial armies against the Arabs, nor of the events of the final siege which eventually forced the city to capitulate in 934. Whereas Theophanes Continuatus describes the Byzantines burning the countryside of the emirate, their use of siege equipment, and the general John Kourkouas' impatience at his initial failure to take the city, Skylitzes summarises the twists and turns of the drama in a single bland phrase: "having confined those inside by siege he [Kourkouas] compelled them to look for agreements".¹²⁸

A comparable example is Skylitzes' treatment of the aftermath of the invasion of the Rus in 941. In Theophanes Continuatus' account the Rus who survived the first naval battle are shown crossing over to Bithynia on the Asian side of the Bosphoros. The Byzantine general Bardas Phokas is then deputed to shadow the Rus as they forage in this area. After forays with Phokas' advance party, and later the main army led by John Kourkouas, the Rus decide to sail home, driven out of the empire by a lack of supplies and the onset of winter. Skylitzes' version of this passage of events is not only shorter than that of Theophanes, but takes place in a geographical and temporal vacuum. In the 'Synopsis' no mention is made of the location of Bithynia. There is no reference to the orders given to Bardas Phokas, so that when he meets the Rus he appears to do so for no good strategic reason except coincidence. Skylitzes does not include the reflection that the Rus had to take to their ships again because of the time of year; instead their decision has no context except a lack of supplies. However, it is interesting to note that the passage of action that Skylitzes does retain in greater detail is the catalogue of colourful outrages the Rus inflicted on those Byzantines they encountered. Here, it might be

¹²⁷ Skylitzes, p.228; Theophanes Con., p.421

suggested that the entertainment of a later-eleventh century audience is more important to Skylitzes than a sense of strategy.¹²⁹

Skylitzes' lack of tactical, topographical and geographical awareness is visible elsewhere in his coverage of the reign of Romanos. For example, Theophanes Continuatus explains that the Byzantines were defeated by the Bulgarians at Pegai in the early 920s because the troops of Symeon suddenly appeared above their enemy and were able to charge down upon their adversaries from a height. The key word in Theophanes Continuatus' text is *ἄνωθεν* ("from above"). However, this tactical advantage is completely ignored by Skylitzes who simply says that the Bulgarians suddenly appeared and attacked the Byzantines. The sense of height advantage enjoyed by the Bulgars at the beginning of their manoeuvre is entirely omitted by Skylitzes because he replaces the crucial term *ἄνωθεν* with the much less specific *ἐκεῖθεν* ("from there").¹³⁰

Equally frustrating for the modern historian who wishes to extract reliable military material from the 'Synopsis' is Skylitzes' tendency to compress the underlying narrative by applying homogenising clichés. These have the effect of suppressing the uniqueness of the events in question, erasing specific detail, and transforming each military engagement into a string of impenetrable stereotypes. Thus, in Skylitzes' text the joining of two sides in battle is frequently represented by the phrase *συμπλοκῆς γενομένης*.¹³¹ One of the protagonists, particularly in a hand to hand engagement, is always likely to be mortally wounded (*πληγῆν*) *καιρίαν δὲ τυπείς*.¹³² A protagonist will conduct a siege with or without care *ἐπιμελῶς/ἀμελῶς*

¹²⁸ Skylitzes, p.224; Theophanes Con., pp.415-6

¹²⁹ Skylitzes, p.229; Theophanes Con., pp.424-5

¹³⁰ Skylitzes, p.215; Theophanes Con., p.401

¹³¹ Skylitzes, p.216

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.214

ἐπολιόρκει.¹³³ The recipient/s of a siege always resist with spirit εὐψύχως τὴν πολιορκίαν ἐδέξατο¹³⁴, until the protagonist presses them too hard στενοχωρήσας.¹³⁵ When they surrender it is usually because they are in need τῆ ἐνδεία of essential supplies.¹³⁶ Camps are always established στρατόπεδον πῆξας.¹³⁷ Those encamped will often scour the surrounding countryside for booty or spoils ἐπὶ διαρπαγῆν σκύλων.¹³⁸ The term ἐνέδρα is preferred when denoting an ambush.¹³⁹ Those who triumph in battle always do so easily ῥαδίως.¹⁴⁰ Equally their triumph is often achieved with unstoppable strength ῥυμη ἀνυποστάτῳ.¹⁴¹ Those who chose to rebel often "hole up" at a well fortified castle: φρούριον ἐρυμνόν.¹⁴²

This enumeration of clichés forces us to ask whether Skylitzes' military shorthand could be used to construct a model military engagement that was not based on any genuine evidence at all. Here, the picture is mixed. On the one hand, a comparison of Skylitzes' text with the narrative of Theophanes Continuatus for the reign of Romanos, suggests that there is usually a concrete event underpinning most of his homogenising interpretations. Yet, it is also equally true that Skylitzes embroiders his underlying source with additional comments composed entirely of clichéd phrases. When Adrianople comes under Bulgarian attack in the early 920s, Skylitzes expatiates on the military bravery of the commander of the Byzantine garrison, the *patrikios* Myroleo, simply by using his own repertoire of bland generalisation. With no support from the underlying text he alleges that the Byzantine commander “opened the gates, attacked with irresistible strength and

¹³³ Ibid., p.218

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.218

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.224

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.218

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.219

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.216

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.214

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.226

triumphed easily”. It should be noted that this phrase contains two of the commonplace generalisations we identified in the paragraph above: ἀναπεταννύς ἐπετίθετο σὺν ῥύμῃ ἀνυποστάτῳ καὶ ῥαδίῳς ἐτρέπετο.¹⁴³

One final example from the reign of Romanos Lekapenos will show how Skylitzes' substitution of a standardised cliché in the service of narrative compression leaves the reader entirely uninformed about the underlying details represented by that standardised phrase. In his encomium of the Kourkouas family Theophanes Continuatus devotes considerable praise to the achievements of John's brother Theophilos. Although Theophanes Continuatus' text is bestrewn with rhetorical hyperbole, including a comparison between Theophilos and the Biblical King Solomon, it also conveys the key information that Theophilos was the *strategos* of Chaldia and Mesopotamia, and that during his tenure of the former position he was involved in the capture of Theodosiupolis (modern day Erzerum) on the Caucasian frontier.¹⁴⁴ Thus, although Theophanes Continuatus overdoses with rhetoric, his text identifies Theophilos' geographical sphere of military operations with some accuracy. In contrast, although Skylitzes removes the hyperbolic allusion to Solomon, he also completely excises all the substantive detail of the general's career by articulating Theophilos' achievements in a standardised and anodyne cliché. He sums up Theophilos' achievements as *strategos* in Mesopotamia with the phrase: ταπεινώσας καὶ τελέως ἀφανίσας τοὺς ἐκ τῆς Ἰαγάρ (“having humbled and finally destroyed the sons of Hagar”)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Skylitzes, p.218; Theophanes Con., pp.404-5. It should be noted that Skylitzes idiosyncratically uses the middle voice of the verb *trepo* in an active sense on many occasions.

¹⁴⁴ Theophanes Con., p.428; see below, pp.222, 229, 290, for the fall of Theodosiupolis to Byzantine armies in 949

¹⁴⁵ Skylitzes, p.230

IV. Conclusions: Skylitzes and the reign of Basil II

This chapter has taken the preliminary steps towards understanding how those parts of the 'Synopsis Historion', where Skylitzes' underlying source materials fail to survive, should be approached. The method developed has been to examine another section of the 'Synopsis', where the underlying text does survive, in order to uncover the most characteristic features of Skylitzes' treatment of source materials. Obviously, the next stage in the process is the application of these general conclusions to sections of the text, such as the reign of Basil II, for which none of the underlying sources are extant. This is an enterprise which will be undertaken at greater length in subsequent chapters of this thesis. However, in concluding the textual analysis in this chapter, I would like to summarise the most important problems that Skylitzes' testimony presents to the historian of medieval Byzantium in general, and of Basil's reign in particular.

The first difficulty which needs to be emphasised is Skylitzes' occasional tendency to make mistakes when he copies dates and figures. These inaccuracies can become particularly intractable when the historian has no independent sources against which to assess Skylitzes' data. As far as Basil's reign is concerned the section of Skylitzes' narrative where such problems are likely to be most acute is his account of warfare in the Balkans between 989 and 1018. During this period checks on his appraisal are limited to very occasional and undated references to Basil's Bulgarian campaigns by Yahya ibn Sa'id and Stephen of Taron. In this context, it is worth drawing attention to the possibility that the most infamous episode of the wars between Byzantium and Bulgaria may rest on Skylitzes' mis-transmission of a number. According to Skylitzes when imperial armies defeated the Bulgarian forces at the battle of Kleidion in 1014, fifteen thousand Bulgarian prisoners were blinded

by Basil II. Yet, as Mark Whittow has recently pointed out, the rest of Skylitzes' account of this campaign does not suggest that the Bulgarians suffered an annihilating defeat in 1014.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the continuation of the war between Bulgaria and the Byzantine empire for another four years indicates that Basil's Balkan adversaries retained considerable fighting capacity. One way of explaining the anomaly between the scale of the Bulgarian defeat at Kleidion reported in the 'Synopsis' and the subsequent recovery of Bulgarian fortunes, might be to suggest that Skylitzes simply miscopied, or else deliberately exaggerated, the figure of Bulgarian casualties.

In addition to his frailties as a copyist, the textual analysis developed in this chapter suggests that Skylitzes' more active authorial interventions, such as his tendency to compress, omit, expand, explain, and add homogenising glosses to his underlying source material, can cause substantial obfuscation. Three particular problems arising from such interventions are of especial relevance to the historian of the political and military history of medieval Byzantium. The first concerns prosopography, or the "Who's Who", of the Byzantine empire. As the detailed textual analysis of Skylitzes' treatment of Theophanes Continuatus has demonstrated on several occasions, our compiler is frequently willing to draw genealogical connections between individuals and to bestow offices and titles on the basis of little supporting evidence from his underlying sources. This cavalier attitude to evidence must warn the prosopographer against using Skylitzes too slavishly in the reconstruction of the careers of the most politically significant individuals and families within the Byzantine empire. The second problem relates to the administrative history of the empire. Here, Skylitzes' ubiquitous tendency to

¹⁴⁶ Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.387-8. He points out that while Basil was victorious at Kleidion, another contemporaneous Byzantine attack led by the general Theophylact Botaneiates, the *doux* of Thessalonika, was heavily defeated by Samuel's forces. Moreover, after

replace precise administrative terms with homogenised generalisations, means that his text represents exceptionally insecure evidence for any historian attempting to explore changes and continuities within the history of the medieval Byzantine bureaucracy. This is a point which will be developed at greater length in the chapters of this thesis which deal with the administration of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries.¹⁴⁷

The third problem is concerned with Skylitzes' idiosyncratic treatment of military matters. The most important point to be stressed here is the extent to which Skylitzes' approach to military action is shaped by his extreme enthusiasm for cinematic moments of dramatic action, and his equally conspicuous lack of interest in the geographical and strategic backdrop to long campaigns. Paradoxically, Skylitzes articulates both his fascination with bloodlust and his distaste for detailed expositions of military tactics through the use of terms from a standardised military lexicon. This list of homogenising terms allows him both to embroider stories of individual heroism or mass slaughter and to compress passages of text which set out the background to warfare. These observations are of particular relevance to the reign of Basil since so much of Skylitzes' coverage of the later tenth and eleventh centuries is dedicated to military action. In Chapter three the extent to which Skylitzes' uses his military lexicon in his description of the civil wars at the beginning of Basil's reign will be explored further.¹⁴⁸ In this case it will be argued that he employs his homogenising repertoire to amplify the heroism of particular individuals, in particular the general Bardas Phokas. In contrast, it is worth noting the extent to which Skylitzes' testimony of Basil's Bulgarian wars is routinely shaped by the second use of his standardising military vocabulary, namely to

Kleidion Basil was forced to return to his base rather than press on into Bulgarian-held territory (see also Skylitzes, pp.348-51)

¹⁴⁷ See below, chapters five and six

compress and abbreviate long campaigns. As a result, his treatment of warfare in the Balkans is customarily denuded of any sense of long-term strategy or geographical context. Instead, his narrative is frequently expressed in a language so uniform and uninformative, that the reader is presented with little more than a litany of ill-defined invasions and sieges against geographically decontextualised targets. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish one campaign from the next.

¹⁴⁸ See below, pp.133-4

Chapter Two

John Skylitzes: Author and Contexts

I. Literary and social contexts

The previous chapter began an investigation into how the later eleventh-century synoptic historian John Skylitzes shapes his presentation of the history of the Byzantine empire in the ninth to eleventh centuries. At the heart of this investigation was a close textual comparison between a small section of the 'Synopsis Historion' and one of its underlying texts, the sixth book of the Continuation of Theophanes. On the basis of evidence offered by the text alone, Skylitzes' working methods and his use and abuse of source materials were investigated. Some of the problems which his selection, presentation, and interpretation of materials pose for modern historians, above all those interested in the reign of Basil II, were highlighted. This chapter continues the analysis of Skylitzes' presentation of the Byzantine past by widening the discussion to consider the broader literary, social and political contexts within which the author was working. Central to this discussion is the question of how Skylitzes, the author who emerges from the close textual analysis in chapter one, relates to Skylitzes, the later eleventh-century, senior Constantinopolitan civil-servant employed by the Emperor Alexios Komnenos, the Skylitzes whose career has been outlined by the prosopographical research of W.Seibt.¹ The chapter will demonstrate that an appreciation of this relationship is fundamental to understanding several key

characteristics of Skylitzes' testimony of the reign of Basil II, above all his conspicuous interest in the Byzantine aristocracy and his fascination with the Balkans.

When attempting to find contexts for a synoptic historian such as Skylitzes, historians have usually turned to the classificatory system proposed by Krumbacher in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to this schema, long derivative historical compilations such as those of Skylitzes writing in the later eleventh century and John Zonaras at work in the mid-twelfth, should be located within the genre of low to middle brow chronicle rather than as part of the same literary world as high brow histories. Thus, whereas high-style histories are said to be typified by eyewitness testimony, classical allusions, ethnographical and geographical *excurses*, and an elevated level of language imitating the Attic style of the writers of the second Sophistic of the second century A.D., chronicles are said to be characterised by a variety of written sources, more extensive chronological coverage, a simplified level of Greek, an absence of classicising tags, and a concentration on sensational events, including natural disasters and portents. As far as authors and audiences are concerned, the literary characteristics of these two genres imply that high-style histories were read and produced by a highly-educated coterie of mandarin civil servants, who worked in the higher echelons of the imperial administration in Constantinople, while the authors and audiences of chronicles were located far from the literary milieu of the imperial court, often in monasteries.²

¹ See above, pp.34-40

² Krumbacher indicated that those who wrote and received chronicles were mainly monks when he labelled this genre 'Mönchskronik'. (Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, pp.226-30, 319-23) His classificatory distinctions have continued to receive wide support during this century: see, for example, Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 243-78; R.Browning, 'Byzantine Literature', *DMA* (13 volumes, New York, 1983), ii, 511-17; J.Ljubarskij, 'Some Notes on the Newly Discovered Historical Work by Psellos', in J.S.Langdon and S.W.Reinert (eds.), *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.* (2 vols., New Rochelle/New York, 1993), i, 213.

However, if we look more closely at Skylitzes' composition in the light of the textual analysis undertaken in the Chapter One of this thesis and in the light of the biography outlined by Seibt, then it becomes evident that many aspects of the Krumbacher model are of little relevance. Indeed, rather than belonging to a literary and social world that was in every way distinct from that of the production of high-style history, Skylitzes' historical writings were composed in the same milieu as high-style productions, and were in many ways their literary counterpart. In the first place it is important to realise that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries most chroniclers, or synoptic historians as I would prefer to call them, did not live and work in monasteries, but in Constantinople, the imperial court, the higher echelons of state administration, and in the law courts: in other words in the same professional environment as many high-style historians.³ Thus, as Seibt's reconstruction of Skylitzes' biography demonstrates, John Skylitzes was *eparch* of Constantinople in the later eleventh century. He also held the senior judicial position of *megas droungarios* of the *vigla*.⁴ John Zonaras served the emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118) in the same position of *megas droungarios of the vigla* and also as *protoasekretis*.⁵ Although Zonaras dedicated himself to writing history once his career was at an end and he had retreated into a monastery, other synoptic historians completed their compositions while still active in Constantinople and in the employ of the emperor. For example, Constantine Manasses who served Manuel Komnenos (1143-80) as a diplomat, was commissioned to compile a synoptic history in verse by the emperor's sister-in-law

For Cyril Mango the differences between chronicle and high-style history are part of a more general distinction between the thought world of the "average" Byzantine and the views of a small clique of intellectuals who "exerted no appreciable influence on the thinking of the public at large" (C.Mango, *Empire of the New Rome* (London, 1980), pp.8-9, and also chapters 10 and 13).

³ H.G.Beck, 'Zur byzantinischen "Mönchskronik"', in *Speculum Historiale: Geschichte im Spiegel von Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdeutung (Festschrift K.Adler)* (Freiburg/Munich, 1965), pp.188-97.

⁴ See above, pp.34-5

Irene, before she died in 1153, and long before he left court to take up his position as metropolitan of Naupaktos.⁶ In these circumstances there is no reason to suppose that Skylitzes himself could not have worked on his synopsis, either composing it or gathering materials, while he was active in government service.

However, having noted that synoptic historians like Skylitzes worked in the same professional milieu as high-style historians, the more important question to be asked is whether there were any other significant overlaps between the two genres of history writing apart from personal and professional proximity? At one level the answer to this question ought to be positive. Alexander Kazdan, a vociferous critic of over-schematic approaches to different manifestations of Byzantine culture, frequently argued that Byzantine literature of all forms was typified more by fluidity and innovation than by conservatism and inertness, and that different genres did not remain immutable in time and isolated from each other.⁷ Within historiography itself he noted parallels in material, presentation and interpretation between higher and lower style productions. For example, as Kazdan pointed out, eleventh- and twelfth-century high-style historians such as Michael Attaleiates and Nikephoros Choniates, are as fond of including notices about omens and natural phenomena in their texts as contemporary synoptic historians.⁸ In contrast, the narratives of many synoptic historians may contain elements more usually associated with high-style productions. The tenth-century synopsis of the Logothete, for example, includes an ornate oration by the Emperor Romanos

⁵ Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 416

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.419

⁷ A.P.Kazdan, 'Der Mensch in der byzantinischen Literaturgeschichte', *JÖB* 29 (1979), pp.1-21; *idem.*, 'Approaches to the history of Byzantine civilisation from Krause to Beck and Mango', in A.P.Kazdan and S.Franklin (eds.), *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1984), pp.11-22.

⁸ Kazdan, 'Der Mensch', p.5. Close parallels have been detected between the conceptual worlds of the sixth-century classicising historians such as Prokopios of Kaisareia and Agathias and the synoptic historian John Malalas of Antioch (R.Scott, 'Malalas and his contemporaries', in E.Jeffreys

Lekapenos to the Bulgarian Tsar Symeon which is riddled with high style rhetorical devices.⁹

Furthermore, it is clear that whenever authors were at work in a shared physical and professional environment, overlaps between literary genres could become even more pronounced. For example, in the mid-twelfth century, several authors who can be identified to varying degrees with service within the imperial court or with members of the imperial family, participated in a groundswell of contemporary literary activity which was characterised by considerable innovation and cross-fertilisation of language levels and genres.¹⁰ Many demonstrated a willingness to experiment with different registers of language, introducing elements of vernacular grammar and vocabulary into higher level productions. Many, including several historians, also moved between genres. For example, Michael Glykas, a secretary at the court of Manuel Komnenos, was a poet, the writer of theological treatises, and a synoptic historian. Constantine Manasses composed panegyric, *ekphrasis*, a verse romance 'Aristandros and Kallithea', and a verse account of his diplomatic mission to Palestine in 1160, as well as his verse synoptic history.¹¹

Although scholarly interest has only recently begun to focus on literary production in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries, it is worth noting that here too innovation and cross-fertilisation has been identified, particularly in works

et al. (eds.), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990), pp.67-85; A.Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London/New York, 1996), pp.24-32).

⁹ George the Monk Con., p.900. This speech is probably taken from the pro-Lekapenos family history that was one of the Logothete's sources.

¹⁰ See for example R.Browning, 'Byzantine Scholarship', *Past and Present* 28 (1964), pp.13-17; A.P.Každan and A. Wharton Epstein (eds.), *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (California Berkeley, 1985), pp.83-6. Apart from historians, other writers who moved between genres and switched registers included Theodore and Manganeios Prodromos, the anonymous author of the 'Spaneas', and the authors of the twelfth-century novels.

¹¹ The literary achievement and career of Glykas are summarised in: Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 422-6; for Manasses see *idem.*, pp.419-21; *ODB*, ii, 1280; and Jeffrey, 'The Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers', pp.202-15.

associated with the imperial court, the higher ranks of the civil service, and Constantinople. For example, some scholars have noted the emergence in this period of a new interest in the telling of vivid stories. Although writers in locations outside Constantinople, such as Kekaumenos, made use of entertaining narratives in their literary productions, this new interest was most conspicuous among those authors who moved in the highest social and political circles in the capital. A fondness for elaborate anecdotes, particularly those describing military endeavour, has been noted among high-style historians such as Bryennios and synoptic historians such as Skylitzes.¹² It has even been argued that this greater interest in martial narrative was inspired during the latter years of the eleventh century by the arrival in Constantinople of provincial aristocrats fleeing the contemporary Turkish invasions of Asia Minor. Beaton has suggested, for example, that the epic/romance 'Digenes Akrites' was composed in Constantinople in this period, as emigrés from central Anatolia sought to make a permanent written record of much older oral poems describing the daring-do of life on the ninth- and tenth-century Arabo-Byzantine frontier.¹³ Although other scholars, most notably Elizabeth Jeffreys and Paul Magdalino, have suggested that the Digenes epic was written down in Constantinople during the mid rather than the early twelfth century, the importance of the arrival of aristocratic refugees from central Anatolia for developments within Byzantine literature throughout the Komnenian period has been widely accepted.¹⁴

¹² Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp.69-78; C.Roueché, 'Byzantine Writers and Readers: Story Telling in the Eleventh Century', in R.Beaton (ed.), *The Greek Novel* (London/Sydney, 1988), pp.123-132; J.D.Howard-Johnston, 'Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*', in M.Mullett and D.Smythe (eds.), *Alexios I Komnenos* (Belfast, 1996), pp.260-302. It should, however, be noted that this enthusiasm for military anecdotes was not an entirely new phenomenon. There are stories about heroic exploits in texts which predate the later eleventh century, such as Theophanes Continuatus and Leo the Deacon.

¹³ R.Beaton, 'Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion', in M.Mullett and D.Smythe (eds.), *Alexios I Komnenos* (Belfast, 1996), pp.329-338.

¹⁴ Digenes Akrites: *Digenis Akritis: the Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*, ed. E.Jeffreys (Cambridge, 1998), pp.xvii, lvi-lvii; P.Magdalino, 'Digenes Akrites and Byzantine Literature: the

Nonetheless, there is a potential objection to the view that synoptic and high-style histories must necessarily be seen as part of the same cultural phenomenon simply because they were produced by historians working within the same physical and temporal environment. This is the very fact that contemporary Byzantine writers indicate a quite explicit generic difference between these two literary productions. In the preface to his world chronicle the ninth-century historian George the Monk, criticised the writers of secular history for their ostentation, loquacity, incomprehensibility and overweening desire for applause.¹⁵ The prefaces to eleventh and twelfth-century synoptic histories contain echoes of George's criticism. Despite his considerable classical erudition and his use of Dio Cassius as a source for his coverage of the Roman Republic, the mid twelfth-century synoptic historian John Zonaras chastised those historians who indulged in detailed descriptions of military matters, lengthy and irrelevant digressions, and improbable dialogues. Here Zonaras appears not only to have been criticising ancient historians, but also the classicising historians of more recent generations such as Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios. In contrast, Zonaras indicates that his own work belongs outside this tradition when he says that it is his ambition to produce a synopsis which will present a short but clear view of important past events.¹⁶ Even Constantine Manasses mirrors the sentiments of contemporary synoptics when he promises his patroness Irene "..... a clear and comprehensible treatise..... giving plain teaching in history", which will remedy the contradictory accounts of the writers of histories and chronographies.¹⁷ However, it is Skylitzes

twelfth century background to the Grottaferrata Version', in R. Beaton and D. Ricks (eds.), *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry* (London, 1993), pp. 1-14

¹⁵ George the Monk: *Georgius Monachus Chronicon*, ed. C. de Boor (and P. Wirth) (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1978 edition), i, 1-2.

¹⁶ Zonaras, ed. Pinder (Bonn, 1841), pp. 4-6. Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 417 sees Zonaras specifically criticising Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios. For Zonaras' good knowledge of classical sources see M. di Maio, 'Smoke in the Wind: Zonaras' use of Philostorgius, Zosimos, John of Antioch and John of Rhodes in his Narrative of the Neo-Flavian Emperors', *B* 48 (1988), pp. 230-255

¹⁷ Manasses, p. 5.

himself who seems to provide the clearest distinction between synopsis and high-style history. As we saw in the previous chapter, Skylitzes uses his preface to draw an explicit contrast between his short and readable continuation of George the Synkellos and Theophanes with the long *psogos*- and encomium-riddled appraisals of recent generations of historians.¹⁸

Yet, it can be argued that the eleventh and twelfth-century synoptic historians protest their differences from their high-style counterparts too much. In many cases they exaggerate the differences in form and content between their writings and the high-brow histories of their contemporaries, while failing to highlight the conspicuous similarities between the two genres. And indeed, in many cases it is the similarities which are the more striking. For example Zonaras couches his reasons for writing in the same terms as the high-style historian Michael Psellos. Both historians explain that it is only the encouragement of friends that has persuaded them to take up their pens.¹⁹ Zonaras' negative portrayal of Alexios Komnenos is a blatant *psogos* for which he, rather than his source, appears responsible.²⁰ Moreover, at a general level, many synoptic historians of the eleventh and twelfth century deviate greatly from the idealised model they claim to follow. They often ignore the annalistic chronological structure of their synoptic predecessors such as Theophanes, employ more elevated language, and take a less providential view of history: features they share in common with more high-brow historians.²¹ Taken as a whole the evidence suggests that by the eleventh century the composition of synoptic history had become a genre of court literature expressed in a middling to high-style register of Greek with its own particular

¹⁸ Skylitzes, pp.3-4; see above, pp.50-2

¹⁹ Zonaras, ed. Pinder (Bonn, 1841), p.4; Psellos, pp.127-8

²⁰ Zonaras, ed. Büttner-Wobst (Bonn, 1897), Bk. XVIII, pp.726-768

²¹ Even Krumbacher accepted that Zonaras was skilled in his appreciation and use of Attic Greek (*Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, i, 370-4). Mango and Scott (*Chronicle of Theophanes*,

rhetoric. If a court official in this period wanted to write a history with a longer compass than his own lifetime, he adopted the chronicle form at a superficial level. In order to indicate the synoptic nature of his production to his potential audience, it was important that he should state in the preface that he intended to produce a short, unbiased, and easily understandable account. Thereafter, considerable innovation and overlap with the methods and materials of higher style histories was possible.

Indeed, it is clear that although contemporaries distinguished between the genres of synopsis and high-style history, they did not necessarily regard them as incompatible forms of literature. Instead, as John Skylitzes' own preface indicates, they were viewed as complementary productions. Although Skylitzes criticises the high-style historians of the past two centuries, such as Joseph Genesios, Theodore Daphnopates, and Theodore of Sebasteia, for *psogos* and encomium, and their limited chronological coverage, he makes it clear that his own synopsis will be crafted from precisely this genre of history writing.²² Furthermore, in his identification of his target audience, Skylitzes suggests that his literary production should be regarded not as an antidote to high-style historical literature, but rather as a guide. Having stated his ambition to produce a synoptic account in digestible prose, he continues: “so that those who approach the books of the said historiansmay carry and visit this book as a travelling companion and [so that] others who have not yet happened upon these histories may have this *epitome* as a guide”.²³ In his analyses of various levels of style within Byzantine literature, I.Ševčenko has indicated the frequency with which high-style texts were reshaped into handbook paraphrases expressed in a middling level of Greek, precisely so that

p.iii) reflect on the failure of the synoptic successors of Theophanes to adopt his strictly annalistic structure.

²² Skylitzes, pp.3-4; see above, pp.50-2

²³ Ibid., p.4; for a full translation see the appendix

subsequent readers and writers could absorb the contents of verbose texts without being forced to read the originals.²⁴

Yet, the main question which arises from the recognition that synoptic historians such as Skylitzes and Zonaras were educated civil servants who used high-style histories in their production of historical handbooks, is whether their audience should also be located within the environs of the imperial court? Since recent research has begun to present a more optimistic picture of levels of literacy and access to literature *outside* the higher echelons of the Byzantine civil service, it would be premature to limit the reception of Skylitzes' 'Synopsis Historion' purely to those most senior ranks of the imperial administration and court familiar with the writing of high-style histories.²⁵ Certainly the incidence of nine Skylitzes' manuscripts dating from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries indicates that his text had a long-term audience which far exceeded the narrow world of the Komnenian elite.²⁶ The fact that the Madrid manuscript was copied in Norman southern Italy during the mid-twelfth century indicates that its appeal extended beyond the political borders of the empire itself.²⁷

Nonetheless, although there is a *longue durée* story of the 'Synopsis' of Skylitzes as an organic text which snaked its way through many generations of later Byzantine

²⁴ I.Ševčenko, 'Levels of Style in Byzantine Prose', *JÖB* 31.1 (1981), pp.309-10; idem., 'Some Additional Remarks to the Report on Levels of Style', *JÖB* 32.1-2 (1982), pp.228-9

²⁵ It has usually been assumed that the high cost of book production meant that few individuals outside elite government circles had regular access to books in medieval Byzantium (C.Mango and I. Ševčenko (eds.), 'Byzantine Books and Bookmen', *DOP* 29 (1975). However, more recently Margaret Mullett has argued for a more optimistic view of literacy levels and the dissemination of literature outside the court elite (M.Mullett, 'Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople', in M.Angold (ed.), *Byzantine Aristocracy* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1984), pp.173-201, and eadem., 'Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium', in R.McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.156-184).

²⁶ In 1201 the library of the monastery of St John on Patmos owned a copy of Skylitzes' history (*syngraphe*) (C.Diehl, 'Le trésor et la bibliothèque de Patmos au commencement du 13e siècle', *BZ* 1 (1892), pp.500, 522; C.Astruc, 'L'inventaire dressé en septembre 1200 du trésor et de la bibliothèque de Patmos, édition diplomatique', *TM* 8 (1981), pp.28-29; Snipes, 'The 'Chronographia' of Michael Psellos and the textual transmission of the Byzantine historians', p.57).

libraries, readers and interpolaters, circumstantial and textual evidence suggests that the author's principal, original audience was based among the Constantinopolitan elite. The circumstantial evidence relates to the fact that synoptic histories such as Skylitzes are often preserved in the same manuscripts as contemporary, high-style literary works. Thus, one of the earliest manuscripts of the 'Synopsis' of Skylitzes, manuscript C (Paris BN Coislin 136) which is usually dated to the twelfth century, contains a variety of high-style materials including the 'Historia' of the later eleventh-century lawyer and courtier Michael Attaleiates, and the speeches of Manuel Straboromanos, the *megas hetaireiarches* (head of the imperial bodyguard), during the final decade of the reign of Alexios I. Manuscript E also conveys Attaleiates' history.²⁸

Confirmation of Skylitzes' predominantly elite and Constantinopolitan audience is also provided by many of the diagnostic elements that emerge from his treatment of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos and which were discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. In the first place Skylitzes' use of a middling to high language register, his complex syntax, and his occasional classicising tags,²⁹ appear compatible with an audience of well-educated civil servants. Analogous parallels between language use and audience have recently been suggested in the case of the sixth-century synoptic historian John Malalas. It has been argued that since Malalas was probably a minor official in the offices of the *Comes Orientalis* in Antioch, his prose style may reflect the level of Greek used in the daily administrative work of local civil servants in Syria at the time of Justinian. Moreover, these civil servants may have constituted Malalas' principal audience.³⁰ Although Malalas writes in a distinctly lower style than that of Skylitzes, the general point that there may be important

²⁷ See above, p.32

²⁸ Thurn, *Ioannis Skylitzae*, p.xxi; P.Gautier, 'Le dossier d'un haut fonctionnaire d'Alexis Ier Comnène, Manuel Straboromanos', *REB* 23 (1965), pp.168-204.

connections between the language levels of synoptic texts and the professional character of the audience remains valid.

However, the best evidence that Skylitzes was writing in response to the competences and concerns of his contemporaries within Constantinopolitan high society, is his conspicuous interest in the political elite of the empire, which for convenience sake I shall term 'the aristocracy'. During the analysis of his treatment of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos contained in the last chapter, Skylitzes' fondness for swashbuckling military anecdotes and his willingness to embroider heroic incidents was noted. This enthusiasm seems compatible with the almost obsessive interest in martial valour which Alexander Každan has identified among the Byzantine ruling families of the later eleventh century.³¹ Further convincing evidence that Skylitzes was writing with an aristocratic audience in mind, is the emphasis that he places upon carefully recording the names, titles and pedigrees of the leading families of the empire during the ninth to eleventh centuries. This emphasis is particularly visible in his retention of the family trees and marriage alliances of the Lekapenos, Argyros and Kourkouas families during his coverage of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos. Nor is his interest in such clans solely confined to the early tenth century. Instead, in the case of the Argyros family his attention persists into the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Thus, in his coverage of the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (945-59), he includes an extensive report on Marianos Argyros' expedition against Sicily. During the reign of Basil II, Basil Argyros is cited twice: first as the *strategos* of Samos who was defeated by the Italian rebel Meles in 1011; second as the first Byzantine commander of

²⁹ See above, pp.56-9, for discussion of Skylitzes' syntax and language register

³⁰ Jeffreys *et al.*, *Studies in John Malalas*, pp.6-11

³¹ See, for example, Každan, 'Der Mensch', p.18ff; *idem.*, 'Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal', in M.Angold (ed.), *Byzantine Aristocracy* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1984), pp.43-58; Každan and Wharton Epstein, 'Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', pp.104-117; Každan, 'The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', pp.23-86.

Vaspurakan. Also recorded is the marriage of the sister of Romanos Argyros to the Doge of Venice. She is explicitly described as “the sister of Argyros who was emperor after these things.”³²

Indeed, Skylitzes’ fascination with the personnel of the elite families of the empire is visible elsewhere in his coverage of the reign of Basil II. His narrative of the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas is replete with names of leading members of the aristocracy. He is careful to record the identities of many senior army commanders within both the Bulgarian and the imperial armies during his testimony of Basil’s campaigns in the Balkans. In his analysis of imperial relations with Caucasia he is conspicuously concerned to record the names of members of the elite who entered Byzantine service from Armenia and Iberia. For example, when Basil II annexed the Iberian princedom of Tao in 1000, Skylitzes informs the reader that Pakourianos, Phebdatos, and Pherses were raised to the rank of *patrikios* and entered the service of the emperor. They are specifically described as being “foremost according to their family (*genos*) in Iberia”. During his account of Basil’s Balkan campaign of 1016 Skylitzes returns to the family of Phebdatos. In his story of Bulgarian attempts to forge an alliance with the Pechenegs, he refers to Tzotzikios the *strategos* of Dristra as, “the son of the *patrikios* Theudatos (Phebdatos) the Iberian”.³³

So great, indeed, is Skylitzes’ emphasis on the elite families in his coverage of Basil’s reign that the narrative is almost entirely presented through the prism of aristocratic names, with the result that the emperor himself is often nothing more than a fleeting presence. For example, at the battle of Kleidion in the Haimos mountains in 1014, acclaimed by Skylitzes as a crushing victory over the

³² Skylitzes, pp.266-7, 348, 354, 343; cf. Lupus Protospatharius, *MGH SS V*, p.58; see below, p.320

Bulgarians, the success of imperial armies is not accorded to Basil himself, but to the inspiration of the commander Nikephoros Xiphias. When the Byzantine armies could not break through the blockade which the Bulgarians had established in the pass of Kleidion, it was Xiphias who recommended that a party of men should be led through the mountains to attack the enemy from the rear. Xiphias himself then led this operation.³⁴ This concentration on the aristocracy at the expense of the emperor may make sense of the criticism included in Skylitzes' preface that historians such as Michael Psellos: "have fallen short of accuracy, having passed over the most opportune things,having made an enumeration of the emperors and having taught who happened to hold imperial rule after whom and nothing more".³⁵ Here, Skylitzes may be implying that the deeds of the emperor were not the more "opportune things" of the past, and that he himself in the course of his compilation was about to depart from this traditional interpretation of history. This is not to suggest that Skylitzes entirely ignores the person of the emperor as a unit around whom the rest of his text is organised. His narrative structure is, for example, based on individual imperial reigns. He usually retains imperial accession dates and lengths of reigns. Yet, within the narrative itself, the focus falls as much on individual members of the elite as on emperors.

Skylitzes' overwhelming interest in the aristocracy becomes particularly obvious once his text is compared with that of John Zonaras. Despite using Skylitzes' 'Synopsis' as one of his principal sources, Zonaras' account of the reign of Basil II, for example, is almost barren of aristocratic names. At key moments in his narrative Zonaras mentions the collective activities of groups of aristocrats in a general

³³ Skylitzes, pp.339, 356

³⁴ Skylitzes, pp.348-9.

³⁵ Skylitzes, p.3; see above, chapter one, p.50. R.Scott, 'The Classical Tradition in Byzantine Historiography', in M.Mullett and R.Scott (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham, 1981), pp.69-70 argues that in medieval Byzantium the reign of the emperor became the standard unit for the writing and interpretation of history.

sense, but with the exception of the principal actors such as Bardas Skleros or Bardas Phokas, individual members of the elite are almost never identified. Thus, during his coverage of the first revolt of Skleros, Zonaras omits all Skylitzes' references to the rebel commanders Michael Bourtzes, Anthes Alyates, Pegasios, Constantine Gauras, the Hagiozacharites brothers, Isaac Brachamios, Andronikos Doukas, Bardas Moungos, Christopher Epeiktes and Leo Aichmalotos.³⁶ By such methods Zonaras removes Skylitzes' conspicuous interest in the exploits of the aristocrats from his account of Basil's reign, and refocuses the narrative around the person of the emperor himself.

II. Political contexts

One explanation for why Skylitzes' 'Synopsis' emerges as the history of the aristocrats is that it was composed in the second half of the eleventh century at a time of immense political tension within the Byzantine political elite. Whether Skylitzes was writing the 'Synopsis' in either the 1070s as Seibt suggests, or the 1090s as I would maintain,³⁷ this was a period characterised by endemic competition for imperial power among the more important families of the Byzantine empire. The past in such circumstances was an important legitimising tool. Michael Attaleiates' elaborate genealogy of the emperor Nicephoros III Botaneiates (1078-81), which traces the emperor's descent from the tenth-century Phokades and the first-century Fabii, demonstrates clearly how the writers of history looked to both the immediate and the remote past to bolster dynastic prestige. Within his generally encomiastic treatment of the emperors Constantine X (1059-67) and Michael VII Doukas (1071-78) in the 'Chronographia', Michael

³⁶ Zonaras, ed. Büttner-Wobst (Bonn, 1897), pp.539-46; Skylitzes, pp.314-28

³⁷ See above, p.38

Psellos includes several references to the genealogy of the imperial family.³⁸ Although Skylitzes' interest in the deeds and family trees of the empire's aristocracy cannot be directly compared with the genealogical enterprises of Attaleiates and Psellos, since the 'Synopsis' is a survey which ranges far wider than the achievements and pedigrees of a single family, it is possible that his text was composed within the very specific political context of aristocratic rivalry at the end of the eleventh century.

It is possible to unravel this political context by starting from the observation that Skylitzes' 'Synopsis' often resembles a 'Who Was Who' of the 'Who Is Who' of the last quarter of the eleventh century.³⁹ That is to say Skylitzes' text frequently displays a conspicuous interest in those figures from the Byzantine past whose ancestors enjoyed political significance in the later eleventh century. Thus, in Skylitzes' narrative of the first Skleros revolt during Basil's reign, he pays particular attention to Anthes Alyates. He describes Alyates as one of Skleros' most effective servants. He notes that it was Alyates whom Skleros sent to rescue his son Romanos Skleros from the imperial palace before the revolt began. He also records Alyates' death during a battle in the Anti Taurus mountains a few months after the outbreak of revolt.⁴⁰ Yet, Skylitzes' detailed interest in Alyates' role in Basil's reign may be dictated more by the political significance of his family in the later eleventh century than during the later tenth. In this context it is worth noting that

³⁸ Attaleiates (Michael): *Historia*, ed. I.Bekker, (CSHB, Bonn, 1853), pp.216-27; Psellos, pp.134, 141; Každan, 'Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', pp.28-9; idem., 'Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal', p.45; P.Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery', in M.Angold (ed.), *Byzantine Aristocracy* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1984), p.64. For late eleventh-century and twelfth-century interest in *genos* see also P.Magdalino, 'Honour among the Romaioi: the Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos', *BMGS* 13 (1989), pp.183-4, 193-6.

³⁹ Analogous to the case of Skylitzes may be the thirteenth-century synoptic history written by George Akropolites, the *meγas logothetes* of Michael VIII Palaiologos (1258-82). Ruth Macrides argues that this history resembles a 'Who's Who' of the Empire of Nikaia. Like Skylitzes Akropolites demonstrates concern that the full names and titles of all officials and aristocrats should be accurately recorded: R.Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', in E.Jeffreys *et al.* (eds.), *Φιλολογία, Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (London, 1996), pp.221-2.

one of Alyates' descendants, a certain Theodore, had been a leading supporter of Romanos IV during the civil wars which overtook the Byzantine empire in 1071. He was taken prisoner in battle and blinded by the forces of Michael VII Doukas. His career in the political ferment of the third quarter of the eleventh century is described by Michael Attaleiates. Significantly, he is a character in whom Skylitzes himself took an interest. When Skylitzes came to use Attaleiates' 'Historia' to write the Continuation to the 'Synopsis' he retained the story of Theodore Alyates.⁴¹

A similarly retrospective rationale may underpin Skylitzes' consistent focus on an individual called Anemas in his accounts of the reigns of the mid tenth-century emperors Nikephoros Phocas and John Tzimiskes. In Skylitzes' appraisal Anemas is mentioned as the son of the emir of Crete who was taken prisoner by the Byzantines during the capture of the island by Nikephoros Phokas in 961. Later he receives two citations for bravery during the campaign led by John Tzimiskes against Dristra on the Lower Danube in 971. He is first depicted fighting heroically against the Rus as a member of the imperial bodyguard. In his second appearance he is killed after a valiant but abortive assault on the Rus prince Svyatoslav.⁴² Yet, it is clear from other evidence relating to the name Anemas that Skylitzes' interest in this tenth-century individual may have been determined by the prestige of the family in the early Komnenian period rather than by his importance in the tenth-century Byzantine polity. Just how important this family was during the later eleventh century is made clear by a variety of Byzantine authors. For example, Anna Komnene includes an account of the rebellion of the four Anemai brothers in her narrative of the reign of Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118).⁴³ She indicates that

⁴⁰ Skylitzes, pp.315-6, 318

⁴¹ Attaleiates, pp.170-1; Skylitzes Continuatus, p.153.

⁴² Skylitzes, pp.249, 304, 308.

⁴³ Anna Komnene: *Anne Comnène, Alexiade*, ed. B.Leib, (3 vols., Paris, 1967), iii, 69-74. Although undated in the 'Alexiad', the revolt is usually assumed to have occurred before 1102 (Cheynet,

the Anemai were leading figures in the army.⁴⁴ The prominence of the Anemai in early Komnenian political society is confirmed in the letters of Theophylact, the contemporary archbishop of Ochrid. One of his correspondents in the period 1093-5 was Nicholas Anemas who held a senior military position in Macedonia, possibly as *doux* of Skopje.⁴⁵

On several other occasions Skylitzes' decision to record the arrival within Byzantine elite of certain "outsiders" during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries may also have been determined by the political significance of aristocratic families with the same name at the end of the eleventh century. Thus, the inclusion of the name Pakourianos among the list of Iberians who entered the service of Basil II in 1000, may stem from his perceived association with the later eleventh-century general Gregory Pakourianos. The role of this latter-day Pakourianos as a powerbroker within the Byzantine polity at the time of the Komnenian coup against Nikephoros III Botaneiates in 1081 is described in detail in the 'Alexiad'. Created *mezas domestikos* by Alexios as a reward for his loyalty, he was the founder of the Georgian monastery at Bačkovo in Bulgaria.⁴⁶ Although he himself appears to have died without children in 1086, one of his younger relatives, also called Gregory, was the son-in-law of Nikephoros Komnenos, the brother of the emperor Alexios. In the mid-1090s Archbishop Theophylact of Ochrid noted that despite his youth this junior Pakourianos enjoyed free access to and counsel with (*parrhesia*)

Pouvoir et Contestations, pp.100-01; B.Skoulatos, *Les personnages byzantins de l'Alexiade* (Louvain, 1980) pp.172, 200-02)

⁴⁴ Michael Anemas led a detachment of Byzantine troops against the Cumans in 1094 (Skoulatos, *Les personnages byzantins*, p.200).

⁴⁵ Theophylact of Ochrid, letters 32, 34, 41. Gautier suggests that Anemas held the position of *doux* of Skopje. He argues that Anemas returned to Constantinople in 1094/5 (Theophylact of Ochrid: *Théophylacte d'Achrida Lettres*, ed. Gautier, pp.39-40). Mullett goes no further than seeing Anemas as a young friend of the bishop who was an official in Bulgaria (Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp.147, 183, 275-6). It is not clear whether Nicholas himself was one of the four brothers who rebelled.

the emperor Alexios.⁴⁷ A comparable example concerns Skylitzes' record of the handover of Vaspurakan by the Armenian prince Senecherim in the final decade of Basil II's reign. Once again a member of a family with the same name was closely associated with the Komnenos regime at the end of the eleventh century. In May 1089 Theodore Senecherim, described as a close associate (*oikeios*) of the emperor Alexios, was sent to oversee the restoration of the Xenophon monastery on Mount Athos to its original founder.⁴⁸

Of course both these late eleventh-century personalities may have had very little to do with their late tenth- and early eleventh-century namesakes. Indeed, in the *typikon* of his monastery at Bačkovo, Gregory suggests that his family had still been located in Iberia until very recent times. He identifies his father as Pakourianos, the “*archon* of the *archontes* of the very noble race of the Iberians.”⁴⁹ After his father's early death he himself wandered through Armenia, Iberia and Syria before seeking employment within the empire.⁵⁰ His Caucasian background was also noted by Anna Komnene.⁵¹ However, the probity of genealogical connections did not have to be Skylitzes' principal concern. The more important

⁴⁶ Skylitzes, pp.339-40; Anna Komnene, i, 73-4; *Typikon*: P.Gautier, 'Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos', *REB* 42 (1984), pp.5-145; P.Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1970), pp.114-191; Skoulatos, *Les personnages byzantins*, pp.112-5.

⁴⁷ Theophylact of Ochrid, letter 68. Gregory was appointed to command in Macedonia during the mid-1090s possibly as governor of Ochrid (Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp.94, 130, 146, 186, 215, 276).

⁴⁸ Skylitzes, pp.354-5; see below, chapter six, p.284; *Actes de Xénophon*, Archives de l'Athos XV, ed. D.Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1986), p.71. This later eleventh-century Senecherim may also be the senior fiscal official of whom Theophylact of Ochrid complained c.1094/5 (Theophylact of Ochrid, letter 77; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p.130).

⁴⁹ *Typikon* (Pakourianos), p.21

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.92

⁵¹ Anna terms Pakourianos an Armenian (Anna Komnene, i, 74). Pakourianos identifies himself rather more broadly. According to his *typikon* he founded his monastery explicitly for the Iberians who had served with him in the Byzantine army and who only spoke Georgian (*Typikon*, p.21). However, he added his signature to the *typikon* in Armenian script (*ibid.*, p.130), while at the same time mentioning that he had Armenian Monophysite relatives (*ibid.*, p.129); cf. N.G.Garsoian, 'Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire', in H.Ahrweiler and A.E.Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, 1998), pp.89-91.

point is that these names from the tenth and early eleventh centuries fitted the political landscape of the later eleventh-century world very neatly.

The most conspicuous group of “outsiders” to attract Skylitzes’ interest in the reign of Basil II was the Bulgarian royal family which was removed from imperial office in 1018 and absorbed within the Byzantine aristocracy. As we have already noted, the second half of Skylitzes’ testimony for the reign of Basil II concentrates almost exclusively on relations with the first Bulgarian empire. Within this narrative most attention is paid to the last four years of the war and the final Bulgarian capitulation.⁵² Dominating the narrative of the surrender itself is a detailed analysis of the size and personnel of the Bulgarian royal family. Skylitzes notes that when Maria, the widow of the last Bulgarian tsar John Vladislav, was brought before Basil II at Ochrid, she was accompanied by three of her own sons and six daughters, as well as by two daughters and five sons of the previous tsar, Gabriel Radomir, and an illegitimate son of the tsar Samuel, Gabriel’s father. Skylitzes goes on to record the surrender shortly afterwards of three more sons of John Vladislav.⁵³ Moving beyond Basil’s reign, Skylitzes continues to chart the progress of the principal members of the family, stressing above all their participation in conspiracies and their marital connections with the Byzantine aristocracy as a whole. Two episodes of aristocratic unrest involving Prousianos, one of John Vladislav’s sons, during the reigns of Constantine VIII and Romanos III are described by Skylitzes. In the first of these accounts the reader is told that the sister of Prousianos was married to Romanos Kourkouas who was blinded by Constantine VIII on suspicion of conspiracy.⁵⁴ During the reign of Michael IV, Skylitzes records the participation of Alousianos, the brother of Prousianos, in the

⁵² See above, pp.24-5

Balkan revolt of Peter Deljan. He begins his description with the reflection that Alousianos was the second son of Aaron (that is John Vladislav), and that he was married to a wife with an estate in the theme of the Charsianon.⁵⁵

It is possible that Skylitzes displays such long-term interest in the family history of the house of John Vladislav because by the end of the eleventh century all the principal families of the empire, including the Komnenoi, had genealogical connections to the former Bulgarian ruling dynasty. During the revolt of Isaac Komnenos in 1057 Skylitzes cites the *magistros* Aaron, one of the sons of John Vladislav, as one of the commanders who remained loyal to the emperor Michael VI. Nonetheless, he also mentions that Aaron's sister was married to Isaac.⁵⁶ This sister was called Catherine. She became empress when her husband Isaac overthrew Michael VI and became emperor. Two years later Isaac was forced to abdicate. According to Michael Psellos, Catherine held Psellos himself responsible for her husband's demise. However, Psellos seems to have had grudging admiration for Catherine, whom he noted was descended "from a very noble family".⁵⁷ Anna Komnene confirms the continuing significance of Bulgarian aristocratic ancestry to status within Byzantine political society at the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century. One obscure revolt against Alexios, she notes, was led by, ".... a man who traced his ancestry back to the famous Aaronoi on one side". The fact that this rebel descended from an illegitimate branch of the family does not appear

⁵³ Skylitzes, pp.359-60. All of the medieval manuscripts record that one of the six sons was Prousianos. Manuscript U adds the names Alousianos, Aaron, Traianos, Radomir; manuscript E adds the name Klimen.

⁵⁴ Skylitzes, pp.372, 376, 384

⁵⁵ Skylitzes, pp.413-415

⁵⁶ Skylitzes, p.493

⁵⁷ Psellos, pp.131-3

to have diminished the lustre of his pedigree or the extent of his political threat in Anna's eyes.⁵⁸

Skylitzes' treatment of the Bulgarian royal family makes it particularly evident that he did not simply conceive of the 'Synopsis Historion' as a genealogical address book of the past. Instead, it is clear that his wider interpretation of the history of the Byzantine empire, the "more opportune things" of the past, was centred on dynastic competition and revolt, particularly among those families who were famous at the end of the eleventh century. The regularity with which aristocratic insurrection had punctuated the senior levels of elite political society in Byzantium during the decades following the death of the last Macedonian empress, Theodora, in 1056, does not make this interpretation surprising. Nonetheless, the idea that Skylitzes produced a compendium of revolt for an audience composed of predominantly of aristocrats, sits uneasily with his position as a highly placed official within the administration of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos.

In order to appreciate fully the ambiguity between Skylitzes' historical interests and his professional role as a civil servant, it is worth stressing the seniority of the position which he enjoyed within Komnenian government at the beginning of the 1090s and his close association with the emperor Alexios himself. In the first place, Skylitzes held the title of *kouropalates*. Although the author of the late eleventh/early twelfth century 'Historia Syntomos' of pseudo-Psellos claims that rank of *kouropalates* "is common now and borne by many people", it was still an important secular title during the reign of Alexios Komnenos.⁵⁹ At the 1094-5

⁵⁸ Anna Komnene, iii, 88-91. Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p.102. In 1107 this Aaron accompanied the emperor Alexios on his campaign in the western Balkans against Bohemond (Skoulatos, *Les personnages byzantins*, pp.3-4).

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Psellos, p.100. This rank held a much more exclusive cachet in the tenth century. Leo Phokas, the brother of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963-9), held this title, as did Bardas Skleros after he surrendered to Basil II in 989. When Skleros was *kouropalates* he was described as second

Synod of Blachernae only seventeen laymen held a title of superior rank, and many of these were members of leading aristocratic families related by marriage to the ruling dynasty.⁶⁰ Moreover, although Skylitzes' position of *mezas drungarios* of the *vigla* was usually held by someone of legal training, evidence from the twelfth-century 'Ecloga Basilicorum' suggests that important officers of the Komnenian judiciary were in the first instance political place men. They were appointed, "..... not because of their legal knowledge but because of their rank and their loyalty to the emperor. The many and frequent cares which beset officials and their attendance on the emperor excuse their ignorance."⁶¹ When Constantine Keroularios was *droungarios* of the *vigla* during the reign of Michael VII (1071-8), he held the senior title of *protoproedros* and was one of the emperor's senior advisers. Such was his political influence that he was accused by contemporary historians of controlling grants of titles and offices.⁶² Another sign of Skylitzes' own political importance to the Komnenian regime was his exercise of the office of *eparch* of Constantinople, during the early 1090s, the period Alexios was under constant threat from internal rivals as well as external foes.⁶³ At such a sensitive time the *eparch*, responsible for public order and the administration of justice within the capital city of the empire, had to be a servant of the utmost loyalty and discretion. In these circumstances, the question of how one of the most senior Komnenian officials, and a man of tried and tested loyalty to the incumbent

in rank only to the emperor (Skylitzes, p.339; Psellos, p.16). R.Guilland, 'Curopalate', in *Titres et fonctions de l'empire byzantin* (London/Variorum, 1976), no III, pp.190-2, discusses the decline in the prestige of this title during the eleventh century; he recognises that Skylitzes and John Thrakesios held the title *kouropalates*, but does not seem to realise that they were the same man.

⁶⁰ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180)*, (Cambridge, 1993), appendix 2, pp.501-3.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.262-3

⁶² Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 279-83; Bryennios, pp.211-13; Hicks, 'The Life and Historical Writings of Michael Attaleiates', pp.238-9.

⁶³ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp.96-9, 361-7 argues that by the 1090s Alexios' regime was widely criticised. Despite enjoying some respite from Norman attack after the death of Robert Guiscard in 1085, and defeating the Pechenegs in 1091/2 at Levounion, domestic discontent was rife. Opposition ranged from criticisms contained in the 1090-1 speeches of John the Oxite, the rebellion of the general Humbertopoulos in the same year, and the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094.

emperor, could write a history which interpreted the past in terms of endemic aristocratic disorder becomes even more perplexing.

A political context developed within Paul Magdalino's analysis of Komnenian government suggests one way in which Skylitzes' professional career as a top-ranking Komnenian official could have been compatible with his interpretation of remote and recent history as the story of the rival aristocratic families. Magdalino has suggested that the regime of the emperor Alexios Komnenos was characterised by its inclusive policies towards other leading aristocratic families. One manifestation of this greater inclusivity was frequent intermarriage between the great dynasties of the empire, such as the Komnenos, the Doukas, the Kontostephanos, and the Bryennios families. In the early years of Alexios' reign Magdalino believes that this strategy of intermarriage was not simply a form of imperial reward for loyal supporters, but was a conciliatory policy explicitly designed to placate recent opponents.⁶⁴ While one would not wish to imply that Skylitzes' history was sponsored or commissioned by the emperor, it is possible that the articulation of history presented in the 'Synopsis Historion' by one of the emperor's most loyal servants may be related to this official policy of division healing within the aristocracy. In the emphasis which it places on the predecessors of contemporary aristocratic families, their valiant deeds, their long-standing associations with high politics, and their frequent intermarriages, the 'Synopsis' of Skylitzes may contain echoes of the Komnenian propaganda which accompanied the processes of dynastic integration.

The idea that a context of greater political inclusivity underpins Skylitzes' production may help to explain the retention and elaboration of other materials

⁶⁴ Magdalino, *Manuel Komnenos*, pp.187, 202-6; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp.359-60, 369-75.

within the 'Synopsis'. For example at several key junctures in his later tenth- and eleventh- century testimony Skylitzes describes the interventions of the military saints, Theodore *Stratelates*, George and especially Demetrios. He records that after the fall of Preslav in 971 to the emperor John Tzimiskes, the Rus were defeated in open battle on the feast day of Saint George. During that emperor's final victory over the Rus at Dristra in 971, Saint Theodore was said to have appeared on a white horse offering assistance to the imperial armies. Tzimiskes' subsequent support for the cult of Theodore at Euchaneia in Paphlagonia is also mentioned.⁶⁵ An aside inserted into the text shortly after Basil II's victory over Bardas Phokas at Abydos, records the emperor's pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Demetrios at Thessalonika.⁶⁶ Later in the text during Skylitzes' coverage of the revolt of Peter Deljan c.1040, Saint Demetrios is also attributed with the relief of the siege of the city of Thessalonika.⁶⁷ It is possible that these stories were purposefully included, or retained, in Skylitzes' text because by the mid- to later eleventh century, military saints were a powerful propaganda tool for the rallying of aristocratic solidarity. The popularity of military saints among soldiers and aristocrats is nowhere more visible than on the lead seals of many members of the Byzantine political elite, especially those who held senior military positions, and no-one was more fond of these saints than the Komnenoi. The seals issued by Alexios Komnenos himself before he became emperor depict Demetrios. The seals of his brothers Isaac and

⁶⁵ Skylitzes, pp.300, 308-9. The emperor rebuilt the church containing the tomb of Saint Theodore at Euchaneia and renamed the town "Theodoropolis". N.Oikonomides, 'Le dédoublement de Saint Théodore et les villes d'Euchaita et d'Euchaina', *AB* 104 (1986), pp.327-35 argues that Euchaina/Euchaneia, the cult centre of Saint Theodore the general (*Stratelates*), was probably a hilltop site near the city of Euchaita, the location of the tomb of Saint Theodore the Recruit (*Tiron*). The tombs of both saint Theodores were popular pilgrimage sites during the eleventh century (E.Malamut, *Sur la route des saints byzantins* (Paris, 1993), p.42).

⁶⁶ Skylitzes, p.339. It was probably during this pilgrimage to Thessalonika, which preceded his 991 campaign against the Bulgarians, that Basil met Saint Photios, the monk who became his spiritual guide and accompanied him on campaigns thereafter. During his lifetime Basil made pilgrimages to the tombs of the warrior martyrs Saint George, Saint Theodore *Tiron* and Saint Theodore *Stratelates* (see above, pp.8-9, n.25; Crostini, 'The Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life', p.78; Schlumberger, *L'Épopée byzantine*, i, 646 and ii, pp.46-7).

⁶⁷ Skylitzes, p.413. Kekaumenos, who conveys a shorter narrative of the same siege, does not mention the intervention of Saint Demetrios (Kekaumenos, pp.160-2)

Adrian feature saints Theodore and George respectively.⁶⁸ Many Komnenian emperors used depictions of military saints on some of their issues of coinage. Alexios' own choice fell on Saint Demetrios.⁶⁹

Of greater significance to the argument that Skylitzes' 'Synopsis' is predicated on the desirability of cohesion within the early Komnenian body politic, however, is the fact that most of the miraculous interventions cited by Skylitzes occur in Balkan contexts. At the end of the eleventh century the Balkans were the principal theatre of Byzantine warfare. In the first two decades of Alexios' reign Byzantine armies were engaged with Normans in the west of the region and nomads in the north. Anna Komnene's accounts of Alexios' Balkan expeditions in this period make it clear that many leading aristocrats occupied positions of high command within the Byzantine campaign armies. Yet, recent research by Cheynet has argued the Balkan policy of the early years of Alexios' reign may have been unpopular with many members of the Byzantine elite. He notes that most incidents of aristocratic discontent against the Komnenian regime occurred shortly after imperial victories in the Balkans; whereas, once Alexios turned his attention to Asia Minor in the second half of his reign such dissent evaporated.⁷⁰ If Skylitzes was at work on the 'Synopsis Historion' in the 1090s, then he was writing at a time when imperial attention was still predominantly focused on the Balkans. In these circumstances, it seems reasonable to argue that one of Skylitzes' motivations in writing may have been to allay contemporary aristocratic suspicion of the geographical trajectory of Alexios' campaigns. Such a motivation would explain two conspicuous preoccupations within Skylitzes' text. First, the overwhelming interest which his narrative takes in the Balkans; and second, the author's frequent demonstration that

⁶⁸ See for example G.Zacos and A.Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (3 vols., Basle, 1972), i, nos.2701-2 (Isaac brother of Alexios); 2704-07 (Alexios before he became emperor); 2708 (Adrian).

it was the bravery of earlier aristocratic generations which had regained the Balkans for the empire in the reigns of John Tzimiskes and Basil II.

Both of these preoccupations are visible throughout the whole of Skylitzes' text. As we have already seen the second half of Skylitzes' treatment of the reign of Basil is almost entirely devoted to the Bulgarian wars. During the course of his narrative he lionises senior army generals such as Nikephoros Xiphias.⁷¹ He also dedicates more than two-thirds of his coverage of the reign of John Tzimiskes to the Balkan sphere, the context in which the heroics of Anemas are recorded.⁷² Other aristocratic names who receive Skylitzes' attention during his Balkan coverage in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries include Gregory and Ashot Taronites, Theophylact and Michael Botaneiates, Constantine Diogenes, and David Areianites.⁷³ These were exactly the families who enjoyed immense political authority at the end of the eleventh century and whose loyalty Alexios needed to consolidate. For example, the Taronites were a high-profile family related to the Komnenoi by marriage.⁷⁴ The Diogenes family had already provided one emperor of recent times, Romanos IV (1068-71), and by the 1090s his son Nikephoros was perceived to be the most dangerous of Alexios' rivals. Despite serving with the imperial campaigns of the 1080s against Normans and Pechenegs, and being appointed governor of Crete, Nikephoros was eventually blinded in 1094 on charges of conspiracy.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the scion of another leading family, Nikephoros III Botaneiates had occupied the imperial throne before Alexios became emperor. Even families featured in

⁶⁹ Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p.51 and n.213. The Saint Demetrios issue was struck at Thessalonika.

⁷⁰ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp.362, 368.

⁷¹ See above, p.90

⁷² See above, p.93

⁷³ Skylitzes, pp.339-42 (Taronites); pp.350 (Botaneiates); pp.352, 355-6, 365 (Diogenes); pp.345, 354-5, 358 (Areianites).

⁷⁴ John Taronites was the brother-in-law of Alexios Komnenos (Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p.277)

⁷⁵ Nikephoros participated in military actions against the Normans in 1081 and Pechenegs 1087 (Anna Komnene, i, 155; ii, 90, 96, 100); his conspiracy (ibid., ii, 169-184).

Skylitzes' tenth and early eleventh-century Balkan coverage with less obvious later eleventh-century imperial credentials remained influential in the period when Alexios came to power. Towards the end of the eleventh century, for example, a certain Leo Areianites held the senior rank of *protoproedros* and was *katepan* of the theme of the Optimatoi.⁷⁶

Intriguing confirmation that late eleventh-century demands of greater political inclusivity conditioned Skylitzes' treatment of his Balkan material emerges in one episode of his coverage of John Tzimiskes' siege of Dristra in 971. During a recent and detailed study of the Greek sources which report on this battle, Stamatina McGrath has observed that both Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes composed their accounts of this campaign using the same basic source material. She argues that Leo's account was much more faithful to original detail, whereas Skylitzes was vaguer and more generalised. For example, where Leo reports that Svyatoslav the leader of the Rus was hit between the neck and the shoulder by the Byzantine hero Anemas, Skylitzes merely reflects that he was hit on the head. Equally where Leo alleges that one of the Byzantine generals, John Kourkouas, was killed while he was drunk, divinely punished for pilfering some Bulgarian holy vessels, Skylitzes maintains more prosaically that he was killed while heroically defending a siege machine.⁷⁷ It is likely that Skylitzes called upon his generalising and homogenising military vocabulary discussed in the first chapter of this thesis to describe both of these martial encounters.⁷⁸ Yet, the fact that Skylitzes went to the trouble of altering the narrative involving John Kourkouas requires more explanation than simple

⁷⁶ J.Nesbitt and N.Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, (3 vols., Washington D.C., 1996), iii, no.71.27

⁷⁷ McGrath, 'The Battles of Dorostolon', pp.152-62; Skylitzes, pp.304, 308; Leo the Deacon, p.148 (Kourkouas), p.153 (death of Anemas). The possibility that Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes used the same source, probably a war diary (*Kriegesbuch*), for their accounts of warfare in the Balkans during the reign of John Tzimiskes, was also raised by G.Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica, Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1958), pp.398-9.

⁷⁸ See above, pp.70-73

standardisation. I would suggest that the clue to this emendation is to be found in the career of one of Kourkouas' late eleventh-century descendants. In 1091-2, the year when Alexios finally defeated the nomad Pechenegs at Levounion, Gregory Kourkouas was *doux* of Philippoupolis, a crucial position in the defence system of the Balkans.⁷⁹ With such an important Balkan city in the hands of Kourkouas, Skylitzes had a powerful motive for obscuring the fact that during that glorious campaign which had first taken Byzantine frontiers back up to the Danube in 971, one of Gregory's forebears had been drunk at his post.

III. Conclusions: Skylitzes and the reign of Basil II

This chapter has outlined some of the later eleventh-century literary, social and political contexts within which John Skylitzes composed the 'Synopsis Historion'. It has been argued that the text itself was compiled by an author, who worked within the upper echelons of the imperial administration during the first two decades of Komnenian rule, for an aristocratic audience which was also based in the Constantinopolitan court. This hypothesis is supported not only by the fact that Skylitzes held a senior position within the imperial government of Alexios Komnenos, but also by textual evidence from within the 'Synopsis Historion' itself.

Although Skylitzes, like other eleventh- and twelfth-century synoptic historians, claimed in his preface that his literary compilation represented a departure from high-style histories, the first half of this chapter has demonstrated the close links between such abbreviated histories and their higher-style counterparts. It has been

⁷⁹ Kourkouas' position as *doux* of Philippoupolis is known from sigillographic and epigraphical evidence. It is a dated inscription at Plovdiv (Philippoupolis) which indicates that he held the position of *doux* in 1091-2 (I.Jordanov, 'Medieval Plovdiv According to the Sphragistic Data', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS* 4 (Washington, 1995), pp.119-121). The prominence of the Kourkouai at the end of the eleventh century may also explain why their pedigree is retained in Skylitzes' coverage of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (see above, pp.62-3)

suggested that synopses and high-style histories were complementary texts rather than polar opposites: they were both read and written by those who lived and worked in the milieu of the early Komnenian Constantinopolitan court. Moreover, the likelihood that Skylitzes was writing for an elite audience based in the imperial capital is supported by several of the key diagnostics which emerge from his treatment of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos. These diagnostics include the middling language level he employs; his interest in swash-buckling military stories; his enthusiasm for the genealogies of key aristocratic families, above all those dynasties which were of political significance towards the end of the eleventh century.

In the second half of this chapter it has been suggested that Skylitzes' devotion to the deeds and pedigrees of the leading aristocratic families of the Byzantine empire was rooted in a very distinct political, as well as social and literary, context. This political context was underpinned by the conditions of internal and external insecurity which prevailed in the Byzantine empire during the first two decades of the reign of Alexios Komnenos. Externally, the greatest danger came from nomad and Norman attacks on the Balkans; internally, the greatest perils were posed by those aristocratic families which rivalled the Komnenoi. Both these tensions shaped Skylitzes' historical writing. On the one hand hostility between leading families at the end of the eleventh century encouraged Skylitzes to interpret the Byzantine past in terms of dynastic connections and competition. On the other hand, his interest in aristocratic achievement in the Balkans may have been shaped by an imperially-sanctioned desire that all the major aristocratic families should work together to protect this region of the empire from external attack.

At various points in the chapter the ways in which these later eleventh-century literary, social, and political contexts shaped Skylitzes' presentation of the reign of Basil II have been highlighted, as have the distortions which these contexts can impose. It has been argued, for example, that the prosopography of Basil's reign is often conditioned by the 'Who's Who' of the Komnenian period. This later eleventh-century filter can distort our understanding of the relative importance of individuals and families within political society during the reign of Basil. For example, it is possible that Skylitzes' reports on the entrance of several Armenian, Georgian and Bulgarian "outsiders" to imperial service during the reign of Basil, are determined more by the political significance of their later-eleventh century descendants, than by their role within Byzantine political society in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Likewise, some of the rebels involved in the first Skleros revolt (976-9), may be retained within Skylitzes' narrative on the basis of the political significance of their eleventh-century descendants, rather than their own importance to the political history of the reign of Basil. At a more general level, it has been suggested that Skylitzes' enthusiasm for interpreting the Byzantine past through the achievements of the great aristocratic families can obscure the role of the emperor. The marginalisation of the emperor as a principal character in the narrative is particularly visible during Skylitzes' coverage of the Balkan wars in the second half of the reign.

As a final point, it is worth considering the most important danger that Skylitzes' aristocratic articulation of the Byzantine past, and his concomitant neglect of the person of the emperor, presents to the historian of Basil's reign. This danger is that Skylitzes' account can convey a false impression of the balance of power between imperial authority and leading members of the political elite. That is to say, by looking at the later tenth and early eleventh centuries through Skylitzes' eyes, it is

easy to overstate the power and prominence of aristocratic families and underestimate the authority of the emperor. While such a balance of power in favour of the aristocracy was the context within which the later eleventh-century politics of Skylitzes' own lifetime were played out, the political situation in the reign of Basil II may have been quite different. Indeed, as the rest of this thesis will demonstrate, the reign of Basil was a period when imperial authority was far from moribund.

Chapter Three

The Revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas: Historiographical Traditions

I. Introduction

The first two chapters of this thesis have constituted historiographical explorations into the main Greek narrative of Basil's reign, the 'Synopsis Historion' of John Skylitzes. Both discussions have been predicated on the premiss that Skylitzes' treatment of the reign of Basil II is best approached through an understanding of how his text as a whole was put together at the end of the eleventh century. One of the key reasons for adopting this broader historiographical focus is the lack of other historical accounts covering the period 976-1025, against which Skylitzes' coverage of Basil's reign can be compared directly. However, there is one period of Basil's reign where the problem of scarcity of evidence is less acute, and a relatively substantial section of Skylitzes' account can be set against several other detailed historical narratives. This period comprises the first thirteen years of the reign (976-89), when the emperor Basil, and his brother and co-emperor Constantine VIII, were challenged for imperial power by the generals Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas. In addition to accounting for approximately half of Skylitzes' coverage of Basil, these revolts represent the dominant narrative in the analyses of the reign presented by Leo the Deacon and Michael Psellos.¹ They also command considerable attention from several other contemporary historians and

¹ Skylitzes, pp.314-39; Leo the Deacon, pp.169-75; Psellos, pp.1-18

hagiographers working on the eastern periphery of the Byzantine world in languages other than Greek, including Stephen of Taron (Armenian), Yahya ibn Sa'id (Arabic), and the author of the Georgian 'Life of John and Euthymios'.² Even historians writing in Arabic in locations far away from Byzantium, whose interest in the domestic history of the empire was rather more occasional, such as Ibn Miskawayh and Abu Shudja al-Rudhrawari, pay close attention to internal Byzantine affairs during this period.³ Moreover, the Arabic evidence pertaining to the revolts is strengthened by the survival of a series of documents from Iraq, which relate to the period between 980 and 987, when Bardas Skleros was held captive by the Buyid authorities in Baghdad. These documents include letters, treaties and eye-witness narrative accounts.⁴

One implication of this plethora of sources is that a more detailed narrative of this period can be constructed than for any other phase of the reign. Moreover, information and interpretation presented in one account can be cross-checked against other sources. It is, therefore, no coincidence that this is the only part of the reign which has regularly been subjected to analysis by modern historians.⁵ However, this relative abundance of sources not only allows for the reconstruction of a coherent narrative, but also offers the unique opportunity to use the history of the reign to comment on the historiography. Above all, by discovering how

² Stephen of Taron, pp.140-3, 187-9; Life of John and Euthymios, pp. 67-142; Georgian Royal Annals, pp.373-4; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.372-89, 398-402, 418-427; see above, pp.11-13

³ Ibn Miskawayh, pp.424-5, 436-9; Al-Rudhrawari, pp.6-7, 23-35, 115-119.

⁴ List of 'documents' under consideration: *Ibn Shahram's embassy to Constantinople in 981/2*: Al-Rudhrawari, pp.23-34; *Propaganda letter of Adud* issued in the aftermath of the embassy of Ibn Shahram contained in the letter collection of Al-Shirazi: J.C.Bürgel, *Die Hofkorrespondenz Adud al-Dawlas* (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp.155-6; *Eyewitness account of the release of the Skleroi*: Al-Rudhrawari, pp.116-17; *The treaty of the release of the Skleroi 987 and a letter to Skleros from the Buyid general Chutur in March 990* contained in a diplomatic treatise of the Egyptian Mamluk jurist al-Kalkashandi: M.Canard, 'Deux documents arabes sur Bardas Sklèros', *Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 5 (1939), pp.55-69.

Skylitzes' narrative compares with those of other Greek and non-Greek accounts of this period, we may learn more about the construction of the 'Synopsis Historion' and its source materials.

This chapter undertakes such a comparison of narratives. However, it should be noted that the method adopted here does not constitute a chronological step-by-step comparison of information and interpretation presented by Skylitzes and the other historical accounts. Such an approach is likely to provide little insight into the background contexts or historiographical traditions within which the individual texts themselves were written. Instead, the chapter will compare the various ways in which the main narratives respond to a series of more general questions. Why were so many contemporary and later medieval historians so intrigued by these rebellions? To what extent did they consciously interpret these revolts as pivotal to the political history of Basil's reign? Which dimensions of the revolts attract their attention? To what extent is their work conditioned by the accident of survival or the constraints of literary genre? Where appropriate this discussion will be illuminated with insights from the historiographical analysis presented in the first two chapters of this thesis. Finally, although the discussion in this chapter is characterised by a constant interweaving of history and historiography, it is necessary that an initial outline of the main political events of this period be established at the beginning. Thus, the chapter will be prefaced by a summary of the internal and external history of the Byzantine empire in the century before Basil came to the throne, and a brief synopsis of the revolts themselves.

⁵ The most detailed and well-rounded account of the revolts is to be found in Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sai'd', pp.370-462. See also N., Adontz, 'Tornik le moine', *B 13* (1938), pp.143-64;

H. Historical synopsis

When Basil II and his younger brother Constantine VIII became senior emperors in 976 they inherited an empire which was much changed since the foundation of the Macedonian dynasty by their great-great-grandfather Basil I in 867.⁶ During the late ninth and tenth centuries a judicious deployment of diplomacy and military force had facilitated the uneven, but inexorable, extension of the territorial boundaries of Byzantium to east and west. Forward momentum in the east prospered as the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad slowly disintegrated. For the first half of the tenth century expansion was piecemeal, with the most conspicuous Byzantine territorial conquest coming in 934 at the Muslim emirate of Melitene. However, in the middle of the century expansion eastwards began to accelerate significantly. With the seizure of Samosata on the upper Euphrates in 958, Byzantine armies broke through the Taurus and Anti Taurus ranges. During the following decade Byzantine field armies conquered the cities of the Cilician plain. By 969 Antioch in northern Syria had submitted. At approximately the same time the western Armenian principedom of Taron was voluntarily ceded by its Bagratid rulers to Byzantine overlordship. By the early 970s imperial military action was undertaken not only in the east but also in the west. Following the defeat of Russian armies at Dristra on the Lower Danube in 971, the empire annexed eastern Bulgaria.

However, with this greater expansion came the threat of greater instability within the upper echelons of Byzantine political society. This threat was presented by the very agent of territorial conquest: the army. As we shall see in the introduction to

W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.29-58.

⁶ The outlines of this summary are aided in the first place by Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.310-374, and Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.370-462. For all geographical references in this chapter, see Map 1.

chapter five, a larger, more centralised, professional, and mobile army had probably begun to evolve in the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-944) under the generalship of John Kourkouas. It was then enlarged and refinanced during the middle of the century, in particular by the emperors Constantine Porphyrogenitus (945-959) and Nikephoros Phokas (963-9).⁷ Yet, as the preface to Constantine Porphyrogenitos' legislation dealing with military finance pointed out, developments within the armed forces could threaten the stability of the state as a whole:

the army is to the state as the head is to the body; if it changes the whole must change with it, and whoever does not carefully supervise it, endangers his own safety.⁸

The political importance of control of the military to the stability of the Byzantine state was first made manifest after the death of Constantine's son, the emperor Romanos II, in 963. Romanos left two sons as heirs to the imperial throne, two sons who would eventually assume power in 976 as the emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII. However, in 963 these brothers were still minors, with their mother Theophano acting as their regent. Their minority rule did not last for long. Within a few months of the death of Romanos, the general Nikephoros Phokas, marched at the head of the army to Constantinople. The boy emperors' great-uncle Basil Lekapenos, the *parakoimomenos*, the chief eunuch in charge of the Great Palace, allowed Phokas to enter the city. On the same day Phokas was crowned emperor.⁹ Six years later he was assassinated. His replacement as emperor was his assassin, another leading army commander, John Tzimiskes.

⁷ See below, pp.222-33

⁸ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 222

In January 976 Tzimiskes himself died with the result that Basil and Constantine finally assumed full rule as adult emperors. However, within six months they were threatened by another revolt led by another senior general. In the spring or early summer of 976, Bardas Skleros, the *doux* of Mesopotamia, the general in charge of the army based east of the Anti Taurus mountains, declared himself emperor. His initial revolt lasted for three years and was punctuated by several pitched battles between imperial and rebel forces. Victory for the emperors was only achieved after Bardas Phokas, the nephew of the emperor Nikephoros, was recalled from internal exile to lead a Byzantine army reinforced with troops from the Georgian principedom of Tao. Skleros was finally defeated by Phokas and this Georgian army in March 979.

But the suppression of the rebels did not preface a period of peace and stability. Skleros and his immediate retinue of about three-hundred men took refuge with, or were imprisoned by, the Buyid ruler of Iraq, Adud al-Dawla, and remained a potential threat off-stage in Baghdad. Skleros' residence in Arab territory was the subject of intense diplomatic exchange between the Byzantine court and the Buyids during the early 980s. It is clear from the diplomatic account of Ibn Shahram, a Buyid envoy sent to Constantinople in 981/2, that Basil himself was willing to contemplate ceding the empire's client state of Aleppo in northern Syria to the Buyids of Baghdad if Adud surrendered Skleros.¹⁰ However, this was a policy that attracted considerable opprobrium both from his military chiefs such as Bardas Phokas, and his great-uncle and chief advisor Basil the *parakoimomenos*.

⁹ A short account of this coup is related by Skylitzes, pp.256-9

¹⁰ Al-Rudhrawari, pp.23-34.

These internal political tensions reached a denouement in 985. The first signs of serious trouble came in the form of a rumour that Basil Lekapenos was about to incite a palace coup against his great-nephew. In response the armies of the east suspended their operations in northern Syria and prepared to intervene. Their expectations of a change of regime, however, were premature. Rather than removing the emperor, the *parakoimomenos* found himself dislodged from power by Basil. Furthermore, the emperor went on to reorganise the military high command on the eastern frontier to the dissatisfaction of leading generals such as Bardas Phokas, Eustathios Maleinos, and Leo Melissenos.¹¹ Their dissatisfaction grew even greater when Basil attempted to wrest the “foreign policy” initiative for himself by attacking Bulgaria the following year. When Basil’s foray across the Haimos mountains to Sofia ended in a humiliating retreat, a second period of civil war ensued. Skleros was released by Baghdad in the winter of 987. He soon relaunched his rebellion in the area around Melitene. Phokas announced his own imperial candidature and seduced Skleros into a military alliance. He then reneged on the terms of the alliance and imprisoned Skleros in the Anti Taurus. For two years Phokas’ forces threatened Constantinople from the Asian side of the Bosphoros.

At some point in late 988 or early 989 Phokas’ forces led by Kalokyros Delphinas were defeated at Chrysopolis.¹² In April 989 Phokas himself was killed at the battle of Abydos during an engagement against an imperial army led by Basil II himself. This imperial army was heavily reinforced with Russian troops sent to the emperor as part of a deal in which Basil's sister Anna was despatched as a bride for Vladimir, the prince of Kiev. Vladimir in turn converted to Orthodox Christianity.

¹¹ See below, pp.307-09

Yet even after the defeat of Phokas, the spectre of rebellion endured. Bardas' younger son Leo held out at Antioch until November 989. Meanwhile, Skleros was released from prison by Phokas' widow, and with his own supporters and the remnants of the Phokas party, launched his third insurrection. This revolt however was of short duration and the Skleroi soon capitulated. Although the exact date of Skleros' final surrender is unknown, it must have happened before 6 March 991, the date when Bardas died.¹³

III. Historiographical discussion

i. General historiographical interest in the revolts

The most obvious question underpinning an investigation of the various historiographical traditions behind the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas is why so many medieval historians from so different traditions of history writing working in so many different languages were so intrigued by these revolts? One answer to this question could simply be that these medieval writers all consciously interpreted this period of civil war as the most important phenomenon of the whole of Basil's reign. Certainly a convincing abstract case can be made that this ought to have been their interpretation. At the very least, the revolts of Skleros and Phokas marked a conspicuous hiatus in the tenth-century expansionist enterprise of Byzantium. With the outbreak of rebellion key resources were diverted away from the offensive on the frontiers and channelled into a debilitating struggle for mastery over Anatolia and Constantinople. During the first Skleros revolt rival armies fought in the passes of the Taurus and Anti Taurus and on the Anatolian plateau; Nikaia and Abydos were besieged; naval engagements were joined off the western

¹² For the problems associated with dating the battle of Chrysopolis see Forsyth, "The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id", pp.439-40.

Asia Minor littoral and in the Sea of Marmara. Localised fighting was reported in Antioch.¹⁴ During the Phokas revolt military action was less widespread, but once again Abydos came under siege.¹⁵ Civil war also enfolded Arab, Armenian and Iberian buffer states into alliances with imperial and rebel armies, and offered encouragement to hostile powers beyond the empire, such as the Fatimids of Egypt and the Buyids of Iraq.¹⁶

This was a reversal in fortune which was immediately apparent to contemporaries. According to Stephen of Taron, the empire was torn apart during the first Skleros revolt: town was pitted against town; village against village.¹⁷ In Iraq Ibn Miskawayh greeted the sight of the respective ambassadors of Basil and Skleros fawning at the feet of Adud al-Dawla in the aftermath of the first Skleros revolt with the reflection that, “nothing like this had ever happened before; it was one of the glories of Adud”.¹⁸ Ibn Miskawayh's reflections are undoubtedly somewhat exaggerated. As one of Adud's most loyal civil servants, he was eager to promote the standing of his political master. But to a certain extent his surprise at the demise of Byzantine prestige was justified.¹⁹ As recently as 972 the invasion of the Upper Tigris region by the emperor John Tzimiskes had triggered riots in Baghdad when the citizens became convinced that the Byzantines were intending to invade Iraq.²⁰

According to other historians, the collapse in the Byzantine position was even more profound: not only had the offensive against the neighbours ceased, but the

¹³ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.430-1

¹⁴ Forsyth, ‘The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id’, pp.370-93

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.433-43

¹⁶ See below, pp.276-9

¹⁷ Stephen of Taron, p.141

¹⁸ Ibn Miskawayh, p.436

¹⁹ For Ibn Miskawayh as a servant of Adud see Forsyth, ‘The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id’, p.44ff.

neighbours had begun to fight back on all fronts. Both Yahya and Skylitzes report that the prolonged period of Byzantine civil war allowed the armies of the Bulgarian state, based in western Macedonia and led by the Kometopoulos family, to raid deep into mainland Greece and the Peloponnese.²¹ Stephen of Taron points out that Bad ibn Dustuk, a Kurdish emir who controlled Chliat on Lake Van, took advantage of the general mayhem in Caucasia to sack the town of Muş.²² But perhaps it is Leo the Deacon who conveys most dramatically the incomprehensible scale and suddenness of the reversal in Byzantine fortunes during the early years of Basil's reign. As a member of the palace clergy and a writer of speeches at the court of Basil II, Leo represents a contemporary, Constantinopolitan perception of the disasters of the post-976 period. His summary of the Skleros and Phokas revolts, the 986 failure in Bulgaria, and the humiliating intervention of the Rus, stand in elegiac contrast to his more detailed accounts of the martial achievements of Basil's imperial predecessors.²³ His sombre reflections are mirrored by some of the poems written by John Geometres in the last quarter of the tenth century which lament the evil consequences of civil war, the shame of the arrival of Rus troops in Constantinople, and the opportunities which internal weakness afforded to the Byzantine empire's Bulgarian adversaries.²⁴

Yet, there are significant reasons to doubt whether these revolts are accorded so much attention in the primary sources solely because medieval historians

²⁰ Ibn Miskawayh, pp.326-9; Yahya ibn Sa'id, *PO* 23, pp.353-8; M.Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiscès', *Mélanges Henri Grégoire, Ann. de l'Inst. de Phil. et d'Hist. Or. et Slav.* 10 (1950), pp.99-108. See below, pp.295-6

²¹ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.430; Skylitzes, pp.329-30, 339. For the rise of the Kometopouloi see Seibt, 'Kometopulen', pp.65-98.

²² Stephen of Taron, p.141; see below p.279

²³ Leo the Deacon, pp.169-78; Mango, *Empire of the New Rome*, p.211.

²⁴ See for example the poems, *εἰς τὴν ἀπόστασιν; εἰς τὰς τῶν Ἰβήρων ἀρπαγὰς; εἰς τοὺς Βουλγάρους; εἰς τὸν Κομιτόπουλον* (Geometres, iv, 271-3, 282-3; Skylitzes, pp.282-3). See also Schlumberger, *L'Épopée byzantine*, i, 641-6, 725; ii, 34, 43-4; Poppe, 'The Political Background to the Baptism of

recognised their fundamental importance to the political history of the reign. In the first place it is always possible that the physical processes involved in the transmission of texts may, over time, either enhance the supply of information about particular events, or contribute to a misleading impression of the abundance of that supply. At the very simplest of levels we must be aware of the accident of survival. For example, very little would be known about Iberian Caucasian involvement in the first Skleros revolt were it not for the survival of a saint's life in Georgian about two late tenth-century Athonite monks, John and Euthymios. Forced to rely on Skylitzes' coverage of this period, we would merely know that after Skleros' victories in 978, the Byzantine general Bardas Phokas sought armed assistance from the Iberian *kouropalates*, David prince of Tao. On the other hand, the Life of John and Euthymios presents a much fuller picture of the diplomatic contacts established between the Byzantine court and David. It details the activities of Tornikios, a Georgian monk from Mount Athos and a general formerly in the employ of David, who travelled from Constantinople to western Caucasia on an imperial mission to enlist the support of the prince of Tao. It also refers to the rewards offered to the Georgian monastery of the Iviron on Mount Athos after Skleros' defeat.²⁵ Yet, the subsequent history of this Athonite saints' life also provides a good example of the dangers inherent in interpreting a plethora of sources as an index of a large number of different witnesses. For instance, the Iberian intervention is mentioned in some versions of the 'Georgian Royal Annals', a heterogeneous collection of eleventh- to fourteenth-century historical and

the Rus', pp.214-7; Ševčenko, I., 'Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Skylitzes', *DOP* 23-4 (1969-70), p.189

²⁵ The Life of John and Euthymios, pp.89-92; Adontz, 'Tornik le moine', pp.143-64; P.M.Tarchnishvili, 'Le soulèvement de Bardas Sklèros', *BK* 17-18 (1964), pp.95-7. Imperial patronage for the Iberians on Athos in the aftermath of the Skleros revolt can be corroborated by various Georgian manuscript colophons and by documents from the archives of the Iviron monastery itself: *Actes d'Iviron I. Des origines au milieu du XIe siècle*, Archives de l'Athos XIV, eds. J.Lefort, N.Oikonomides, D.Papachryssanthou, H.Métrévéli (Paris, 1985), pp.7-31, 117ff.

historiographical materials. However, the description provided in this text is nothing more than a paraphrase of the historical background contained in the Life of John and Euthymios which was interpolated into the Annals during the eighteenth century.²⁶

In addition part of the significant Arabic contribution to the history of the revolts, which at first sight appears to be based on a solid core of documentary evidence, may also be something of an illusion. For while Skleros' flight to Iraq and seven-year detention in Baghdad can be traced in several pieces of first-hand evidence, now contained in a variety of Arabic literary sources, the survival of this evidence is probably determined as much by the dictates of genre, as by its significance for the domestic politics of Byzantium and relations between Baghdad and Constantinople.²⁷ For example, the treaty containing the terms of the release of the Skleroi from Baghdad in 987 is to be found out of all historical context in the later fourteenth- or fifteenth-century diplomatic manual of the Egyptian Mamluk secretary al-Kalkashandi.²⁸ Moreover, even the appearance of revolt-related documentary evidence in the text of an Arabic history may be determined more by literary tradition than by the significance of the Skleros rebellion in Buyid-Byzantine relations. The history in question is the later eleventh-century annalistic account of al-Rudhrawari. This text includes a lengthy summary of the diplomatic report which the Buyid envoy Ibn Shahram compiled about his embassy to Constantinople in 981-2, as well as a detailed eyewitness account of the ceremonial

²⁶ Georgian Royal Annals, pp.373-4

²⁷ See above, p.110, n.4 for the documents in question

²⁸ Canard, 'Deux documents arabes', pp.65-68. A similar text to Kalkashandi is the *Kitab al Doha'ir wa-l-tuhaf*, discovered by Hamidullah ('Nouveaux documents sur les rapports de l'Europe avec l'Orient musulman au moyen âge', *Arabica* 7 (1960), pp.281-98), another later medieval Egyptian text with roots in the later eleventh century. This text is a list of embassies and diplomatic gift exchanges. It includes the most detailed account of the 917 Byzantine embassy to Baghdad, the list of the emperor Romanos Lekapenos' gifts to the Ikhshidid leader of Egypt, as well as notes on Basil II's relations with the Fatimids of Egypt and Sicily.

surrounding the release of the Skleroi five years later.²⁹ Both these records could be interpreted as manifestations of a general Arab literary enthusiasm for the distant, the foreign, and the exotic. This enthusiasm had its roots in a genre of Arabic literature known as *adab*. Taking material from a variety of other literary genres, including poetry, oratory and grammar, *adab* was primarily concerned with rendering its reader more courteous, urbane, and erudite. As Arab contact with non-Arab peoples grew, so had *adab* come to be informed by the written traditions of Iran, India and the Greek-speaking world. As a result it encouraged widespread interest in the cultures which fostered these exotic literary forms.³⁰ Marius Canard, the great Byzantino-Islamic scholar of the pre- and post-Second World War decades, frequently suggested that many allusions to Byzantium in medieval Arab literature were conditioned by the traditions of *adab*.³¹ Certainly, in the case of al-Rudhrawari's report on the release of the Skleroi, there is striking evidence of a fascination with the exotic as it applied to Byzantium. This evidence comes in the explicit reference to the fact that the Skleroi spoke Greek during the ceremonial which preceded their departure from Baghdad.

As Ward (ie Bardas [Skleros]) approached he bowed his head slightly and kissed the prince's hand. A chair with a cushion was placed for him and he sat down thereon. Samsam al-daulah proceeded to make civil inquiries, and he [Ward] invoked a blessing on the prince and *thanked him in Greek, the conversation being conducted through an interpreter.*"³²

²⁹ Al-Rudhrawari, pp.23-34, 116-7

³⁰ *EI*, i, 175-6; Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman*, ii, 152-89

³¹ M.Canard, 'Quelques "à côté" de l'histoire des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes', *Studi medievali in onore di G. Levi della Vida* (2 vols., Rome, 1956), i, 98-119; expanded in 'Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes', *DOP* 18 (1964), pp.35-56.

³² Al-Rudhrawari, pp.116-7.

ii. Pro-Skleros interest in the Greek historiography

a. Bardas Skleros: the focus of attention

The principle that the demands of genre may lead to the preservation of original source materials in later literary productions is also of central importance in understanding the coverage of the Skleros and Phokas revolts in the Greek historiographical tradition represented by John Skylitzes and Michael Psellos. To demonstrate why this is so, we must start by noting the degree to which these Greek historians concentrate on the rebellion of Bardas Skleros at the expense of that of Bardas Phokas. Here *three* principal diagnostic elements are of great significance:

1) First, it is the Skleros rebellion of 976-79 which is narrated at much greater length and in greater detail than the Phokas revolt of 987-9. For example, Skylitzes' account of the itineraries of Skleros' campaigns in Asia Minor between 976 and 979 is full of detailed information. In contrast, he has virtually no hard evidence on how Phokas crossed Anatolia from his campaign head-quarters in central Anatolia to the Asian shores of the Bosphoros when he rebelled in the summer of 987. Even Skylitzes' description of the Phokas blockade of Constantinople is exceptionally thin.³³ This discrepancy in the length and detail of coverage can best be illustrated by a comparing a section of Skylitzes' account of Skleros' first march across Asia Minor in 976/7 with his analysis of the early stages of the 987 Phokas revolt. It is important to note that even in a very small section of Skylitzes' coverage of the Skleros rebellion, the reader is presented with a high concentration of very specific

³³ The most detailed account of the key battles fought in the extreme west of Asia Minor between 987 and 989 is to be found outside the Greek tradition in the history of Stephen of Taron (Stephen of Taron, pp.188-9; Yahya ibn Sa'id's account contains the crucial information that the final battle of Abydos was fought on 13 April 989 (Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.419-31). However, Yahya's more detailed coverage of the revolt is usually concerned with events on the eastern frontier, especially in Antioch and Trebizond.

information about personnel, place-names, and titles, (highlighted in bold font in the text produced below), as well as a reasonably coherent picture of a key battle. On the other hand, Skylitzes' account of the outbreak of the Phokas revolt *as it involved Phokas* amounts to no more than two very short passages (also produced below). Not only are these passages short, they convey exceptionally little detail about the few bald facts they present.

Itinerary of the first march of Skleros across Asia Minor

As he advanced on **Kaisareia** Skleros dispatched advance parties and spies in order to scout about and to find out where the enemy might be, and to prepare the road for him. And **Anthes Alyates** had been selected as the leader of those who were sent. When these men came up against and chanced upon a part of the imperial army which had as its leader **Eustathios Maleinos, magistros**, in a pass (they call the place **Koukoulithos**), they tested the enemy and made attacks.And after **three days** he (Skleros) reached **Lapara**. This place was part of **Cappadocia**, which is now called **Likandos**, so named because of its wealth and abundance. Once the **stratopedarches** had learned this, he employed a night march for fear of Skleros passing by, and camped opposite the enemy. And up to this point they [both] hesitated, and shirked open battle and attempted to steal victory. Bardas outwitted his opponents, having prepared many meals, as if about to get his own army to eat; thus he deceived the enemy. For on the assumption that he was not about to initiate the battle during that day, they themselves turned to feasting. Skleros, when he knew this (for he had the forces prepared for battle), suddenly sounded the warcry with the trumpet and attacked the enemy as they were eating. But they defended themselves stoutly for a while. Then Bardas, after making outflanking manoeuvres and causing the enemy to fear that they were being encircled, sent out the **tribute troops** against the rear, and turned the enemy to flight and inflicted much bloodshed, with the **doux of Antioch, Bourtzes**, withdrawing first..... And he [Skleros] seized the whole camp with its baggage and from there he acquired boundless wealth. From there he came once again to the place called **Tzamandos**. The city of **Tzamandos** lay on a precipitous rock, well populated and dripping with wealth. Having taken this city from the willing inhabitants he collected much wealth. This victory disturbed many of the adherents of the emperor and compelled them to desert to Skleros. For **Bourtzes** was the first to desert, and the *patrikios* **Andronikos Lydos**, the *doux*, with his sons. And the **Attaleians** imprisoned the admiral of the emperor and

went over with the whole fleet to **Michael Kourtikios**, sent by Skleros to be *strategos* of the **Kibyrrhaiotai**.³⁴

Passage two: early stages of the Phokas revolt

But the greatest men of the Romans were very angry with the emperor.....they gathered together in **Charsianon** in the house of **Maleinos**, on the 15th August, of the 15th indiction, and proclaimed **Bardas Phokas** emperor, having set the diadem around him and the rest of the recognisable regalia of empire.

[Bardas] himself delegated part of the army to the *patrikios* **Kalokyros Delphinas** and sent it to **Chrysopolis** on the other shore from the capital. Leading the rest of the forces with him, he went to **Abydos**, in the hope that with the straits under his control, he would win over the citizens who were oppressed by need.³⁵

2) The second diagnostic feature which suggests an artificially enhanced treatment of Skleros in the Greek tradition is that most of the narrative dealing with the Phokas rebellion of 987-9 is concerned with the *story and viewpoint of Skleros*, rather than the deeds of the principal rebel Phokas. For example, in contrast to the extreme brevity of his description of Phokas' preparations for war, Skylitzes devotes a much longer section of text to a tortuous excursus exploring Skleros' conundrum about which side he should support in the forthcoming conflict. The following passage illustrates how long and detailed is Skylitzes' treatment of Skleros' internal musings:

He [Skleros] was uncertain and changeable in his thoughts. For on the one hand he judged that he was too weak to continue and hold fast to the revolt on his own. But he thought it ignoble and unmanly to move over to Phokas or to the emperor. And so having discussed at length with his supporters, in the end he calculated that for him to be hailed as emperor on his own was reckless and

³⁴ Skylitzes, pp.318-20. See Map 1 for all geographical references in this passage

³⁵ Skylitzes, pp.332, 336

unprofitable, because it was impossible, and yet he hated the idea of going over to one of the dynasts and rejecting the other, because of the uncertainty of the future. And so he decided that as far as was possible, he would win over both powers, in order that in any unfortunate eventuality he should have the help and support of at least one of them. And so he himself sent letters to Phokas asking for a joint plan of action and for a partition of the empire, if they were able to conquer the emperor. But with *very clever judgement and calculation*, he secretly sent his son Romanos to the emperor, as though he [the son] were a deserter, so that if Phokas prevailed, he himself [Skleros] would be the saviour of his son, and if the emperor proved the stronger, he himself [Skleros] would be saved from danger, as the beneficiary of the intercession of that man [Romanos]. And Romanos, having assumed the appearance of flight, went to the emperor.³⁶

3) The third diagnostic element in a tradition which seems to emphasise the actions and views of Skleros rather than Phokas is the frequency with which the Greek coverage draws attention to the cunning and acumen of Skleros. Two examples occur in passages already cited above. In his analysis of Skleros' first march across Asia Minor, Skylitzes describes how Skleros cleverly used deception to gain an advantage at the battle of Lapara. In the passage which expatiates on Skleros' vacillations in 987, the general's decision to send his son Romanos to the emperor is explicitly interpreted by Skylitzes as a sign of shrewdness. It is noteworthy that Michael Psellos, in his appraisal of the 976-89 revolt period of Basil's reign, also picks up on this general theme of Skleros' cunning and strategic awareness. He favourably compares Skleros' abilities as a commander with those of Phokas:

this man Skleros, although apparently not to be compared with Phokas in physical prowess, was a greater exponent of military strategy and management. It was also said that he was more resourceful.³⁷

Psellos expatiates on this resourcefulness in greater detail, describing the skill with which Skleros deprived both Constantinople and the imperial field armies of

³⁶ Skylitzes, pp.334-5

³⁷ Psellos, p.14

essential supplies. For example, he tells his reader that Skleros diverted naval convoys, blocked roads, and siphoned off merchandise for his own troops.³⁸

b. Bardas Phokas: the more dangerous rebel

The next stage in the argument that the Greek coverage of the 976-89 period is shaped by literary constraints is to note certain key discordances between the testimonies of Skylitzes and Psellos and many of the other sources. For example, the Greek historical record's overwhelming interest in Skleros and its parallel neglect of Bardas Phokas, naturally leads the modern reader to assume that Skleros was the more threatening of the foes to face Basil II. Yet, when the accounts of Skylitzes and Psellos are compared with other material and literary evidence, then a rather different picture emerges. Although an absence of data about the landed property of senior Byzantine families, and the extent to which authority and wealth derived from private resources or from the tenure of military command, make it difficult to assess the respective strengths of the two rebels, the weight of evidence from various literary and material sources suggests that it was Phokas, rather than Skleros, who constituted the greater threat to Basil II.

Phokas, for example, was almost certainly able to mobilise much larger private resources in support of his own insurrection. By the middle of the tenth century, it is likely that the Phokas family owned considerable estates in Cappadocia in central Anatolia.³⁹ While the exact location and scale of these Cappadocian estates remains unknown, an index of Phokas family wealth in the locality is provided by the luxurious gold and lapis lazuli decoration of the Cappadocian rock church, Tokalı Kilise, which has been identified as a Phokas foundation. It is usually argued that

³⁸ Ibid., pp.14-15

the nearby church of the Great Pigeon House at Çavuşin, which includes a fresco depicting the emperor Nikephoros Phokas and his brother the *kouropalates* Leo, was excavated and decorated by local adherents of the Phokas family.⁴⁰ Considerable private Phokas resources and local support may also explain why Nikephoros Phokas, the eldest son of Bardas, was able to lead a rebellion based in central Anatolia against the emperor as late as 1021/2, despite not having held office since his father's defeat in 989.⁴¹

In contrast, Skleros seems to have relied more upon those resources at his immediate disposal in his capacity as a military commander. For example, at the beginning of his first revolt, he established his campaign headquarters at Charpete (also known as Harput in Armenian, and Hisn Ziyad in Arabic), a strong point in the Anzitene, the region east of the Anti Taurus which he controlled in his capacity as *doux* of Mesopotamia.⁴² Next, he sequestered the fiscal revenues of nearby Melitene. Finally, he secured additional troops from outside the empire by contracting military alliances with the regional powers which neighboured Byzantine Mesopotamia. The Armenian prince of Mokh, a region south of Lake

³⁹ Kaplan, M., 'Les grands propriétaires de Cappadoce', in C.D.Fonseca (ed.), *Le aree omogenee della civiltà rupestre nell'ambito dell'impero bizantino: la Cappadocia* (Lecce, 1981), pp.139-43

⁴⁰ N.Thierry, 'La peinture de Cappadoce au Xe siècle: recherches sur les commanditaires de la nouvelle église de Tokalı et d'autres monuments', *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his Age, Second International Byzantine Conference, Delphi 1987* (Athens 1989), pp.218-33. L.Rodley, 'The Pigeon House Church at Çavuşin', *JÖB* 33 (1983), pp.301-339. See below, p.182

⁴¹ Aristakes, pp.17-19; Skylitzes, pp.266-7; Yahya (Cheikho), p.239; Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya', p.223.

⁴² Skylitzes, pp.315-6; Yahya, pp.372-3; J.D.Howard-Johnston, 'Crown lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *Byz Forsch* XXI (1995), p.93; idem., 'Byzantine Anzitene', in S.Mitchell (ed.), *Armies and Frontiers in Anatolia* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1983), pp.248-50; A.Bivar, 'Bardas Skleros, the Buwayids and the Marwanids at Hisn Ziyad in the light of an unnoticed Arab inscription', in S.Freeman and H.Kennedy (eds.), *Defence of the Roman and Byzantine Frontiers* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1986), pp.9-21; T.Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: an Architectural and Archaeological Survey* (4 vols., London, 1987-90), iii, 13-35. See Map 1.

Van, fought with Skleros forces; the Hamdanid emir of Mosul, Abu Taghlib, provided light cavalry troops in return for a marriage agreement.⁴³

This is not to argue, however, that the Skleros alliance did not possess considerable resources or present considerable danger to the emperor. For example, in the eyes of contemporary Arab witnesses, Skleros' principal ally, Abu Taghlib, was exceptionally wealthy. The traveller and geographer Ibn Hawkal makes several references to the immense rental revenue of the Hamdanids of Mosul. Hints of large Hamdanid estates also emerge from a gazette of contemporary Baghdad gossip collated by al-Tanukhi. Ibn Miskawayh describes the immense cash reserves he saw accumulated in Hamdanid mountain fortresses when he made an inventory of Abu Taghlib's possessions for Adud al-Dawla in 979. In the course of his negotiations with the Byzantines in the early 980s, the Buyid envoy Ibn Shahram stressed how valuable had been the support of Abu Taghlib to Skleros' insurrection: "You are well aware that when Abu Taghlib assisted Ward [Bardas Skleros] he foiled the Byzantine sovereigns".⁴⁴ Equally, the extent of Skleros' military success, at least during his first revolt, should not be understated. Apart from defeating several imperial field armies, he was recognised as emperor in Antioch, controlled

⁴³ For Skleros' Armenian support see: Stephen of Taron, pp.140-1; Skylitzes, pp.320-1. Skylitzes also mentions that the Armenians of the Byzantine army were the first to hail Skleros as emperor (Skylitzes, pp.315-6). For relations with Abu Taghlib see Skylitzes, pp.315-6; Yahya, *PO* 23, p.398ff.; and Ibn Miskawayh, pp.424-6. Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.38, and Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya', p.377, both refer to the marriage alliance between Abu Taghlib and Skleros, but do not discuss it in detail. This lack of interest on the part of modern historians is surprising since such an alliance must have involved the marriage of a Christian to a Muslim.

⁴⁴ Ibn Hawkal: *La Configuration de la terre*, trans. J.H.Kramers and G.Wiet (Beirut/Paris, 1964), p.205; Al-Tanukhi: *Table Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge*, trans. D.Margoliouth (London, 1922), pp.195-201; Ibn Miskawayh, pp.312, 415, 421-5, 431-4; al-Rudhrawari, pp.26-7. Ibn Miskawayh and Yahya make indirect references to the legendary wealth of Abu Taghlib in their reports about the expulsion of the Hamdanids from Mosul by Adud al-Dawla in 978/9. They allege that Adud was afraid that Abu Taghlib would use rumours about his immense fortune to persuade the Fatimids of Egypt to help him regain control of northern Syria and the Djazira from the Buyids (Ibn Miskawayh, p.434; Yahya, *PO* 23, p.402). See below, p.131, for expulsion of Abu Taghlib from Mosul by Adud.

part of the thematic navy, and besieged the key point of Abydos by land and by sea, thus threatening the supply of grain into Constantinople.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, as the revolt progressed, it became clear that Skleros' only real hope of success had been a swift knockout punch. The longer the campaigns went on, the more apparent became the structural weaknesses in Skleros' challenge to imperial authority. Fundamental to Skleros' ultimate lack of success was that he was never able to present a permanent threat to Constantinople. Whenever he approached the capital, a new imperial field army always emerged to drive him back. For example, having defeated imperial forces at the battle of Lapara in the eastern theme of the Lykandos at the beginning of his revolt, Skleros and his army marched west and camped at Dipomaton on the western reaches of the Anatolian plateau, near the Lake of the Forty Martyrs, modern Akşehir Gölü. In response to the arrival of Skleros in the west, an imperial army under the command of Peter the Stratopedarch and Leo the *protovestiaros*, set out from Kotyaion, marched past the rebel camp at night, and so drew Skleros' forces south and east towards Ikonion and away from Constantinople. Although Skleros defeated his enemies in the subsequent pitched battle at Rhageai, his victory was achieved at the price of turning eastwards.⁴⁶ Less than a year later, Skleros was back in the west, now geographically much closer to Constantinople: not only was Abydos under siege, but Nikaia had also been taken. Yet, he was still forced back onto the plateau, when imperial armies crossed the Bosphoros under the command of Bardas Phokas and

⁴⁵ Skylitzes, pp.315-27; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.372-89, 398-402; J.T.Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', *DOP* 13 (1959), pp.104, 119, on the importance of Abydos in the passage of basic foodstuffs into Constantinople from the eighth to the tenth century. See below, p.196

⁴⁶ Skylitzes, pp.319-32; Skleros' itineraries across Asia Minor during his first revolt can be traced in several of the volumes produced by the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* project: F.Hild and M.Restle, *TIB, Kappadokien* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften) (Vienna, 1981), pp.93-4; K.Belke and M.Restle, *TIB, Galatien und Lykaonien* (Vienna, 1984), p.71; K.Belke and N.Mersich, *TIB Phrygien und Pisidien* (Vienna, 1990), pp.96-7. For place names, see Map 1; see below, chapter four, pp.160-3, for further discussion of these routes.

began marching towards Kaisareia. Once again Skleros was victorious in the field battles which ensued; but once again these victories were achieved at the price of moving eastwards. For while Skleros defeated Phokas at the battle of Pankaleia near Amorion in the theme of the Anatolikon in June 978, he was unable to prevent Phokas from regrouping imperial forces, and continuing his march away from Constantinople. When Skleros won a second engagement later in 978, it was far to the east at Basilika Therma in the theme of the Charsianon, and despite his military success, Skleros was forced to spend the winter in this area of Anatolia. Thus, even though Skleros had remained undefeated during 978, his threat to the capital had been thoroughly dissipated by Phokas' march east. Moreover, during the winter of 978, Skleros' position worsened considerably. By March 979 the imperial forces led by Phokas had been reinforced by the Iberian army dispatched by David of Tao. On 24 March 979 this joint Ibero-Byzantine army defeated Skleros at Sarvenisni (Aquae Saravenae) in Charsianon. Skleros and his immediate retinue fled across the Diyar Bakr to Mayafariqin, where they were taken into custody by the Buyid forces of Adud ad-Dawla.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, even though his first revolt had lasted more than two years, Skleros' power-base had always been prey to the uncertain loyalty of many of his supporters. His rebellion had, from the very beginning, been afflicted by defections. Before Skleros had even crossed the Anti-Taurus at the start of his revolt, he was forced to have his chief of staff (*hetaireiarches*) murdered to prevent him from swapping sides. As early as 977 the Hagiozacharites brothers defected to the *protovestiaros* Leo; when they were captured by Skleros at the battle of Rhageai they were blinded as a punishment for their disloyalty. An even more significant defector was the

⁴⁷ Skylitzes, pp.323-5; Yahya pp.375, 399; Stephen of Taron, pp.142-3; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, pp.94, 143-4, 156-7.

basilikos Obeïdallah, Skleros' lieutenant at Antioch.⁴⁸ Moreover, this gradual withering of domestic support was paralleled by the ongoing disintegration of his diplomatic alliance in the east. Severe stresses began to appear as soon as Abu Taghlib was attacked by the Buyid armies of Adud al-Dawla, and was forced to flee from Mosul in 978. At first Abu Taghlib took refuge at Hisn Ziyad, Skleros' main command centre in the east, and requested military aid from his Greek ally. Skleros responded by telling Abu Taghlib that more Hamdanid troops were needed to secure a victory against Bardas Phokas before he could come east to fight the Buyids. Although Abu Taghlib despatched some fresh troops, he himself left Hisn Ziyad and fled back to the Djazira, and thence to Syria the moment he heard that Skleros had been defeated by Phokas and the Iberians of Tao in March 979.⁴⁹

In contrast, fragility of support and limited resources do not seem to have been typical of the 987-9 Phokas revolt. While information about the events of the Phokas rebellion is much less readily available, rebel forces do appear to have presented a much more consistent danger to imperial authority in Constantinople. The very fact that the key battles between rebel and imperial armies were fought at Chrysopolis and Abydos, in the extreme west of Asia Minor close to Constantinople itself, suggests that it had been impossible for Basil and his ministers to muster the forces from within the empire necessary to drive Phokas back onto the Anatolian plateau. Secondly, the fate of the Phokas party in the aftermath of their defeat points to Phokas as the greater threat. After Phokas was

⁴⁸ Skylitzes, pp.318, 322; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.376-7. See below, pp.332-3, for an outline of the career of the *basilikos* Obeïdallah.

⁴⁹ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.397-402; Ibn Miskawayh, pp.420-443. The chronology of Abu Taghlib's wanderings on the Djazira frontier is confused since the accounts of Yahya and Ibn Miskawayh which deal with his expulsion from Mosul and his flight into exile do not coincide exactly (Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya', pp.315-6). However, it is clear that Abu Taghlib's fortunes were on the wane from the moment that Adud al-Dawla took control of Baghdad at the end of May 978. Buyid troops loyal to Adud were besieging Mosul by the end of June 978 (Ibn Miskawayh, pp.420-1)

killed at Abydos in 989 his head was conveyed around the empire as a warning to other rebels. A few months earlier after the defeat at Chrysopolis, Kalokyros Delphinas, one of Phokas' generals had been impaled.⁵⁰ In contrast, when the Skleroi finally surrendered in 989, they were allowed to retain their offices and titles.⁵¹ Later in the reign they can be observed in top ranking military posts. For example, Romanos Skleros, the son of Bardas, led a Byzantine army against Fatimid forces near Antioch in c.992.⁵² A certain Bighas, a servant of Skleros, is identified by Yahya ibn Sa'id as a Byzantine army commander in the Antioch area during the Arab revolt of al-Acfar in 1004/5.⁵³

c. A pro-Skleros or a pro-Phokas source ?

The likelihood that the accounts of Skylitzes and Psellos artificially enhance the role of Bardas Skleros at the expense of Bardas Phokas in the history of the first thirteen years of Basil's reign, has important implications for our understanding of the source material used in the medieval Greek historical record. As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, many modern scholars believe that a lost Phokas family chronicle was utilised by several later Greek historians, including John Skylitzes, in their coverage of the second half of the tenth century.⁵⁴ However, the minimalist treatment of Phokas and the expansive coverage of Skleros in both Skylitzes' and

⁵⁰ Leo the Deacon, pp.174-5; Skylitzes, p.336.

⁵¹ Skylitzes, p.338; Psellos, pp.36-8; al-Rudhrawari, p.119; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.426-7, 430-1. Yahya also refers to estates in northern Syria bestowed on Skleros and his brother Constantine in 989/90: these included Raban, a town populated by Armenians who ejected their Islamic overlords and declared their loyalty to Basil II c. 980 (Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.405-6; E.Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071* (Brussels, 1935), p.73). See below, pp.261-2, for further discussion of the post-revolt fate of the Skleroi.

⁵² Stephen of Taron, p.199; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, pp.334-5; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.62-4. It is unclear whether Romanos was *doux* of Antioch at this time: see below, pp.310-11

⁵³ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.466; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, pp.334-5, identifies this Bighas with Pegasios who served as Skleros' commander at Nikaia in 978; see also Skylitzes p.323

⁵⁴ For the idea that Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes used pro- and anti -Phokas material see Siuziumov, 'Ob istochnikakh Leva Dialona i Skilitsii', pp.106-66; Každan, *ODB*, p.1217 and 'Iz istorii vizantijskoj chronografii', pp.106-128; Roueché, 'Byzantine Writers and Readers', p.127; Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, i, 368

Psellos' appraisals of the revolt period of 976-89, must cast some doubt on whether a pro-Phokas source was widely utilised to report on the reign of Basil II.

Suspicious that a non-Phokas source is at work in the Greek tradition surface even on those occasions when Phokas is presented with greatest favour. The most notable of these occasions are a variety of battle scenes in which he is customarily portrayed as a fighter of heroic and gigantic proportions. For example, during the first Skleros revolt, Skylitzes portrays Phokas in the thick of an engagement with an advance party of Skleros supporters. During the course of the battle he kills one of Skleros' adjutants, Constantine Gauras with his mace.

This man [Phokas] on seeing him and recognising who he was, went forth to meet him and struck him on the head with his mace, and he [Gauras] immediately fell down lifeless from his horse with the unstoppable force of the blow.⁵⁵

However, the most striking element of Phokas-related passages such as these is that their content is usually very brief, vague, and repetitive. In the course of the final, and decisive, battle at the end of the first Skleros revolt in 979, Skylitzes describes a duel fought between Phokas and Skleros in very similar terms to that between Phokas and Gauras:

Then Phokas having seen his own army giving ground little by little and on the point of flight, and judging that a renowned death was better than an ignoble and reproached life, broke through the enemy phalanxes and attacked Skleros with all his might.....Skleros cut off the right ear of the horse of Phokas and the bridle with a blow from his sword. And Phokas, having beaten

⁵⁵ ὃν οὗτος ἰδὼν καὶ ὅστις εἶη κατανοήσας, ἠρέμα τὸν ἵππον παρενεγκὼν καὶ ὑπαντιάσας παίει κορύνῃ κατὰ τῆς κόρυθος. καὶ ὁ μὲν λειποθυμήσας τῇ ἀνυποστάτῳ φορῇ τῆς πληγῆς πίπτει παραυτίκα τοῦ ἵππου (Skylitzes, p.325)

him on the head with his mace, threw him down over the neck of his horse with the weight of the blow.⁵⁶

Likewise, when Skylitzes describes Phokas' final battle against Basil II at Abydos in 989, he explains both the general's motivation for fighting, and his actual military action, in terms which are identical to his account of Phokas's earlier engagement with Skleros in 979.

*...., having nobly selected an honourable death rather than an ignoble life, when Phokas saw the emperor from a distance..... he reasoned with himself that if he were to triumph over this man (ie Basil) he would easily vanquish the rest; having spurred on his horse, he charged violently against him, and slicing the enemy phalanxes in two, to everyone he appeared unstoppable.*⁵⁷

Indeed, it seems likely that rather than emanating from a family chronicle, scenes such as these were constructed from phrases out of Skylitzes' bland, generalising, and homogenising military lexicon, which was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.⁵⁸ For example, it is not surprising to note that two of these excerpts depict either Phokas or his military initiatives through the use of one of Skylitzes' favourite adjectives: *ἀνυπόστατος* (unstoppable).

Yet, if the case for pro-Phokas material in the Greek record of Basil's reign is proven to be rather weak, the overwhelming interest in the activities and attitudes of his rival, Bardas Skleros, points to the possibility that a pro-Skleros source may

⁵⁶ ἐνταῦθα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λαὸν θεασάμενος ὁ Φωκᾶς κατὰ μικρὸν ἐνδιδόντα καὶ πρὸς φυγὴν βλέποντα, βέλτιον εἶναι κρίνας τὸν εὐκλεῆ θάνατον τῆς ἀγεννοῦς καὶ ἐπονειδίστου ζωῆς, τὰς τῶν ἐναντίων συγκόψας φάλαγγας πρὸς αὐτὸν μετὰ σφοδρότητος ἵεται τὸν Σκληρόν..... καὶ ὁ μὲν Σκληρὸς τοῦ ἵππου τοῦ Φωκᾶ τὸ δεξιὸν οὖς σὺν τῷ χαλινῷ παίσας ἀποκόπτει τῷ ἔμφει. ὁ δὲ Φωκᾶς τῇ κορύνῃ πατάξας αὐτὸν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦτον μὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ τραχήλου τοῦ ἵππου ῥίπτει τῷ βάρει τῆς πληγῆς κατενεχθέντα.....(Skylitzes, p.326)

⁵⁷ ὁ Φωκᾶς τοῦ ζῆν ἀγεννώως τὸ γενναίως ἀποθανεῖν εὐγενῶς προκρίνας, τὸν βασιλέα θεασάμενος πῶρρωθεν....καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν λογισάμενος, ὡς, εἰ τούτου ἐπιτυχῆς γένηται, ῥᾶον ἂν καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς καταγωνιεῖται, τὸν ἵππον μυωπίσας ῥαγδαίως ἴκετο κατ'αὐτοῦ, τὰς ἐναντίας φάλαγγας διακόπτων καὶ ἀνυπόστατος τοῖς πᾶσι φαινόμενος (Skylitzes, p.337)

⁵⁸ See above, chapter one, pp.71-2

underpin the testimonies of both Skylitzes and Psellos.⁵⁹ Indeed, the most convincing support for such a source in the Greek historiographical tradition is provided, paradoxically, by those other texts which focus upon Skleros to the greatest extent, that is to say various narratives and documentary records from Buyid Iraq. For example, a comparison between the Buyid and Byzantine accounts of Skleros' departure from Baghdad in 987 demonstrates the extent to which episodes of Skleros ingenuity, so conspicuous in the Greek record, are probably simply the confections of a pro-Skleros party. According to a detailed, lively, and heroic account conveyed by Skylitzes, and to a rather briefer version in Psellos, the Skleroi were released from Baghdad, because the Buyid authorities in Iraq had become so hard-pressed by their own enemies, that they needed to draft the stern and sturdy Romans into the ranks of their own pusillanimous troops. But at first Skleros "was crafty and with dissimulation asked how men who had been imprisoned for such a long time would be able to handle weapons."⁶⁰ Eventually he accepted his commission, but refused to receive additional supplies or troops from his former captors. Instead, the hardy Byzantine prisoners were let out of gaol, given a bath, and sent into battle, where they routed the opposition. Rather than returning to Baghdad, the Romans then spurred on their steeds, and completed a heroic charge out of Iraq and into the empire.⁶¹

An alternative story emerges from the Buyid evidence. Both the eyewitness accounts of the release of the Skleroi in the history of al-Rudhrawari, and the treaty in the diplomatic handbook of al-Kalkashandi which details the terms of their departure from Baghdad, indicate that the former rebels were set free under the

⁵⁹ The only historian who has ever raised this possibility is Roueché, 'Byzantine Writers and Readers', p.127.

⁶⁰ Skylitzes, p.333

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.332-4; Psellos, pp.7-8

strictest of conditions, and provided by the Buyids with the necessary troops and supplies to enable them to reach the empire.⁶² Skleros promised, in the event of his becoming emperor, to set free all Muslim prisoners of war, to protect the property and families of Muslims, to prohibit any Byzantine army from marching on the eastern frontier, and to hand over seven border fortresses to the control of the authorities in Baghdad.⁶³ Furthermore, it is also clear from subsequent correspondence between a Buyid general called Chatur and Skleros, that Baghdad was prepared to bankroll Skleros' enterprises once the rebel was back in Byzantium.⁶⁴

d. Dating the pro-Skleros source

The identification of pro-Skleros material behind the Greek historiographical record represented by John Skylitzes and Michael Psellos demands answers to two important questions: when and why would such a panegyric source have been written? The strongest likelihood must be that this pro-Skleros material represents an encomium which was composed at some point after Skleros returned to Byzantium in 987 and before his death in March 990/1.⁶⁵ However, against this more general background, two rather more specific contexts can be suggested. The first is that the text was written as part of the propaganda war which preceded Skleros' surrender to Basil II in 989. The second is that it was composed *after* Skleros lay down his arms and met the emperor at a conference of reconciliation in late 989 or early 990.

⁶² Al-Rudhrawari, pp.116-7; Canard, 'Deux documents', pp.59-62, 65-8. Yahya also reports that the Skleroi returned to Byzantium under the escort of Buyid troops (Yahyan, *PO* 23, pp.419-20)

⁶³ Canard, 'Deux documents', pp.59-62, locates these seven fortresses in the extreme north of the Diyar Bakr in the area of the Upper Tigris. Canard argues that they had fallen into Byzantine hands during Tzimiskes' campaigns on the Mesopotamian frontier in 972 (see above, p.117, and below, pp.295-6). They were at the centre of negotiations between the Buyids and Byzantines at the time of Ibn Shahram's embassy in 981-2 (see above, p.114); see also Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.402-409, 426.

⁶⁴ Canard, 'Deux documents', pp.63-4, 68-9

There is persuasive evidence for the first interpretation. Like all rebels, Skleros had always sought to manipulate public relations. During his first revolt he let it be known that his spiritual guide, a certain monk, had foreseen Bardas' elevation to the imperial purple in a dream.⁶⁶ Both Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas are said to have taken great comfort in the popular contemporary prophecy that the name of the future emperor would begin with the letter *beta*.⁶⁷ However, by the final stages of his revolt in 989, Skleros had rather different propaganda needs. Instead of being engaged in a quest for the imperial purple, he was involved in a game of diplomatic bluff to ensure his own survival. Indeed, since his return to the empire in Baghdad in 987 Skleros had been struggling to keep afloat. Despite being escorted back to the empire by Bedouin and Kurdish horsemen and seizing the revenues from his erstwhile base at Melitene, he had been unable to build the "auld alliances" which had underpinned his first revolt a decade earlier. The Bedouin and Kurdish troops had soon left his service, and in his vulnerability he had joined Phokas.⁶⁸ On his release from captivity by the Phokas family in March/April 989, Skleros' support base was fragile and his scope for military action limited. His correspondence with the Buyid general Chatur indicates that as late as June 989, at least three months after his release from imprisonment by the Phokades in the Anti Taurus mountains, Skleros was still to be found in the plain of Larissa in eastern Cappadocia.⁶⁹ There is no evidence that he ever advanced any further west. Instead, he seems to have set up a laager in eastern Anatolia from which he negotiated his surrender with the emperor.

⁶⁵ See above, p.116 and n.13 for Yahya's dating of the death of Skleros

⁶⁶ Skylitzes, pp.316-7; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, pp.161-2, points out the need for rebels against imperial authority in the tenth to twelfth centuries to disseminate effective propaganda.

⁶⁷ Skylitzes, p.338, interpolation in manuscripts U and E.

⁶⁸ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.421-3; Stephen of Taron, pp.187-8; Skylitzes, pp.334-6

⁶⁹ Canard, 'Deux documents', pp.63, 68-69.

Central to Skleros' strategy was a need to persuade the emperor that despite his lack of resources he remained a potent foe. Delaying in Larissa, safely distant from the hinterland of the capital was one element to this strategy. Allowing the emperor to believe that preparations were underway for a resumption of revolt was another strand.⁷⁰ Yet another might have been the production of a narrative which contained examples of the heroism of the Skleroi, above all extensive coverage of their fabulously exotic military exploits in the distant regions of Buyid Iraq. Certainly there is independent evidence to suggest that Basil feared Skleros' qualities as a general, especially his ability to raise light cavalry troops from neighbouring powers. Although Skleros' return to Byzantium in 987 proved to be a false dawn, Yahya ibn Sa'id reports that the emperor was terrified of the arrival of the erstwhile usurper and his nomad escort. So great indeed was his concern that he reappointed Bardas Phokas to the position of *domestikos* of the *scholai*, commander-in-chief of the army, only to see Phokas himself organise a much more potent rebellion.⁷¹ Furthermore, Skleros' continuing correspondence with the Buyid authorities, after his release from captivity by the Phokades in 989, might have suggested that this long-term dissident still had the contacts necessary to build a future eastern alliance.

Yet, although it is possible that the pro-Skleros encomium was composed before the rebel and emperor came to terms, there is more convincing evidence that it was written after the Skleros surrender. That evidence comes from the fact that that some of the most overtly pro-Skleros material in the Greek tradition occurs in that

⁷⁰ It is interesting that in referring to the renewal of Skleros' revolt in 989, Skylitzes uses a verb meaning 'to get into training for war': *ὁ Σκληρός πάλιν ἀνελάμβανεν ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὴν προτέραν ἐσωμάσκει ἀποστασίαν* (Skylitzes, p.338).

⁷¹ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.421-3

part of Michael Psellos' account which describes the conference between Basil and Bardas, that took place after the general had capitulated to the imperial authorities. Early on in his description of the eventual meeting between Basil and Skleros, Psellos contrasts the experience and dignity of the rebel favourably with the juvenile irascibility of the emperor. He vividly describes Skleros approaching the emperor still wearing the red shoes symbolic of imperial rule. According to Psellos Basil, "..... saw all this from a distance and shut his eyes in annoyance, refusing to see him at all until he first clothed himself like an ordinary citizen."⁷² More significantly, however, this is the occasion at which Skleros' ingenuity is presented by Psellos as the quality which allows him to transcend the ignominy of defeat. Despite failing to take the throne himself, the battle-hardened general is still able to call upon his idiosyncratic cunning, and thus give the emperor some Machiavellian advice on how to prevent future disorder:

After this the emperor questioned him, as a man accustomed to command, about power, and how his rule could be protected, free from dissension? Skleros proposed advice which was not typical of a general, but more like a *cunning* plot: destroy the governors who are overproud; let no generals have too many resources; exhaust them with unjust exactions, so that they are kept busy with their own affairs; admit no woman to the palace; be accessible to no-one; share with few your most intimate plans.⁷³

But why should such encomiastic material have been necessary after Skleros' surrender? One of the reasons may have been that Skleros needed to justify his political career to the Byzantine political elite at large, to members of his own family, and even to himself. Amid the complexities and confusions presented by the Skleros narrative in the Greek record, it is easy to forget the enormous cost of Bardas' revolt to his immediate supporters. By refusing to surrender to Basil at the

⁷² Psellos, p.17

end of his first revolt in 979 with the rest of the rebel party, Skleros had led his immediate family and entourage into a ten-year political cul-de-sac. This impasse had involved at least six years' of imprisonment in Baghdad, two years' confinement by Phokas, and more important still, many years without the benefits that service within the upper echelons of the Byzantine military could bring.

Another reason for the production of a Skleros panegyric in the post-conference period may have been that imperial authorities still needed to be persuaded that the Skleroi were worth rehabilitating. In this context it is important to stress the completely supine position of the Skleroi after they capitulated. Far from meeting the emperor on equal terms in 989, Skleros appeared before Basil as a broken man. Both Psellos and Skylitzes record "the well known story" that Basil greeted the appearance of Skleros in the imperial tent with disdain. According to this account, which appears to have had a popular, and possibly oral origin, outside the tradition of the Skleros source, Basil sneered, "..... the one whom I have feared and trembled before comes led by the hand". In a particularly obscure phrase Skylitzes hints that the reason for Skleros' decrepitude was the fact he had been blinded during the course of his journey to meet Basil: "for having been struck during the journey by a lack of sight, he threw away sighted knowledge, and was led blind before the emperor."⁷⁴ In such unpropitious circumstances it was imperative for the future of the Skleros family that the imperial authorities should be reminded of the military daring and expertise of the Skleros family. More important, it was vital that these qualities were recognised as indispensable to the future well-being of the Byzantine state.

⁷³ Ibid. (translation adapted: E.R.A.Sewter, *Michael Psellus: Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (London, 1966), p.43). This story is also briefly alluded to by Kekaumenos, although Skleros is not actually named in his account (Kekaumenos, p.284)

⁷⁴ Skylitzes, pp.338-9; Psellos, p.17

However, while the appearance of other members of the Skleros family at the head of Byzantine armies during the subsequent decades of Basil's reign proved that military expertise was the route back to political fortune, Bardas Skleros and his brother Constantine did not live to see this revival.⁷⁵ Having been resettled in Thrace by the emperor, where it is possible that they were kept under house arrest, both died before the end of March 991, in circumstances that at least one later medieval Arab historian found suspicious.⁷⁶ Given the brevity of the time that intervened between the surrender and death of Skleros, it is likely that the encomium preserved in the accounts of Skylitzes and Psellos was written during the latter part of 990.

IV. Conclusion: the pro-Skleros source and the writing of history at the end of the eleventh century

Having identified traces of a pro-Skleros source behind the Greek historical record of the first thirteen years of Basil's reign, the most pressing question must be, why did historians such as Skylitzes and Psellos choose to articulate their appraisals around this source? One reason for their choice could of course have been the accident of survival: when they came to write their respective accounts in the mid-to-late eleventh century this was all they had available. But this is not the only possibility. Skylitzes himself says that an alternative account about the activities of the Skleroi in Baghdad existed: that they fought for the Buyids, were well-treated, and that as Adud al-Dawla lay dying he ordered his son to grant the Romans their

⁷⁵ See above, p.132 and below, p.310-11 for the future careers of Bardas' son Romanos and the rest of the Skleros entourage.

⁷⁶ Al-Rudhrawari notes that some reports alleged that Bardas Skleros died of poison (al-Rudhrawari, p.119)

freedom.⁷⁷ In addition, an alternative Byzantine narrative also seems to have entered the Arabic tradition, represented by the annalistic historian al-Rudhrawari. Inserted into his text just before mention of the Ibn Shahram embassy of 981/2 is a summary account of domestic Byzantine history from the death of Romanos II in 963 to the arrival of Skleros in Baghdad.⁷⁸ This account seems to have been taken from a Greek original since it displays an accurate rendering of Byzantine names and titles, which is unusual in most Arab historiography.⁷⁹ More striking, however, is the fact that this narrative does not portray Skleros the astute military hero, but rather Skleros, the leader of a motley band, limping into Baghdad, having been abandoned by most of his supporters:

Before the arrest of Ward his chief followers assembled in his presence, and told him that they saw no likelihood of their negotiations with Adud ending in the latter's furnishing effective aid. They said..... our right course is to return to Byzantine territory peacefully if we can, or if we must fight then doing our utmost with the prospect of winning, or else leaving this world with honour unimpaired. He replied that this proposal was worthless, that he had a high opinion of Adud.....when he resisted their proposalsmany of them abandoned him.⁸⁰

However, while the contemporary source that made its way into the Iraqi historical tradition may have been a more accurate account of events at the end of the tenth century, it is possible that Psellos and Skylitzes selected their underlying source materials with criteria other than precision and truthfulness in mind. In the previous two chapters it has been suggested that Skylitzes' 'Synopsis Historion' was compiled in accordance with many of the requirements and expectations of history-

⁷⁷ Skylitzes, p.334

⁷⁸ Al-Rudhrawari, pp.4-7

⁷⁹ For typical instances of inaccuracy in such matters see M.Canard, 'Les sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles', *REB* 19 (1961), pp.296-7, n.7; idem., 'Quelques noms de personnages byzantins dans une pièce du poète Abu Firas', *B* 11 (1936), p.452, n.5; cf. Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman*, ii, 387-91 comments on the habitual inaccuracy displayed by Arab geographers in describing Byzantium.

writing of the latter stages of the eleventh-century. In concluding this chapter I would like to suggest that the use of the pro-Skleros source in Skylitzes' and Psellos' accounts, both of which were written in the second half of the eleventh century, may be explained more by the political and literary demands of the period in which these historians themselves were writing, rather than by the source's accurate representation of the political history of the first half of the reign of Basil II.

At the most basic level of levels we should note the extent to which the pro-Skleros source meets the general requirements of history-writing in the second half of the eleventh century. In the second chapter of this thesis, a widespread enthusiasm among both authors and audiences in the later eleventh century for lively narratives which contained large doses of vivid military heroism was noted. The long and detailed military accounts within the Skleros source, in particular the narrative describing the general's heroic flight from Iraq in 987, certainly meet this fascination.⁸¹ Moreover, the ubiquity of praise for Skleros' ingenuity and cunning within this source may also have satisfied a contemporary interest in military acumen and clever strategies, an enthusiasm which Alexander Každan has identified as characteristic of much eleventh- and twelfth-century historical literature.⁸²

If we look more specifically at Skylitzes, then it is clear that here too a pro-Skleros source would fit with his later eleventh-century working methods and use of source materials. As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, Jonathan Shepard has argued

⁸⁰ Al-Rudhrawari, pp.7-8

⁸¹ See above, chapter two, pp.82, 88

⁸² Každan, 'Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal', *passim*; idem., *Change in Byzantine Culture*, pp.99-118, and especially pp.104, 112; idem., 'Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', pp.63-73

that eulogistic narratives of senior generals were among Skylitzes' preferred source materials in the writing of history. Shepard concluded from his assessment of Skylitzes' coverage of the mid-eleventh century, that two of his key sources were a laudatory account of the general Katakalon Kekaumenos, and an apologetic text produced to justify the revolt of George Maniakes (1043).⁸³ If Skylitzes was prepared to use encomia produced by senior generals as the main vehicle for his articulation of the history of the empire in the mid eleventh-century, then there is no reason why he should not have used similar source material in his account of Basil's reign. In this context it is worth pointing out that the ways in which the panegyric accounts of the generals Kekaumenos and Maniakes shape Skylitzes' eleventh-century testimony closely resemble the impact of the Skleros narrative on Skylitzes' coverage of the later tenth-century. Thus, narrative passages connected to the exploits of Kekaumenos and Maniakes tend to be long and detailed. The careers of these generals are minutely explained. Their tactical cleverness and strategic awareness are frequently stressed. It is their viewpoint which is most overwhelmingly audible. All these are diagnostic traits which have been detected in those parts of Skylitzes' coverage of Basil II which appear to be taken from the Skleros source.

Moreover, it is possible that Skylitzes' use of pro-Skleros material in his historical writings also reflects one of his other later eleventh-century interests examined in an earlier chapter. That interest is Skylitzes' enthusiasm for prosopography, and his related desire to express the Byzantine past through the deeds and achievements of the ancestors of those families who enjoyed political prominence in the early Komnenian period. In this context, it is worth noting that the Skleroi were not only an important family during the reign of Basil II, but were also still a very important

⁸³ See above, p.47

dynasty at the end of the eleventh century during the early decades of the reign of Alexios Komnenos. For instance, at the Synod of Blachernae in 1094-5, one Andronikos Skleros held the extremely senior title of *protonobelissimos*, a position which was inferior only to the rank of *sebastos* found among those families which had marriage links with the Komnenoi. Another member of the family who participated at the same synod, Michael, possessed the senior rank of *kouropalates*.⁸⁴ A further sign of the political prominence of the family in the early Komnenian period is the fact that an un-named member of the family participated in the Anemas revolt, an insurrection which has been dated to around the year 1100-01.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is clear that the family were too politically important to be irreparably damaged by their association with this conspiracy. Instead, their star continued to rise. By 1104, the Andronikos, who was a *protonobelissimos* in 1094, held the title of *sebastos*. Seibt, the principal modern prosopographer of the Skleros family, has suggested that this elevation in status may even reflect the fact that Andronikos had recently married into the imperial family.⁸⁶ While this hypothesis has yet to be substantiated by other evidence, Andronikos' senior title clearly indicates his importance within the highest echelons of Byzantine political society in the first decade of the twelfth century.

The idea that Skylitzes selected pro-Skleros source material in his analysis of Basil's reign on the basis of the political importance of this family in his own lifetime, gains support from the appearance of similar material in the account of Basil's reign in Michael Psellos' 'Chronographia'. Although the exact date of the composition of Psellos' 'Chronographia' has yet to be established, it is likely that Psellos was at work on his history several decades before Skylitzes wrote the

⁸⁴ Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos*, pp.501-2; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.97-101

⁸⁵ Anna Komnene, iii, 70; see above, pp.93-4 for further discussion of the Anemas revolt

‘Synopsis Historion’, probably during the third quarter of the eleventh century.⁸⁷ However, just as the Skleroi enjoyed political prominence at the end of the eleventh century when Skylitzes was writing, so they occupied the highest echelons of Byzantine elite society when Psellos was active. Among the leading Skleroi of the mid eleventh century, were Basil Skleros, *strategos* of the theme of the Anatolikon in the late 1020s and early 1030s; Romanos Skleros, *doux* of Antioch on two separate occasions during the 1050s, and a leading protagonist in the 1057 coup which unseated Michael VI; and two female members of the family.⁸⁸ The first of these women was the wife of Constantine Monomachos, who died before her husband became emperor in 1042. The second, called Maria, was Constantine’s long-standing mistress both before and after his accession to the imperial purple.⁸⁹

The prominence of the family at this time was certainly recognised by Psellos himself. For example, in the early stages of his account of the reign of Constantine Monomachos (1042-55) he refers at length to the emperor’s Skleraine mistress.⁹⁰ However, it is his much briefer reference to the Skleraine who had been Monomachos’ wife, which is the more interesting for our purposes. According to Psellos this woman was, “..... descended from the very famous Skleros family”.⁹¹ In this brief phrase the reader gains an elusive hint of the extent to which the political identity of mid eleventh-century members of the Skleros family was articulated through the fame and renown of their ancestors. This conclusion is substantiated by the contents of a letter written by Michael Psellos to Romanos Skleros, former *doux* of Antioch, in the mid 1050s. In this letter Psellos notes: “....

⁸⁶ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.98

⁸⁷ *ODB*, iii, 1754-5; *DMA*, x, 202-3

⁸⁸ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.65-8, 76-85

⁸⁹ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.70-6

⁹⁰ Psellos, pp.141-7

⁹¹ ἦν ἐκ τοῦ τῶν Σκληρῶν ἐπιφανεστάτου γένους ἡγάγετο (Psellos, p.141)

I neither saw your grandfather nor lay eyes on your father. But reputation has it that they were noble (*gennaioi*) men and the paragons of good birth (*eugeneia*).”⁹² While the prosopographical research of Seibt suggests that Bardas Skleros, the rebel of Basil’s reign, was too old to have been either the father or grandfather of the *doux* Romanos,⁹³ the comments of Michael Psellos offer strong circumstantial evidence that stories glorifying the earliest members of the Skleros dynasty were ubiquitous in mid eleventh-century Byzantium. Given the continuing importance of the Skleroi within Byzantine political society at the time Psellos was writing, it may not be entirely surprising that he chose to use one such Skleros narrative, that of Bardas, the founder of the Skleros family, as one of his sources for his appraisal of the reign of Basil II.

Although any connection between Michael Psellos and the pro-Skleros source must remain provisional until I have been able to conduct more detailed research into the historiographical background to the ‘Chronographia’, it nonetheless offers further support for the general argument that has underpinned the first three chapters of this thesis. That argument maintains that the first step towards uncovering the history of Basil’s reign, lies in understanding more of the social, literary and political contexts behind the much later historiographical traditions which describe that reign.

⁹² ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ σοι οὔτε τὸν πάππον εἶδον οὔτε τὸν πατέρα τεθέαμαι· ἡ φήμη δὲ τούτους γενναίους ἄνδρας καὶ εὐγενείας ἔχει ἀγάλματα (Psellos (Michael), *Scriptora Minora: Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora*, ed. E.Kurtz and F.Drexl (2 vols., Milan, 1937-41), ii, 102). Romanos Skleros was not the only member of this family with whom Psellos corresponded. At a rather later date, in the early 1070s, Psellos wrote to Nicholas Skleros, at that time a *proedros* and *krites* of the theme of the Aegean Sea (Psellos (Michael), *Scriptora Minora*, ii, letters 37, 44, 56 and 63; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.94-5). By 1084 Nicholas had been appointed to the senior judicial position of *mezas droungarios* of the *vigla*. He may even have been Skylitzes’ predecessor in this post (see above, chapter one, p.35)

⁹³ Romanos’ father was probably the brother of the Basil Skleros, the *strategos* of the Anatolikon mentioned above. His grandfather was Romanos, the son of Bardas Skleros (Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.64-5, 76)

Chapter Four

Anatolia and the Eastern Frontier: Geography, Economy and Trade

I. Introduction

The over-arching ambition of this thesis is to analyse the political history of the reign of Basil II by investigating how the Byzantine empire was governed in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. The first three chapters began that inquiry by considering the medieval historiographical background to the reign. In the specific case of John Skylitzes it has been suggested that the later eleventh-century literary, social, and political contexts within which the author was working, meant that he presented the reign in terms of the rivalries, deeds, and pedigrees of the aristocratic families, above all those which were famous at the end of the eleventh century. At a more general level, the extent to which all historians, whether writing in Greek or in other eastern languages, were interested in the revolts of the first thirteen years of the reign, has been noted.

These preoccupations on the part of medieval historians have profound implications for any perception of government during the reign of Basil. On the one hand Skylitzes' idiosyncratic and ahistorical focus on the aristocracy can obscure a full understanding of the nature of imperial authority during the reign. On the other, the widespread coverage accorded to the revolts of Skleros and Phokas by all the principal historians

of the reign, and their relative neglect of the post-989 period, make it difficult to assess to what extent the civil wars of the first thirteen years of the reign precipitated changes in the government of the Byzantine empire in the second half of the reign. Thus, it is impossible from the historical record alone to assess the viability of Michael Psellos' claims that after Basil defeated Skleros and Phokas in 989, he suppressed the greatest families and took the day-to-day running of the empire into his own hands. By extension it is difficult to use the historical record to consider the rather broader claims made by modern historians on the basis of Psellos' analysis. That is to say, it is impossible to tell whether Basil's reign represents a watershed in the government of medieval Byzantium, when a centrifugal state, typified by an overweening aristocracy, was replaced by a more centripetal empire, characterised by a highly centralised bureaucracy, which extended the reach of imperial authority in Constantinople into the provinces.¹

In trying to overcome the difficulties presented by the medieval historical record, there are a number of ways the historian could approach the question of Byzantine government during the reign of Basil II. The first might be to look at the relationship between members of the political elite and the emperor on a case-by-case basis, in order to assess the sustainability of Michael Psellos' contention that the emperor suppressed the greatest families of the empire after the revolts of Skleros and Phokas. This is an approach which has been adopted most recently by Sifonas. He has suggested that with the exception of the Phokas family and their close allies the Maleinoi, most leading families were not purged from government by Basil, and that indeed, the emperor fostered the later tenth- and early eleventh-century aristocracy

¹ See above, Introduction, pp.3-5

within his administration.² Thus, at a structural level, Sifonas sees little change in the balance of power between emperor and aristocracy during the reign as a whole.

Yet, predicating any analysis of Byzantine government in this period on the relationship between the emperor and the great families runs the risk of becoming hostage to the interpretations of the reign offered by Michael Psellos and John Skylitzes. As the first three chapters of this thesis have illustrated, the Greek historiographical tradition represented by Psellos and Skylitzes is so profoundly shaped by a later eleventh-century interest in the aristocratic families of the empire, that it distorts any impression of earlier periods of the Byzantine past such as the reign of Basil. In these circumstances, to progress with an analysis of political relations during Basil's reign which is based on the testimonies of Psellos and Skylitzes may leave the modern historian open to the danger of anachronism.

Instead, if the veil imposed over Basil's reign by historians at work in the later eleventh century is ever to be lifted, it is necessary to start with a different conceptual framework, and with alternative forms of evidence. These are the precepts underpinning the inquiry into Byzantine government in the reign of Basil presented in the rest of this thesis. In terms of conceptual framework, the analysis offered in the next three chapters will focus on imperial authority, since it is only once the structures and processes fundamental to the power of the emperor have been identified, that relationships between the emperor and leading members of the political elite can be meaningfully analysed. In other words, it is only once the outlines of the authority of the state have been determined, that the use, abuse, and appropriation of that authority

² C.S.Sifonas, 'Basile II et l'aristocratie byzantine', *B* 64 (1994), pp.118-133

by members of the political elite can be investigated, and the relationship between the exercise of private and public power established. Given the time limits of a doctoral dissertation, this analysis of imperial authority during Basil's reign will concentrate on the eastern half of the empire, the region that was at the centre of the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas. As far as evidence is concerned, the thin historical record will be set against other literary and material sources. However, since much of the evidence from outside the historical record is difficult to date, the chronological parameters of the investigation will extend beyond the limits of Basil's reign, backwards into the mid-tenth century, and forwards into the mid-eleventh. Chapters five and six will deal with imperial administration. This chapter will provide the context to that discussion by looking at the economy of the eastern half of the empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries, thus establishing the potential and limitations of the resource-base upon which the bureaucratic framework of the Byzantine state was built.

II. Sources

Unfortunately any study of the economy of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries is hampered by a variety of source material problems. A dearth of documentary evidence, such as wills and land grants, means that the agricultural exploitation of the countryside, the size and economic life of urban settlements, and patterns of trade remain obscure. Indeed, the only archive materials comparable to those found in much greater quantities in contemporary early medieval western Europe, amount to the will of Eustathios Boilas, a member of the landed gentry of mid eleventh-century Mesopotamia, and a small selection of documents

connected to the later eleventh-century landed arrangements of various monasteries from the islands and littoral of western Asia Minor.³ In conditions of such documentary dearth, any interpretation of the economy in the Byzantine east has to be based on occasional references in a kaleidoscope of literary sources and the material record. Literary evidence includes Greek and non-Greek historical writings, saints' lives, letters written by contemporaries, 'Digenes Akrites' (the solitary Byzantine epic/romance), military handbooks from the second half of the tenth century, and the accounts of ninth- and tenth-century Arab geographers. The material record is more extensive and includes coins, seals, art, architecture and archaeology. However, many of these forms of evidence are often not well-documented or well-known by historians.

Within this miscellany of literary and material sources some regions are better represented than others. Areas of coastal western Asia Minor and the Pontus, where Byzantine occupation continued into the thirteenth century, are represented in later medieval archival documents. With care, conclusions about the patterns of land tenure and methods of agricultural cultivation visible in these documents can be used to reflect on conditions in the same localities in earlier periods such as the tenth and eleventh centuries. These areas of the littoral of western Asia Minor are also relatively

³ *Testament* (Eustathios Boilas): P.Lemerle, 'Le testament de Eustathios Boilas (April 1059)', in *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1970), pp.40-62. None of the eleventh-century monastic document collections is very big. The largest comes from the monastery of Nea Moni on the island of Chios off the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. Yet, this collection only amounts to nineteen texts available in poorly edited versions of early nineteenth-century copies. Only four pre-1080 documents are extant from the monastery of Stylos which was located on Mount Latros, south-west of Ephesos. These are to be found in a fifteenth-century copy of a fragmentary cartulary. Only one document survives from the monastery of Xerochoraphion, which was located to the north of Mount Latros. To this slim repertoire can be added five pre-1080 documents which pertain to western Asia Minor, and survive in the archives of the monastery of Saint John on the island of Patmos. These monastic collections are summarised in M.Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor on the Eve of the Turkish Invasion' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1987), pp.371-2.

rich in saints' lives.⁴ Moving slightly inland, the economy of those transitional regions stretching from the uplands of the coastal river valleys onto the western and northern reaches of the plateau is less well served in the written record. Here, references have to be culled from a patchy hagiographical record and a handful of letters written by contemporary churchmen.⁵ However, throughout the littoral and plateau regions of western Asia Minor, written materials can also be supplemented with archaeological findings from a variety of sources: excavations at several urban sites in the river valleys of western Anatolia, including Ephesos, Sardis, Priene, Pergamon, and Hierapolis (Pamukkale); the excavation at the late Roman and Byzantine city of Amorion on the western reaches of the plateau; surveys of Byzantine fortifications and regional landscape histories in which the medieval period is but one phase in a *longue durée* perspective.⁶ However, it should be stressed that the archaeological record

⁴ The archive record of the river valleys of thirteenth-century western Asia Minor is analysed in M.Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile. Government and Society under the Lascarids of Nicaea 1204-6* (Oxford, 1975) and H.Ahrweiler, 'L'histoire et la géographie de la région de Smyrne entre les deux occupations turques (1018-1307) particulièrement au XIII^e siècle', *TM* 1 (1965), pp.1-204; for the Pontus see A.Bryer, 'The Estates of the Empire of Trebizond', *Archaeion Pontus* 35 (1979), pp.370-477. Saints' lives that reflect on everyday life in western Asia Minor include Saint Peter of Atroa (ninth century; *BHG* 2364), Saint Paul of Latros, Saint Nikephoros of Miletos (both tenth century; *BHG* 1474 and 1338), and Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion (eleventh century; *BHG* 979); from the Pontus, see the Miracles of Saint Eugenios of Trebizond (various periods; *BHG* 610-13), Saint George of Amastris (late eighth/early ninth century; *BHG* 688), the earlier sections of both versions of the life of Saint Athanasios, the founder of the Athonite monastery of the Lavra, who grew up in Trebizond (tenth and early eleventh century; *BHG* 187-8; 'Vitae Duae Antiquae Sancti Athanasii', ed. Noret, pp.5, 128, 130). Some of the letters of Nikephoros Ouranos, one of Basil II's closest advisers, refer to this region: Ouranos (Nikephoros): *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, ed. J.Darrouzès (Paris, 1960), pp.44-48.

⁵ Saints' lives from the northern or western periphery of the plateau: Saint Theodore of Sykeon (sixth to seventh century; *BHG* 1748), Saint Philaretos (eighth to ninth century; *BHG* 1511), Saint Luke the Stylite (tenth century; *BHG* 2239), and the Miracles of Saint Theodore (*BHG* 1764). The letters of the metropolitans Leo of Synada and John Mauropous reflect on the economy of these transitional regions (Leo of Synada, letters 43 and 54; Mauropous (John): *The Letters of Ioannes Mauropous Metropolitan of Euchaita*, ed. A.Karpozilos (Thessalonika, 1990), pp.25, 148-93; see below, pp.170-1).

⁶ The most detailed published interpretations of the Byzantine phases of several urban sites in western Asia Minor have been produced by C.Foss: see, for example, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979) and idem., *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (Cambridge (Mass.), 1976); see also the unpublished thesis by Whittow for analysis of some of the less well-known urban sites of the Maeander Valley ('Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', especially chapters 2-6, pp.26-265). For Amorion see annual reports by R.M.Harrison and C.S.Lightfoot in *Anatol Stud* Vols. 38-46 (1988-1996). C.Foss is also the principal authority on medieval Byzantine fortifications:

almost always reflects the history of urban settlement rather than the fortunes of the Byzantine countryside, since with the exception of some recent surveys, most excavations have focused on the great city sites of Late Antiquity rather than smaller towns or villages.⁷

Further east the archaeological record is patchier, literary sources are rare, and the approach in the secondary literature to the material culture of these areas has tended to be encyclopaedic rather than interpretative, with a stress on the recording of monuments and their decoration rather than on the wider economic, social, and political contexts of the visual record.⁸ This is an approach particularly visible in many

'Late Byzantine Fortifications in Lydia', *JÖB* 28 (1979), pp.297-320; idem., 'The Defenses of Asia Minor against the Turks', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), pp.145-204; idem., 'Sites and Strongholds of Northern Lydia', *Anatol Stud* 37 (1987), pp.81-101; idem., 'Strobilos and Related Sites', *Anatol Stud* 38 (1988), pp.147-74; idem., 'Byzantine Malagina and the Lower Sangarius', *Anatol Stud* 41 (1991), pp.161-183; idem., *Survey of Medieval Castles of Anatolia* (3 vols., Oxford, 1985-1996); and idem. with D.Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: an Introduction* (Pretoria, 1986). For the fortifications of the Maeander region in western Turkey see H.Barnes and M.Whittow, 'The Oxford University/British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Survey of Medieval Castles of Anatolia', *Anatol Stud* 43-44 (1993-4) dealing with Mastaura and Yılanlı kalesesi respectively; for the Pontus, J.Crow and S.Hill, 'Byzantine Fortifications of Amastris in Paphlagonia', *Anatol Stud* 45 (1995), pp.251-65; and for the northern reaches of the plateau, J.Crow, 'Alexios Komnenos and Kastamon: Castles and Settlement in Middle Byzantine Paphlagonia', in M.Mullett and D.Smythe (eds.), *Alexios I Komnenos* (Belfast, 1996), pp.12-36. Regional surveys in which the Byzantine period will be contextualised within a broader chronology, include the projects underway in Paphlagonia and on the Konya (Ikonion) plain: R.Matthews, 'Project Paphlagonia', *Anatolian Archaeological Reports* 3 (1998) pp.20-1; D.Baird, 'Konya Plain Survey', *Anatolian Archaeological Reports* 1-3 (1995-7). Many of the volumes produced by the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* project present a site-by-site guide to the eastern half of the empire. Each volume also contains a summary of the historical geography of the regions it covers. The relevant volumes are: 2 (Kappadokien), 4 (Galatien und Lykaonien), 5 (Kilikien und Isaurien), 7 (Phrygien und Pisidien), 9 (Paphlagonien und Honorias). Volume 10 (Aigaion Pelagos), deals with the islands lying off the coast of western Asia Minor (*TIB*: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Vienna, 1981-1998). A.Bryer and D.Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontus* (2 vols., Washington D.C., 1985) also present a historical geography of the Pontus.

⁷ S.Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor* (2 vols., Oxford, 1993), i, 9

⁸ The Life of Saint Michael Maleinos (first half of the tenth century; *BHG* 1295) contains occasional references to Cappadocia and Ankara. Although most of the Life of Saint Nikon Metanoieite of Sparta is set in Greece and the Peloponnese in the second half of the tenth century, it contains some references to the saint's childhood in the theme of the Armeniakon (*BHG* 1366). Other literary sources include the Digenes epic which comments on early medieval Cappadocia and the Euphrates region (Digenes Akrites: *Digenis Akritis: the Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*, ed. E.Jeffreys (Cambridge, 1998). The standard guide to the monuments of the Byzantine east is T.Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: an Architectural and*

modern analyses of Cappadocia in eastern Anatolia. Although hundreds of rock-cut churches, monasteries, and other troglodyte complexes in this region, many richly decorated with wall-paintings and sculpture, have been rigorously documented and discussed by art historians, the significance of this material record for the broader political history of the medieval Byzantine empire is rarely considered.⁹ This is a curious omission since Cappadocia is widely believed by many modern historians to be the region where the most powerful aristocratic families held their estates, and where, indeed, they regularly fomented rebellion against imperial authority.¹⁰

The dispersed and fragmentary nature of the evidence has given rise to very different interpretations among modern scholars about the nature of the economy in Asia Minor during the period which followed the loss of Egypt, Syria and Palestine to the Arabs in the mid-seventh century and the Turkish invasions of Asia Minor itself at the end of the eleventh century. Some historians maintain that consistent seasonal raiding by Arab armies between the seventh and the tenth centuries caused such widespread depopulation and deurbanisation that Anatolia was turned into a zone characterised by

Archaeological Survey (4 vols., London, 1987-90). Relatively few studies integrate geography, monuments, and literary texts in these regions: among the rare exceptions is Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Anzitone', pp.239-90.

⁹ The standard art history guides to the rock complexes of Cappadocia include G. de Jerphanion, *Une Nouvelle Province de l'art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce* (2 vols., Paris, 1925-42) and M. Restle, *Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien* (3 vols., Recklinghausen, 1967). In recent years the architectural and artistic record of this region has attracted enormous interest from art historians. Some of the most noteworthy studies include: A. Wharton-Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise: Tenth-Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington, 1986), and C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les Églises byzantines de Cappadoce: le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords* (Paris, 1991). The basic historical geography of Cappadocia is provided by Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, and F. Hild, *Das byzantinische Strassensystem in Kappadokien* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften) (Vienna, 1977). Various publications among the vast oeuvre of N. Thierry have made some attempt to place the artistic and architectural record of Byzantine Cappadocia in wider social and political contexts: see, for example, *Nouvelles Églises rupestres de Cappadoce: région du Hasan Dağ* (Paris, 1963); idem., 'Les enseignements historiques de l'archéologie cappadocienne', *TM* 8 (1981), pp.501-19; idem., *Haut Moyen-âge en Cappadoce: les églises de Çavuşin* (Paris, 1994); see also L. Rodley, *Cave Monasteries of Cappadocia* (Cambridge, 1985).

scattered village communities. According to this model Late Antique city sites were reduced to hill-top forts, home only to imperial tax collectors and army garrisons.¹¹ Others believe that although raids drained the vitality of the economy of Asia Minor, city sites continued to be occupied and act as centres of economic exchange for their agricultural hinterlands.¹² Less contentious is the belief that as Arab raiding activity waned in the later ninth and early tenth centuries the economy of Asia Minor began to recover. However, it should be stressed that much less attention has been paid to this period of expansion than to the retraction that followed the defeats of the seventh century.¹³

¹⁰ See, for example, Kaplan, 'Les grands propriétaires de Cappadoce', pp.125-158

¹¹ Proponents of widespread and dramatic deurbanisation in the seventh to ninth centuries include Mango, *Empire of the New Rome*, pp.71-3; A.P.Každan and G.Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies*, 3rd edn. (Washington, 1996), p.57; J.F.Haldon and H.Kennedy, 'The Arabo-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military and Society in the Borderlands', *ZVRI* 19 (1980), pp.85-95; M.Angold, 'The Shaping of the Medieval Byzantine 'City'', *Byz Forsch* 10 (1985), pp.1-8. Clive Foss's analyses of the archaeological records of a variety of seventh- to ninth-century urban centres have often been cited by those scholars who wish to support theories that the Late Antique city completely disappeared and that settlement retreated to hilltop sites. However, although Foss suggests that the Persian invasions at the beginning of the seventh century and regular incursions by Arabs over the next two centuries dramatically reduced the size of many urban sites of Asia Minor, he does not envisage the complete desertion of such locations, and admits that the literary and material evidence of urban decay is both fragmentary and sometimes contradictory: see for example Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis*, pp.53-62; *Ephesus After Antiquity*, pp.103-113.

¹² S.P.Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), pp.6-24, adhered to this more optimistic model. His views have been supported to some extent by more recent research which argues that the lower cities of many Late Antique sites continued to be occupied, with their inhabitants only fleeing to hill-top citadels during raids: see, for example, Crow and Hill, 'Byzantine Fortifications of Amastris', pp.251-65; Crow, 'Alexios Komnenos and Kastamon', pp.26-33; C.Zuckerman, 'The Reign of Constantine V in the *Miracles of St Theodore the Recruit* (BHG 1764)', *REB* 46 (1988), pp.191-210.

¹³ A.Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900-1200* (Cambridge, 1989), chapters 2 to 6; Mango, *Empire of the New Rome*, pp.81-3; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp.272-93, deal with the expansion of the economy in the ninth to twelfth centuries throughout the Byzantine empire, that is to say, in the Balkans as well as in Asia Minor. Their conclusions overturned previously held beliefs that internal political collapse and external military defeat in the last third of the eleventh century were predicated on longterm economic decline. For this older view, see for example, N.Svoronos, 'Société et organisation intérieure dans l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle: les principaux problèmes', in *Études sur l'organisation intérieure, la société et l'économie de l'empire byzantin* (Variorum Reprints, London, 1973), number 6.

This chapter will be primarily concerned with the changes to the economy that were set in train by the waning of Arab raids into the heartland of Anatolia during the tenth century, and the eastern conquests that were secured by Byzantine armies in and beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains during the half-century preceding Basil's reign. Given the sheer size of the geographical area under consideration and the effort required to collate and synthesise such a heterogeneous array of source materials, this investigation does not represent a detailed synthesis of all the available material and literary evidence, but instead offers a backdrop against which administrative and political developments during Basil's reign can better be understood.¹⁴

III. Relief, climate and communications¹⁵

At the heart of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire lies the central Anatolian plateau. Ringed on all sides by mountains, and roughly triangular in shape, the plateau extends five-hundred kilometres from Akroinos (modern-day Turkish Afyon) in the west to the Halys river (Kızıl Irmak) in the east, and three-hundred kilometres from the mountains of the Pontus in the north to the Taurus range in the south. It rises from a height of one thousand metres in the west to one-and-a-half thousand metres in east. Although some of the terrain, particularly the area around the salt lake, Tuz Gölü, is flat and barren, much of the plateau is characterised by rolling hill country. It is punctuated by high peaks, notably the 4,000 metre Mount Argaios south of Kaisareia

¹⁴ It should also be noted that while most references in the remainder of this chapter are taken from original primary material, the considerable weight of evidence considered means that some citations are extracted from secondary authorities.

¹⁵ See Map 2 for all references in this physical geography section

(Kayseri), and isolated fertile plains, including those around Ikonion (Konya) in the south and Kaisareia in the east. Surrounded by a rim of mountains on all sides, the plateau experiences a continental climate of hot dry summers and cold winters. Snow falls between November and February for an average of twenty-five days a year in western regions, rising to thirty-six days further east. Rainfall is low averaging 230 millimetres *per annum* in the area around Ankara and 180 millimetres in the Ikonion plain. Much of the terrain is treeless, but in springtime, the season when most of the annual rain is precipitated, much of the plateau is covered with grass and wild flowers.¹⁶

To the north the plateau is bordered by the heavily-wooded Pontus mountains, which while continuous and steep in the east, gradually give way to the lesser ranges of Paphlagonia further west. Beyond these mountains lies a narrow coastal strip bordering the Black Sea where the climate is typified by mild, wet winters and relatively humid summers. To the north-west and west of the plateau mountains rise to a height of two-and-a-half thousand metres, before yielding to the plains and river valley systems of the coasts of the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean. Here the climate is predominantly Mediterranean: hot dry summers followed by mild, wet winters, with little frost, although winter conditions can be more severe around the Sea of Marmara.¹⁷ Steep, rugged mountains shield the southern side of the plateau. South of these mountains lies

¹⁶ For the relief and climate of the plateau see Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i, 43-7, M.Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1992), pp.7-8,17-18; M.F.Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300-1450* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.26-28, 40-46; X. de Planhol, *Les Fondements géographiques de l'histoire de l'Islam* (Paris, 1968), pp.197-201, 207-209, 221-4. J.D.Howard-Johnston, 'Studies in the Organisation of the Byzantine Army in the Tenth and Eleventh centuries', (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1971), pp.xix-xxi, 194-236.

¹⁷ For the coastal river valleys in general see: Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.15-16, 23; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, p.30; Hendy, *Studies*, pp.28-32. For western Asia Minor: Angold, *Byzantine*

the Pamphylian plain which surrounds the port town of Attaleia (Antalya). Once again this region is typified by a Mediterranean climate.¹⁸ However, while marked differences in climate and relief exist between the coasts of western Asia Minor and the central plateau of the interior, there are large transitional areas between these two regions where a mixture of littoral and plateau conditions prevail. For example, in the regions of the headwaters of the Maeander river, fertile plains exist up to a height of a thousand metres. A little further east around the Pisidian Lakes the month of April can bring an average of three days of frost, and yet daytime temperatures can reach thirty degrees centigrade.¹⁹

To the south-east of the plateau lies the steep, narrow rim of the Taurus mountains. Beyond this range stretches the broad Cilician plain where a Mediterranean climate is intensified by very torrid summer heat.²⁰ The Cilician plain continues eastwards to the Amanos mountains, which run in a north-east to south-west direction and separate the plain of Antioch from the coast of northern Syria. East of the Taurus lies the rather broader range of the Anti Taurus extending one-hundred-and-thirty kilometres from west to east, and two-hundred kilometres from north to south. Between the major ridges of this range are located alluvial depressions, such as the plains of Lykandos

Government, p.102ff. For the Pontus: Bryer, *Empire of Trebizond*, p.372ff.; Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments of the Pontus*, pp.2-4.

¹⁸ C. Foss, 'The Cities of Pamphylia in the Byzantine Age', in *Cities, Fortresses and Villages of Byzantine Asia Minor* (Variorum, Aldeshot, 1996), number 4, pp.1-4; X. de Planhol, *De la Plaine pamphylienne aux lacs pisidiens: nomadisme et vie paysanne* (Paris, 1959), pp.27-42.

¹⁹ Hendy, *Studies*, pp.56-7 following the fourth-century 'Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium' draws too sharp a distinction between the climate and economies of interior plateau regions such as Cappadocia, Galatia, Phrygia, Armenia Minor, Paphlagonia and the Pontus and the coastal areas of Pamphylia, Lycia, Caria, Asia, Hellespont and Bithynia. De Planhol, *La Plaine pamphylienne*, p.32, Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i, 5-7 and Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.17 stress the existence of transitional areas between coast and plateau.

²⁰ Philetos Synadenos, the judge (*krites*) of Tarsos during Basil's reign, comments on the vicious heat of the summer in Cilicia: Synadenos (Philetos): *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, ed J.Darrouzès (Paris, 1960), letter 12.

(Elbistan), Melitene (Malatya) and the Anzitene.²¹ Eastwards beyond the Euphrates and its principal tributary the Arsanias (Murat Su) stretch the mountains and lava flows of western Caucasia (Armenia and Iberia), a predominantly upland terrain broken up by isolated alluvial plains. The most important plain in southern Armenia is that of Muş located approximately eighty kilometres due west of Lake Van. This plain lay at the heart of the tenth-century Armenian principdom of Taron. Further north a series of plains are located along the Araxes river near the town of Theodosiupolis (Erzerum). The severity of the long winters in these regions can hamper communications from October until early May.²²

In the Byzantine period any detachment of soldiers, caravan of merchants, party of pilgrims, or private traveller setting out from the shores of the Sea of Marmara could cross the Anatolian plateau by taking one of three principal routes.²³ The more northerly route went via Ankara to Sebasteia. An important diagonal route across the plateau also led to Ankara where it split, leading either eastwards to Kaisareia in Cappadocia, or south-eastwards to Tyana and thence to Podandos located on the northern flanks of the Taurus range.²⁴ The most southerly route headed to Ikonion on the southern reaches of the plateau, and from there branched either eastwards towards

²¹ Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Army', pp.xxi, 239, 250-3; 'Byzantine Anzitene', pp.248-9.

²² R.Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (Paris, 1947), pp.13-25; M.Rothman and G.Kobze, 'Muş in the Early Bronze Age', *Anatol Stud* 47 (1997), p.105; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.17; Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments of the Pontus*, pp.3-4; Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Army', p.xxi.

²³ Bryer and Winfield, *Monuments and Topography*, p.20 ff. and note 23 for a summary of the Anatolian land route system, an up-to-date bibliography, and a critical appraisal of W.Ramsay's study of the Asia Minor route system contained in *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor* (1890).

²⁴ The diagonal road leading across Asia Minor from Constantinople via Ankara to Tyana was constructed at the end of the first century AD. This route is commonly termed the Pilgrim's Road by historians (D.French, *Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor: Fascicule 1 The Pilgrim's Road* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1981), especially pp.13-32 and map 2).

Kaisareia, or south-eastwards to Podandos.²⁵ However, once on the plateau the traveller could branch away from these main roads and take several more minor routes which followed north-south, as well as west-east, trajectories. One of the principal north-south routes ran along the western edge of the plateau from Dorylaion, via Kotyaion to Mesanukta near Philomelion in the region of the Pisidian Lakes. Furthermore, although the interior of western Anatolia was separated from the western littoral by mountains, it was relatively easy to pass from the western reaches of the plateau into the coastal river valleys. For example, some routes led from Amorion on the western plateau, via Apameia (Dinar), into the Maeander valley. Others led westwards from Amorion, via modern-day Uşak, before descending into the Hermos valley system.²⁶

Much more difficult than travelling westwards from the plateau was crossing the mountains that bordered the Anatolian interior to the north and the south. In the Byzantine period most routes from the southern coast led up from Attaleia, and having crossed the mountains, headed either in a westerly direction towards coastal valleys of the Aegean, or northwards along the western edge of the plateau and on to Constantinople.²⁷ On the northern periphery of Anatolia, routes traversing the

²⁵ The more southerly route of these routes (that from Constantinople to Podandos via Amorion and Ikonion) was described in detail by the ninth-century Arab geographer Ibn Khurradadhbih: *Bibliotheca Geographicorum Arabicorum*, ed. M.J.de Goeje (Leiden, 1889), vi, 73-5, 82, 85.

²⁶ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', p.194

²⁷ These routes are described by the twelfth-century geographer al-Idrisi on the basis of earlier Arab accounts: M. Kordosis, 'The road network in Asia Minor and Armenia according to Edrisi. The stop of "Meldini"', in E.Jeffreys *et al.* (eds.), *Φιλελλην*, *Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (London, 1996), especially p.182, which describes the route between Attaleia and Amorion and lists as stopping places a variety of points in Pisidia including Philomelion and Polybotos. At the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion followed a route which led inland from Strobilos in south-west Asia Minor to Chonai in the interim zone between coast and plateau. He then journeyed southwards to Attaleia (Malamut, *Sur la route des saints byzantins*, p.41; see also Hendy, *Studies*, p.26, and Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.33)

mountains and linking coast and plateau were rare. In the far north-east many roads were open only on a seasonal basis.²⁸ As recently as the beginning of this century, caravans could not journey over the Pontic Alps to Trabzon (Trebizond) on the Black Sea from Erzerum (Theodosiupolis) before June or after October.²⁹ The impenetrability of these northern and southern ranges, meant that the coastal strips they sheltered were more accessible by sea than by land.³⁰ Harbour towns, many heavily refortified by imperial authorities during the seventh to the tenth centuries, punctuated both shorelines: Attaleia, Korykos and Seleukia in the south; Amastris, Sinope and Trebizond on the Pontic coast.³¹ To the south-east of the plateau the Taurus mountains present an almost impenetrable barrier. The only major passage through this range is at the Cilician Gates linking Tyana in southern Cappadocia with the Cilician plain.³² The Anti Taurus mountains are more easily traversed. One important Byzantine route ran from Kaisareia, past the mountain-top fortification of Tzamandos, eastwards to the plains of Melitene and the Anzitene.³³ A Roman road from Kaisareia to Melitene took a more circuitous route through the Anti Taurus via the plain of

²⁸ The easiest passage ran between Amisos on the shores of the Black Sea and Amaseia on the northern reaches of the plateau: Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, pp.32-3.

²⁹ Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, pp.39-56; T.Mitford, 'Military Road from Satala to Trabzon' *Anatolian Archaeology Reports* 2 (1996), p.21-2.

³⁰ Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, p.18: a messenger travelling from Constantinople to Theodosiupolis at top speed by an overland route in the medieval period took fifteen days; the journey could be completed in a third of the time if the Constantinople-to-Trebizond leg of the journey was by sea.

³¹ For many of these sites see Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, pp.15-16, 21-2, 30; Foss, 'Cities of Pamphylia', pp.1-62; Crow and Hill, 'Byzantine Amastris'. The principal medieval refortification of Trebizond occurred in the fourteenth century. However, parts of the Roman defences in the upper city show signs of having been repaired during the ninth century: Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, pp.186-93.

³² Hild, *Strassensystem*, pp.51-63, 118-129; Ibn Hawkal reflected on the impenetrability of the Taurus (Ibn Hawkal, p.181)

³³ Hild, *Strassensystem*, pp.90-100. Ibn Hawkal describes an Arab raiding expedition from Mayafariqin which travelled via the Anzitene, Melitene and Tzamandos (Ibn Hawkal, pp.191-2). A similar route linking the regions beyond the Anti Taurus with Kaisareia is mentioned by Ibn Hawkal's close contemporary al-Mukaddasi (E.Honigmann, 'Un itinéraire arabe à travers le Pont', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves: Mélanges Franz Cumont* (Brussels, 1936), pp.270-1).

Lykandos (Elbistan). In the first year of his revolt, Bardas Skleros seems to have crossed the Anti Taurus from Charpete (Harput) in the Anzitene using this Roman road. Having arrived in the Lykandos, he then headed northwards to Tzamandos picking up the Byzantine road which then led to Kaisareia.³⁴

Further east still the Anti Taurus range itself could be approached from western Caucasia by routes which followed the principal rivers of the region. The more southerly route ran alongside the Arsaias (Murat Su) from Manzikert north of Lake Van, via the plain of Muş, towards Melitene. The northerly route kept close to the Araxes, passed Theodosiupolis, and approached the northern Anti Taurus along the upper Euphrates.³⁵ The importance of these two routes lay in the ease of passage they allowed for east-west movement between Caucasia, the Anti Taurus and Anatolia. But while lateral movement across Caucasia along these east-west arteries was relatively easy, it was much more difficult to move into this region from those areas which lay to the south. The only major passes connecting the isolated plains of the Anti Taurus and the Armenian highlands with the northern Djaziran cities of Amida and Mayafariqin located on the upper Tigris river, were the Bitlis pass south-west of Lake Van, and the Ergani pass south of the Anzitene. A subsidiary pass crossed the Bingöl Dağı approximately half way between the Ergani and the Bitlis passes.³⁶

³⁴ Skylitzes, pp.317-9. See chapter three, pp.123-4, for the route followed by Skleros in 976/7.

³⁵ Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, p.20. A tenth-century Armenian itinerary refers to a trading route which ran from Dvin in eastern Armenia to Karin (Theodosiupolis), and thence to Constantinople via a series of towns along the northern reaches of the Anatolian plateau including Koloneia, Amaseia, Gangra and Ankara (H.A.Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, (trans. N.G.Garsoian), (Lisbon, 1965), pp.168-9).

³⁶ J.D.Howard-Johnston, 'Procopius, Roman Defences North of the Taurus and the New Fortress of Citharizon', in D.H.French and C.S.Lightfoot (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1989), pp.215-8.

IV. Land use³⁷

i. Coastal plains and river valleys

The most productive areas of the landmass of Anatolia are the coastal plains and river valleys of the north and west, which enjoy a mild Mediterranean climate. Traditionally these regions have been characterised by a mixed agriculture of arable, arboriculture (vines, olives, figs and other fruit trees) and small-scale livestock rearing. In the thirteenth century the agricultural economy of the empire of the Laskarids based in the river valleys of western Asia Minor included the rearing of animals and the cultivation of arable crops, olives, vines and orchards. The main grain-producing area was around Smyrna.³⁸ Although the evidence for land use in the tenth and eleventh centuries is less plentiful than during the Laskarid period, contemporary accounts comment upon the agricultural productivity of the western littoral of Asia Minor in the second half of the tenth century. Leo, the metropolitan of Synada, a diocese located on the western periphery of the plateau, declared that he was accustomed to receiving supplies of wine, olives, and wheat from the western theme of the Thrakesion and the region of Attaleia. The Arab geographer Ibn Hawkal noted that the territory which separated the two cities of Constantinople and Attaleia :

is fertile and well populated and the passage of trade is uninterrupted along the whole route all the way from the suburbs of Attaleia and its rural hinterland, which flourishes greatly and is very productive, as far as the Bosphoros.³⁹

³⁷ For all place names henceforth in this chapter, see Map 3, except for those in western Cappadocia, which are indicated on Map 4.

³⁸ Angold, *Byzantine Government*, p.103 ff.; see below, pp.194-5 and n.150

³⁹ Leo of Synada, letter 43; Ibn Hawkal, p.196; see also Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.23; Hendy, *Studies*, p.28; Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', pp.369, 389.

A similar pattern of intensive market gardening characterised the landscape of the medieval Pontus. In 1292 the envoys of Edward I of England, who stopped off in the empire of Trebizond on their way to Tabriz in northern Iran, were able to purchase wine, meat, cereal, rice, oil, fruit, wax, herbs, spices, cloth, and hemp.⁴⁰ Some of these products were produced in this region in the ninth and tenth centuries: the Book of the Eparch, compiled during the reign of Leo VI (886-912), mentions that linen and spices were both exported from the Pontus to Constantinople.⁴¹ The capacity of the northern shore of Asia Minor to support a string of towns from Early Antiquity on into the medieval period, despite the narrowness of the cultivable area between the Black Sea and the Pontic Alps, is a further index of the natural productivity of this region.⁴²

ii. Anatolian plateau

Inland from the fertile coasts it is usually argued that the principal economic activity of the central Anatolian plateau during the medieval Byzantine period was the rearing of livestock. Such arguments are predicated on the belief that until advent of modern irrigation and transportation, the altitude, the scrubby terrain, and above all the intensity of the winter cold and the irregularity of annual rainfall, made the cultivation of crops unduly precarious.⁴³ The best contemporary evidence in support of this view comes from a letter written by Leo of Synada. He claimed that the altitude of the theme of the Anatolikon, the province in the western plateau where his diocese was located, was such that neither wheat, grapes, nor olives would grow there, and that the only

⁴⁰ Bryer, 'Empire of Trebizond', pp.375-8; Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, pp.5-7.

⁴¹ *Eparch: Das Eparchenbuch Leos des Weisen*, ed. J.Koder (CFHB XXXIII, Vienna, 1991), pp.106.

⁴² Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p.30

⁴³ Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.23-4; Hendy, *Studies*, pp.26-8, 34-5, 53-8.

viable arable crop was barley.⁴⁴ Furthermore, when Crusading armies crossed the central Anatolian plateau on their way to Palestine in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they reported on an absence of sedentary populations and arable agriculture. Instead, they noted the ubiquity of Turcomen nomads and straggling herds of sheep.⁴⁵

There are also several references within other Byzantine and Arab sources to the ubiquity of the rearing of livestock all over the tenth- and eleventh-century plateau. Saint Philaretos, who owned forty-eight estates in the late eighth century in Galatia and Paphlagonia on the north-west periphery of the plateau, possessed vast flocks and herds.⁴⁶ The ninth-century life of Saint Peter of Atroa refers to a wealthy landowner in upland Lydia whose flocks died prematurely after succumbing to the malevolence of a demon.⁴⁷ In the early tenth century Saint Luke the Stylite worked as a swineherd near Kotyaion (Kütahya).⁴⁸ When Arab *jihad* raiders attacked the plateau from east of the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains in the ninth and early tenth-centuries they often rustled livestock on the plateau. In 931 raiding parties from Tarsos headed for Amorion and Ankara to capture live animals. Eight years previously a huge tally of eight thousand cattle and twenty thousand sheep had been captured by Tarsiote forces.⁴⁹ In the mid-tenth century the Arab geographer Kudama ibn Djafar advised

⁴⁴ Leo of Synada, letter 43; L.Robert, 'Sur les lettres d'un métropolitain de Phrygie au Xe siècle', *Journal des Savants* (1961), pp.97-166; (1962), pp.1-74.

⁴⁵ For instance, the German contingent of the Third Crusade could find no ready supplies of grain or fruit on the plateau during their march between Laodikeia (Denizli) in the west and Karaman in the south. Odo of Deuil, a participant in the Second Crusade of 1147, had observed a similar lack of supplies in the regions east of Laodikeia (Hendy, *Studies*, pp.42-3).

⁴⁶ Philaretos' livestock amounted to 600 cattle, 100 pairs of oxen, 800 mares, 80 mules and 12,000 sheep: Saint Philaretos: 'La vie de S.Philaretè', ed. and trans. M.H. Fourmoy and M.Leroy, *B* 9 (1934), p.113; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.332.

⁴⁷ H.Maguire, *Ikons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1996), p.114.

⁴⁸ Saint Luke the Stylite: 'Vie de saint Luc le Stylite (879-979),' ed. and trans. F.Vanderstuyf, *PO* XI (1915), p.211.

⁴⁹ Ibn al Athir in A.A.Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* (Brussels, 1950), ii (2), 148-53.

raiding parties to brave the winter snows of Anatolia and the mountain passes, in order to round up flocks and herds which had been brought down from their upland summer pastures and left to graze on the more accessible regions of the plateau.⁵⁰ By the ninth century baggage animals for imperial expeditions were reared in the western-plateau districts of Phrygia, on private estates as part of a tax in kind called the *mitaton*. When imperial expeditions were due to depart from Constantinople, the *logothetes* of the herds and flocks would transport pack animals reared on these estates north and westwards to Malagina in the region of the lower Sangarios, the first stopping place on the route for armies heading towards the eastern frontier. The animals would then be left in the care of the *komes* of the Stables.⁵¹ Further east the plain of Lykandos was described by Constantine Porphyrogenitus as suitable for the raising of stock, the fattening of cattle, and grazing of horses.⁵² The historian Michael Attaleiates records in the eleventh century that livestock markets were held at Ikonion on the southern reaches of the plateau.⁵³

Yet, it would be premature to assume that the whole of the Anatolian interior had by physical necessity to be given over to the rearing of livestock. In the first place it is clear that the interior of Anatolia could support other agricultural activities. In all but a few areas of the plateau the soil cover is suitable for the growing of grain. In some regions such as the area around the Pisidian lakes, a rich red loam even makes some varieties of arboriculture possible. Moreover, while drought can affect the plateau on

⁵⁰ Kudama ibn Dja'far: *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M.J.de Goeje (Leiden, 1889), vi, pp.199-200; Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Army', p.213.

⁵¹ *Military Expeditions*: J.Haldon, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions* (Vienna, 1990), text A; see also Foss, 'Byzantine Malagina', p.163; Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Army', p.168. Ibn Khurradadhbih described the region around Dorylaion in Phrygia as "the pasture of the asses of the emperor" (Ibn Khurradadhbih, p.73).

⁵² Hendy, *Studies*, p.55.

occasions, average annual precipitation levels are adequate for the cultivation of grain. Furthermore, during the Late Antique period all but the most barren and arid zones of Asia Minor were typified by a sedentarised arable agriculture.⁵⁴ According to the life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon, cereal production was ubiquitous in the north-west plateau in the sixth and seventh centuries.⁵⁵

While it is possible that depopulation caused by subsequent centuries of Arab raiding curtailed the scale of arable cultivation practised in the heyday of Late Antique Anatolia, there is still evidence to suggest that some arable crops were grown during the Byzantine period. The family of Saint Luke the Stylite cultivated grain at Lampe in the region of Sebasteia on the western reaches of the plateau north-west of Synada. Further east in the theme of the Armeniakon the young Saint Nikon decided to become an ascetic as he witnessed the *paroikoi* of his father toiling remorselessly in the fields.⁵⁶ Moreover, the incidence of storage facilities where bumper crops could be preserved, suggests that precautions could be taken against the vicissitudes of climate. For example, when the area around Saint Luke's home was threatened with dearth, the young saint opened his father's subterranean silo which contained four-thousand *modioi* of grain.⁵⁷ The tenth-century Arab geographer Masudi referred to an underground corn store at Magida, modern day Niğde, in south-west Cappadocia.⁵⁸ The material record of this region of Cappadocia confirms the existence of

⁵³ Angold, 'Medieval Byzantine 'City'', p.12

⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i, 144-7; de Planhol, *Les Fondements géographiques*, pp.197-209, 220-4

⁵⁵ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, ii, 131.

⁵⁶ Saint Luke the Stylite, pp.200-6; Saint Nikon, pp.35-6.

⁵⁷ Saint Luke the Stylite, p.206. It has been calculated that the dimensions of this silo was in the region of sixty-eight cubic metres. Silos which have been found in the Late Antique villages of the Syrian limestone massif are of a similar size (Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.124-5).

⁵⁸ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii (2) 401; Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman*, ii, 402.

underground complexes where grain could be stored in order to sustain local communities during famine or invasions. These depositories were often guarded with large millstones.⁵⁹ One of the biggest underground complexes is at Derinkuyu (Byzantine Malokopeia), close to Magida. Sunk to a depth of seven storeys, this complex not only includes store rooms, but also a chapel complete with pillars.⁶⁰ Finally, it is clear that many accounts of agricultural dearth on the plateau presented by Crusaders reflect more the short-term effects of Turkish raiding rather than the immutable constraints of climate and terrain. For example, during the First Crusade in 1097/8 Fulcher of Chartres believed that a lack of bread near Pisidian Antioch was caused by the devastation of the neighbouring countryside by Turkish raiders.⁶¹

But if arable farming was possible and indeed practised on the contemporary plateau, how are Leo of Synada's reflections on the limited agricultural potential of western Anatolia to be interpreted? Here we should be cautious of accepting Leo's statements as accurate autopsy. Leo's complaints about the desolate nature of his diocese are formulated in a letter to Basil II requesting the restoration of an allowance which enabled him to give generous hospitality to his guests. Despite the guarantee of this allowance by previous imperial chrysobulls, it had recently been rescinded. If, as its modern editor suggests, this letter can be dated to the late 990s, then it may be that Leo was victim of the novel promulgated in 996, in which all chrysobulls issued by Basil's great uncle and former advisor Basil Lekapenos were declared void unless

⁵⁹ Arab geographers noted that rock was quarried and shaped into mill stones in the area of western Cappadocia characterised by underground complexes (Ibn Khurradadhbih, p.80)

⁶⁰ Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, p.227. See Map 4, for the exact location of Derinkuyu

⁶¹ Hendy, *Studies*, p.54. The difficulty of knowing whether Crusaders reflected on short term devastation caused by Turkish invasions or long-term economic malaise has been pointed out by Foss, 'The Defenses of Asia Minor against the Turks', p.151.

countersigned by Basil himself.⁶² In these circumstances it is distinctly possible that Leo chose to exaggerate the barbarity of the wilderness in which he was forced to live, in order to get his erstwhile privileges restored. That Leo's comments should be interpreted within the wider context of a petition to the emperor, was first suggested several decades ago by Louis Robert. He noted that the archbishop's testimony was steeped in a rhetoric of humiliation, "profitable pour une réclamation fiscale".⁶³

It is clear that hyperbole is relevant in other contexts where letter writers comment on the poverty of their provincial locales. In one letter, the mid-eleventh century metropolitan of Euchaita John Mauropous describes his see on the northern plateau as an uninhabited, treeless desert devoid of shade, wood, and vegetables. Yet in the same letter John grudgingly concedes that the region "abounds.... in the production of grain."⁶⁴ And in his sermons he praises the well-watered hinterland of Euchaita, the crops produced by local villages, the fat herds of local cattle, and the bustling fair (*panegyris*) held on the feast day of the Saint Theodore.⁶⁵ Such a dichotomy only makes sense if it is understood within the literary *topoi* practised in epistolography in medieval Byzantium. Tenth- to twelfth-century letter writers such as Nikephoros Ouranos, Philetos Synadenos, Theophylact of Ochrid and Michael Choniates all reflected on the poverty of their provincial postings as a matter of good literary taste.⁶⁶

⁶² Leo of Synada, letter 43; Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 270-1; see below, p.258 and n.165.

⁶³ Robert, 'Sur les lettres d'un métropolitain de Phrygie', pp.150-6.

⁶⁴ Mauropous (John), letter 64, pp.172-3

⁶⁵ Hendy, *Studies*, p.141; S.Vryonis, 'The *Panegyris* of the Byzantine Saint', in S.Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint* (Birmingham, 1981), p.202. In a summary of the medieval evidence relating to Euchaita, J.Crow suggests that interpretations which see Euchaita reduced to little more than a livestock-rearing ranch have been unduly pessimistic ('Alexios Komnenos and Kastamon', pp.25-33).

⁶⁶ During military expeditions Nikephoros Ouranos (Constantinopolitan, keeper of the imperial inkstand, diplomat and leading general during the reign of Basil II) displayed conspicuous nostalgia for Constantinople and distaste for the hardships of life on campaign (Ouranos, letters 19, 41 and 47). Philetos Synadenos, *krites* of Tarsos during Basil's reign, complained that residence among the Cilicians

Yet, as the correspondence of Theophylact and Michael Choniates demonstrates, the same letter writers could also write on other occasions in praise of the locales under their responsibility displaying as much enthusiasm in their laudations as they expended elsewhere in the rhetoric of ennui.⁶⁷ It would be a mistake to assume that the comments of Leo of Synada and John Mauropous were driven any less by the demands of contemporary literary tastes. Indeed, a rhetorical model for the comments of John is readily available. His reflections on the inhospitable nature of Euchaita mirror almost exactly the description of Sasima in western Cappadocia by Gregory of Nazianzos in the fourth century as, "... uninhabited, with no charm, no trees, no green, no forest, no shade, utterly barbarous and devoid of culture."⁶⁸

iii. Eastern frontier

Beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus, in the plains which had been conquered by Byzantine armies in the tenth century, there is less ambiguity about the use to which the land was put. Here, as in the fertile river valleys of coastal Anatolia, mixed agriculture was practised, and the landscape was characterised by cultivated fields, pastures, trees, and mills. Most of these plains were quite large but isolated; their agricultural produce supported a single, but sizeable, urban settlement. Only the very extensive Cilician plain sustained more than one city: Tarsos, Mopsuestia, Adana and Anazarbos. Unfortunately most descriptions of the agricultural production of these regions in the early Middle Ages were composed by Arab geographers and historians who wrote in the period before the Byzantine conquests of the mid- to later tenth

was turning him into a barbarian (Synadenos, letter 7). See below, pp.313-5, 336-9, for further discussion of the careers of Nikephoros and Philetos.

⁶⁷ M.Mullet, 'Originality in the Byzantine Letter: the Case of Exile', in A.R.Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford, 1995), pp.39-58.

century.⁶⁹ However, a rare snapshot of life in Byzantine rural northern Syria is provided by Ibn Butlan, a Christian Arab doctor who travelled from Baghdad in 1048/9. As he journeyed from Aleppo to Antioch he reported on a countryside typified by, "... fertile soil cultivated with wheat and barley under olive trees, its villages follow each other in uninterrupted succession, its gardens are full of flowers and its watercourses stream freely." The first village which Ibn Butlan saw on the road from Aleppo was Imm, location of the fortress controlled in the first half of the 990s by Michael Bourtzes, the *doux* of Antioch. Here Ibn Butlan noted a spring with fish and a mill. Wine was easily procured.⁷⁰

The evidence pertaining to land use suggests that all regions of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire, including the Anatolian plateau, were able to support a mixed agriculture of arable production and livestock rearing. Furthermore, it is clear that mixed husbandry was maintained, albeit at a subsistence level, even in regions which suffered severe Arab raiding. Once peace came to the eastern half of the Byzantine empire, agriculture of many varieties had the potential to prosper. However, the degree to which prosperity could be realised would be dependent on other economic variables, not least the size of the labour force available to manage the landed resources of Anatolia and the eastern frontier.

⁶⁸ V. von Falkenhausen, 'Bishops', in G. Cavallo (ed.), *The Byzantines* (Chicago, 1997), p.179.

⁶⁹ For example Ibn Hawkal, writing in the later tenth century, describes Antioch and the cultivated fields, pastures, trees and mills of its immediate hinterland. However, he explains that the city is now in enemy (ie. Byzantine) hands. It is clear that his description draws on the observations of earlier Arab geographers rather than contemporary eye witness testimony (Ibn Hawkal, pp.176-7)

⁷⁰ Ibn Butlan: *The Medico-Philosophical Controversy between Ibn Butlan of Baghdad and Ibn Ridwan of Cairo*, trans. and ed. J. Schlacht and M. Meyerhof (Cairo, 1937), pp.54-5.

V. Economic growth

i. Coastal plains and river valleys

Turning from land use to economic expansion, there is clear evidence from across the eastern half of the Byzantine empire that the tenth and eleventh centuries represented a period of significant growth. In the regions of the coastal plains and river valleys the best evidence of expansion comes from the archaeology of a variety of "urban" sites in the river valleys of the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts. At Sardis during the ninth century the main basilical church was refurbished. By the tenth century domestic dwellings and small industrial units began to appear with greater frequency in many different locations within the city: on the acropolis, at the temple of Artemis, in the gymnasium, and at the sites of several Roman suburban villas. In the same period the city of Ephesos also began to expand. The church of the Virgin was remodelled, and the area around it became a new residential precinct. At several "urban" sites in western Asia Minor finds of stray copper coins, the small change of everyday economic exchange, are more plentiful in the tenth and eleventh centuries than in the preceding Dark Age period. Although the numbers involved are patchy because of the unsystematic way in which many of these retrievals were recorded by earlier generations of archaeologists, an expansion in the number of such finds is conspicuous at Aya Suluk, (two kilometers inland from the ancient urban settlement at Ephesos), as well as at Sardis, Priene and Pergamon.⁷¹

⁷¹ G.Bates, *Byzantine Coins* (Cambridge (Mass.), 1971) deals with the coin finds at Sardis; C.Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, p.112, 130ff. deals with those at Ephesos; C.Morrisson, 'Monnaie et finances dans l'empire byzantin Xe-XIVe siècle', in *Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantin* (2 vols., Paris,

More controversial than whether these "urban" sites were expanding is how this expansion should be interpreted. In his assessment of Sardis in the early Middle Ages Clive Foss emphasises the modesty of the expansion of the "city" in the ninth and tenth centuries. Rather than a viable urban settlement, Sardis was nothing more than a loose network of villages scattered in the ruins of the Late Antique city. The purpose of the agricultural activity of these villages and their small industrial units, such as potteries, was merely to provide food and goods for local consumption. Yet, this highly localised model may misrepresent the economy of tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine western Asia Minor. In the first place, it is possible that some towns were considerably larger than the current state of their excavations indicate. For example, much of medieval Sardis may still be underground: neither the area around the Byzantine cathedral nor the western reaches of the site, where two Byzantine fortifications are located, have yet been excavated.⁷² More important, however, it would be premature to assume that dispersed settlement was necessarily incompatible with urban vitality. Anthony Bryer has suggested that although medieval Byzantine towns often took the form of an agglomeration of villages separated by fields and orchards, these discrete settlements were not entirely independent or self-sufficient, but instead performed quite distinct functions that contributed to the overall prosperity of the town as a whole. Within this loose urban matrix, certain sectors could be devoted to specialist industries or commercial enterprises; others were dominated by residents with monastic or military functions; others by particular religious or ethnic groupings. This flexible, disaggregated structure enabled the inhabitants of these different component

1992), ii, 298-308 figure 2 summarises the copper coin finds in graphical form from a variety of ninth- to eleventh-century archaeological sites including those in western Asia Minor.

⁷² Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis*, p.60

villages to identify themselves with the city as a whole, and to contribute to a level of economic activity which transcended the merely subsistent.⁷³

Indeed, elsewhere in coastal western Asia Minor, literary evidence from the tenth and eleventh centuries suggests that urban sites could act as genuine centres of commercial exchange for extensive agricultural hinterlands. For example, Ephesos was populated in the tenth and eleventh centuries by a cosmopolitan population of Jews, Bulgars, Arabs and Armenians. Traders included booksellers, painters, perfumers and translators. Monks from Mount Latros journeyed to the city to collect essential supplies and luxury goods. The remains of early medieval rural settlements in the countryside around Ephesos, including a farmhouse and an eleventh-century unwalled site at Arvalia, suggest that the city on the coast was supplied from its agricultural hinterland.⁷⁴ A Jewish marriage contract from the Cairo Geniza archive, dated to 1022, indicates that Jews lived at Mastaura, close to modern-day Nazilli in the Maeander Valley, during the reign of Basil II.⁷⁵ A Jewish community is also attested in Attaleia on the south coast during the same decade.⁷⁶ Further north at Nikaia the life of the ninth-century monk Constantine, a convert from Judaism, confirms the existence of a Jewish community in this town too.⁷⁷ Seals of customs officials (*kommerkiarioi*) from Nikaia and *xenodochoi* (officials in charge of hostels where merchants were

⁷³ A.Bryer, 'The Structure of the Late Byzantine Town: *Dioikismos* and the *Mesoi*', in A.Bryer and H.Lowry (eds.), *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*, (Birmingham/Washington, 1986), pp.263-279.

⁷⁴ Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, pp.120-34; Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, pp.10-11.

⁷⁵ T.Reinach, 'Un contrat de mariage du temps de Basil le Bulgaroctone', in *Mélanges offerts à M.Gustave Schlumberger*, (Paris, 1924), ii, 123.

⁷⁶ Foss, 'Cities of Pamphylia', pp.9-10; see below, p.194, for Attaleia's importance as a trading centre

⁷⁷ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.12; BHG 370.

accommodated), also indicate the commercial importance of the town.⁷⁸ During the reign of Basil II it was endowed with large grain silos, big enough to feed the garrison of the city for two years. Awed by the size of these silos Bardas Skleros was persuaded not to undertake a full scale siege against the city during his first revolt. Although he was tricked into believing that the city was well provisioned by the fact that the silos had been filled with sand and covered with grain, the sheer size of the storage facilities in question indicate that the city must have been supplied with basic foodstuffs from its hinterland, rather than by crops grown on a small scale within the urban site itself.⁷⁹

Yet, while the economy of the littoral of Asia Minor expanded during the tenth and eleventh centuries, it would be unwise to overstate the extent of this growth. This is because retraction during the seventh to ninth centuries may not have been so pronounced here as in other regions of Anatolia. A series of literary references, for example, indicate the local economy in these regions enjoyed a certain vitality even during the eighth and ninth centuries. When the Anglo-Saxon bishop Willibald visited Ephesos in 721, the town was still a thriving port.⁸⁰ In 795 the fair held at the city yielded at least one hundred pounds for the imperial authorities.⁸¹ Meanwhile, on the Black Sea coast, the early ninth-century life of the eighth-century Saint George, metropolitan of Amastris, includes allusions to Greek merchants from the Euxine

⁷⁸ Leo, *kommerkiarios* of Nikaia (tenth to eleventh century): K.M.Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντιὰ μολυβδόβουλλα τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἐθνικοῦ Νομισματικοῦ Μουσείου* (Athens, 1917), no.122d. For various contemporary *xenodochoi* from the city see J.Nesbitt and N.Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, Vol. 3 (*West, North-West, and Central Asia Minor and the Orient*) (Washington D.C., 1996), no.59.7 (tenth century); Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.263; G.Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1884), p.250, no.1. In the ninth century Arab geographers reported that vegetables were transported from Nikaia to Constantinople (Ibn Khurradadhbih, p.74)

⁷⁹ Skylitzes, p.323

⁸⁰ Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, pp.108-110.

⁸¹ Theophanes: *Chronographia*, ed. C.de Boor (2 vols., Leipzig, 1883-5), i, 469.

travelling between different local port towns. In the later ninth century Niketas the Paphlagonian described Scythian, probably Rus, merchants from the Crimea travelling to the Pontus to trade.⁸² Archaeological evidence also suggests that the lower cities of many Late Antique urban sites in these coastal and river valleys regions continued to be occupied during this period, and that flight to hilltop sites was a phenomenon connected more to Turkish invasions in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries than to Arab incursions in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁸³ The reason for a degree of economic prosperity was almost certainly the fact that these regions were more sheltered from Arab raids than other districts of Anatolia. The towns and hinterlands of the north coast were always protected from raiding parties by the Pontic mountains.⁸⁴ The western river valleys were shielded by a series of fortifications constructed at places such as Dorylaion and Kotyaion during the seventh and eighth centuries, which were located along the edge of the western plateau. Although not immune from invasion, these regions were less liable to be ravaged every year.⁸⁵ Raids conducted by dualist Paulicians from the Anti Taurus regions which reached as far as Ephesos in 867 seem to have been unusual. Certainly, they provoked a swift imperial response. In 871 Basil I launched a sustained campaign against Tephrike, the Paulician headquarters located north of Melitene. In 878 the town was finally taken.⁸⁶

⁸² Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.15.

⁸³ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', pp.26-244 *passim*, but especially p.245; Barnes and Whittow, 'The Survey of Medieval Castles of Anatolia: Mastaura', p.131.

⁸⁴ See above, p.158

⁸⁵ R.J.Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber: Studien zur Strukturwandlung des byzantinischen Staates im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1976), pp.325-6, n.93; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p.178.

ii. Anatolian plateau

On the western reaches of the plateau, enemy incursions had been more frequent and more intense than in the river valleys, continuing indeed until the first decade of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-944).⁸⁷ However, once Arab raids ceased, a very visible economic recovery ensued. Good evidence for this expansion comes from the material remains of tenth- and eleventh-century churches found at sites and museums across the transitional zone between plateau and river valleys, and on the western plateau itself. For example, at Sebasteia, a Byzantine urban site located in Phrygia fifty kilometres south-west of Afyon (Byzantine Akroinos), two sixth-century basilicas were rebuilt in the tenth century.⁸⁸ At a neighbouring site, where the stone for the Sebasteia churches was quarried, there is a rock-cut church with tenth-century frescoes.⁸⁹ At Beycesultan in the same region of Phrygia, church fittings resembling those at Sebasteia were found with pottery sherds which can be dated to the same period.⁹⁰ Spolia of church furnishings from the eleventh century have been discovered at the hilltop site of Tabala on the road between the head of the Hermos valley and the Phrygian plateau.⁹¹ The fragment of an epistyle dated to the reign of Romanos Lekapenos has been found reused in a Muslim sufi *tekke* at Afyon; an architrave dated

⁸⁶ Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p.314.

⁸⁷ The last raid was dispatched from Baghdad in 923 and from Tarsos in 931 (Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(2), 148, 152); see below, chapter five, p.219

⁸⁸ The smaller of the two basilicas was rebuilt as a cross-in-square church with a dome. It was decorated with frescoes. According to epigraphical evidence the restoration was sponsored by a bishop Eustathios (N.Firatlı, 'Découverte d'une église byzantine à Sébaste de Phrygie', *Cah Arch* 19 (1969), pp.151-68). When the larger of the two basilicas was reused in the tenth-century, restoration-work appears to have been focused on the apse in the east end. Like its neighbour, this church was also domed during the medieval period. However, it should be noted that less research has been carried out on the second of these churches (Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', pp.221-3).

⁸⁹ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', p.224.

⁹⁰ G.R.H.Wright, 'Beycesultan 1954: Some Byzantine Remains', *Anatol Stud* 47 (1997), pp.177-193.

⁹¹ Foss, 'Late Byzantine Fortifications', p.304.

to 1063-4 was discovered in the region of Synada.⁹² Furthermore, similar undated pieces abound at museums in the cities on the western reaches of the plateau such as Afyon (Akroinos), Uşak, Kütahya (Kotyaion), Eskişehir (Dorylaion), and Yalvaç (Pisidian Antioch).⁹³

However, the best evidence for increased prosperity in western Anatolia comes from the excavations at Amorion, the capital of the Anatolikon theme, which despite its sack by Arab armies in 838, experienced a significant revival during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The late antique three-aisled basilical church in the lower city was completely rebuilt as a cross-domed basilica, and decorated with terracotta tiled and opus sectile floors, plastered and frescoed walls, tenth-century impost capitals, stained glass windows, and extensive ceiling mosaics. In the style and quality of the marble furnishings and its glass windows the Amorion basilica has been compared to several churches from tenth- and eleventh-century Constantinople built by figures of great prestige at the imperial court.⁹⁴

The prosperity of Amorion is evident in other forms of material evidence. Both the lower and the upper city were occupied after 838: finds of stray copper coins from the ninth to eleventh centuries have been made at locations in both sites; glass bowls and

⁹² C.Barsanti, 'Scultura anatolica di epoca mediobizantina', *Milion: Studi e ricerche d'arte bizantina*, (Rome, 1988), p.281. Two other dated epistyle fragments, from 960 and 967 respectively, have been found further west, at Ionia (960) and in a mosque at Manisa (967).

⁹³ Ibid., pp.275-307. Firatli, 'Une église byzantine à Sébaste', p.165. When Cyril and Marlia Mango visited the museum at Afyon in the 1980s they discovered more than thirty pieces of carved marble from the tenth and eleventh centuries which may have come from as many as twenty separate churches (J.D.Howard-Johnston and N.Ryan, *The Scholar and the Gypsy* (London, 1992), p.223). These observations were confirmed by Professor Mango in conversation.

⁹⁴ The marble carving resembles that in the tenth-century Constantinopolitan church of Constantine Lips; the stained glass, the early twelfth-century imperial Komnenian church, Christ Pantokrator (Lightfoot,

bracelets of the same period, some of extremely good quality, have been found everywhere; a pottery workshop was located in the upper city.⁹⁵ Discoveries of seeds of wheat and grape pips during archaeo-botanical investigations at the site indicate that the inhabitants of the city had access to products which Leo of Synada claimed could not grow in these interior regions. Signs of prosperity in the hinterland around Amorion indicate that most of the food products consumed in the city were cultivated locally rather than being imported. Not far from the main urban site excavators have surveyed three rock-cut church complexes and two churches constructed from stone.⁹⁶

Further east the remote reaches of the plateau and the isolated plains (*ovalar*) of the Anti Taurus had been the areas most severely affected by annual Arab raids from the later seventh to the early tenth centuries. As Byzantine, Arab, and Persian sources indicate, this region had become sparsely populated, characterised by isolated rural communities which grew crops and raised flocks at a purely subsistence level. The tenth-century geographer Ibn Hawkal reflected that, "... most of their [Byzantine] country comprises mountains, citadels and fortresses, troglodyte villages and hamlets with houses dug in the rock or buried underground." From as far afield as tenth-century Afghanistan the author of the 'Hudud al Alam' noted that, "..... in the days of old cities were numerous in Rum [the Byzantine empire], but now they are few. Most of the districts have an extremely strong fortress on account of the raids. To each village appertains a castle, where in time of flight they take shelter".⁹⁷ While Arab and Persian accounts may exaggerate the demise of Byzantine Anatolia for their own

'Amorium', *Anatol Stud* 44 (1994), pp.120-2; 45 (1995), pp.128-131; *Anatolian Archaeological Report* 1 (1995), p.6).

⁹⁵ Lightfoot, 'Amorium', *Anatol Stud* 43-6 (1993-6).

⁹⁶ Idem., *Anatol Stud* 43 (1993), pp.151-3; 45 (1995), pp.126-7, 134-6.

propagandist purposes, some support for their analysis comes from contemporary sources written in Greek within the empire itself. For example, the tenth-century military manual 'On Skirmishing' instructed Byzantine military commanders serving in the eastern regions of the plateau to ensure that local villagers and their flocks were conveyed to places of refuge during raids.⁹⁸

Yet, here too, both literary and material evidence suggests that as Arab raiding activity began to wane in the tenth century, and the Byzantine eastern frontier moved beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus ranges, the economy began to expand. The most visible evidence of that expansion comes from western Cappadocia. Here, in a triangle of land between modern-day Niğde, Nevşehir and Aksaray, lie a series of valleys gouged out of the lava produced by the isolated volcanoes of this region such as Mount Argaios (Erciyes Dağı).⁹⁹ The cliffs and outcrops of these valleys are riddled with hundreds of churches, chapels, monasteries, and hermits' cells, cut into the soft volcanic tufa. Although most of these churches and complexes have to be dated according to the style of their architecture and their wall paintings, criteria which frequently divide art historians, it is generally agreed that between the mid-seventh and mid-ninth century very few churches or monasteries were either excavated or decorated. However, from the second half of the ninth century onwards the excavation and decoration of churches and associated complexes once again began to pick up. The few surviving dated inscriptions support this chronology. Of the fourteen churches which bear dated

⁹⁷ Ibn Hawkal, pp.194-5; *Hudud al Alam (The Regions of the World: a Persian Geography 372 A.H./982 A.D.)*, trans. V.Minorsky, 2nd edn. (London, 1970), pp.156-7.

⁹⁸ *Skirmishing*: G.Dagron and H.Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris, 1986), pp.51-3; Henty, *Studies*, pp.28, 54 ff., 557; Harvey, *Economic Expansion*, pp.30-2, 149-50; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.23-4; Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Army', chapter 3.

⁹⁹ See Map 4, for sites located in western Cappadocia

inscriptions, eight were painted in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the rest in the thirteenth century. None was decorated before the minority of Constantine VII (913-19).¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, it is clear that the most elaborately carved and expensively decorated churches, such as New Tokalı Kilise and the so-called Column churches located in the vicinity of the Göreme Valley ten kilometres east of Nevşehir, date from the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh century.¹⁰¹ A similar date has been applied to a series of little understood complexes scattered across the rocky valleys, which some scholars have seen as monasteries, others as the homes of the local gentry or even Byzantine hans (hostels for travellers). The characteristics of these large complexes usually include a three-sided courtyard, an inverted “T” shaped vestibule and reception hall, and a cross-in square side chapel.¹⁰² While it is difficult to know whether all the Cappadocian rock

¹⁰⁰ J.Lafontaine-Dosogne, ‘Nouvelles notes cappadociennes’, *B* 33 (1965), pp.182-3, lists the following five dated churches from the tenth and eleventh centuries: Tavşanlı kilise near Ürgüp (Constantine VII: probably 913-19); the Great Pigeon House at Çavuşin (reign of Nikephoros Phokas: 963-9); Direkli kilise in the Ihlara valley (Basil II/Constantine VIII: 976-1025); Saint Barbara in the Soğanlı valley (either 1006 or 1021); Karabaş kilise in the Soğanlı valley (1060-1). To these may be added: Ayvalı Kilise (Saint John at Güllü Dere) near Çavuşin (913-9), Saint Michael in the Ihlara valley (either 1025-8 or 1055-6) (N.Thierry, ‘Notes critiques à propos des peintures rupestres de Cappadoce’, *REB* 26 (1968) pp.357) and Egri Taş kilise in the Ihlara valley (921-7) (N.Oikonomides, ‘The Dedicatory Inscription of Egri Taş Kilisesi’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), pp.501-6). Furthermore, none of the three churches with datable graffiti inscription predates the eleventh century: Ballık kilise in the Soğanlı valley (1031); Kızlar kilise near Göreme (1055); Saint Eustathios near Göreme (1148-9) (R.Cormack, ‘Byzantine Cappadocia: the Archaic Group of Wall Paintings’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association Third Series* 30 (1967), p.22)

¹⁰¹ Tokalı kilise is a church of three phases. The first phase was excavated in the later ninth or early tenth century. The second phase, Old Tokalı kilise, was a single-aisled basilica decorated in the early tenth century. Half a century later, a transverse nave was then excavated behind the single-aisle church to form a new construction, New Tokalı kilise. This final phase was decorated using luxury materials such as gold and lapis lazuli. The high quality of the frescoes of New Tokalı suggests that an artist from either the capital or from the provincial centre of Kaisareia was employed (Wharton-Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise, passim*); see above, chapter three, pp.126-7 for the connection of this church with the Phokas family.

¹⁰² Rodley, *Cave Monasteries of Cappadocia*, pp.11-120, sees most of the courtyard complexes as monasteries, although she believes that several courtyard complexes at Acık Saray may be hans (ibid. pp.121-50). These seven complexes are located on a key north-south route running through Niğde and Nevşehir, and are thus ideally placed to act as hostels for merchants. Furthermore, since they only have

units of this period are monasteries, particularly these so-called courtyard complexes, it is the rate at which rock installations of all varieties were produced that should be stressed. For example, more than thirty churches, chapels and associated domestic complexes were excavated in and around the small valley of Göreme in the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁰³

Since relatively few of the churches and other buildings bear inscriptions identifying their donors, it is difficult to know whether the proliferation of churches, monasteries, and other complexes in western Cappadocia reflects a boom in the local economy during the tenth and eleventh centuries, or investment from outside sponsors. Lyn Rodley has suggested that many of the monastic complexes in this region were sponsored by officers in the Byzantine field army who served on the eastern frontier. Their reasons, according to Rodley, for undertaking this action were manifold: to express personal piety; to provide themselves with a place of shelter on their way to the frontier, where they might also take advice from monks who were their spiritual advisors; to build themselves mausolea where they could be buried when they died.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the foundation of new bishoprics in western Cappadocia during the tenth century suggests that the proliferation of rock-cut architecture also reflects significant growth in the local economy. In the early tenth century, three new bishoprics, suffragans of Kaisareia, were established in the rocky valleys in the region of modern-day Ürgüp: at Dasmendron (Taşkinpaşakoy), Sobessos (Şahinefendi/Suveş) and Hagios Prokopios

two churches between them, it seems unlikely that they are monasteries. Robert Ousterhuit has recently proposed that many of the courtyard units of western Cappadocia may be houses belonging to the local gentry, that is to say the owners of small estates in the immediate locality ('Survey of the Byzantine Settlement at Çanlı Kilise in Cappadocia: Results of the 1995 and 1996 Seasons', *DOP* 51 (1997), pp.301-6). However, his findings are as yet highly provisional.

¹⁰³ Rodley, *Cave Monasteries of Cappadocia*, pp.160-183

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.250-54.

(Ürgüp itself).¹⁰⁵ It is noteworthy that many of the churches excavated and decorated in the second half of the ninth century and the first half of the tenth, are to be found in the main drainage valleys contained within the geographic area covered by these three bishoprics.¹⁰⁶ The establishment of churches, many without associated monasteries, in reasonably wide fertile valleys close to significant water supplies, clearly suggests that they were excavated to serve local villagers rather than monks. A mid tenth-century inscription on a tomb at the modern village of Zelve near Çavuşin which refers to a *chorepiskopos* (rural bishop) is further evidence of the development in Cappadocia of a church hierarchy serving a lay population.¹⁰⁷

In eastern Cappadocia economic expansion was driven by the arrival of settlers from Armenia, Mesopotamia, and northern Syria. Among these migrants the Armenians appear to have been the most numerous, part of a much wider later ninth- and tenth-century phenomenon in which Armenians of all backgrounds migrated to live and work within the Byzantine empire.¹⁰⁸ The first signs of migration to the eastern reaches of the plateau from western Caucasia came in the first decade of the tenth century. At this time the emperor Leo VI (886-912) was approached by five Armenians with the request that they should be appointed to military commands over a variety of passes and small plains in the Anti Taurus mountains west of the emirate of Melitene. The initial success of the scheme was limited as one by one these commanders were killed by local Arabs, or exiled for rebelling against the emperor. However, one of their

¹⁰⁵ *Notitiae: Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. J.Darrouzès (Paris, 1981), pp.66-7, 274; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, pp.116-7. Although these three bishoprics are not mentioned in later tenth-century *notitiae*, by the 1030s yet another new bishopric had appeared in the rocky valleys at Matiana (modern day Göreme): *Notitiae* pp.109, 324; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, p.116.

¹⁰⁶ Giovannini, L., *Arts of Cappadocia* (Geneva, 1971), plans 1-4

¹⁰⁷ Thierry, *Haut moyen-âge en Cappadoce*, pp.329-33; idem, 'Les enseignements historiques', p.518.

number, Melias, was more fortunate. Initially named as *tourmaches* of Euphrateia, Trypia and the desert, by 913 he had occupied and fortified the ancient *kastron* of Lykandos. He was named *kleisourarches* of Lykandos. Later he founded a castle on the mountain top at Tzamandos, which also became a *kleisoura*, and developed the previously deserted area of Symposium into a *tourma*. By 916 Lykandos had been upgraded to a theme, and Melias was its first full military governor, or *strategos*. A *patrikios* at the time of his appointment, he was soon raised to the rank of *magistros* "for his many and infinite feats of daring against the Saracens", which included campaigning against the emirate of Melitene in the late 920s and early 930s.¹⁰⁹

However, in addition to personal aggrandisement, Melias also brought long-term prosperity to those "desert" regions under his command. When Bardas Skleros marched westwards in 976 or 977 from Melitene, he fought imperial forces on the plain of Lykandos (Elbistan) which lay below the main castle built by Melias. Skylitzes notes that the alternative name for Lykandos was "Lapara" because of the richness (*τὸ λιπαρόν*) and the abundance (*τὸ πάμφορον*) of the region. Next, having won an engagement at Lykandos, Skleros moved onto Tzamandos described by Skylitzes as a "city (polis) lying on a precipitous rock, well populated and dripping with wealth."¹¹⁰

At first sight this *ekphrasis* seems unjustified. If the Byzantine fortress of Tzamandos

¹⁰⁸ Garsoïan, 'Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire', pp.53-124.

¹⁰⁹ *DAI*, pp.238-40; Kudama, p.193; G.Dédéyan, 'Les Arméniens en Cappadoce aux Xe et XIe siècles', in G.Fonseca (ed.), *Le aree omogenee della civiltà rupestre nell'ambito dell'impero bizantino: la Cappadocia* (Lecce, 1981), pp.76-80; idem., 'Mleh le grand, stratège de Lykandos', *REArm* 15 (1981), pp.73-102; N.Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe-XIe siècles', [Acts of the 14th international congress 1971] (Bucharest,1974), Vol. I, pp.286-7 and in the same congress proceedings, H.Ahrweiler, 'La frontière et les frontières de Byzance en Orient', pp.219-23. See below, pp.228-9, for Melias' feats of daring especially at Melitene in the 920s.

¹¹⁰ Skylitzes, p.319; see above, p.123 for Skylitzes' description of Tzamandos; Leo the Deacon, p.169. When the Turks attacked Tzamandos in the later 1060s they discovered a region characterised by trees, vines, and gardens (Bar Hebraeus, p.220).

is to be identified with the site of the extant Seljuk castle of Kuşkalesi, it is difficult to see how it could be described as a town.¹¹¹ The site is far too elevated and barren to be anything more than a mountain-top fortress. However, the "city" to which Skylitzes refers may have been located below the fortress. Tzamandos was raided by Sayf al-Dawla in 957 and was described in Arab sources as a "city".¹¹² By the early tenth century it was the site of a Chalcedonian bishopric; by 954 a Syrian metropolitan had taken up residence there.¹¹³

Tentative signs of economic and urban revival driven by migrant populations of Armenians and Syrians are to be seen elsewhere in the eastern plateau.¹¹⁴ At Sebasteia and Larissa a mixed Greek and Armenian population got big enough that each community had to have its own priests and bishop.¹¹⁵ Some of these Armenians may have been long-term residents but others were certainly migrants. The most famous movement of Armenians to Anatolia during Basil II's reign occurred at some point between 1016 and 1021, when Senecherim, prince of the Artsruni family, handed over Vaspurakan south of Lake Van to the Byzantine emperor in return for estates in

¹¹¹ Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, pp.300-01

¹¹² Yahya, *PO* 18, p.774

¹¹³ The Chalcedonian bishopric was dependent on Kaisareia (*Notitiae* p.274; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, p.116). For a later tenth-/early eleventh-century Chalcedonian bishop's seal from the town see: J.C.Cheyne, C.Morrisson and W.Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris, 1991), no.276. The presence of the Syrian metropolitan is signalled in G.Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la fin du Xe et au XIe siècles: l'immigration syrienne', *TM* 6 (1976), p.192; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, pp.91-2, 117-8.

¹¹⁴ Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', p.209.

¹¹⁵ Stephen of Taron, pp.148-185. Tensions between both communities ran high as the Greek metropolitan of Sebasteia tried to force local Armenian priests to convert to the Chalcedonian confession, and sent the Armenian bishop of the city to Constantinople as a prisoner. The Armenians were banned from ringing bells, and several priests moved towards a Chalcedonian position. When Basil II visited this region in 1000, he put an end to this persecution of the Armenian monophysite clergy by their Chalcedonian counterparts (Stephen of Taron, p.210).

Cappadocia.¹¹⁶ But the arrival of the Artsruni clan and their fourteen thousand followers was clearly prefaced by a more low-level, but long-standing, migration of the Armenians to eastern central Anatolia. As early as the second half of the tenth century Leo the Deacon alleged that the land of the Armenians began at Lykandos.¹¹⁷ Syriac sources note that Armenians were migrating to Cappadocia in large numbers by the beginning of Basil's reign.¹¹⁸ Indeed, this long-term migration may have dictated the locations where the Artsruni were granted estates by Basil. For example, the Armenian princes were given new territories near or in Sebasteia, Larissa and Tzamandos, sites where Armenian settlement was already firmly established. Since the Artsruni were also granted lands at Kaisareia, Gabadonia, and Abara, it is possible that significant numbers of Armenians were already in residence in these areas by the turn of the tenth century, before the great migrations from Vaspurakan.¹¹⁹ Epigraphical evidence from a rock-cut church in western Cappadocia confirms the presence of a large Armenian population by the early tenth century at one of the future Artsruni sites. According to a Greek inscription in the church of Ayvalı Kilise (Saint John at Güllü Dere) (913-20), the district of Gabadonia located to the east of Kaisareia was known as "Great Armenia".¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ See below, p.284

¹¹⁷ Garsoïan, 'Armenian Integration', p.56

¹¹⁸ Michael the Syrian, pp.132-4; Bar Hebraeus, p.179.

¹¹⁹ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism* p.54.

¹²⁰ M.Thierry, 'Données archéologiques sur les principautés arméniennes de Cappadoce orientale au XI siècle', *REArm* 26 (1996-7), p.119. Recent research has identified several tenth- and eleventh-century monastic complexes and other churches traditionally associated with Armenians in eastern Cappadocia. For example, both literary and archaeological evidence points to the presence of Armenians at Sebasteia in the eleventh century. According to the thirteenth-century Armenian historian Vardan Vardapet the monastic complex of Aregak Surb-Nsan, two kilometers north-west of the city, was built by David the son of Senecherim Artsruni. A monastery-building on this site is still extant. Although heavily restored in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much earlier medieval elements are still visible (Thierry, *infra*, pp.124-9). However, elsewhere the evidence is less convincing. In some cases tenth- and eleventh-century sites are identified as Armenian simply on the grounds that their architecture is reminiscent of structures built in the same period in western Armenia. Very few can be firmly connected to Armenian princely or

Another group of incomers to the eastern plateau were the Banu Habib, a tribe living near Nisibis in northern Mesopotamia, who became so disaffected with the level of taxation demanded by the Hamdanids of Mosul, that they defected to the Byzantines, converted to Christianity, and were settled at an unknown location on the western side of the Anti Taurus. During the next twenty years they participated in Byzantine raids on the plains of the Anzitene and northern Mesopotamia. Although it is usually assumed that this tribe were pastoralists, whose lifestyle could be easily accommodated by the ranching economy of the eastern plateau, they were in fact settled agriculturalists. According to Ibn Hawkal, a native of northern Mesopotamia, the region the Banu Habib occupied near Nisibis before their defection produced grain on a commercial basis. When the Banu Habib migrated to Byzantium they continued to live as arable farmers. They were equipped for a sedentarised agricultural lifestyle, given villages, buildings, and beasts of labour.¹²¹ Nor were the Banu Habib the only Muslims encouraged to settle within the heartland of the empire, convert to Christianity, and devote themselves to settled agriculture. According to an appendix towards the end of the mid tenth-century 'Book of Ceremonies', Muslim prisoners of war who converted were liable to receive three nomismata from the imperial

aristocratic patrons. Meanwhile, although it is argued that Armenians often appropriated sites built by Greek Chalcedonians in the ninth and tenth centuries, the evidence for these claims tends to come from much later medieval historians. It is, therefore, difficult to know the scale of such appropriation in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Thierry, *infra, passim*).

¹²¹ Ibn Hawkal, pp.205, 214; M.Canard, *Histoire de la Dynastie des H'amdaniides de Jâzira et de Syrie* (Paris,1953), pp.737-9. Haldon and Kennedy, 'Arabo-Byzantine Frontier', p.101, characterise the Banu Habib as "semi pastoralists". The later tenth- and eleventh-century fate of the Banu Habib is not clear. It has been suggested that the Amiropoulos family were direct descendants of the Banu Habib (J.C.Cheyne, "L'apport arabe à l'aristocratie byzantine des Xe-XIe siècles", *ByzSlav* 61 (1995), p.141, n.34); or that Ibn Baghil, a Skleros supporter active at Antioch, was a member of the family (Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.46). However, neither of these suggestions can be corroborated

authorities. They were also given six nomismata to buy oxen, and fifty-six *modioi* of grain for sowing.¹²²

iii. Eastern frontier

East of the Anatolian plateau the Byzantine military advance in the third quarter of the tenth century had caused significant damage to the local economy of the former Muslim emirates in Cilicia, Syria and northern Mesopotamia. During his campaigns against Melitene in the 920s and 30s the *domestikos of the scholai*, John Kourkouas, repeatedly "destroyed the surrounding hamlets and villages by fire."¹²³ The same strategy was adopted by Nikephoros Phokas in the 960s. By burning and destroying crops on a yearly basis and capturing the people and animals of the villages, "... he seized by this manner of action all the frontier towns of Syria and Mesopotamia"¹²⁴ Tenth-century Arab geographers and historians were insistent that frontier regions either controlled by the Byzantines, or subject to regular Greek invasions, were by the third quarter of the tenth century "ruined". The policy of forcing Muslims who would not convert to Christianity to leave conquered territories also resulted in depopulation. When Tarsos fell to Nikephoros Phokas in 965 many Muslims left the city, first for Antioch, and then in 969, when that city succumbed to imperial attack, to Balanias (Baniyas) on the coast of northern Syria.¹²⁵

¹²² *De Cerimoniis: Constantini Porphyrogeniti Imperatoris De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. J.Reiske (Bonn, 1829), pp.694-5

¹²³ Theophanes Con., p.415

¹²⁴ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.826

¹²⁵ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.797; al-Mukaddasi: *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, trans. B.A.Collins (Reading, 1994), p.147; Dagon, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.180-1, enumerates and discusses the tactics of devastation, and the incidence of depopulation, famine and inflation during the Byzantine eastern conquests of the second and third quarters of the tenth century.

Yet, there are signs that the negative impact of these conquests on the economy was short-lived. The migration of Armenians to Cilicia and Syria, as well as to Cappadocia, is documented by Michael the Syrian, suggesting that while there were outgoing populations, there were also incomers.¹²⁶ At some point between 972 and 992, during the catholicate of Khachik, Armenian bishoprics were created at Tarsos and Antioch.¹²⁷ Syrians were another favoured group of migrants despite their Monophysite, non-Chalcedonian confession. Already identified in the growth of tenth-century Tzamandos,¹²⁸ they also settled in large numbers in Melitene in northern Mesopotamia, particularly after the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963-9) persuaded the Syrian patriarchate to move to this region from Antioch in order to escape persecution by local Melkite Christians.¹²⁹ But even before the arrival of the patriarch, Syrian monasteries had begun to appear in the hinterland of Melitene, contributing to the recovery of the countryside. In 958 a monastery of Sergios and Bacchos appeared in a place where, "... a small number of people lived with their beasts". The pace of construction seems to have been frenetic, and in the course of the next half century the monastic church was rebuilt at least twice. The construction of an irrigation system also allowed the monks to grow their own vegetables.¹³⁰ By the early eleventh century there were fifty-six Syrian churches in and around Melitene.¹³¹

Growth in monastic activity on the fertile terraces of the mountains around Antioch, points to a similar recovery of the countryside of northern Syria. Monks of all

¹²⁶ Michael the Syrian, p.133.

¹²⁷ Stephen of Taron, p.196; Garsoïan, 'Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire', pp.56-7, 71.

¹²⁸ See above, pp.185-6, and n.110

¹²⁹ Michael the Syrian, pp.130-32; G.Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.186-204. A tenth-century Syrian church was built at Charpete/Hisn Ziyad/Harput in the Anzitene (Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, iii, 26).

¹³⁰ Michael the Syrian, pp.125-7.

¹³¹ Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', p.194.

denominations and nationalities seem to have been involved. When Romanos III campaigned against Aleppo in 1030 he recruited "heretic" anchorites (presumably either monophysite Syrians or Armenians) into his armies from the mountains around Antioch and in the Orontes valley.¹³² During the reign of Basil II Armenian communities were attested in the Amanos mountains.¹³³ Eleventh-century manuscript colophons and archaeological investigation also indicate that Chalcedonian Georgian monasteries were already flourishing on mountain sites in the vicinity of Antioch by the reign of Basil.¹³⁴ By the eleventh century Georgians also controlled one of the most famous sites of Late Antique Byzantine monasticism: the monastery of Saint Symeon the Younger Stylite on the Wondrous Mountain to the south west of Antioch. In the mid-eleventh century the Arab traveller Ibn Butlan noted the extreme wealth of all the monasteries and eremitic cells in the mountains around Antioch, but he drew especial attention to the foundation of Saint Symeon, which he alleged received an income of several hundred-weight of gold and silver a year.¹³⁵

¹³² Canard, 'Les sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles', p.309.

¹³³ Matthew of Edessa: *Armenia and the Crusades in the Tenth to Twelfth centuries: the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. A.E.Dostorian (Lanham/New York/London, 1993), 47-8

¹³⁴ W.Z.Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch-on-the-Orontes* (1976, Louvain); idem., *Archaeological Investigations in the Region West of Antioch-on-the-Orontes* (Stuttgart, 1986). At Saint Baarlam's monastery on Mount Kasios. 65 kilometres south-west of Antioch, three anonymous copper *folles* of issues A1 and A2 have been discovered (*Archaeological Investigations*, pp.218-9.) These issues are usually dated to the period 969-76 (A1) and 976-1028 (A2): V.Ivanisevic, 'Interpretations and Dating of the Folles of Basil II and Constantine VIII - the Class of A2', *ZVRI* 27 (1989), pp.37-39).

¹³⁵ Ibn Butlan, p.56. Inscriptions demonstrate that Greek and Georgian monks were resident at the monastery of Symeon the Younger Stylite. Epigraphical evidence also points to an eleventh-century restoration of the site, possibly sponsored by Bagrat IV, king of Iberia and Abkhazia (Djobadze, *Archaeological Investigations*, pp.204-11). However, Greek sponsorship was also important since the patriarch Theodore III (1034-42) founded a library of 420 books there (Djobadze, *Archaeological Investigations*, p.59). By the end of the eleventh century Saint Nikon of the Black Mountain noted the presence of Chalcedonian Armenian monks at Saint Symeon's monastery (Garsoïan, 'Armenian Integration', pp.106-08). Several eleventh-century seals issued by the monastery survive: Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Seyrig*, no.288; V.Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, Vol. V, *L'Église* (Paris, 1963-72), no.1559.

Furthermore, it is clear that while there were incoming populations, indigenous inhabitants, including Muslims, also often remained in the newly conquered territories of the east. Hints that conquered regions were not entirely denuded of their local populations occur even at times of surrender. When John Kourkouas seized Melitene in 934 he set up two tents. Atop one tent was a cross. Those Muslims who wished to have their goods and families returned to them were told to gather at this tent; those who remained loyal to Islam were to go to the other tent. The majority of the population went to the tent with the cross, thus choosing to stay at Melitene and convert to Christianity.¹³⁶ Moreover, in some reconquered regions conversion to Christianity may have been unnecessary. Many local inhabitants chose to stay in northern Syria happy to pay the local head tax demanded of those who were not Christians.¹³⁷ Many former inhabitants of Tarsos chose to return to the city once the price inflation caused by a lack of supplies in the immediate aftermath of Byzantine conquest had subsided.¹³⁸ The early eleventh-century general Nikephoros Ouranos recommended relatively mild treatment for Muslims who surrendered voluntarily: they should be

¹³⁶ Ibn al-Athir in Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(2), 154.

¹³⁷ Ibn Hawkal, p.186. In this instance Byzantine authorities appear to have applied to Muslims living in the empire a tax which had long been applied to Jews. According to Arab geographers a head tax of one *nomisma per annum* was exacted on Jews within the empire during the ninth century (Ibn Khurradadhib, p.83)

¹³⁸ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.797; Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.182-4, acknowledges that indigenous Muslims either stayed in their homes or returned after the Byzantine conquests were completed. However, he believes the phenomenon was relatively rare, and that most Muslims were either taken captive and sold into slavery, or forced to flee. Yet, most of the figures Dagron uses in referring to the mass deportation or enslavement of Muslims, are derived from the fourteenth-century Syrian chronicler Bar Hebreus, who customarily inflates exponentially statistics of all varieties. Thus, in another context, Bar Hebreus reports that in 994 ten thousand Byzantine prisoners were taken to Egypt after a heavy defeat by Fatimid armies (Bar Hebreus p.181). The Egyptian historian Maqrizi, using eye-witness evidence, which is now lost, from the contemporary Egyptian annalist al-Musabbihi, presents a figure of two-hundred-and-fifty (Forsyth, "The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id", p.491).

allowed to keep their possessions and their leaders among the urban elite should receive presents.¹³⁹

It is of course impossible to calculate how many Muslims stayed within Byzantine territory during the period of rule from Constantinople. During his travels through Byzantine Syria, Ibn Butlan noted that the village of Imm had a mosque as well as four churches. At the coastal town of Laodikeia (Lattakiah) an old pagan temple previously reused as a mosque had been reconverted into a church. However, there was an alternative mosque for the local Muslim population who also retained their own *qadi* (judge). Although Ibn Butlan's indicates that life for Muslims was not easy - at Imm the call to prayer was conducted secretly, and in Laodikeia it was smothered by the ringing of church bells - there is little evidence of sustained resistance to Byzantine rule.¹⁴⁰ The only revolt by local populations occurred at Laodikeia in 992, at the same time as armies from Fatimid Egypt attacked northern Syria.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Basil II himself seems to have attracted only favourable reports from Muslim writers. An encomium contained in the eleventh-century Iraqi chronicle of al-Rudhrawari explicitly praises Basil II for his justice and affection for Muslims, his willingness to keep out of Muslim territory and his kindness to Muslims who entered his.¹⁴²

VI. Trade

¹³⁹ *Ouranos Taktika (a)*: J.A.de Foucault, 'Douze chapitres inédits de la 'Tactique' de Nicéphore Ouranos', *TM* 5 (1973), pp.298-9; E.McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the 10th Century* (Washington D.C., 1995), p.158. Indeed, Ouranos reserved the harshest treatment for local Christians. If Armenians, Syrians, or Arab Christians within a besieged city did not defect to the Byzantines, they could expect no mercy from the imperial armies, and would be beheaded.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Butlan, pp.54, 57

¹⁴¹ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.439

i. Coastal plains and river valleys

The greater prosperity of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries cannot be divorced from trade, whether local, regional, or international. A variety of sources reflect on the importance of regional trade on the littoral of western and northern Asia Minor. According to the *De Administrando Imperio* Cherson in the Crimea was supplied in the tenth century with "grain.....wine.....[and] other needful commodities and merchandise" by ships sailing from a variety of sites along the southern Black Sea coast: Paphlagonia, the theme of the Boukellarion, and the Pontus.¹⁴³ Turning to the west coast of Asia Minor, the life of Athanasios relates how monks from Mount Athos sailed from the Chalkis peninsula to Smyrna for supplies.¹⁴⁴ The wealth of Attaleia located on the southern coast of Asia Minor was drawn from its position on regional and international trade routes. Seals of customs officials (*kommerkiarioi*) with joint responsibility for Attaleia and Cyprus indicate the importance of trade between these two locations.¹⁴⁵ When Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion visited Attaleia in the eleventh century he was almost sold as a slave into the hands of an Armenian sea captain.¹⁴⁶ The fact that Leo of Synada's diocese on the western plateau was supplied with foodstuffs from Attaleia indicates that trade also

¹⁴² Al-Ruhdrawari, p.119

¹⁴³ *DAI*, p.286.

¹⁴⁴ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.11

¹⁴⁵ Tenth- to eleventh-century seals of officials connected to the joint *kommerkia* of Attaleia and Cyprus include John the *semiophoros* of the *kommerkia* (J.Nesbitt and N.Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, Vol.2 (*South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor*) (Washington D.C., 1994), no.64.2) and Leo a *kommerkiarios* (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.305). Some *kommerkiarioi* were responsible for Attaleia alone (A.Szemioth and T.Wasilewski, *Sceaux byzantins de Musée National de Varsovie* (Warsaw, 1966), no.52; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, ii, no.64.1). There were also *kommerkiarioi* further east along the south coast at Seleukeia (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, pp.271-3). A small number of the documents from the voluminous Cairo Geniza archive, (from which the trading activities of a network of eleventh-century north African Jewish traders can be reconstructed) refer to ports along the southern shores of Asia Minor including Attaleia, Seleukeia, and Tarsos (S.J.Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (5 vols., California, 1967-93), i, 214).

travelled from this city by land. Leo's supplies almost certainly came via the route which cut through the southern mountains of Asia Minor, continued past the Pisidian lakes, and then stretched along the western edge of the plateau.¹⁴⁷ Agricultural products from coastal Asia Minor may also have helped provision Byzantine enterprise further afield during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The seal of an eleventh-century *horrearios* (an imperial official probably connected to grain supplies) from Kios in Bithynia, has been discovered in the region of modern-day Serbia between the Danube and the Sava rivers. It is tempting to see in this seal the physical proof of the injunctions of a contemporary military manual dealing with warfare in the Balkans that Byzantine armies operating in Bulgaria should be provisioned by food supplies produced inside the empire.¹⁴⁸

However, the biggest market for the coastal regions of northern and western Asia Minor was Constantinople. The grain trade was particularly important, with cereals transported in the main by sea.¹⁴⁹ There are tenth- and eleventh-century seals of *horrearioi* attached to sea ports along the western and northern shores of Asia Minor.¹⁵⁰ Although the precise responsibilities of these imperial officials are unknown,

¹⁴⁶ Malamut, *Sur la route des saints byzantins*, p.41; Foss, 'Cities of Pamphylia', pp.8-9.

¹⁴⁷ See above, p.161, for this route

¹⁴⁸ L.Maksimovic and M.Popovic 'Les sceaux byzantins de la région danubienne en Serbie', in N.Okonomides (ed.), *SBS 3* (Washington D.C., 1993), pp.116-7, no.1. The manual in question is 'Campaign Organisation and Tactics': Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, p.304; see above, p.8, n.22. Grain was sent from Anatolia to a variety of military frontiers including the Danube in Late Antiquity (Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i, 250).

¹⁴⁹ It has been widely argued that there was a rapid increase in the demand for grain in Constantinople between the tenth and eleventh centuries (Hendy, *Studies*, pp.47-9; Angold, 'Medieval Byzantine 'City'', pp.6-14; P.Magdalino, 'The Grain Supply of Constantinople in the Ninth to Twelfth Centuries', in C.Mango and G.Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.35-48).

¹⁵⁰ Amisos (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.611; Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.153; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F1856 and 55.1.2549); Amastris (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2408); Nikomedia: (Nesbitt and Okonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.83.2); Opsikion: (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F1390); Smyrna

it is likely that they were connected with supplying grain to the capital.¹⁵¹ The Miracles of Saint Eugenios indicate the importance of the traffic of grain from the Pontus region to Constantinople during Basil's reign. While the forces of Bardas Phokas were attacking Constantinople in 988, Basil II wrote to "all the villages and towns lying around the Black Sea as far as Trebizond to send a cargo of all sorts of grain to the capital of cities via ships quickly."¹⁵² Preventing grain reaching Constantinople by sea from Pamphylia may have been one of the reasons why Bardas Skleros seized Attaleia during his first revolt.¹⁵³ Certainly both Skleros and Phokas went to great lengths during their respective rebellions to ensure that Constantinople was deprived of grain supplies from either the Mediterranean or the Black Sea regions. For example, both rebels tried to seize the town of Abydos, which from its location on the Hellespont guarded the seaways between the Aegean and the imperial capital.¹⁵⁴

(Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.138; Zacos *Byzantine Lead Seals* II, no.550; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, nos.35.1-2); Kios: (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.50.1; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.4601-2)

¹⁵¹ S.G.Mercati, 'Oriarios-Horrearius', *Aegyptus* 30 (1950), pp.8-13, discusses the etymology and history of the term *horreion*. *Horrearioi* were not only found in imperial service, but also within the management of monastic houses. Although associated with the management of grain supplies, *horrearios* often seems to have been a generic term connected to the supply and storing of all foodstuffs, including wine and oil.

¹⁵² Panagiotakes, 'Fragments of a Lost Eleventh-Century Byzantine Historical Work', pp.348. Phokas' lieutenant at Chrysopolis, Kalokyros Delphinas, controlled both sides of the entrance to the Bosphoros from the Black Sea in order to prevent the relief of Constantinople by a grain fleet from Trebizond; see above, p.44). Bryer and Winfield, *Topography and Monuments*, p.18, note the plethora of ports in the many small deltas along the southern shores of the Black Sea. The tenth/eleventh century seal of a *kommerkiarios* of Hieron (located at the mouth of the Bosphoros) and Pontus illustrates the passage of trade from the Black Sea coast through the Bosphoros to Constantinople (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.72.1).

¹⁵³ See below, chapter five, pp.234-5; during Ibn Hawkal's description of the prosperity of the region around Attaleia (see above, p.164) he reports that the sea journey from Attaleia to Constantinople took fifteen days with a favourable wind.

¹⁵⁴ Skylitzes, pp.322, 324 (Skleros); p.336 (Phokas); Leo the Deacon explicitly states that by his control of the sea and his seizure of Abydos Bardas Skleros tried to prevent grain supplies getting to Constantinople (Leo the Deacon, p.170). For Phokas' unsuccessful attempt to take Abydos see Leo the Deacon, pp.173-4. For the importance of Abydos to the passage of basic foodstuff into Constantinople see Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', pp.104, 119. The growth in trade passing from the Aegean to Constantinople during the tenth and eleventh centuries seems to be reflected in the material embellishment of the town of Abydos: in the eleventh century a roof was added to the agora (Angold,

ii. Anatolian plateau

Provisioning the market at Constantinople also underpinned the increasing prosperity of the western reaches of the plateau during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Leo of Synada, for example, describes the driving of pigs, asses, sheep, horses, and cattle to the market at Pylai on the southern shores of the Sea of Marmara, from whence they were transported to Constantinople. It is usually assumed that the animals seen by Leo had been brought to this livestock emporium from the western reaches of the plateau.¹⁵⁵ A commercial relationship between Constantinople and the owners of livestock on the western plateau is also indicated by the exhortation of the early tenth-century 'Book of the Eparch' that Constantinopolitan butchers should go beyond the Sangarios river in north-west Asia Minor to buy sheep at a reasonable price.¹⁵⁶

In Late Antiquity many other products such as grain, wine, wool and salt were transported to the coasts from the interior of Asia Minor, despite the transportation costs involved in moving bulk goods of these varieties.¹⁵⁷ In the medieval Byzantine period the evidence for such traffic is less substantial. However, on the western edge of the plateau and in the transitional zones it is clear that arable production could

'Medieval Byzantine 'City'', pp.14-5). Customs officials, *kommerkiarioi*, are recorded in the sigillographical record at Abydos (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, nos.40.11,12,13,15,17,19; Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, nos.627, 728, 1000) and at places on the opposite side of the Hellespont such as Hexamilion (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, i, no.54.2)

¹⁵⁵ Leo of Synada, letter 54.

¹⁵⁶ *Eparch*, p.124.

transcend levels of mere subsistence production. Official government memoranda dealing with the Cretan expedition of 911 record that the western plateau theme of the Anatolikon supplied this military enterprise with wheat grain and flour as well as barley biscuit.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately it is impossible to know whether this grain was a one-off requisition by the imperial authorities, or acquired from private traders who regularly transported grain from the interior to the littoral.

The possibility that the plateau produced other goods commercially is more speculative. However, it has been argued that brocades, textiles, and woollen products may have been made in the Anatolian interior. The best evidence for this assertion comes from the much later testimony of the fourteenth-century traveller Ibn Battuta, who saw Greek workmen manufacturing carpets at the town of Denizli (Laodikeia) located in the transitional zone between the Upper Maeander and the western plateau.¹⁵⁹ Some indirect evidence that this interim zone between river valleys and plateau produced such goods in the tenth and eleventh century comes from the church furnishings discovered in this area which were discussed above. Cyril Mango has suggested to me that some of the fantastical depictions of plants and birds carved on these furnishings may reflect carpet designs manufactured in the immediate locality.

iii. Eastern frontier

Commerce certainly seems to have been a motivation for the settlement of Syrians in the isolated plains of the Anti Taurus and on the eastern reaches of the plateau. By the

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, pp.147, pp.245-7: however, Mitchell thinks that these bulk products were part of a tax in kind, and that the transportation costs involved in moving them may have been included within this fiscal due. Hendy, *Studies*, pp.554-61, argues against the viability of transporting grain in Anatolia.

¹⁵⁸ *De Ceremoniis*, p.659; Foss, 'Cities of Pamphylia', p.7, n.28.

early eleventh century the most famous monastic patrons in Melitene were the Banu Abu Imran who came from Takrit, a town located far away from Byzantium on the west bank of the Tigris river in Iraq. Their wealth was such that when Basil II arrived in Melitene in the winter of 1022 with the imperial field army, the Banu Imran were able to lend the emperor enough money to support the entire Byzantine expeditionary force while it stayed in the city.¹⁶⁰ If the Banu Imran belonged to the same socio-economic group as other Takritans who founded monasteries in the environs of Melitene then the source of their wealth was trade.¹⁶¹ Melitene's potential as a trading centre lay in its location on the crossroads of routes from Caucasia, the Djazira and the Anatolian plateau. To the east of the city lay Armenia, source of highly prized silks and woollen products for Byzantines and Arabs. Carpets from this region were considered among the best in the world.¹⁶² To the south of Melitene routes led via the Ergani pass to the Djazira, "the source of all supplies for Iraq".¹⁶³ Amida, located on the headwaters of the Tigris, was an established entrepôt for Byzantine linens. Less than two hundred kilometres down river from Amida was Djazirat ibn Umar, which lay on a key point in the trade routes between Armenia, Byzantium, Mayafaraqin, and Arran. Several hundred kilometres further was the great river port of Mosul, where additional representatives of the Banu Imran also lived, and two hundred kilometres on from

¹⁵⁹ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.23; Hendy, *Studies*, p.560.

¹⁶⁰ Michael the Syrian, p.145; Bar Hebraeus, p.178. They gave the emperor one hundred *kentaria* of gold: 720,000 *nomismata*. Even allowing for exaggeration, the point that the Banu Abu Imran were unusually wealthy is well made. The total here amounts to ten times the sum of money the emperor reputedly spent on repairing Hagia Sophia after an earthquake destroyed the dome of the church in 989 (Skylitzes, p.332).

¹⁶¹ Michael the Syrian, pp.126-7; Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.193-4.

¹⁶² Al-Muqaddasi, pp.329-31 Ibn Hawkal, p.338; al-Tanukhi, p.137.

¹⁶³ See above, p.163, for location of this pass; al-Muqaddasi, p.124.

Mosul was Takrit.¹⁶⁴ If Takritan merchants in Melitene, such as the Banu Imran, retained links with the Tigris cities, then it could be this trade route which made them so wealthy. Such wealth and such family connections may also help to explain why the later tenth- and eleventh-century Marwanid rulers of the Djazira south of the Anti Taurus mountains chose to expel the Arab populations of Amida and Mayafariqin in favour of Syrian and Armenian settlers.¹⁶⁵

Trade with Muslims was also important for the economy of the eastern frontier. The first official document recording long-distance, overland trade between the empire and its Arab neighbours is the treaty of Safar, drawn up between Byzantium and the northern Syrian emirate Aleppo in 969/70. According to the commercial clauses of this agreement, goods conveyed by overland caravan included gold, silver, non-worked silk, precious stones, silks, linen, Greek brocades and animals.¹⁶⁶ Such caravans bearing goods and tribute to Byzantium continued, on an intermittent basis, even during the civil wars of the early part of Basil's reign. Indeed, imperial and forces loyal to Skleros competed for control of the annual caravan as it crossed the Taurus mountains in 977/8.¹⁶⁷

However, as well as the more exotic long-distance trade between the empire and neighbouring Arab states, commerce occurred at local and regional levels too. During the ninth and tenth centuries Byzantine spies in Arab lands had often been

¹⁶⁴ Al-Muqaddasi, p.133 (Amida); Ibn Hawkal, p.219 (Djazirat ibn Umar), p.209 (Mosul). Takrit was famous for its wool and sesame (al-Muqaddasi, p.111). It was a city populated by many different Christian sects (Ibn Hawqal, p.223).

¹⁶⁵ Stephen of Taron, p.203

¹⁶⁶ W.Farag, 'The Truce of Safar A.H. 359', Paper from the Eleventh Spring Symposium held at Birmingham University (Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977): Professor John Haldon kindly gave me a copy of this off-print; Canard, 'Les relations politiques et sociales', p.52.

merchants.¹⁶⁸ Ships from Attaleia went to Tarsos, ".... to commit themselves there to commerce, while their agents scoured the country collectingprecise intelligence."¹⁶⁹ At the end of the tenth century the general Nikephoros Ouranos acknowledged that local trade in essential items was difficult to prevent even during wartime. Cheese, grain and meat were among the products that Muslim cities under siege would try to buy from local Byzantine merchants.¹⁷⁰ In addition, the arrival of large expeditionary forces in a locality created ideal conditions for trade since the army needed to be fed. When Romanos III campaigned in Syria his camp was equipped with a market.¹⁷¹ Localised trade between Byzantium and the Arab states was important enough to be used as a political tool. After the expulsion of Mansur ibn Loulou, a Byzantine ally, from Aleppo in 1016 by the Fatimid governor of Apameia, Basil II shut the border between Aleppo and Antioch to local trade. The only regional power to gain an exemption from this prohibition was a local bedouin tribe called the Mirdasids. However, longer distance trade with Egypt and Syria, much of which must have travelled by sea, was not affected.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Skylitzes, p.321

¹⁶⁸ *Skirmishing*: Dagrón and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, p.51.

¹⁶⁹ Ibn Hawkal, p.193

¹⁷⁰ *Ouranos taktika (a)*: de Foucault, *Douze chapitres inédits*, p.298; *Ouranos taktika (b)*: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp.154-6.

¹⁷¹ Canard, "Les sources arabes", p.306.

¹⁷² Yahya (Cheikho), p.214 [translation: Feras Hamza]. It is usually asserted that this trade embargo was imposed by Basil on long-distance trade between the empire and Fatimid territories such as Egypt and Palestine (Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt*, p.40; Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', p.545; W.Farag, 'The Aleppo Question: a Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interest in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century', *BMGS* 14 (1990), pp.59-60). However, I am assured by Feras Hamza that the Arabic text, although somewhat obscure, does not support such a reading. Moreover, circumstantial and literary evidence make a long-distance trade embargo unlikely. The Cairo Geniza archive refers to trading relationships between Fatimid Egypt and Byzantium during the 1020s (Farag, 'The Aleppo Question', p.60). For long distance trade between Byzantium and Arab states, especially Egypt, in the tenth and eleventh centuries see Canard, "Les relations politiques", pp.53-4.

One of the most important cities within the trading networks which linked the Byzantine Near East to its Muslim neighbours was Laodikeia (Lattakia). When Ibn Butlan visited the town he observed the many foreigners who stayed at "hans". The number of such "foreigners" must have been significant since an organised prostitute business was run for their benefit.¹⁷³ The majority of traders in Syrian Laodikeia must have been involved in sea trade along the Levant and in the Aegean. Other evidence for maritime trade between Byzantium and the Islamic east comes from references to mosques in key ports along the coasts of Asia Minor and Byzantine Greece as well as in Constantinople itself. Ibn Khurradadhbih indicates that a mosque was to be found in ninth-century Ephesos.¹⁷⁴ Epigraphical evidence suggests that there was also a mosque in Athens in the second half of the tenth century.¹⁷⁵ In 1027, only two years after Basil II's death, a new mosque was established in Constantinople itself.¹⁷⁶ However, the best evidence for sea trade between the empire and neighbouring Muslim states during Basil's reign comes from a wreck which sank off Serçe Liman on the southern coast of modern-day Turkey. On board were copper coins of Basil II and gold quarter dinars of the contemporary Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (996-1021).¹⁷⁷ The ship itself was carrying glass to be reprocessed. Although it is unclear where this reprocessing was due to take place, it is possible that the ship was in transit between the Peloponnese and Egypt. Excavations at Corinth have unearthed a medieval glass factory.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Ibn Butlan, p.57

¹⁷⁴ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, pp.10-11; see above, p.175, for references to Arabs at Ephesos.

¹⁷⁵ G.C.Miles, 'Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Sea', *DOP* 18 (1964), pp.19-20.

¹⁷⁶ Každan and Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, p.175

¹⁷⁷ G.F.Bass, 'A Medieval Islamic Merchant Venture', *Archaeological News* 7 (1979), pp.84-94.

¹⁷⁸ G.R.Davidson, 'A Medieval Glass Factory at Corinth', *American Journal of Archaeology* 44 (1940), pp.297-324, discusses the possibility that this factory was founded by refugees expelled from Egypt by the caliph al-Hakim during a purge of Christians and Jews at the end of the first decade of the eleventh century.

Another important Byzantine city on international, early medieval trading routes was Trebizond. An important staging-post for travellers journeying to Constantinople from Caucasia, Mesopotamia and Iraq, it was also a key entrepôt where Muslim merchants collected Byzantine linens, silks, woollens and cloaks.¹⁷⁹ Its prosperity was promoted by a series of fairs, including that established by Basil I in the ninth century to celebrate the festival of the local saint Eugenios.¹⁸⁰ Arab geographers were favourably impressed by the enormous customs revenue of Trebizond.¹⁸¹ Indeed, so great was this income that at the beginning of the tenth century it paid half of the twenty-pound annual salary of the *strategos* (governor) of Chaldia, the theme (province) of which Trebizond was the capital.¹⁸² The impression of a busy trading centre is confirmed by the large number of seals of customs' officials (*kommerkiarioi*) that survive from Chaldia.¹⁸³

VII. Conclusion: the limits of expansion

Given the considerable problems associated with the source materials, any conclusions about the nature of the Byzantine economy during the early Middle Ages must of necessity be impressionistic. In particular it is difficult to measure rates of growth in given regions, or to compare the economic fortunes of one region with another.

¹⁷⁹ Ibn Hawkal, p.337

¹⁸⁰ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p.15

¹⁸¹ Ibn Hawkal, pp.192-3, 337

¹⁸² ὁ στρατηγὸς Χαλδίας λλ. ι' , ὡς λαμβάνων ἀπὸ τοῦ κουμερικίου ἑτέρας λλ. ι' (*De Ceremoniis* p.697). The *strategos* of Mesopotamia was paid his ten-pound salary entirely from the proceeds of the *kommerkion*, further confirming the importance of trade in the eastern frontier regions of the Byzantine empire (*ibid.*)

¹⁸³ Many seals of *kommerkiarioi* of Chaldia are listed in Bryer and Winfield, *Monuments and Topography of the Pontus*, p.318. Examples published subsequently: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, nos.306, 357, 442; Cheynet, Morriison and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.137

However, it is clear that the end to incessant Arab attacks during the tenth century allowed the whole of the eastern half of the Byzantine empire to undergo economic expansion. This upturn in prosperity was probably at its most marked on the plateau, the region that had consistently borne the brunt of Arab raids. Furthermore, despite early depopulation and devastation caused by annexation, the eastern territories beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains enjoyed an economic recovery during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Trade was of fundamental importance to increased prosperity across the eastern half of the empire. On the coasts and the western reaches of the plateau this trade was closely connected to provisioning Constantinople with basic foodstuffs. On the eastern plateau and on the eastern frontier, trade with neighbouring Muslim and Caucasian powers was more important.

However, it is important to draw attention to one key difference between the economic fortunes of the eastern and western regions of the area of the Byzantine empire under discussion in this chapter. In western Asia Minor, whether in the coastal plains, the river valleys, or the western reaches of the plateau, economic revival appears to have been driven by an indigenous Greek-speaking population. The situation in the eastern regions of the plateau and on the eastern frontier itself was quite different. Here, prosperity was driven by non Greek-speaking populations, many of them migrants from outside the empire. A contemporary explanation for this phenomenon is offered by the twelfth-century chronicler Michael the Syrian. Commenting on the repopulation of Melitene, he claims that Nikephoros Phokas had been forced to turn to Syrian migrants because Greeks were too afraid to settle in these eastern regions lest they

should be attacked by Muslim forces.¹⁸⁴ However, a more plausible explanation is that the emperor was compelled to take this course of action because the core Anatolian territories of the Byzantine empire simply did not have the necessary resources of manpower and capital to repopulate the eastern reaches of the plateau, and to revivify the sophisticated market and trading economy of those regions which lay beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains.

Such a deficit of surplus indigenous resources in Anatolia is surely one of the explanations for the ubiquity of tax breaks, which imperial authorities offered to populations from outside the empire, to persuade them to settle in the eastern plateau and on the frontier itself. Thus, the fourteenth-century historian Bar Hebraeus observes that Takritan merchants were attracted to Melitene because the Byzantine tax regime was more favourable than that operating in those regions of Mesopotamia and Iraq controlled by the bedouin Uqalids of Mosul.¹⁸⁵ We know from documentary evidence contained in the mid tenth-century 'Book of Ceremonies' that lands received by Muslim converts who settled in the empire, such as the Banu Habib, were immune from taxes for three years. Moreover, each Christian household which welcomed a baptized Muslim into their ranks through marriage received a three-year exemption from the *kapnikion* and *synone* tax.¹⁸⁶ Another sign of the intractability of the demographic deficit faced by the Byzantine authorities is the generous treatment that was meted out to Armenian soldiers who deserted from imperial armies. Although

¹⁸⁴ Michael the Syrian, p. 130

¹⁸⁵ Bar Hebraeus, p. 178; contemporary Arab geographers comment on the oppressive fiscal regimes operated by many of those Muslim states neighbouring Byzantium. Al-Muqaddasi mentioned the severity of Buyid taxes (al-Muqaddasi, pp. 33, 121); Ibn Hawkal condemned the fiscal regime of the Hamdanids who preceded Uqalid rule at Mosul, noting that many inhabitants had emigrated from the city oppressed by the tax burden (Ibn Hawqal, pp. 205-209)

their lands were liable to be forfeit after three years' absence, if they returned to fight with imperial armies, they were to be provided with new lands.¹⁸⁷

This, of course, is not to argue that there was no Greek migration eastwards. For example, by the early eleventh century, Melitene was not only populated by Jacobite Syrians. It also had a Greek speaking population and a Chalcedonian metropolitan.¹⁸⁸ However, as the history of the city of Edessa indicates, it is unlikely that the numbers of Greek speakers in the east during the tenth and eleventh centuries ever matched the Syrian, Armenian, or even Arab populations. Edessa in northern Mesopotamia was annexed by the Byzantines in 1032 seven years after Basil's death. In the next decades several Greek Chalcedonians migrated to the city and its hinterland. Among them was Eustathios Boilas, who moved from Cappadocia in 1051 to the hinterland of Edessa, east of the Euphrates. Yet, when Eustathios compiled his will in 1059, he commented on the unfamiliar world of foreign languages and alternative religious rites that he had encountered on his arrival in the east.¹⁸⁹ In 1071/2 a contemporary estimate of the population of the city of Edessa suggested that Greeks were outnumbered by Armenians and Syrians by more than four to one.¹⁹⁰ Even Antioch, which as we shall see in the next chapter was a key Byzantine administrative centre on the frontier, retained a large population of Arabs, Syrians and Armenians, many of whom adhered to their languages and their faiths throughout the period the city was under Byzantine

¹⁸⁶ *De Ceremoniis*, pp.694-5; Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, pp.66-7; see above, p.188, for earlier discussion of the Banu Habib.

¹⁸⁷ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 247-8; E.McGeer, 'The Legal Decree of Nikephoros Phokas Concerning Armenian *Stratiotai*', in T.S.Miller and J.Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of G.T.Dennis* (Washington, D.C. 1995), p.126.

¹⁸⁸ Michael the Syrian, pp.136, 140-5; Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.200-205.

¹⁸⁹ *Testament* (Eustathios Boilas): pp.20, 22, 27. Among his neighbours were several Armenians.

¹⁹⁰ According to Sawiras ibn al Mukaffa the population comprised 20,000 Syrians, 8,000 Armenians, 6,000 Greeks and 1,000 Latins (Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', p.195, n.80).

control. For example, although Michael the Syrian lamented that many local Syrian Christians were forced to convert to Chalcedonianism during the patriarchate of Agapios of Antioch (978-89/96), Syrian and Armenian churches were still to be found within the city walls as late 1053/4. Meanwhile, wealthy Syrian inhabitants exercised influence over local government inciting the envy of the local Greeks.¹⁹¹ Moreover, despite living in Antioch for at least three decades of the first half of the eleventh century, the well-educated doctor and historian Yahya ibn Sa'id appears never to have learnt Greek.¹⁹²

The challenge facing successive tenth and eleventh-century emperors in the eastern half of the empire, was how to manage the relatively sophisticated economy and heterogeneous populations of the frontier, in the context of the more limited resources of the heartland of Asia Minor. This challenge was of central importance to the administration of Anatolia and the eastern frontier in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the subject with which the next two chapters are concerned.

¹⁹¹ Michael the Syrian, p.131; Matthew of Edessa, pp.84-5; see below, chapter six, pp.334-5, for the activities of Agapios.

¹⁹² Yahya (Cheikho), pp.263-4. There are many signs throughout Yahya's history that he was familiar with Byzantine officials who spoke Greek, but that he did not know the language well himself. One such example comes from his coverage of the arrival of a famous Edessan relic in Constantinople during the reign of Romanos III (1028-34). This relic was the correspondence between Christ and King Abgar of the Armenians. According to Yahya this correspondence was first translated from Syriac into Greek for the emperor Romanos himself. However, Yahya himself gained access to the letters through an Arabic translation, which he then reproduced in his own chronicle: "they [the letters] were translated into Arabic for us by the scribe whose task was to copy them into Greek." [translation Feras Hamza].

Chapter Five

Administration and Imperial Authority in Anatolia

I. Introduction

The previous chapter offered an overview of the pattern of economic growth conspicuous across the eastern half of the Byzantine empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The next two chapters will investigate how this increasingly prosperous region was administered during the reign of Basil II. Two questions will frame the discussion. First, to what extent did the exercise of imperial authority in the eastern provinces during this period represent the continuation of gradualist changes set in train by Basil's imperial predecessors? Second, to what extent did internal civil war and short-term diplomatic and military relations with the empire's neighbours during the reign itself precipitate more revolutionary developments?

Both these questions demand some background understanding of how the administrative machinery of the eastern half of the empire had developed in the century before Basil came to the throne. Above all, it is necessary to establish how the bureaucratic superstructure of the Byzantine state had both facilitated the territorial expansion of the empire eastwards over the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains in the third quarter of the tenth century, and how it had been changed by that expansion. Thus, following a brief analysis of source materials, this chapter will be prefaced by a general overview of bureaucratic developments in the eastern half of the empire before Basil's accession in 976. This overview will make

extensive use of recently published research, which has been conducted into the administrative history of the Byzantine empire in the later ninth and tenth centuries. Following this preliminary overview, the main body of this chapter will go on to consider administrative structures and processes in the provinces of Anatolia during Basil's reign itself. This analysis will be based almost exclusively on primary materials, in particular lead seals. The next chapter will move east and deal with the frontier regions beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains. Within the discussion in both chapters the overlapping spheres of military and civil administration will be the main topics of analysis. Ecclesiastical administration will not be considered in detail.

II. Sources

The best general introductory guides to the bureaucratic machinery of the Byzantine empire in the century *preceding* the reign of Basil II are a series of administrative *taktika*, practical manuals used by officials within the Great Palace which list in order of precedence the heads of the different bureaus (*sekreta*) of central and provincial government. Among those which have been published to date, the most important are the later ninth-century 'Kleterologion' of Philotheos, and the so-called 'Escorial Taktikon' drawn up approximately a century later.¹ In addition to these *taktika*, the administrative history of the first three-quarters of the tenth century is also illuminated by a small array of documents relating to three military expeditions, which are preserved in the 'De Ceremoniis', one of the great encyclopaedic collections collated by the imperial scriptoria in the mid-tenth

¹ Both these *taktika* are published in: *Listes*: N.Oikonomides, *Les Listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972). The 'Kleterologion' is to be found between pp.80-235; the 'Escorial Taktikon' between pp.262-277. Oikonomides' publication also contains two more minor *taktika*: the mid ninth-century 'Taktikon Uspenkij' and the mid tenth-century 'Taktikon Benesevič' See below, chapter six, pp.285-9, for further discussion about dating the 'Escorial Taktikon'

century. These documents are memoranda concerned with the logistics of the imperial expeditions to Crete in 911 and 949, and to Lombard Italy in 935.² Further information on the organisation of the army in the first three-quarters of the tenth century is discernible within a variety of military manuals which also bear the name *taktika*. Foremost among these manuals are 'On Skirmishing' and the 'Praecepta Militum', both of which appear to have been written by close associates of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963-9).³

Unfortunately the student of the administrative history of the reign of Basil itself is hampered by the fact that the relatively rich seam of written administrative evidence available for the first three-quarters of the tenth century peters out fast after the 970s, and fails to recover in the eleventh century. Moreover, this paucity of written evidence is particularly acute in the eastern half of the empire. Thus, there are no extant lists of precedence with which the 'Escorial Taktikon' can be compared. The only substantial military manual which has been dated to Basil's reign, 'On Campaign Organisation and Tactics', refers predominantly to warfare in the Balkans.⁴ Although ten chapters of a military *taktikon* compiled by Basil II's close political associate, the general Nikephoros Ouranos, reflect on his experience as the supreme commander of Byzantine forces on the eastern frontier in the first decade of the eleventh century, most of his vast compendium is a paraphrase of

² *De Ceremoniis*, pp.650-9 (Crete 911); pp.660-2 (Italy 935); pp.662-9 (Crete 949). Another of the mid tenth-century encyclopaedia, the 'De Administrando', may also contain archive material relating to the expedition of 935 against the Lombards in Italy. Chapters 50 and 51 refer to the commutation of military service owed by soldiers from the Peloponnese, who were due to fight with a campaign in Lombardy during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44); (*DAI*, p.257; see below, p.232).

³ *Skirmishing*: G.Dagron and H.Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris, 1986), pp.32-135; *Praecepta Militum*: E.McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the 10th Century* (Washington, 1995), pp.12-58; see below, pp.218-9, 224.

⁴ *Campaign Organisation and Tactics*: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, pp.246-326; see below, p.8.

much earlier military manuals.⁵ Further insight into administration of the eastern frontier comes only from sporadic allusions in the correspondence of Ouranos and his friend, Philetos Synadenos, the judge (*krites*) of Tarsos, or from brief references in historical accounts written in languages other than Greek.⁶ In central and western Anatolia, the written record is even more meagre. Here, the principal written source is Skylitzes. As the discussion in the first chapter of this thesis demonstrated, Skylitzes is so inconsistent in his transmission of administrative terminology that his text cannot be accepted as a reliable reflection of administrative *realia* at the end of the tenth century.⁷

However, where written sources pertaining to the administration of the Byzantine empire during the reign of Basil disappoint profoundly, a much richer seam of evidence is offered by the sigillographical archive, that is to say, by the thousands of lead seals issued by tenth- and eleventh-century officials, which are preserved in collections, or have been found at excavations of medieval sites. The importance of this record for administrative history is obvious: lead seals used by state officials to authenticate documents not only mention the office held by their owner, but also the geographical location over which his jurisdiction was exercised. There are, nonetheless, significant problems associated with using seals in the reconstruction

⁵ Very little of Ouranos' vast *taktikon* is published. A.Dain, *La 'tactique' de Nicéphore Ouranos* (Paris, 1937) provides only a background analysis of the contents, sources and manuscript tradition of the manual. In 1973 de Foucault published chapters 63 to 74 in the belief that these represented a hitherto unidentified source for the *taktikon* (*Ouranos Taktika* (a): de Foucault, 'Douze chapitres inédits de la 'Tactique' de Nicéphore Ouranos', pp.281-310). More recently McGeer has argued that chapters 66 to 74 are derived from the Classical tactician Onasander, while chapters 56-62 are a paraphrase of the 'Praecepta Militum' of Nikephoros Phokas ('Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos', *DOP* 45 (1991) p.132). However, he has also argued that chapters 63 to 65, represent an original attempt to update the 'Praecepta' in the light of Ouranos' own experience on the eastern frontier. Thus, taken as a whole, chapters 56 to 65 constitute a treatise which blends Ouranos' reading of earlier tactical works and his own eastern military experience (McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality', pp.132-4). These chapters are published in *Ouranos Taktika* (b): McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp.88-162.

⁶ J.Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle* (Paris, 1960), pp.217-48 (Nikephoros Ouranos); pp.249-59 (Philetos Synadenos).

of Byzantine administrative history, the most fundamental of which is the difficulty of dating such material. Unless a seal is attached to a dated document, or unless its owner can be identified with a known individual within the written historical record, establishing a precise date for any given seal is almost impossible. In such cases, dating relies on comparing the iconography and epigraphy of the seal in question with the very small number of specimens whose dates *are* known because they are attached to dated documents.⁸ A further problem concerns the question of provenance: where seals were struck and where they were found. If these details are unknown, the circulation pattern to which a seal belongs, and its position within the relationship between central and local administration, cannot be convincingly reconstructed.⁹ The difficulty of provenance is particularly acute in the Byzantine east. Whereas the recording of discoveries of seals at excavations in the Balkans, particularly at Preslav and various Danubian sites, makes this difficulty less pronounced in the western half of the empire¹⁰, seals from further east rarely come to the attention of sigillographers as the direct result of archaeological inquiry. Instead, they usually appear in catalogues produced by museums, private collectors, and auction houses with their find spot unrecorded.

Yet, with the publication and intensive study of many more seals in the last twenty years, solutions to many of these problems have begun to emerge. Iconography, epigraphy, decorative elements, the inclusion or omission of family names, and

⁷ See above, chapter one, pp.67-8, 75

⁸ N.Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, 1986)

⁹ J.C. Cheynet and C.Morrisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS 2* (Washington D.C., 1990), pp.105-131

¹⁰ I.Jordanov, 'Les sceaux de deux chefs militaire byzantins trouvés à Préslav: le magistros Leo Mélissenos et le patrice Théodorokan', *Byzantinobulgarica* (1986), pp.183-9; idem., 'La Stratégie de Preslav aux Xe-XIe siècles selon les données de la sigillographie', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS 1* (Washington D.C., 1987), pp.89-96; idem., 'Molybdo bulles de domestiques des scholes du dernier quart du Xe siècle trouvés dans la stratégie de Preslav', *SBS 2*, pp.203-211; idem., *Pechatite ot strategijata v Preslav, 971-1088* (Sofia, 1993). For seals found at sites on the Lower Danube see for

connections between particular ranks and offices, can all now be used as sensitive dating tools.¹¹ Models have also been suggested for the circulation of seals within the locality itself, and between the centre and the provinces.¹² Nonetheless, despite these methodological advances and the ever-increasing body of seals in publication, relatively little work has yet been done on applying sigillographical evidence to the field of Byzantine administration, particularly in the eastern half of the empire. For a general history of the administration of the Byzantine east in the later tenth and eleventh centuries, historians still have to rely on the outline sketches provided by Ahrweiler and Oikonomides in the 1960s and 70s.¹³

In the survey of Basil's reign which follows in the next two chapters, I shall use a wide range of seals to reflect on the picture produced by Ahrweiler and Oikonomides, and to reconstruct a picture of the administration of the Byzantine east which takes better account of the ever-expanding sigillographical record. Seals from as many major published collections as I have been able to consult

example: I.Barnea, 'Sceaux byzantins de Dobrouja', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS* 1 (Washington D.C., 1987), pp.74-87; idem., 'Sceaux byzantins mis au jour à Noviodunum', *SBS* 2, pp.153-161.

¹¹ Oikonomides, *Dated Lead Seal*; W.Seibt, 'Die Darstellung der Theotokos auf byzantinischen Bleisiegel besonders im 11.Jahrhundert', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS* 1 (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp.35-56 for representations of the Virgin; J.C.Cheyne, 'Du prénom au patronyme: les étrangers à Byzance', *SBS* 1, pp.57-65 and P.Stephenson, 'A Development in Nomenclature on the Seals of the Byzantine Provincial Aristocracy in the Late Tenth Century', *REB* 52 (1994), pp.187-211 for family names.

¹² Cheynet and Morisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', *passim*

¹³ H.Ahrweiler, 'Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IX^e-XI^e siècles', *BCH* 84 (1960), pp.1-109; idem., 'La frontière et les frontières de Byzance en Orient', [Acts of the 14th International Congress 1971] (1974), Vol. I, pp.219-23; idem., 'Recherches sur la société byzantine au XI^e siècle: nouvelles hiérarchies et nouvelles solidarités', *TM* 6 (1976), pp.99-124; N.Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe-XI^e siècles et le taktikon de l'Escorial', [Acts of the 14th International Congress 1971] (1974), Vol. I, pp.285-302; idem., *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et Xe siècles*, (Paris, 1972); idem., 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XI^e siècle', *TM* 6 (1976), pp.125-52; idem., 'L'épopée de Digenis et la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe-XI^e siècles', *TM* 7 (1979), pp.375-97. Articles published more recently by Jean-Claude Cheynet tend to concentrate on very specific administrative problems. While these articles are invaluable in themselves, they do not provide a general overview. See, for example, J.C. Cheynet, 'Toparque et topotèrètès à la fin du 11^e siècle', *REB* 24 (1984), pp.215-224; idem., 'Du stratège de thème au duc: chronologie de l'évolution au cours du XI^e siècle', *TM* 9 (1985), pp.181-94.

within the time limits of doctoral research will be considered.¹⁴ In addition, a large number of as-yet unpublished seals from northern and central Anatolia and the eastern frontier held within the collection at Dumbarton Oaks, which were studied by my supervisor Dr James Howard-Johnston in the summer of 1981, will, with his permission, be cited.¹⁵ Discussion of the eastern frontier will be facilitated by the published seals from another collection, that belonging to the late Henri Seyrig. This collection is of particular relevance to the eastern frontier because approximately fifteen percent of its seals were bought in Syrian and Lebanese markets, and thus have a certain provenance from the south-east of the empire.¹⁶ Recent publication of seals at the museums of Tarsos and Antakya (Antioch) amplifies the body of sigillographical material with a known eastern origin.¹⁷

III. Tenth-century background to the administration of the eastern half of the empire

In the second quarter of the seventh century Arab invasions had shorn the Byzantine empire of its provinces of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. As

¹⁴ The principal collections I have consulted in detail during my research are, in order of date of publication: G.Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1884); K.M.Konstantopoulos, (*Molybdoboulla*) *Βυζαντιὰ μολυβδόβουλλα τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἐθνικοῦ Νομισματικοῦ Μουσείου* (Athens, 1917); J.Ebersolt, *Musées impériaux ottomans. Catalogues des sceaux byzantins* (Paris, 1922); V. Laurent, *Les Sceaux byzantins du Médailleur Vatican* (Vatican, 1962); G.Zacos and A.Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (3 vols., Basle, 1972); W.Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich I: Kaiserhof* (Vienna, 1978); V.Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin, II, L'Administration centrale* (Paris, 1981); G.Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, compiled by John Nesbitt (Berne, 1985); J.Nesbitt and N.Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, (3 vols., Washington D.C., 1991-96) (I: *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea*; II: *South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor*; III: *West, North-West and Central Asia Minor and the Orient*); *The George Zacos Collection of Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1 (Auction 127, Spinks catalogue, 7 October 1998); Vol.2 (Auction 132, Spinks catalogue, 25 May 1999)

¹⁵ I have accepted the provisional dates given to the unpublished seals by the editors and curators of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection in 1981

¹⁶ J.C.Cheyne, C.Morrisson and W.Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris, 1991)

¹⁷ J.C. Cheynet, 'Sceaux byzantins des musées d'Antioche et de Tarse', *TM* 12 (1994), pp.391-479; idem., 'Sceaux de plomb du musée d'Hatay', *REB* 54 (1996), pp.249-70

a result the eastern half of the empire had been reduced to little more than the rump of western and central Asia Minor. In the next three centuries provincial administration in the east was predicated on the need to defend this Anatolian landmass against invasion and permanent occupation by Arab armies. At the heart of this system of defence was the so-called 'theme', an administrative unit of exceptionally obscure origins and controversial development. For example, when Leo VI discussed the term at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries, he clearly understood a 'theme' as a geographical region over which a governor (*strategos*) exercised both military and civilian control.¹⁸ Yet, the earliest mention of the term conveys a rather different meaning. In his account of the recruitment of armed forces by Herakleios in the early 620s, the ninth-century historian Theophanes used the term 'thema' to denote 'army'.¹⁹ Until recently these two references have usually been reconciled by the arguing that both the army, and the local administration of the Anatolian rump of the Byzantine empire, were revolutionised in the wake of seventh-century attacks by Persian and Arab forces. Paralysed by a lack of ready cash as a result of the territorial and economic contractions of the seventh century, the Byzantine state gave land on imperial estates to free peasants in return for military service. By aligning military service to property the state no longer needed to pay its army in coin. The hereditary system of service meant that the manpower of the army was naturally replenishing. The regions in which these localised armies were based gradually became known as 'themes'.²⁰

¹⁸ Leo VI, "Tactica", *PG CVII* (Paris, 1863), col. 680. Map 5 illustrates the location of the Byzantine empire's Anatolian themes c.917, shortly after Leo's reign. This map is based on Whittow, 'Making of Orthodox Byzantium', p.166, map IX.

¹⁹ Theophanes, pp.300, 303-4; J.F.Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army 550-950* (Vienna, 1979), pp.28-29.

²⁰ The classic articulation of this model of the development of the themes and the close relationship between military service and peasant land tenure is to be found in Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp.92-109; idem., 'Agrarian Conditions', pp.206-09. See also Hendy, *Studies*, pp.619-26, 634-45.

More recently some historians, although not all, have been eager to refine certain elements in this model of army, administration and local society. According to this revisionist position, the ‘big bang’ revolution of Herakleios has been discounted. Rather than being peasant militias, the original theme armies were the former Late Roman field armies withdrawn from the eastern and western frontiers in order to defend the landmass of Anatolia against Arab attack. As these armies settled in Asia Minor they lent their names to the regions they occupied. Thus, when the army of Thrace withdrew to the western reaches of Anatolia, it gave its name to the Thrakesion; the army of Armenia settled in the north-east of the plateau and lent its name to the theme of the Armeniakon.²¹ Moreover, evidence from early medieval hagiography suggests that although the soldiers of theme armies often became farmers and owned landed estates, they did not receive territory in return for military service. Instead, service was hereditary and attached to the person of the soldier; troops were paid in coin; recruits came from gentry rather than peasant backgrounds.²² In the late eighth century cavalry men (*stratiotai*) were expected to turn up to muster with their own horse and equipment, conditions which excluded many peasants from serving in the theme army.²³ One of the soldiers from the army of the Anatolikon which campaigned against the forces of Symeon of Bulgaria in the early tenth century was Saint Luke the Stylite. As we saw in the previous chapter, Saint Luke’s father was a landowner in the interim region between the

²¹ R.J.Lilie, ‘*Thrakien und Thrakesion. Zur byzantinischen Provinzorganisation am Ende des 7. Jahrhunderts*’, *JÖB* 26 (1977), pp.7-47; J.F.Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.208-20; idem, ‘Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations’, *DOP* 47 (1993), pp.7-9.

²² Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription*, pp.19-38; idem, ‘Military Service, Military Lands’, pp.20-30; Ahrweiler, ‘Recherches’, pp.5-10; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.113-122. However, the view that theme armies consisted of salaried members of the gentry has not been universally accepted. Although W.Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284-1081* (Stanford, California, 1995), pp.21-5, acknowledges that the origins of the themes lay in the withdrawal of the Late Roman field armies to the heartland of Asia Minor, he maintains that by the reign of Constans II (641-68) the army was manned by free peasants, who were settled on former imperial estates and owned their lands in return for military service.

river valleys of western Asia Minor and the Anatolian plateau. When famine came to this area, the grain reserves held by the saint's family were sufficient to feed an entire local community. The saint's father was, indeed, wealthy enough to be able to purchase the local bishopric of Sebasteia for his son.²⁴ The family names of the landowning classes of Anatolia in later centuries often recalled their ancestry of service among the thematic cavalry. For example, the Kaballourioi owned property in the town of Strobilos on the south-west coast of Asia Minor, and on the nearby islands of Kos and Leros in the mid-eleventh century.²⁵

Nevertheless, while the revisionist model of the development of the themes presents compelling evidence for discounting a direct relationship between land and military service, it should still be stressed that the theme system as it developed in the eastern regions of the Byzantine empire between the seventh and early tenth centuries was predicated on the need to defend Anatolia from Arab invasion with the use of minimal resources. Byzantine armies were small and locally-recruited.²⁶

Against them were ranged regular, salaried Muslim troops based in forward attack

²³ Saint Philaretos, p.127.

²⁴ Saint Luke the Stylite, pp.199-209; see above, pp.166, 168.

²⁵ A Constantine Kaballourios *strategos* of the maritime theme of the Kibyrrhaiotai was killed in 1043 defending Constantinople from naval attack by the Rus (Skylitzes, p.432); a younger namesake died in 1079 (Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region', pp.396-8; Foss, 'Strobilos and Related Sites', p.149). Another late eleventh-century contemporary, Akindynos Kaballourios, held the prestigious title of *kouropalates* (J.Nesbitt and M.Braunlin, 'Selections from a Private Collection of Byzantine Bullae', *B* 68 (1998), pp.161-2, no.10). See Map 3 for geographical references.

²⁶ Relying on the testimony of Mohammed ibn Abi Muslim al-Djarni, who had been held as a prisoner-of-war in Constantinople in the mid-ninth century, the early tenth-century Arab geographers Ibn al-Fakih and Kudama argued that the Anatolian thematic armies were between four- and fifteen-thousand men strong. However, these figures are almost certainly too high, the reflection of Byzantine court propaganda. Internal central government memoranda concerned with the Cretan expeditions of 911 and 949, suggest that theme armies were much smaller, in the region of one to one-and-a-half thousand men. This view is supported by the tenth-century manual "On Skirmishing" (see below, p.218), which claims that an army of less than three thousand men was still large (Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.181-193; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.3-4). Some historians, however, continue to argue for much larger thematic armies on the basis of the figures in the Arabic sources: see, for example, Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp.65-79; H.J.Kühn, *Die Byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata* (Vienna, 1991), p.59.

emirates such as Kalikala (Theodosiupolis/Erzerum) in western Caucasia, Melitene in the western reaches of the Anti Taurus, and Tarsos in Cilicia.²⁷ Arab raids into Anatolia were customarily augmented by hundreds of volunteer *ghazis*, who came from all over the Muslim world to fulfil a commitment to holy war (*jihad*) and, in a society predicated on a military ethic, to prove their manhood. They were able to stay at hostels called *ribats* before the raids set off, establishments which were financed by donations sent to charitable institutions called *waqfs* by those pious Muslims who could not fight themselves.²⁸ In order to counter this Arab superiority in resources, Byzantine military strategy was built on a bedrock of information, preventative action, and guerilla warfare, which exploited the terrain of the Anatolian plateau and the mountains that straddled the frontier. Tactics were developed which enabled small detachments of men to limit the damage caused by enemy raiders.

For a detailed appraisal of how this apparatus of defence worked in practice, there is no better source than the military treatise 'On Skirmishing'.²⁹ Although this text was written in the context of incursions of the Hamdanids of Aleppo during the mid-tenth century, the defensive strategy it expounds was rooted in the cumulative experience of many centuries of warfare between Byzantium and its Arab

²⁷ See Map 5 for the proximity of these attack bases to the eastern themes of Anatolia

²⁸ The fact that the Muslim forces enjoyed superior reserves of manpower, material wealth, and morale was widely acknowledged among Byzantine writers. The emperor Leo VI, for example, drew attention to the Byzantine inferiority in all these respects in his *taktika* written at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries (G.Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle à propos des Constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris,1983), pp.219-43) The Arab geographer Ibn Hawkal describes the *ribat* sponsored by *waqfs* which existed in the frontier emirate of Tarsos before the fall of the city to the Byzantines in 965 (Ibn Hawkal, pp.181-2).

²⁹ *Skirmishing*: Dagron and Mihaescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, pp.32-135. All references will come from this edition. However, it should be noted that another edition with an English translation is to be found in G.T.Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, 1985), pp.144-250.

neighbours.³⁰ It stresses the importance of forward intelligence provided by spies, including merchants and border guards, as well as the wisdom of moving villagers and animals to fortified refuges or remote hill-top spots whenever an invasion was expected.³¹ It warns against open battle, recommending instead that Arab forces should be shadowed and only attacked if they broke up into smaller raiding parties.³² Highly praised is the tactic of ambushing the enemy in the passes of the Taurus and Anti Taurus, either as they started out on their raids, or as they returned eastwards from the plateau laden with booty.³³ Incursions by the Byzantines into territory beyond the frontier are only countenanced in order to force the enemy back to defend his home country.³⁴

Yet, by the time that "On Skirmishing" was compiled, the need for traditional defensive theme armies was fading. With the collapse of the authority of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad in the first quarter of the tenth century, Muslim incursions into Anatolia from the east had become much rarer. The last raid from Iraq was dispatched from Baghdad in 923/4 and from Tarsos in 931/2.³⁵ Even when Arab raiding resumed in the later 940s and 950s under the leadership of Sayf al-Dawla, Hamdanid emir of Aleppo, few jihad incursions penetrated very deep into the Anatolian plateau: no raid reached further than Koloneia on the north-eastern reaches of the plateau.³⁶ And although the Hamdanid court poets rejoiced in the

³⁰ Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p.176; Ahrweiler, 'La frontière at les frontières', pp.216-9.

³¹ *Skirmishing*: Dagron and Mihăescu, pp.39-41, 51-2

³² *Ibid.*, pp.51-63

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.41-5, 63, 73-5

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.111-117.

³⁵ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1), 250, 265-6; ii(2), 148, 152 (Ibn al-Athir). Ibn al-Athir mentions a Muslim incursion in 924/5, but does not indicate whether this invasion came from Baghdad, Tarsos or another of the frontier emirates. See above, p.172, n.87

³⁶ Sayf reached Koloneia in 940 according to the historians Ibn Zafir and Ibn al-Azraq (Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1), 284-90; ii(2), 122-3, 289-90); see Map 3. The expedition is also described by the contemporary court poet Abu Firas, Sayf's own cousin (Vasiliev, ii(2), 357-8). Yet, while the Arab sources praise Sayf for his fortitude in reaching so far west, alleging that news of his

heroism of Sayf's attacks, the emir's military record was patchy: Sayf himself was lucky to escape from defeats by Byzantine armies in 950, 958 and 960.³⁷ Moreover, once the Byzantines went onto the offensive against Sayf in the later 950s, his threat immediately diminished. By 962 the suburbs of Aleppo had been raided. Sayf was forced to flee northern Syrian and take refuge at Mayafariqin in the Djazira south of the Anti Taurus mountains. He died shortly after returning to Aleppo in 967.³⁸ After the fall of Antioch to the Byzantines early in 969, Aleppo itself entered a tributary arrangement with Byzantium and became an imperial client.³⁹

Indeed, as the military threat of attack from the east waned and the possibilities for Byzantine military expansion waxed, the military enterprises of the empire were increasingly undertaken by forces other than the theme armies. Although it would be premature to suggest that the theme armies had ceased to exist in the mid-tenth century, it is clear that full-time professional forces based in Constantinople were increasingly to be found at the forefront of Byzantine armed endeavour.⁴⁰ A standing army had, of course, long complemented the provincial theme armies. Established in Constantinople in the mid-eighth century by Constantine V, its

siege of Koloneia caused terror in Constantinople, the fact that they stress that no Muslim raid had reached this far west in living memory indicates that the Anatolian plateau had become much less vulnerable to marauders from the Islamic east by the mid-tenth century. Sayf himself was never to raid so far west again.

³⁷ The most prominent of the many Hamdanid court poets who lauded Sayf's military achievements against the Byzantines was Mutannabi (Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(2), 304-348; M.Canard, 'Mutannabi et la guerre byzantino-arabe', *Mémoires de l'Institut français de Damas*, (Beirut, 1936), pp.99-114). Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, p.157, summarises these defeats in the defiles of the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains; see also Vasiliev, *infra.*, ii(2), 70-1, 96, 111, 181 and E.Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze*, pp.84-5; Canard, M., *Histoire de la dynastie des Hamdanides de Jâzira et de Syrie* (Paris, 1953), pp.763-8, 795, 801-3; R.J.Bikhazi, 'The Hamdanid Dynasty of Mesopotamia and North Syria 254-404/868-1014' (Univ. of Michigan PhD. Thesis, 1981), pp.716-23, 785-8, 845-9.

³⁸ Bikhazi, 'The Hamdanid Dynasty of Mesopotamia and North Syria', pp.856-68, 934-5.

³⁹ See above, p.200, for discussion of the commercial clauses of the treaty that guaranteed this relationship.

⁴⁰ Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.2; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.323-7.

duties had traditionally been twofold: to protect the emperor from armed insurrections led by provincial generals, and to act as a rapid reaction force which could be sent to the frontiers more quickly than thematic armies.⁴¹ By the end of the ninth century the core of this centralised army comprised four battalions (*tagmata*) of cavalry troops: the *Scholai*, the *Exkoubitai*, the *Hikanatoi*, and the *Arithmos*. There were also two infantry battalions: the Walls (*Teichos*) and the *Noumeroi*.⁴² The *hetaireia*, the palace body guard, was a vital augment to this centralised army. Particularly conspicuous among the troops of the *hetaireia* were overseas mercenaries including Bulgarians, Russians and Turks from central Asia.⁴³

As Byzantine military campaigning became more adventurous in the middle of the tenth century, new units were added to this centralised army. Before the end of the reign of the emperor John Tzimiskes (969-76) several new *tagmata* had been established such as the *Athanatoi* (the Immortals) and the *Stratelatai*.⁴⁴ The

⁴¹ J.F.Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians* (Bonn, 1984), pp.228-35.

⁴² Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.101-05; H.J.Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.67-72; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.25-6.

⁴³ The *hetaireia* first appeared during the reign of Leo V (813-20). The first mention of foreign mercenaries within the unit comes in the reign of Basil I (867-86). In 935 Pharganoi and Khazars from central Asia were among the overseas mercenaries within the *hetaireia* (see below, p.232). By the later tenth century there were four branches to the *hetaireia*, including an infantry brigade. (Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.209, 270-1, 327-8). The number of mercenaries in Byzantine service was augmented significantly by the arrival of detachments of Rus troops to aid Basil II in his struggle with Bardas Phokas in late 988 (S.Blondal/B.S.Benediktz, *The Varangians of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1978), pp.41-53; Franklin and Shepard, *Emergence of Rus*, pp.202-3). By the end of the tenth century the Varangian Guard had been founded, and by the eleventh century this unit contained English and German mercenaries as well as Russians (Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', pp.143-4). While many forces within the *hetaireiai* were overseas mercenaries, native-born troops could also serve in these units (Oikonomides, *infra*; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.27-8).

⁴⁴ The foundation of the *Athanatoi* by John Tzimiskes is mentioned by Leo the Deacon, pp.107, 132; see also Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.332-3. The duties of this regiment seem to have overlapped with those of the *hetaireia*. When the emperor was on campaign in the Balkans at the end of the tenth century, the different branches of the *hetaireiai* and the *Athanatoi* camped in closest proximity to the imperial tent (*Campaign Organisation and Tactics*: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, pp.251-3). The *tagma* of the *Stratelatai* was under the command of Michael Bourtzes at the time of the death of John Tzimiskes in 976 (Skylitzes, p.315; Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.352; see below, p.304). Two other *tagmata* may have been founded by the end of the tenth century: the first an overseas corps under the command of an *ethnarches*, and the second the *tagma* of the satraps (Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.143; *idem.*, *Listes*, p.333). The unit of satraps served in the region of Mount Athos in the reign of Basil II (*Actes de Lavra*, p.291). For further discussion

domestikos of the *scholai* usually assumed overall control of the *tagmata* and *hetaireia*, and indeed of the whole Byzantine army including thematic forces, during a major expedition. From the middle of the tenth century onwards the Byzantine field army was divided into western and eastern contingents led respectively by the *domestikoi* of west and east.⁴⁵ Whenever there was no *domestikos*, the army could be led by a *stratopedarches* or a *stratelates*.⁴⁶

The date at which the size and the ambition of this more centralised and professional army began to expand is unclear. During the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), the *domestikos of the scholai* John Kourkouas led the Byzantine field army on long distance raids against the Arab emirates of Dvin and Chliat in Armenia (927/8) and Edessa in northern Mesopotamia (943/4).⁴⁷ He also orchestrated more sustained campaigns against Melitene, which fell to Byzantine forces in 934, and Theodosiupolis (Kalikala), which finally surrendered to his brother Theophilos in 949.⁴⁸ Although these are the only two large-scale permanent conquests noted in the historical record during the first half of the tenth century, it is clear that during the 930s and 940s, armies led by the Kourkouas brothers, gradually brought many of the small, isolated, upland depressions within the Anti Taurus mountains under Byzantine control. These areas were created into small

of the new tenth-century *tagmata* see Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.68-9, 243-49; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.27-32.

⁴⁵ Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.135-57

⁴⁶ Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.262-5; Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.142; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.26. For example, Peter the *Stratopedarches*, a servant (*doulos*) of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, led the main Byzantine army of the east at the fall of Antioch in 968/9 and at the siege of Dristra in Bulgaria in 971, and was in charge of forces loyal to the emperors Basil and Constantine during the first year of the Skleros revolt (Skylitzes, pp.272, 300, 308, 315-22; also see above, p.123, 129, and below, p.300)

⁴⁷ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1) 262-3, 296-303. Those Armenian historians who refer to a Kourkouas raid against Dvin in 922, are almost certainly recounting the raid of 927 but applying a date that is five years too early (Vasiliev, ii(1) 250). See Map 6 for all place names along, and beyond, the Byzantine eastern frontier in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

border themes, such as Chozanon and Asmosaton, many of which are listed in the later tenth-century 'Escorial Taktikon'.⁴⁹

Yet, the scale of Byzantine military activity in the first half of the tenth century should not be overstated. The more spectacular of the Kourkouas-led enterprises, at Dvin and Edessa, were not expeditions of permanent conquest. Instead, their objectives were more closely connected to fuelling triumphalist imperial propaganda. On the one hand, they were designed to terrify the empire's eastern neighbours; on the other, to bolster imperial prestige within Byzantium. For example, the principal aim of the Edessa expedition was not the conquest of northern Mesopotamia, but instead the acquisition of the Mandylion of Christ, a precious relic (or possibly an ikon) on which was imprinted the face of Jesus. This was brought back to Constantinople amid great ceremony, greeted by the emperor and the patriarch, paraded from the Golden Gate to Hagia Sophia, and then taken and stored in the Great Palace. Having handed over the Mandylion to the forces of Kourkouas, the inhabitants of Edessa were themselves given a guarantee against future attack and left in peace.⁵⁰

Indeed, it seems more likely that pace of military innovation and territorial expansion only really increased when Nikephoros Phokas, the future emperor Nikephoros II (963-9), became *domestikos of the scholai* in the latter years of the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (945-959). At this point in the tenth century,

⁴⁸ *Melitene*: Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1) 266-70; Theophanes Con., pp.426-9; and see above, pp.185, 189, 192; *Theodosiupolis*: Vasiliev, ii(1) 318-19; *DAI*, pp.212-15; see below, chapter six, p.290

⁴⁹ Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze*, pp.74-80; Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands', pp.86-91; see above, p.209 and Map 6.

⁵⁰ George the Monk Con., pp.918-9; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(2) 156-7 (Ibn al-Athir); Yahya, *PO* 18, pp.730-33; A.Cameron, 'The History of the Image of Edessa: the Telling of a Story', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), pp.80-94.

according to Greek sources, Nikephoros abandoned the defensive tactics of the previous *domestikos*, his own father Bardas Phokas. Now, instead of "... hiding and avoiding action", as had been the Byzantine wont, the imperial armies "lived in enemy territory as if it were their own." The Arab historian Yahya ibn Said was of a similar opinion: "...les incursions de Nicephore devinrent comme un plaisir pour ses soldats parce que personne ne les attaquait; il marchait ou il voulait."⁵¹

A significant growth in the size and development of the martial capacities of both cavalry and infantry forces during the middle of the tenth century underpinned the greater confidence of Byzantine field armies operating in enemy territory. A key formation was the hollow infantry square, composed of several thousand spearmen, archers and slingers, which protected the cavalry and baggage train during marches through enemy terrain, while at the same time acting as a base from which Byzantine horsemen could attack the enemy. The fact that the infantry square was first discussed within military manuals dated to the period c.940-50 suggests that the outlines of this manoeuvre may have been developed by the generals John and Theophilos Kourkouas during the eastern campaigns of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos.⁵² Yet comparison of the tactic described in these early manuals with the strategy outlined in the 'Praecepta Militaria', a military *taktikon* compiled during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas (963-969), possibly from the field notes of the emperor himself, indicates that this formation only began to be employed on a large scale after Nikephoros took control of the Byzantine army. For example, while one

⁵¹ Theophanes Con., pp.459-60; Yahya, *PO* 18, p.826

⁵² The hollow infantry square is discussed in the forty-seventh chapter of the 'Sylloge Tacticorum', a vast compilation of Late Antique and contemporary military tactics drawn up c.950. The slightly earlier tactical pamphlet, the 'Syntaxis Armatorum Quadrata', appears to be the source for the elaboration of this manoeuvre in subsequent tenth-century military treatises (E.M.McGeer, 'The

of the earlier manuals, the 'Sylloge Tacticorum', recommends an infantry force of three thousand men, the 'Praecepta' presents a figure which is four times this size.⁵³ Another key tactical innovation, either introduced or developed by Nikephoros Phokas, was the deployment within the imperial field army of an elite unit of approximately five-hundred heavy cavalry, who were known as *kataphraktoi*. Clad in mail and riding horses which were themselves protected by heavy coverings, these were shock troops whose principal task in open battle was to charge in a triangular wedge formation, smashing their way through the ranks of their opponents, and scattering the enemy before them.⁵⁴ The success of these tactical developments was soon apparent. Between the period when Nikephoros Phokas was appointed *domestikos* (c.955) and his death as emperor in 969, Byzantine field armies crossed the Taurus mountains conquering and annexing Cilicia in 964-5, and Antioch in northern Syria in 969. By 971 Nikephoros' imperial successor, John Tzimiskes, had translated this success westwards. By defeating Russian and Bulgarian forces at Preslav and Dristra in the Balkans, he was able to add eastern Bulgaria to the Byzantine empire.⁵⁵

Simultaneous with the growth of a more centralised and heavily-armed land force was the development of a more integrated fleet. In the tenth century the main components of the Byzantine naval force were the imperial fleet based in Constantinople, and the three thematic fleets of Samos, the Kibyrrhaiotai and the Aegean located in the islands and littoral of western Asia Minor. Increased attention to maritime warfare had been demanded in the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries by the Arab occupation of the Mediterranean islands of Crete and Sicily,

Syntaxis Armatorum Quadrata, a Tenth-Century Tactical Blueprint', *REB* 50 (1992) pp.219-229; idem., *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp.257-264; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp.113-5).

⁵³ McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp.172-5, 265-6, 273.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.34-38, 214-17, 286-9.

and by the sporadic appearance of Rus fleets in the Black Sea.⁵⁶ The seriousness of these naval threats is apparent in the literary and archaeological records of the northern and western shores of Asia Minor.⁵⁷ For example, posthumous miracles related by the Life of George of Amastris, describe local inhabitants taking refuge from Rus raids during the first half of the ninth century in the fortified citadel of Amastris on the Black Sea coast. Archaeological survey has suggested that this site was an important harbour for the imperial navy.⁵⁸ Epigraphical evidence indicates that the fortifications at Attaleia on the southern coast were strengthened to withstand Arab attack between 911 and 916.⁵⁹

At various points during the tenth century Byzantium tried to take the naval offensive, in particular against the Arabs of the Mediterranean. Expeditions to conquer Crete were launched in 911 and 949, both of which required the participation of large fleets. Neither, however, was successful. It was only in 961, under the command of Nikephoros Phokas, that Byzantine forces were able to regain Crete. By 965 Cyprus had also fallen.⁶⁰ Yet, the success of these offensive operations at sea was limited. By the mid-tenth century the principal naval rivals to the Byzantines in the Mediterranean were the Fatimids of North Africa and Sicily. In the final years of the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus a series of inconclusive naval engagements between Byzantine and Fatimid navies were joined

⁵⁵ Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.292-9, 323-7.

⁵⁶ H.Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer* (Paris, 1966), pp.93-122. Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, p.68, sees the growth of a fleet based in Constantinople as a complement to the greater centralisation of the land forces.

⁵⁷ Ahrweiler, 'La frontière at les frontières', p.222

⁵⁸ Crow and Hill, 'Byzantine Fortifications of Amastris', pp.251-65

⁵⁹ H.Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure* (Paris, 1922), p.104, no.304; Foss, 'The Cities of Pamphylia', p.8; Ibn Hawkal refers to naval warfare in the waters off Attaleia in the tenth century (Ibn Hawqal, p.193)

⁶⁰ Skylitzes, pp.249-50, 270

off the coast of Sicily.⁶¹ In 965 Nikephoros Phokas' cousin Manuel and the eunuch Niketas, the admiral of the imperial fleet, led an unsuccessful invasion of Sicily.⁶² After this Byzantine defeat, it is possible that the Fatimids dispatched a fleet to the eastern Mediterranean in an attempt to regain the island of Cyprus, or at the very least disrupt Byzantine control of the seas in this area.⁶³ Although this obscure expedition does not appear to have been successful, the fall of Egypt, Palestine and southern Syria to the Fatimids in 969/70 brought the naval threat of the North African Muslims into the very heart of the Levant.

The more ambitious military enterprises of centralised Byzantine forces in the tenth century, whether at sea or on land, were also supported by an expansion in the administrative organisation of the periphery of the empire. As far as the eastern half of the empire is concerned, this expansion took the form of a proliferation of new administrative and territorial units. These units were created both from the core Byzantine territories in the eastern reaches of the plateau, and from the lands newly-conquered by imperial armies. As early as the mid-ninth century the easternmost regions of the plateau, including Cappadocia, Charsianon, Chaldia and Koloneia, had been detached from the administrative structures of the sprawling themes of the Anatolikon and the Armeniakon, becoming in the process themes in their own right.⁶⁴ East of these themes lay the *kleisourai*, small administrative blocs which commanded vital border passes. By the early tenth century many of these

⁶¹ See Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1), 371-6, for a summary of this warfare and the difficulty of establishing the chronology of Fatimid-Byzantine relations between 956-59; Theophanes Con., pp.454-5; von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft*, p.165

⁶² Leo the Deacon, p.65ff.; Skylitzes, p.261; Kleinkroniken, i, 338-340, no.45; Canard, 'Quelques noms de personnages byzantins', p.457; von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft*, pp.99, 126-7

⁶³ Yahya, *PO* 18, pp.794-5

⁶⁴ A.Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (London, 1973), pp.252-74; see Map 5 for the Anatolian themes and *kleisourai* early in the tenth century.

kleisourai, including Sebasteia and Lykandos, were upgraded to themes.⁶⁵ As we have already seen, new small border themes were added to this administrative tessellation when the Kourkouas brothers led Byzantine field armies into the Anti Taurus during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos.⁶⁶ The armies of these border enclaves were often staffed with Armenian infantry and cavalry troops recruited from the hill country of western Caucasia. As a result these small themes were known collectively as the Armenian themes (*Armeniaka Themata*).⁶⁷ In some respects they were like the *kleisourai* of earlier periods, since one of their principal tasks was to watch over mountain passes and send intelligence to commanders in the interior of the empire.⁶⁸ On the other hand they also supported Byzantine field armies during long-term campaigns against key Arab urban targets.

The harrying role of first the garrisons of the *kleisourai*, and later the *Armeniaka themata*, is visible in a number of Byzantine military actions on the eastern frontier during the tenth century. In the earlier part of the century the armies of *kleisourai* within the Anti Taurus mountains allowed the Byzantines to apply constant military pressure against the emirate of Melitene. Annual raids conducted by the Byzantine field army were supported by covert operations organised by border commanders such as Melias, the *kleisourarches* of Lykandos and Tzamandos.⁶⁹ The most daring of Melias' undercover tactics was to infiltrate Armenian soldiers disguised as workmen into the emirate during the winter of 928, so that when the main Byzantine army arrived the following year, these fifth columnists would be able to

⁶⁵ *DAI*, pp.238-40; Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale', pp.297-300; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.46-50, 81-2; idem., 'La frontière at les frontières', pp.216-7.

⁶⁶ See above, p.222-3

⁶⁷ See above, chapter four, *passim*, for the entry of Armenians into the Byzantine empire, especially as soldiers.

⁶⁸ *Skirmishing*: Dagron and Mihaescu, pp.39-41; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.49, 82; idem., 'La frontière at les frontières', p.217; Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.61-4.

⁶⁹ See above, pp.184-5 for further discussion of the career of Melias.

deliver the city without a protracted siege. Although the plot failed when the true identity and purpose of the Armenian workmen was uncovered, the unremitting pressure of annual attack by field armies and consistent harrying by border troops had forced the emir of Melitene, Abu Hafs, to enter a tribute arrangement with the empire in 931. When this arrangement lapsed on the death of Abu Hafs, the city once again came under sustained military pressure from Byzantine armies. It was finally conquered by John Kourkouas in 934.⁷⁰

Further north and east, the emirate of Kalikala (Theodosiupolis) came under similar pressure from raiding parties operating out of the fortress of Hafdjidj (in Greek known as Chauzizion) on the Araxes river during the decade before its fall in 949.⁷¹ Even Nikephoros Phokas' more rapid, ambitious, and far reaching conquests in Cilicia and northern Syria in the 960s relied on small scale operations from hill-top castles to provide back-up for the main expeditionary forces. At Antioch the hinterland of the city was softened up by a large raid in the autumn of 968. As the main army withdrew to Cappadocia for the winter, Michael Bourtzes was left at the castle of Baghras in the Amanos mountains as *strategos* of the newly created theme of Mauron Oros. He was instructed to "prevent the inhabitants of Antioch from coming out and collecting the supplies necessary for living" during the winter. In the spring the main army under Peter the *Stratopedarches* returned; by the autumn the city had fallen.⁷²

⁷⁰ Theophanes Con., pp.415-6; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1), 266-7; see above, pp.68-9, 185, 189, 192

⁷¹ *DAI*, pp.206-214. The historian Ibn Zafir notes that the Byzantines had already built a fortress at Hafdjidj by 939 (Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii(1) 284; ii(2) 122). This fortress has yet to be identified although it has been tentatively located north of the Bingöl Dağı, near the source of the Araxes river (Howard-Johnston, 'Procopius, Roman Defences North of the Taurus', p.203; Honigman, *Die Ostgrenze*, pp.79-80, 195). See Map 6.

⁷² Yahya, *PO* 18, p.816; Leo the Deacon, pp.73-4. See Map 6. Skylitzes gives the name of the theme, Mauron Oros, although he wrongly locates it in the Taurus rather than the Amanos range, a mistake which some modern historians of Byzantium have copied (Skylitzes, pp.271-2; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.46). Skylitzes suggests that the castle controlled by Bourtzes was built from scratch

However, the growth in the number of small garrisons on the eastern frontier and the centrally-organised Byzantine field army which they supported, came with a high financial price. Finding an adequate financial footing for the military had long been a difficult matter. Even when Byzantine armies had consisted predominantly of locally-recruited thematic troops mustered on only an occasional basis, many *stratiotai* had been unable to supply their own horses, weapons and equipment. In the early ninth century Nikephoros I had tried to alleviate this difficulty by ruling that impoverished soldiers were to be supported by their neighbours within their villages (*choria*).⁷³ Leo VI recommended that new *stratiotai* should only be recruited from among the well-off (*euporoi*)⁷⁴ Nonetheless, by the middle of the tenth century the position of many theme soldiers remained parlous. In his novel dealing with military finance the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus claimed: "the affairs of the *stratiotai*, from which their existence and livelihood are drawn, have, in time, sickened and declined."⁷⁵ Yet, at the same time as many soldiers were oppressed by the costs of warfare, the basic equipment required to fight in the increasingly aggressive Byzantine army, particularly within the cavalry, was

in 968. However, Ibn Hawkal, indicates that the site was already fortified before the period of Byzantine rule (Ibn Hawqal, p.182). Although this theme is not listed in the later tenth-century 'Escorial Taktikon', a later eleventh-century seal of a *strategos* of Mauron Oros, and mention of Mount Mauros "and all the castles dependent on it" in the 1108 Treaty of Devol, suggest that it continued to exist throughout the eleventh and into the early twelfth centuries (Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.183; Anna Komnene, iii, 133-6; Honigman, *Ostgrenze*, p.127). Mauron Oros was almost certainly only one of a string of small forts ringing Antioch garrisoned by Byzantine raiding parties during the two years which preceded the fall of the city. Among other sites fortified and used as forward attack bases was Qalat Siman, the monastery of the fifth-century stylite Symeon, located between Aleppo and Antioch (W.B.R.Saunders, 'Qalat Siman: a Frontier Fort of the Tenth and Eleventh centuries', in S.Freeman and H.Kennedy (eds.), *Defence of the Roman and Byzantine Frontiers* (BAR International Series, Oxford, 1986), pp.291-305)

⁷³ Theophanes, p.486. It has been widely argued that between the eighth and ninth centuries thematic *stratiotai* fell into one of two groups, distinguished one from another other by levels of personal wealth. Richer soldiers, such as Saint Luke the Stylite (see above, p.217), supplied their own equipment; poorer soldiers were supported either by state provisions or by contributions from wealthier members of their own local community (Haldon, 'Military Service, Military Lands', pp.21-6; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.5-6, 14-15, 19-20).

⁷⁴ Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle à propos des constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI', pp.234-5

becoming much more expensive. Nor was the cost purely financial. The burden of taxation required to finance the more expansionist Byzantine military apparatus of the third quarter of the tenth century also carried considerable political risk. Despite his conquests in the east, the emperor Nikephoros Phokas was pelted with stones during a procession in Constantinople by citizens enraged by his military expenditure. To ensure his own security he had to fortify the imperial palace.⁷⁶

In order to provide a long-term answer to the problem of military finance the imperial regime of the mid-tenth century decided, for the first time, to legislate so that military service was connected explicitly to land rather than to the person. An undated novel from the reign of Constantine VII (945-59) decreed that soldiers were to hold properties worth at least four pounds. These estates were to be registered and inalienable; the heir of the soldier inherited the military obligation when he inherited the lands.⁷⁷ During the 960s the emperor Nikephoros Phokas decreed that soldiers could only alienate lands which exceeded a threshold of twelve pounds in value.⁷⁸ This measure did not raise the minimum amount of property that soldiers were required to own from four to twelve pounds, as some historians have alleged. However, the fact that soldiers could not sell their lands

⁷⁵ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 222.

⁷⁶ Skylitzes, pp.267-9, 273-8; C.Mango, 'The Palace of the Boukoleon', *Cah Arch* 45 (1997), pp.41-50. Contemporary Arab thought believed that the fiscal burden of Nikephoros' warmongering was the main reason why the emperor was assassinated in 969 (Ibn Hawkal, p.194).

⁷⁷ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 222-3. The most powerful advocates of the view that it was only at this late date that land and military service were tied together in law are Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription*, pp.42-54, idem. 'Military Service, Military Lands', pp.20-41 and D.Górecki, 'The *Strateia* of Constantine VII: the Legal Status, Administration and Historical Background', *BZ* 82 (1989), pp.157-76. For those historians who argue that lands were granted to peasants in the mid-seventh century in return for military service (see above, pp.215-6, nn.20, 22), the legislation of the tenth century merely protected rather than created military estates (for example, Ostrogorsky, 'Agrarian Conditions', p.218). Yet as Haldon points out, there are no references to military lands in hagiographical, legal texts, chronicles and letters from the seventh to early tenth centuries. The same sources uniformly indicate that hereditary military service was attached to the person of the soldier rather than to land. Thus the legislation of Constantine Porphyrogenitus *should* be regarded as innovatory rather than merely a confirmation of established practice.

⁷⁸ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 255-6.

unless they owned estates in excess of twelve pounds, did entail that a much greater pool of immovable property was connected on a permanent basis with military service.⁷⁹

Yet, these legislative initiatives were not latter-day attempts to create or expand land-based peasant militias. Instead, the new arrangements represented a novel property tax designed to finance the armed forces more efficiently, known as the fiscalised *strateia*.⁸⁰ The commutation of personal military service to a tax in coin was already widely practised by the time Constantine promulgated his novel in the mid-tenth century. For example, when Romanos Lekapenos sent troops to Italy to deal with the Lombard rebellion in 935, the *stratiotai* of the theme of the Peloponnese commuted their military service, and instead of fighting they provided one thousand horses and one hundred pounds in gold. Their place on the expedition was taken by tagmatic cavalry, Khazar and Pharganoi (Central Asian) mercenaries from the Middle and Great *Hetaireiai*, and other mercenaries, including Turks, Armenians, and former prisoners-of-war from Mosul in Iraq. However, the Lombard expedition demonstrated the difficulty of raising adequate sums from soldiers whose obligation to fulfil military service was inherited on a personal basis rather than by virtue of their tenure of land. Because some of the *stratiotai* from the Peloponnese were too poor to pay the full commuted amount of their service, they only contributed half the going rate of five *nomismata* each.⁸¹ It is clear that one of the aims underpinning the mid tenth-century decision to link fiscalised military service to land rather than to the person, was the hope that this problem of individual impoverishment could be circumvented. Under the new land-based

⁷⁹ For this more nuanced approach to the novel of Nikephoros Phokas see Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.251-3.

⁸⁰ Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription*, pp.59, 65; idem., 'Military Service, Military Lands', pp.37-9; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.12-14.

system the *strateia* would always be paid in full. For example, in cases where the lands were subdivided because they had been inherited on a partible basis, the fact that all the heirs were obliged to contribute on a *pro rata* basis meant that the full amount due would still enter the coffers of the state.⁸²

A further imperative behind the increasing incidence of fiscalisation was an imperial desire to ensure that those provinces which were now secure from external attack and enjoying increased economic prosperity, such as the core Anatolian themes, should still support the financial burden of the Byzantine armed forces. The best illustration of how imperial authorities tried to channel the prosperity of the Anatolian themes into financing the new, mobile, and professional army comes from the Cretan expedition of 949. On this occasion one hundred and fifty *stratiotai* from the western Anatolian theme of the Thrakesion were called up for active service. However, a further eight hundred troops paid *four nomismata* each in lieu of their service. The sum raised paid the salaries of the seven hundred and fifty officers and *stratiotai* from the small eastern theme of the Charpezikion, who travelled from the Anti Taurus to fight in the expedition.⁸³ This arrangement contrasts with the earlier Cretan expedition of 911 when the entire complement of one thousand *stratiotai* from the Thrakesion fulfilled active service.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *DAI*, p.253; *De Ceremoniis*, pp.660-1.

⁸² Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 223

⁸³ *De Ceremoniis*, pp.662, 667-8. The Charpezikion was located in the western reaches of the Anti Taurus, south of Tephrike (Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.359). It was probably one of those small themes created from the territorial conquests achieved by Byzantine armies in the 930s or 940s (see above, p.223, 228; Map 6).

III. The administration of Anatolia in the reign of Basil II

In the century before Basil II came to the throne the administration of the Anatolian heartland of the Byzantine empire had changed radically. With the waning of Arab raids a system of local government based on the exigencies of defence had slowly begun to be eroded. By the mid-tenth century there was little need for part-time theme armies recruited from the ranks of local landowners. Instead, military service was fiscalised with greater frequency, and the receipts of commutation channelled into the more adventurous military expeditions of the centralised armed forces. The remaining sections of this chapter examine how these deeply-rooted trends of demilitarisation, fiscalisation and centralisation developed in the Anatolian themes during the reign of Basil.

i. Military administration

Any investigation into the administrative history of the Anatolian themes during Basil's reign, must begin with some consideration of the officials who had exercised both civil and military gubernatorial powers over the locality in the ninth and tenth centuries, namely the thematic *strategoi*.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, tracing the development of this position during the reign of Basil II is rendered very difficult by a lack of solid information in the historical record. This is a problem which is particularly pronounced in the first half of the reign, when even identifying contemporary *strategoi* is almost impossible. Despite the seriousness of the armed struggle which engulfed Asia Minor during civil wars waged by Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, only one *strategos* can be named and indisputably linked to a theme in the whole 976-89 period. That *strategos* was Michael Kourtikios, who was

⁸⁴ *De Ceremoniis*, p.652

⁸⁵ Continue to consult Map 5 for all references to themes in western and central Anatolia

nominated to the naval theme of the Kibyrrhaiotai in south-west Asia Minor by Bardas Skleros shortly after the outbreak of his first revolt in 976.⁸⁶ For further information about *strategoï* during the first half of the reign, one has to turn to more indirect literary clues, most of which are offered in John Skylitzes' coverage of the first Skleros revolt. Thus, from Skylitzes' narrative we may deduce that Theodore Karantenos was *strategos* of Samos, the maritime theme which encompassed the south-west littoral of Asia Minor. According to Skylitzes, Karantenos fought for the imperial side during Skleros' first revolt. He defeated Kourtikios in a naval battle in 977 near the port of Phokaia which lay within the thematic boundaries of Samos.⁸⁷ Similarly, it is likely that Manuel Erotikos, who unsuccessfully defended Nikaia from a siege by Skleros forces in 977/8, was the *komes* of the Opsikion, the theme of which Nikaia was the capital.⁸⁸ When Erotikos

⁸⁶ Skylitzes, pp.319, 322. It is possible that an unpublished seal belonging to Michael Kourtikios, *magistros* in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection may refer to this *strategos* [58.106.1360]. At an earlier stage in his career Kourtikios appears to have been a *strategos* and *protospatharios* (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.380). Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p.28 n.7., believes on the basis of the Schlumberger seal, that Kourtikios was a *protospatharios* when he was *strategos* of the Kibyrrhaiotai. However, since most of the senior Skleros commanders held the title of either *magistros* or *patrikios*, it is more likely that he was a *magistros*.

⁸⁷ Skylitzes reports on the Karantenos:Kourtikios engagement off Phokaia (Skylitzes, p.322). However, Skylitzes mistakenly implies that Karantenos was the admiral of the imperial fleet based at Constantinople. In fact, the contemporary Leo the Deacon relates that Bardas Parsakoutenos was the head of the central fleet. This fleet used Greek fire to destroy a navy loyal to Skleros off Abydos (Leo the Deacon, p.170). It is likely that this confusion between Karantenos and Parsakoutenos in Skylitzes' narrative results from the author's characteristic tendency to conflate events (see above, chapter one, pp.46-7). Here, he has confused two battles, the first conducted off the western coast of Asia Minor by Kourtikios and Karantenos, the commanders of two thematic navies; the second fought much closer to Constantinople between the imperial navy of the capital led by Parsakoutenos and another Skleros maritime force whose commander is unknown. The likelihood that Skylitzes conflates the two battles has also been suggested by Seibt (*Die Skleroi*, p.42).

⁸⁸ This is the argument presented by Seibt on the basis of evidence provided by Skylitzes (Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.42; Skylitzes, p.323). Anna Komnene, however, maintains that the office fulfilled by Erotikos was that of "*autokrator, strategos* of the whole east" (Anna Komnene, iii, 9-10). According to Anna, Erotikos was charged by Basil II with the responsibility of either putting an end to the civil war with Skleros, or to resisting the rebel by force. A similar story is transmitted by Nikephoros Bryennios, Anna's husband (Bryennios, p.75). However, it should be remembered that Erotikos was the tenth-century founder of the Komnenian dynasty. It is possible that later members of the Komnenian clan, such as Bryennios and Anna, may have deliberately exaggerated the political importance of Erotikos' role in the Skleros revolt in order to enhance their own family history. It is striking that none of the more contemporary sources, such as Yahya, Stephen of Taron, or Leo the Deacon, indicate that Erotikos held an unusually elevated position during the civil wars of the late tenth century. The governor of the theme of Opsikion was by tradition called *komes* rather than *strategos*.

was forced to evacuate the city with his garrison, Skleros appointed an Arab called Pegasios as commander of the city. It seems probable that he also held the position of *komes*.⁸⁹ Finally, from Skylitzes' account it may be possible to identify one more *strategos* towards the end of Skleros' first revolt. This was Nikephoros Parsakoutenos. He negotiated the surrender and amnesty of several rebels from the Skleros party, who had taken refuge in several castles in the theme of the Thrakesion after the revolt collapsed in 979/80. It is likely that Parsakoutenos performed this task as *strategos* of the Thrakesion.⁹⁰

In contrast to the dearth of information about the officials who held the position of *strategos* in the first half of the reign, references in the historical record are a little more plentiful in the second, although most have to be extracted from Skylitzes' testimony. Thus, from Skylitzes we learn that Basil Argyros campaigned in southern Italy in 1011 against the rebel Meles while exercising command over the maritime theme of Samos.⁹¹ Further east Skylitzes relates that when Senecherim king of Vaspurakan handed over his hereditary lands in southern Armenia to Basil II, he became *strategos* of the central Anatolian theme of Cappadocia. Although the period when Senecherim held this office is uncertain, because of the difficulties in applying a precise date to the cession of Vaspurakan, he must have exercised responsibilities in central Anatolia before Basil's death in 1025.⁹² Another

⁸⁹ Skylitzes, p.323; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, pp.334-5.

⁹⁰ Skylitzes, p.328. The rebels were Christopher Epeiktes and Bardas Mungos, the sons of Andronikos Doukas, as well as Leo Aichmalotos. They had taken refuge at a number of fortresses including Plateia Petra and Armakourion. The fortress of Plateia Petra has been identified with the Dark Age fort of Sahan Kaya in the remote mountains of northern Lydia (Foss, 'Sites and strongholds of northern Lydia', pp.81-91). It is a relatively sophisticated site. Approached by a rock-cut staircase, it includes amenities such as a cistern and waterchannels. A variety of red coarse ware was found on the surface of the site which seems to resemble tenth- and eleventh-century pottery discovered at other fortified sites in western Asia Minor (Barnes and Whittow, 'Survey of Medieval Castles: Çardak kalesisi', p.24).

⁹¹ Skylitzes, p.348.

⁹² Skylitzes, pp.354-5; see below, pp.284, 318 for the problems associated with dating the handover of Vaspurakan

Skylitzes reference to an Anatolian *strategos* in the second half of Basil's reign comes just before the emperor died. At this point the historian notes that a *strategos* of Samos defeated a Rus fleet off the Aegean island of Lemnos. This *strategos* was assisted by the fleet of the theme of Kibyrrhaiotai as well as warships from Thessalonika.⁹³ Several other references to Anatolian *strategoi* in Skylitzes' testimony occur immediately after the death of Basil, during the three-year reign of his brother Constantine VIII (1025-8). He notes that an Arab fleet was destroyed off the Kyklades islands by the *strategoi* of the theme of Samos and the island of Chios.⁹⁴ Another *strategos* in western Anatolia during the reign of Constantine, according to Skylitzes, was Prousianos, the eldest son of the last Bulgarian tsar John Vladislav. He held command over the theme of the Boukellarion.⁹⁵

The reasonably detailed coverage afforded by a wide variety of historians to the 1021/2 revolt of Nikephoros Xiphias and Nikephoros Phokas ensures that several *strategoi* from the central themes of Anatolia can be identified at the very end of Basil's reign. Shortly before Basil II departed to campaign against George of Abasgia in 1021 the emperor appointed Nikephoros Xiphias as *strategos* of the Anatolikon.⁹⁶ When Xiphias rebelled he was replaced in this position by

⁹³ Skylitzes, p.368. The *strategos* of Samos was called David of Ohrid. He may be the same person as David Nestoritzes, a Bulgarian commander, who raided Thessalonika in 1014. Called simply Nestoritzes at another point in Skylitzes' text, he appears to have been among those senior Bulgarian generals who surrendered to Basil II at Ohrid in 1018 (Skylitzes, pp.350, 359)

⁹⁴ Skylitzes, p.373. The *strategos* of Samos was George Theodorokanos. He was almost certainly a relative of an Armenian called Theodorokan, who served Basil II during the first decade of the eleventh century as *strategos* of Philippoupolis and *doux* of Adrianople (Skylitzes, pp.343-5; Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, p.150; H.C.Evans and W.D.Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era 843-1261* (New York (Metropolitan Museum) 1997), pp.357-8)

⁹⁵ Skylitzes, p.372

⁹⁶ Skylitzes, pp.366-7; Yahya (Cheikho), p.241. The 'Georgian Royal Annals' mention the involvement of Xiphias in the revolt but not the nature of his command (Georgian Royal Annals, p.283). Previously Xiphias had exercised command in the Balkans. In 1000-1 he led a raid against the principal eastern towns of eastern Bulgaria in the company of Theodorokan, *strategos* of Philippoupolis. Shortly afterwards he replaced Theodorokan at Philippoupolis. He still held this office at the time of the battle of Kleidion in 1014 (Skylitzes, pp.343, 348; see above, chapter two,

Theophylact Dalassenos.⁹⁷ One of the co-conspirators in the Xiphias revolt was a Georgian called Pherses, who had entered Byzantine imperial service when the principedom of Tao was annexed by Basil in 1000. He was executed for his role in the Phokas-Xiphias revolt. Sigillographical evidence suggests that at some point between 1000 and his death in 1022, Pherses had held the office of *strategos* of Cappadocia.⁹⁸

Although written references pertaining to *strategoi* of Anatolia in the reign of Basil II are extremely rare, the occasional appearance of individuals holding this office in the historical record in the post-989 period indicates that this position continued to exist throughout the tenth century and on into the middle of the eleventh. This is an impression which is confirmed by the sigillographical record. In an article written in 1985, which charted the eleventh-century history of the office of *strategos*, Jean-Claude Cheynet argued, largely on the basis of seals, that this office survived until deep into the eleventh century in almost all regions of Anatolia. For example, he noted that a member of the Bourtzes family was the *strategos* of the Anatolikon in the mid 1050s, and that Constantine Doukas held this position as late as 1072. Meanwhile, Leo Iasites and Theodore Dalassenos were respectively *strategoi* of the

pp.89-90, and below p.315). After the revolt was over, Xiphias was confined to the Studios monastery (Skylitzes, p.376). Yahya claims that his punishment was relatively mild, precisely because of his previously loyal service to the emperor in Bulgaria (Yahya (Cheikho), p.243).

⁹⁷ Yahya (Cheikho), p.241

⁹⁸ Skylitzes, p.367; Aristakes, p.21; Georgian Royal Annals, p.283; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3367. Pherses entered Byzantine service in 1000 with his brother Phebdatos/Theudatos. They were both honoured as *patrikioi* (see above, p.89) The family had an egregious military pedigree. Pherses himself had led the Iberian contingent of a joint Ibero-Armenian army which defeated the emir of Azerbaijan in 998 (Stephen of Taron, pp.205-6). He himself held the position *prince of princes* (*eristav eristavi*), the office inferior only to that of the ruler in the polities of western Caucasia. The office was hereditary. In 979 Pherses' father Tzotzikios had exercised the same position in the Iberian army which joined forces with the imperial armies led by Bardas Phokas to defeat Bardas Skleros (Stephen of Taron, p.142; see above, p.114, 119-20). Once the family took up residence in Byzantium, it served in many locations across the empire, including the Balkans. In 1016/7 Tzotzikios, the son of Theudatos and nephew of Pherses, was *strategos* of Dristra on the Lower Danube (Skylitzes, p.356; see above, p.89). Pherses himself was executed in 1022 because he

Boukellarion and the Opsikion in the middle of the eleventh century.⁹⁹ Several further examples can be added to Cheynet's list from the seals I have studied. A certain Andronikos served as *strategos* of the Thrakesion as late as the 1080s. He exercised this responsibility at the same time as he was the *anthropos* of the *kaisar* John Doukas.¹⁰⁰ The title of *kaisar* was held by John Doukas between 1081 and 1088.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, seals of another eleventh-century *strategos* of the Thrakesion have been found far from Asia Minor at Sougdaia in the Crimea.¹⁰² To the list of Cappadocian *strategoi* can be added a certain Michael, whose seal is decorated with a patriarchal cross standing on an orb, surrounded by curling, ornate leaves, a design often found on seals at the end of the tenth century.¹⁰³ Sigillography also allows three eleventh-century *strategoi* of Seleukeia to be identified: Leo Blangas; an Arab called Soulaios; and an Armenian called Apellarib Arsakides.¹⁰⁴

However, although sporadic literary references and lead seals indicate that the position of *strategos* continued to be occupied throughout Basil's reign and deep into the eleventh century, there is little evidence to suggest that this survival signified the revival of local, indigenous armies. Instead, although vestiges of the theme armies lingered into the early eleventh centuries, literary and sigillographical evidence indicates that many of the troops stationed in the core Anatolian themes under the command of local *strategoi* increasingly tended to be professionals

killed four *kouratores* and an imperial eunuch during the revolt of Xiphias and Phokas (Skylitzes, p.367).

⁹⁹ Cheynet, 'Du stratège de thème au duc', pp.187-191

¹⁰⁰ See above, p.66, n.120 for the meaning of *anthropos*

¹⁰¹ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.2.39.

¹⁰² V.Šandrovskaya, 'Die Funde der byzantinischen Bleisiegeln in Sudak', in N.Oikonomides (ed.), *SBS 3* (Washington, 1993), pp.94-5

¹⁰³ Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.234

¹⁰⁴ *Leo Blangas*: Cheynet, 'Sceaux byzantins des musées d'Antioche et de Tarse', no.57 and Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F1316; *Soulaios*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.705; *Apellarib Arsakides*: *The George Zacos Collection of Byzantine Lead Seals* (Auction 132, Spinks catalogue, 25 May 1999), no.112. The latter was the uncle of Gregory *magistros*, who was katepan of

recruited from outside the locality.¹⁰⁵ The deployment of professional forces recruited from outside Anatolia had already begun before Basil's reign. The memoranda concerned with the Cretan expedition of 949 indicate that by the mid-tenth century some detachments of the *tagmata* of the central field army, once resident in Constantinople, were now based in the themes. In the case of the *tagmata* of the Scholai they were to be found in the European provinces of Thrace and Macedonia. In the case of the Hikanatoi and Exkoubitai, their base was in north-west Asia Minor, and they were accordingly known as the *peratika tagmata*.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, elsewhere in western Asia Minor professional troops employed from outside the empire were increasingly ubiquitous. As early as 911, five hundred Armenian troops were stationed in the Thrakesion and another five hundred in the Anatolikon.¹⁰⁷ By 949 the number of Armenian troops in the Thrakesion had expanded to six hundred, while two hundred and thirty Slavs were located in the Opsikion.¹⁰⁸ It has been convincingly argued by James Howard-Johnston that the number of Armenian troops resident in the Thrakesion during the first half of the tenth century was deliberately increased, in order to provide some limited compensation for a short-fall in recruits of indigenous thematic cavalrymen.¹⁰⁹ The seal of Peter, the *domestikos* of the western Anatolian theme of the Optimatoi, and *katepan* of the Iberians, datable to the later tenth century indicates that troops from western Caucasia were still being deployed in the

Vasporakan in the mid-eleventh century (see below, pp.298-9). Like his nephew he was a member of the Armenian Pahlawuni family (Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyri*, p.43).

¹⁰⁵ The case for the gradual withering of the theme armies and their replacement by professional troops in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries has received wide support in the secondary literature. See among others Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee, passim*; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.2, 23; M.Grigoriou-Ioannides, 'Themata et tagmata. Un problème de l'institution de thèmes pendant les Xe et XIe siècles', *Byz Forsch* 19 (1993), pp.35-41.

¹⁰⁶ *De Ceremoniis*, p.666; Howard-Johnston, 'The Byzantine Army', p.116

¹⁰⁷ *De Ceremoniis*, p.652; Howard-Johnston, 'The Byzantine Army', pp.105-112

¹⁰⁸ *De Ceremoniis*, p.666

¹⁰⁹ Howard-Johnston, 'The Byzantine Army', p.112

western themes of Asia Minor, during the reign of Basil II himself.¹¹⁰ By the mid-eleventh century large numbers of mercenary troops from outside Byzantium were organised into ethnic *tagmata* and stationed in the provinces.¹¹¹ It is reasonable to assume that these troops were usually paid from the receipts of the fiscalised *strateia* first introduced, as we have seen, during the middle of the tenth century.¹¹²

Nevertheless, the increased use of permanent mercenaries within the themes during the tenth and eleventh centuries does not mean that Anatolian soldiers had entirely ceased to join the Byzantine armed forces. Some continued their traditional service within local theme armies, while others either participated in campaigns with the imperial field armies in enemy territory, or were stationed on the frontiers. At least two examples of the involvement of troops from the core Anatolian themes in the military endeavours of the centralised armed forces can be identified during the reign of Basil. According to a confirmation of a land grant issued to the Athonite monastery of the Iviron in the mid-990s, a certain John Chaldos was *doux* of the Armeniakon, Boukellarion and Thessalonika.¹¹³ Given the proximity of the Athos peninsular to Thessalonika, it seems safe to assume that Chaldos was stationed at Thessalonika in the Balkans in command of a garrison staffed by troops from the

¹¹⁰ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.11.

¹¹¹ It is possible to identify the ethnic roots of these troops, and to locate where they were stationed from eleventh-century lists of exemptions from the *mitaton*, the obligation (or commutable tax) to quarter these soldiers in the winter. In 1044 the exemption lists refer to Rus troops; in 1060 to Rus, Varangians, Franks and Saracens. By 1088 thirteen ethnic groups were represented (Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.144 Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.21-3, 32-4).

¹¹² Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.23. More recently Magdalino has pointed out that certain members of the Norman mercenary *tagma* settled in the theme of the Armeniakon had, by the mid-1050s, acquired estates (*The Byzantine Background to the First Crusade* (Toronto, 1996), pp.10-11). However, there is no evidence to demonstrate that they held these estates in return for their military service. Instead, the *oikoi* which they bought in the locality were almost certainly acquired from the salaries which they were paid in their capacity as mercenaries.

¹¹³ *Actes d'Iviron*, p.153. Although the year in which this document was issued is not certain, 995 seems the most likely. Certainly it had to be issued before Chaldos, *doux* of Thessalonika, was taken prisoner by the Bulgarians in 996 (Skylitzes, pp.347, 357). Although the Iviron document contains no annual date, it does indicate that it was issued in the ninth indiction. This indiction tallies with the year 995.

Boukellarion theme in north-western Anatolia, and the Armeniakon in the north-east. Troops from the core of Asia Minor were also to be found on the eastern frontier. For example, shortly before the death of Basil II in 1025, the *protospatharios* Nikephoros Komnenos became *archon* (probably *katepan*) of Vaspurakan. According to the Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivert the soldiers under his command were from Cappadocia.¹¹⁴ Soldiers from the Anatolian naval themes were also involved in long-range, and centrally-organised, offensive operations. In 997 Byzantine warships appeared off Tyre, in the hope of providing succour to a party of Hamdanids, who had rebelled against the Fatimids of Egypt.¹¹⁵ It is possible that the seal of a *topoteretes* of the Kibyrrhaiotai (the naval theme located on the southern coast of Asia Minor) discovered at Tyre should be linked to this expedition.¹¹⁶

Although none of the sources cited above apply a generic name to the units of troops they describe, it is likely that they are reporting on early examples of the thematic (or provincial) *tagmata*, a phenomenon more usually attributed by historians to the middle of the eleventh century. These thematic *tagmata* become particularly visible in the historical record during the campaigns waged by Byzantine armies in southern Italy during the early 1040s. For example, in 1042 the army of Michael Dokeianos, the *katepan* of Italy, contained a *tagma* from the Opsikion, as well as the so-called *tagma* of the Phoideratoi. The Phoideratoi were Pisidians and Lykaonians, troops from the theme of the Anatolikon. In the same period Katakalon Kekaumenos commanded a garrison at Messina in Sicily described by Skylitzes as the *tagma* of the Armeniakoi. By 1056 troops from Pisidia and Lykaonia were called the *tagmata* of the Anatolikon, and a year later a *tagma*

¹¹⁴ Skylitzes, pp.355, 371-2; Aristakes, p.29; see below, p.320

¹¹⁵ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.454-5

from the Armeniakon joined the rebel army of Isaac Komnenos. Moving on twelve more years, the army of Romanos IV (1068-71) contained a *tagma* of Lykaonians.¹¹⁷

Comparison between this list of examples and the cases cited during the reign of Basil II, suggests that thematic or provincial tagmata recruited from within the core Anatolian themes were usually deployed on frontiers of the empire, or within the Byzantine field army. As such the troops who served within these units were, like other tagmatic troops, full-time professionals. Moreover, the location of their deployment makes it clear that they were not, as H.J.Kühn has argued, stationed in the Anatolian heartland as the direct replacements for the former thematic armies.¹¹⁸ Indeed, if there was a time when such full-time professional units were located in the Anatolian provinces where they were recruited, it was much later, during the third quarter of the eleventh century, when this region came under greater threat from Turkish invasion. In contrast, during the first half of the eleventh century, the lack of an external threat to the prosperous core of Anatolia, meant that elite troops from these regions could be more profitably employed on the frontiers.

With the main body of soldiers recruited in Asia Minor serving on the frontiers, and in the absence of any significant external martial threat, the size of the thematic armies located in Anatolia probably continued to diminish throughout the reign of

¹¹⁶ Cheynet and Morrisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', p.130.

¹¹⁷ Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.251-7; see also the brief discussion in Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.29-35. To the examples listed here, can be added the instance of Romanos Skleros serving simultaneously as *doux* of the Anatolikoi and *domestikos* of the *scholai* of the west during the mid-eleventh century (Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.82). The most reasonable explanation for Skleros' combination of responsibilities is that he was head of a field army deployed in the western half of the empire which included *tagmata* from the the theme of the Anatolikon.

¹¹⁸ Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, p.252

Basil, although establishing the exact magnitude of that decline is impossible.¹¹⁹ While the documentation of the Cretan expeditions of 911 and 949 allows us to track the contraction of numbers of active thematic *stratiotai* in the first half of the tenth century, no such written evidence exists which facilitates a similar calculation for the reign of Basil II. Furthermore, it is difficult to know the extent to which those professional troops from the centralised *tagmata* and overseas mercenaries stationed within the themes made up any shortfall in locally-recruited troops. Nonetheless, while the written record leaves such questions open, evidence from lead seals suggests that a marked demilitarising of the core Anatolian themes occurred during the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Most conspicuous within the sigillographical record is the extent to which those officials within the secretariat of the *strategos* who had been most intimately connected with the logistics of active military service during the ninth and early tenth centuries, either developed new, fiscally-related responsibilities, or simply disappeared.

Among the officials who seem to have disappeared was the thematic count (*komes*) of the tent, whose duties had once included helping to put up the imperial tent during campaigns. In the course of my research I have been able to find no seals dated to later than the tenth century for this office.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, the seal of an eleventh-century thematic *domestikos*, the official in charge of the general staff of the thematic headquarters, provides further evidence for the contraction of military infrastructure. By the time he fulfilled his position he was responsible for two

¹¹⁹ A significant decline is postulated by J.V.A.Fine, 'Basil II and the Decline of the Theme System, *Studia Slavico-Byzantina et Medievalia Europensia* I (Ivan Duijcev Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies, Sofia, 1989), pp.44-7. However, his model of a complete collapse of an active military presence in the themes may be a little too severe, since it does not account for the incidence of professional garrisons within the provinces.

¹²⁰ This official appears within the office of the *strategos* in the late ninth-century administrative *taktikon* of Philotheos (Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.109, 153, 341; J.B.Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (London, 1911), p.43). The latest specimen I found dates

separate themes, the Opsikion and Anatolikon, rather than simply one as in previous centuries.¹²¹

The survival of *tourmarchai* (or *merarchai*), those officials whom ninth-century *taktika* designated as the immediate subordinates of the *strategos*, in the Anatolian themes in the later tenth and eleventh centuries, is demonstrated by both literary and sigillographical evidence. For instance, the Cretan inventory of 949 enumerates three such officials from the Thrakesion.¹²² In addition, we have the seals of a tenth-century *merarches* from the Charsianon, and eleventh century *tourmarchai* from Seleukia and Paphlagonia.¹²³ However, other seals demonstrate the extent to which the responsibilities of even the most senior of thematic military officials had widened to include non-military duties. For example, one eleventh-century *tourmarches* of Abydos supplemented his military duties with the tax-raising powers of a *kommerkiarios*, a collector of customs revenues.¹²⁴ An eleventh-century *tourmarches* of the Anatolikon was also a *dioiketes*, a local tax-collector.¹²⁵ Although the brevity of the information conveyed on these seals leaves the exact practice of such fiscal responsibilities ambiguous, they verify the observations made by the social commentator Kekaumenos that during the eleventh century many local military commanders frequently undertook tax-raising duties.¹²⁶

to the mid-tenth century, and belonged to an official from the theme of the Kibyrrhaiotai (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, ii, no.59.17).

¹²¹ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.86.1. Once again this official was listed in the late ninth-century *taktikon* of Philotheos (Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.109, 157; Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System*, p.43; see note above).

¹²² *De Ceremoniis*, p.666.

¹²³ *Charsianon*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F3397; *Paphlagonia*: Cheynet, 'Les sceaux du musée d'Iznik', *REB* 49 (1991), no.13; *Seleukeia*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3409.

¹²⁴ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.40.13

¹²⁵ Szemioth and Wasilewski, *Sceaux byzantins: Varsovie*, no.45

¹²⁶ Kekaumenos warns *strategoï* of the risks of taking on fiscal duties (*demosiake douleia*) of all sorts (Kekaumenos, p.154). He cites as an example a salutary case concerning John Maios, a *strategos* who decided to manage an estate (*episkepsis*) belonging to the Orphanotropheion in the expectation that any surplus profits he accrued would enable him to acquire a bigger house. However, he soon found himself ruined and imprisoned. The fact that Kekaumenos writing in the 1070s, relates that the

A diversification of responsibilities also characterises two other offices associated with the secretariat of the *strategos* which persisted into the eleventh century. One was the *chartouarios* of the theme, the official who had once been the local representative of the central bureau of the Stratiotikon charged with the maintenance of local muster rolls. Undoubtedly this office survived into the eleventh century because thematic *chartouarioi*, who had once registered *stratiotai* for active service, were in the best position to document and administer the fiscalised *strateia* which had come to replace personal military obligations.¹²⁷ The other official traditionally associated with local military administration who was still active in the later tenth and eleventh centuries, was the thematic *protonotarios*. It is clear from central archive documents drafted in the ninth century and later collated into a short tenth-century *taktikon* on imperial expeditions, that these bureaucrats had once been responsible for provisioning Byzantine expeditionary armies *en route* to the eastern frontier.¹²⁸ The duties of such officials in later centuries, particularly in the reign of Basil once the eastern frontier had ceased to be an active theatre of war, are less clear. However, it is worth noting that many eleventh-century Anatolian *protonotarioi* exercised either judicial or fiscal powers. Three *protonotarioi* were also *epi ton oikeiakon*, agents who dealt with the management of fiscal lands, an eleventh-century innovation in local government

Maïos affair happened in the time of his father, suggests that the diversification of the interests of military officials into civilian offices was certainly current during the first half of the eleventh century (Kekaumenos pp.194-6; P.Lemerle, 'Prolégomenes à une édition critique et commentée des 'Conseils et Récits' de Kékauménos', *Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres Mémoires* 54 (1960), pp.82-5)

¹²⁷ *Chartouarioi* are not only listed in the ninth-century *taktika* (Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.109,115,153, 341) but also in the later tenth-century *Escorial Taktikon* (ibid., p.273). For the ninth-century duties of the thematic *chartouarioi* see Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System*, p.44; Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.43. Seals of eleventh-century *chartouarioi* are common. A small sample would include: from the *Anatolikon* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, nos.86.11, 86.7; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2716); from the *Armeniakon* (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2904; F1152); from the *Boukellarion* (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.270; 55.1.1568). See above, p.232-3, for discussion of the fiscalised *strateia*.

discussed at greater length below.¹²⁹ One was a *kourator* (manager) of imperial estates and a *horrearios*, a government agent concerned with the supply of foodstuffs to Constantinople.¹³⁰ Two were *kritai*, local judges.¹³¹

The principal conclusion to be drawn from the diversification of the duties performed by many officials attached to the secretariat of the *strategos* in the core themes of Anatolia, must be that during the course of the later tenth and eleventh centuries the underlying principle of provincial government shifted away from military defence, and turned instead towards the fiscal exploitation of the localities. There is evidence in the later eleventh-century historical record that this growth in the judicial and fiscal competences of military officials was closely connected to a desire on the part of central government in Constantinople to extract maximum benefit from the greater prosperity of the localities within the Byzantine empire. According to Michael Attaleiates so overwhelming was Constantine X Doukas' (1059-67) wish to increase public finances and hear private lawsuits that, "the Roman state was shaken by specious vexations and sophistic methods and a swarm of litigious questions and the complexities of fiscal investigations".¹³² As a result, "... even soldiers were transformed and instructed themselves in the basics of such knowledge".¹³³ The fact that Attaleiates was a propagandist for the emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078-81), a rival to the Doukas family, means that his

¹²⁸ *Military Expeditions: Haldon, Constantine Porphyrogenitus' Three Treatises*, p.88.

¹²⁹ From the *Boukellarion* (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.302, no.3); *Paphlagonia* (Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.159); *Optimatoi* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.28).

¹³⁰ From the *Anatolikon* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.86.22)

¹³¹ From the *Anatolikon* and *Cappadocia* (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, pp.265-6, no.1; p.278, no.2)

¹³² συκοφαντικαῖς ἐπιπλοκαῖς καὶ σοφιστικαῖς μεθόδοις καὶ δικανικῶν προβλημάτων ἐσμῶ καὶ σεκρετικῶν ζητημάτων ἐπιπλοκαῖς τὸ Ῥωμαϊκὸν ἐκλονεῖτο (Attaleiates p.76; translation from P.Magdalino, 'Justice and Finance in the Byzantine State, Ninth to Twelfth centuries', in A.E.Laiou and D.Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries* (Washington D.C., 1994), p.94).

comments may be deliberately exaggerated. However, it is worth noting that Skylitzes, a close contemporary of Attaleiates, appears to agree with this analysis of eleventh-century provincial government. When Skylitzes paraphrased this section of Attaleiates' 'Historia' in the 'Continuation' to his 'Synopsis Historion', he put the case for the demilitarisation of the themes even more clearly, arguing that Constantine X forced soldiers to lay aside their weapons and become lawyers.¹³⁴

ii. Civil administration

a. Judges

A shift away from the provision of local defence towards the more intensive exploitation of resources by the Byzantine state is also the most reasonable explanation for the greater ubiquity within the locality, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, of officials who were purely concerned with judicial and fiscal duties. Most conspicuous within this new proliferation of civil officials was the thematic judge or *krites*. Although judges had always exercised a role within thematic government, their role throughout the ninth and early tenth centuries had always been subordinate to that of the *strategos*.¹³⁵ However, several sources of evidence suggest that by the later tenth and eleventh centuries the position of the judge within local government began to increase rapidly in significance, and that as a result his authority not only began to detach from that of the *strategos*, but even began to present a rival threat.

¹³³ ὡς καὶ αὐτοὺς στρατιώτας μεταβαλεῖν καὶ μεταμαθεῖν τὰ πρὸς τὴν τούτων γῶσιν παράγοντα (Attaleiates, p.76)

¹³⁴ ὡς καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς στρατευομένους τὰ ὄπλα καὶ τὴν στρατείαν μεταθέντας συνηγόρους (Skylitzes Continuatus, p.112). For Attaleiates' 'Historia' as a source of Skylitzes Continuatus, see above, p.38.

¹³⁵ The mid-ninth century Uspenskij *taktikon* and the later ninth/early tenth-century *taktika* of Leo VI refer to the thematic judge as a *praitor*, and indicate his subordination to the *strategos* (Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.43). It is likely that the thematic *strategos* had first taken charge of civil matters in the second half of the eighth century (Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp.194-207).

At the very simplest of levels there appear to have been more judges in the later tenth and eleventh centuries than had been the case in earlier centuries. Even the swiftest perusal of a major seal catalogue indicates a much greater incidence of the seals of judges, (who may also be called *kritai*, *praitores* or *dikastai*), in the eleventh century than in earlier periods.¹³⁶ Furthermore, the sigillographical evidence also indicates that the responsibilities of these judges were not limited to merely judicial affairs, but that they also undertook fiscally-related responsibilities. Many seals belonging to later tenth- and eleventh-century Anatolian judges indicate that their owners were also employed by the Genikon, the main bureau in Constantinople concerned with tax collection. The most frequent office within the Genikon held by thematic *kritai* was that of *megas chartouarios*, the official who was probably the principal representative of the fisc in the locality.¹³⁷ A smaller number of judges held lesser offices within the Genikon hierarchy such as *chartouarios*, *exaktor*, *epoptes* or *oikistos*.¹³⁸

The correlation of judicial and fiscal responsibilities within the person of one official, visible within the sigillographical *data* from later tenth- and eleventh-

¹³⁶ For example, of the twenty seals of judges of the *Thrakesion* listed in the third volume of published seals from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, five are dated to either the tenth or the eleventh centuries, while fifteen are dated to the eleventh century alone. In the *Opsikion* the figure is one from the ninth/tenth centuries, one from the tenth/eleventh centuries, and ten from the eleventh century; in the *Optimatoi*, one from the tenth/eleventh, and three from the eleventh; in the *Anatolikon* one from the tenth/eleventh and ten from the eleventh (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, nos.2.11-30; 39.7-20; 71.23-6; 86.23-33).

¹³⁷ Examples of thematic judges who were also *megaloi chartouarioi*: from the *Anatolikon*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.86.27; Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.266, no.2; from the *Armeniakon*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, nos.432, 797; from the *Boukellarion*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, nos.376, 388-9, Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.3049, 55.3404-06, 58.106.5703; from *Paphlagonia*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.5642; from the *Opsikion*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.39.10; from the *Charsianon*: Szemioth and Wasilewski, *Sceaux byzantins: Varsovie*, no.50.

¹³⁸ Examples of thematic judges who were also *chartouarioi* of the Genikon: from *Paphlagonia*: Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.299, no.3; from *Cappadocia*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2861; those who held the position of *exaktor*: from the *Opsikion*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.39.20; of *epoptes*: from the *Thrakesion*:

century Anatolia, corroborates the findings of much recent research, which has suggested that fiscal imperatives were closely associated with the provision of justice in medieval Byzantium. As Paul Magdalino has pointed out, although an overt association between the provision of justice and the supervision of fiscal matters is considered morally reprehensible in the twentieth century, such an overlap in responsibilities was fully accepted, and indeed positively encouraged, in the Byzantine empire.¹³⁹ Michael Psellos, who served at least one term as a provincial judge himself, believed that the ability to collect money for the treasury was a key attribute for a judge. In a letter he sent to the *kaisar* John Doukas in the 1080s concerning the appointment of a thematic judge, Psellos recommends a particular candidate on the grounds that, "... he will not only distinguish himself in his appointed theme, but if there is any opportunity for increasing the emperor's treasure, he will increase it and add it to the treasury."¹⁴⁰

The most obvious area where fiscally and judicially related competences clearly overlapped in the single person of the judge was in the enforcement of the provisions of the 'poor' versus the 'powerful' legislation of the tenth century. This legislation, which is most easily traced through a corpus of imperial legislation contained in the appendices of the *Synopsis Basilicorum Major*, had as its prevailing theme the defence of the properties of poor landowners of the free peasant village (the *chorion*) against intrusions by their more powerful neighbours.¹⁴¹ Government concern about this problem first became manifest

Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.2.32; of *oikistikos*: from the *Boukellarion*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.2219.

¹³⁹ Magdalino, "Justice and Finance", *passim*. The combination of judicial and fiscal responsibilities undertaken by eleventh-century judges has been noted elsewhere: Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.70-5.

¹⁴⁰ Michel Psellos, (ed.) K.N.Sathas, *MB*, Vol 5, (Venice-Paris), pp.399-400; Magdalino, 'Justice and Finance', p.94

¹⁴¹ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 198-273. Svoronos, *La Synopsis Major des Basiliques et ses appendices*, pp.17-45 (appendix A), pp.91-100 (appendix B)

during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), when the famine of 927-8 and the harsh winter of 933-4 had been the catalysts for the 'powerful' to acquire properties from the 'poor' at prices significantly below market value. In a novel issued in 934 Lekapenos tried to force the 'powerful' to return their recent acquisitions to the former owners.¹⁴² This legislation was periodically reissued and strengthened by his tenth-century imperial successors. Constantine Porphyrogenitus not only lengthened the time period allowed for the 'poor' to repurchase their lands from the 'powerful', he also ordered that no compensation was to be paid in instances where properties had been acquired by force.¹⁴³ Nikephoros Phokas extended the restrictions on acquisitions by the 'powerful' to *choria* where they might already hold lands.¹⁴⁴ In 996 Basil II himself introduced a blanket measure, which stated quite baldly that all property acquired by the 'powerful' from within free *choria* since 927 should be restored to its former owners, without compensation for either the original purchase price or for subsequent improvements. He also abolished the principle that property ownership was immune from judicial inquiry after forty years.¹⁴⁵

Although historians have disagreed violently over the motivations for the introduction and elaboration of this legislation during the tenth century and its intended targets, it is generally agreed that this conflict should not simply be interpreted as the high-minded, disinterested protection by the emperor of the

¹⁴² Zepo and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 205-214; Theophanes Continuatus, pp.443, 448-9; R.Morris, 'The Poor and the Powerful in Tenth-Century Byzantium: Law and Reality', *Past and Present* 73 (1976), pp.8-10; P.Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium from the Origins to the Twelfth Century: the Sources and Problems* (Galway, 1979), pp.94-7; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.421-26.

¹⁴³ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 215, 242; Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.97-8; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.426-7, 431-2.

¹⁴⁴ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 254; Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.100-2; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.434-5.

¹⁴⁵ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 263; Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.104-5; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.437-8.

interests of the 'poor' against the territorial rapacity of the 'powerful'.¹⁴⁶ Instead, the legislation was designed to protect imperial authority at several levels: to prevent the erosion of the fiscal integrity of the *chorion*, the main tax-paying unit in the localities, and to ensure that the landed and manpower resources of the locality remained in the service of the state, rather than being transferred to the private service of the 'powerful'. As the 934 novel of Romanos Lekapenos stated:

For the authority of such persons [the 'powerful'] has exulted over the great misery of the 'poor', by the number of their servants, their hirelings and those otherwise attending and accompanying their prominent positions, which brings in prosecutions, forced services,oppressions and distresses, and has introduced no little destruction of the common good For the habitation of the multitude shows the great profit of its employment, the collective contribution of the taxes, the joint rendering of military services, which will be entirely lacking when the common people have perished.¹⁴⁷

One of the most significant implications of this legislation for the development of local administration during the tenth and eleventh centuries was the role which judges played in its practical implementation in the provinces. It is worth noting that at the very end of his novel, Romanos Lekapenos explicitly identified judges as

¹⁴⁶ According to one view, most forcefully advocated by Ostrogorsky, the anti-'powerful' legislation represented an attempt by the Macedonian imperial dynasty to prevent the sequestration of the fiscal and military base of the Byzantine state by an aggressive land-based aristocracy (Ostrogorsky, 'Agrarian Conditions in the Byzantine Empire', pp.215-221). In contrast to Ostrogorsky's views, another argument maintains that this legislation had little to do with the curtailing of an overweening feudal aristocracy. Instead, its main purpose was to preserve the fiscal integrity of the Byzantine state. For Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.85-115, the chief proponent of this second view, the main characteristic of the Byzantine fiscal system was the joint contribution of taxes paid by 'poor' landowners living within free *choria*. In these circumstances, invasions by the 'powerful', whom Lemerle defined as public officials rather than feudal aristocrats, meant that the lands from the *chorion* might easily be consolidated into private estates, *idiostata*, and thus become detached from the basic tax unit. Lemerle's views have been rearticulated at greater length by Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.414-43. A middle position has been taken by Morris, "The Poor and the Powerful", pp.3-27, who argues that the novels of the tenth century represented a flexible tool which emperors could wield against a variety of targets whenever their authority was threatened. She suggests that the legislation was customarily issued at times of crisis for imperial authority: in 934 after a series of natural disasters; in the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, when the emperor was trying to free himself of those families who had supported his palace coup in 944/5; and in 996 as part of a package of retribution against the families involved in the Phokas and Skleros revolts of 976-89.

¹⁴⁷ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 209; translation from C.M.Brand, *Icon and Minaret: Sources of Byzantine and Islamic Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969), pp.83-4.

those who were to enforce the protection of the poor: "let each of those who happens to be a judge constantly maintain these things."¹⁴⁸ Nor was his mandate mere rhetoric. Various written sources indicate that by the mid-tenth century imperial officials dispatched from Constantinople were at work in the Anatolian localities, dealing with the problems identified in the legislation issued by Romanos and his successors. Theophanes Continuatus noted that, "having ringing in his ears the injustices and losses which the pitiable and wretched poor had suffered", Constantine Porphyrogenitus, "sent pious and virtuous men to lighten the great burdens of the suffering poor." Those "pious and virtuous men" dispatched to the principal provinces of central and western Anatolia are named: "And to the Anatolikon he sent the *magistros* Romanos Saronites, and to the Opsikion the *magistros* Romanos Mousele, and to the Thrakesion the *patrikios* Photios and to the Armeniakon Leo Agelastos".¹⁴⁹

The promulgation of further anti-"powerful" legislation by Basil II in the later tenth century, and its continued enforcement in the eleventh century, must be one reason why thematic judges continued to proliferate long after new legislation itself had ceased to be issued. For example the 'Peira', a legal handbook compiled in the 1030s from the case notes of Eustathios Romaios, a Constantinopolitan judge whose career had begun during the reign of Basil II, includes several chapters specifically concerned with the practical application of this legislation, in particular the novel of 996.¹⁵⁰ Many of the cases refer to contemporary Anatolia. In one case,

¹⁴⁸ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 214

¹⁴⁹ Theophanes Con., p.443

¹⁵⁰ The 'Peira' is to be found in J.Zepos and P.Zepos, *Ius Graecoromanum* (8 vols., Athens, 1931), iv, 9-260. Sections concerned with the enforcement of the anti-'powerful' legislation of Basil II and the preservation of the rights of the fisc are to be found on pp.38-40, 142-8, 213-4. See Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.441-2; Magdalino, 'Justice and Finance', p.105. The career of Romaios is outlined in N.Oikonomides, 'The 'Peira' of Eustathios Romaios: an Abortive Attempt to Innovate in Byzantine Law', *Fontes Minores* 7 (1986), pp.169-92.

in Bithynia, the metropolitan of Klaudioupolis, the bishop of Krateia and the ‘poor’ of Rhyakia, were in disputation over the rightful ownership of the lands of a *patrikios* called Eusebios.¹⁵¹ In a number of examples a certain Skleros *magistros* attracted the attention of local judges. He was accused of cheating a monastery, using force against small farmers in order to expand his own estates, and beating a priest.¹⁵² At an earlier point in his career, when he held the lower ranking title of *patrikios*, he was alleged to have bought men into his own service.¹⁵³ This Skleros has been identified as Basil Skleros, who was married to the sister of the emperor Romanos Argyros (1028-34). According to sigillographical evidence he was also *strategos* of the Anatolikon in the second quarter of the eleventh century.¹⁵⁴

Recently, Michel Kaplan has argued that the issuing of the anti-powerful legislation of tenth century and its continuing enforcement in the eleventh, indicates that the Constantinopolitan authorities were engaged in a losing battle to protect the integrity of the fisc.¹⁵⁵ Yet, it can be argued that the extension of imperial authority into the localities in the shape of fiscal and judicial officials, was not simply a defensive and rearguard action on the part of the Byzantine authorities. Although this is the sentiment encouraged by the defensive tone of the legislation, and by the tendency of modern scholars to study the novels as an hermetically sealed corpus of evidence, it should be remembered that the laws themselves reflect an entirely imperial and Constantinopolitan view-point. When this evidence is set against broader social and economic contexts, it becomes clear that the promulgation of the anti-“powerful” legislation, and the civilianising of the localities which that legislative impulse precipitated, were not merely a defensive and negative response

¹⁵¹ *Peira: Zepos and Zepos, Ius*, iv, 39

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.53-4 (chapter 15/14); p.88 (chapter 23/7); p.176 (chapter 42/11)

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.190-1 (chapter 45/15)

¹⁵⁴ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.67-8; see above, p.146

from the imperial authorities. Instead, they also reflected a desire that the authority of the emperor should be imposed more directly on the localities, not least so that the state could be a direct beneficiary of the increasing prosperity of urban and rural western and central Asia Minor.

That the penetration of civilian officials into the provinces was seen in this light by contemporaries is made clear by the author of the military manual 'On Skirmishing', produced either during or shortly after the reign of Nikephoros Phokas (963-9). He alludes disparagingly to the appearance within the locality of "tribute levying mannikins who contribute absolutely nothing to the common good [but] store up many talents of gold", and to thematic judges who dishonour the indigenous *stratiotai*. More crucially, in his adamant insistence on the antiquity of the claims of *strategoi* to supreme governance over their themes, he suggests that these new civilian officials were beginning to present a threat to the traditional military hierarchy of thematic government:

The law itself stipulates that each officer has authority over his own men and can judge them. Does anyone else have authority over the men who live in the theme beside the *strategos* alone whom the holy emperor has appointed? For this reason, from the most ancient Romans and from the law, the *strategos* possessed authority over his own theme. He judges cases in matters that affect the soldiers, and he manages affairs that come up in them. He has a judge (*krites*) to co-operate with him and with whom he too co-operates. He also co-operates with the *protonotarios* and the others appointed in the service of the fisc (*tou demosiou*).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.441-2

¹⁵⁶ *Skirmishing*: Dagron and Mihăescu, pp.109-111; translation (adapted) from Dennis, *Three Military Treatises*, p.217. Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.46, 51-2, 68-9, 74, has interpreted the first half of the eleventh century as the heyday of the thematic judge. In the absence of any significant military threat civil officials such as judges were no longer tightly controlled by the *strategos*. This relative independence was curtailed, however, after 1050 as the greater external military threat presented by the empire's neighbours, especially the Turks, required the core provinces of Byzantium to move onto a more defensive footing.

Yet, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter, by the eleventh century those officials within the secretariat of the *strategos*, who had traditionally performed military functions, were increasingly forced to adopt the responsibilities of “tribute levying manikins” themselves. Although he complained bitterly, the author of ‘On Skirmishing’ was fighting a losing battle against the greater penetration into the locality of the state in its civilian guise.

b. Fiscal lands

An imperial desire to exploit the growing prosperity of the core Byzantine provinces may also underpin key developments within the management of fiscal estates during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. According to a tenth-century treatise on taxation, fiscal lands were those which had been vacated by their owners for more than thirty years, designated *klasmata*, and taken into the hands of the fisc.¹⁵⁷ During the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44) these lands were usually sold on cheaply, with their tax liability reduced to only a twelfth of its former rate.¹⁵⁸ Yet, by the end of the tenth century there is evidence from Constantinople that imperial authorities were becoming more interested in the direct exploitation of these assets rather than in their immediate sale. By 972/3 a department can be detected operating within the Genikon, the main fiscal revenue department, which dealt specifically with the fiscal receipts of *klasmata* once they had been sold.¹⁵⁹ By 1030 this office, the *sekretion ton oikeiakon*, had become independent. This development has been attributed to Basil II. It is widely believed that he chose to end the sale of *klasmata*, and deciding instead to use tenant

¹⁵⁷ C.Brand, ‘Two Byzantine Treatises on Taxation’, *Traditio* 25 (1969), pp.45-6

¹⁵⁸ Howard-Johnston, ‘Crown Lands’, p.79. For example, in 941, towards the end of the reign of Romanos Lekapenos, Thomas, *epoptes* of Thessalonika, was responsible for the sale of *klasmata* in the Athos region: Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.161-4; Oikonomides, *Dated Lead Seal*, pp.68-9, no.63

¹⁵⁹ Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.320-2.

farmers, known as state *paroikoi*, to cultivate fiscal lands directly.¹⁶⁰ The sudden appearance of seals belonging to the staff of the *epi ton oikeiakon*, which can be dated to the turn of the tenth-to-eleventh century, certainly corroborates the view that this agency grew significantly in the reign of Basil.¹⁶¹

It has been argued by Oikonomides that the major impulse behind this greater imperial enthusiasm for the direct management of fiscal lands was a sudden and exponential growth in the amount of immovable property controlled by the state during Basil's reign. This rapid expansion of fiscal lands was caused, so Oikonomides maintains, by the emperor's ready willingness to confiscate the estates of those landowners who contravened the anti-'powerful' legislation, and those who had fought for the rebels during the civil wars of Skleros and Phokas at the beginning of the reign.¹⁶² Here, at first sight, the evidence appears to be strong. A growth in the lands held by the fisc as the result of confiscation could, theoretically, have begun in 979. When the Skleros party fled to Buyid Iraq in March 979, their estates may have been sequestered by the state. The fisc could also have been further enriched in 985 with the fall of Basil's great uncle, the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos. Both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes indicate that during the reigns of Basil's imperial predecessors, the *parakoimomenos* had secured estates for himself in southern Cappadocia and Cilicia. As a result, "nothing worth speaking of was left to the fisc

¹⁶⁰ Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', pp.136-7; idem., 'Terres du fisc et revenu de la terre aux Xe et XIe siècles', in V.Kravari, J.Lefort, C.Morrisson (eds.), *Hommes et richesses* (1991, Paris), pp.321-2; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.321

¹⁶¹ Laurent, *Vatican*, pp.15-16, reflects on the contrast between the silence of literary sources on the existence of this office before the 1030s, and the frequency with which seals belonging to officials from this bureau begin to appear after 1000.

¹⁶² Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', pp.136-7; idem., 'Terres du fisc et revenu de la terre aux Xe et XIe siècles', in V.Kravari, J.Lefort, C.Morrisson (eds.), *Hommes et Richesses* (1991, Paris), pp.321-2

[*demosion*]"¹⁶³ Leo identifies Longias and Drizes as the location of these properties; Skylitzes pinpoints Podandos and Anazarbós.¹⁶⁴ When the *parakoimomenos* was dismissed from office in 985, it is likely that these lands were returned to the management of the fisc. Furthermore, it is possible that at the time of Lekapenos' dismissal, his supporters were also deprived of any land grants they had received from him. According to Basil's novel of 996, all chrysobulls issued while the *parakomoimenos* had been in power were to be considered invalid, unless they had been checked and confirmed by the emperor himself. The fact that this novel also indicates that this order had first been issued at the time of the *parakoimomenos*' dismissal in 985, suggests that any attack on the lands of the Lekapenos nexus could have been underway for a full decade before Basil issued his legislation in 996.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, the novel of 996 demonstrates that Basil's attack on the 'powerful' landowners was not simple rhetorical bluster but was implemented at a practical level. That is to say, it indicates that some territory certainly was confiscated by the emperor. The main text of the novel itself contains an exemplary story about one Philokales, a leading court official, who had used the influence and wealth he had accrued while he was an imperial *protovestiaros*, to buy all the lands within his native village (*chorion*). As a result the village itself was turned into his private

¹⁶³ Skylitzes, pp.311-2

¹⁶⁴ Leo the Deacon, p.177; Skylitzes, pp.311-2. Drizes is the same site as Drizion, a castle on the Cappadocian side of the Taurus mountains, where Nikephoros Phokas spent the winter of 964-5 during his campaign against Cilicia (Skylitzes, p.268; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, pp.172-3). Podandos was also located in Cappadocia north of the Taurus. Anazarbos was in Cilicia and was conquered by Nikephoros Phokas in 964 (Skylitzes, pp.268-9). Longias has yet to be identified: it is not listed within the Cappadocian sites recorded by Hild and Restle in *TIB Kappadokien* (Vienna, 1981). See Maps 2 and 3 for the locations of Podandos and Anazarbos

¹⁶⁵ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 270-1; Michael Psellos confirms that Basil personally checked the grants of Lekapenos. Those which had been issued for the benefit of the state were allowed to stand; those issued as favours were rescinded (Psellos, pp.12-13). As we saw in the previous chapter, Leo metropolitan of Synada, whose see was located on the western edge of the Anatolian plateau, was

estate (*proasteion*). Since this consolidation of immovable property flew in the face of the anti-‘powerful’ legislation of the tenth century, Basil II deprived Philokales of all but his original holding.¹⁶⁶ The location of Philokales’ estate is not clear from Basil’s legislation. However, the novel of 996 provides firm proof that landowners in Asia Minor could easily fall victim to confiscation. In a marginal note to the novel, the emperor asserts that the Mousele family were among those ‘powerful’ malefactors found guilty of using their tenure of public office for the acquisition of landed estates. As a result of their abuses, the emperor deprived the family of their properties. These estates lay near Philomelion, close to the Pisidian lakes in the western plateau region of Anatolia.¹⁶⁷

The details furnished by this *scholium* do not make it clear whether the Mousele family suffered the fate of sequestration simply because they disobeyed the anti-‘powerful’ legislation, or because they had participated in the revolts of Skleros and Phokas. However, if evidence from elsewhere in the same novel is set in the context of the historical record, it becomes clear that it was long-standing opponents of the emperor who were most likely to be accused of contravening the anti-“powerful” legislation and forced to suffer the appropriation of their property. In another *scholium* to the 996 novel the emperor cites the Phokas and Maleinos families as members of the ‘powerful’ who had built estates in defiance of the legislation of his imperial predecessors.¹⁶⁸ As we saw in chapter three, by rebelling against the emperor in 987 the Phokas family had presented the most serious threat to imperial authority during the first thirteen years of Basil’s reign. The Maleinos family were their close allies and fellow rebels. Indeed, it was at Eustathios

one possible casualty of Basil’s review of the chrysobulls issued by Basil Lekapenos. See above, pp.169-70

¹⁶⁶ Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 265

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.266-7

Maleinos' house in the central Anatolian theme of the Charsianon that Bardas Phokas had been declared emperor in August 987.¹⁶⁹ Although the *scholium* to the novel merely identifies the families as 'powerful' transgressors, it does not indicate whether Basil confiscated their lands as a punishment. However, the historical record represented by Skylitzes' 'Synopsis Historion' draws an explicit parallel between Basil's legislation of 996 and his sequestration of the territory of former rebels. In Skylitzes' account of the reign of Basil, the provisions of the 996 novel are juxtaposed next to a story dealing with the arrest of Eustathios Maleinos in the final decade of the tenth century. According to Skylitzes, when Basil returned from campaigning on the eastern frontier in either in 995 or 1000, he stayed at the Maleinos *oikos* in Cappadocia. So great were Eustathios' resources that he was able to offer hospitality to the whole Byzantine field army. When Basil left, he put Eustathios under house arrest, and forced him to return to Constantinople. Eustathios died at an unknown date in the capital, and his lands passed into the hands of the fisc.¹⁷⁰ While most of the lands which were seized by the state were based in Cappadocia, Maleinos estates elsewhere in Asia Minor may also have been sequestered. In the tenth century the Maleinos family owned urban properties in Ankara and lands in a hundred-kilometre stretch of the Lower Sangarios river.¹⁷¹

Yet, while evidence from the novel of 996 provides clear evidence that political opponents of the emperor and those who contravened the anti-'powerful' legislation, (frequently one and the same individual or family), were liable to have

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.264-5

¹⁶⁹ Skylitzes, p.332

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.340. Skylitzes' account of Maleinos' arrest is undated. He merely notes that Eustathios paid host to Basil when the emperor journeyed through Cappadocia. Basil could have passed through Cappadocia in 995 on his return from raiding Fatimid-controlled northern Syria, or in 1000 on his way from annexing the western Caucasian principdom of David of Tao (see below, pp.277, 281-2)

¹⁷¹ Kaplan, 'Les grands propriétaires de Cappadoce', pp.143-8; E.Honigmann, 'Un itineraire arabe a travers le Pont', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves: Melanges Franz Cumont* (Brussels, 1936) p.268

their estates confiscated, I believe it would be premature to suggest that such sequestrations necessarily contributed to a vast swelling of fiscal lands. In the first place, it is possible that when many estates belonging to the 'powerful' fell foul of the imperial legislation and were dismembered, their component parts were returned to their original 'poor' landowners rather than retained by the fisc. The novel of 996 indicates that the individual properties comprising the estate of Philokales were given back to their original village owners.¹⁷² Moreover, it is possible that many territorial confiscations, even those properties seized from the emperor's leading political opponents, were much less significant in size than some historians have assumed. This is because relatively few of those families who rebelled against Basil in the first thirteen years of his reign were substantial land-owners. As we saw in chapter three of this thesis, it was the resources that a rebel like Bardas Skleros could command in his capacity as a regional army commander, namely taxes, the army and diplomatic alliances, which formed the basis of his authority, and provided him with the practical means to foment revolt. At no point in his first rebellion, nor when he returned to the empire after ten years in exile in Baghdad, does Skleros' political threat appear to have resided in his tenure of immense private resources.¹⁷³

Yet, even if the Skleros party did own substantial immovable property in the eastern half of the Byzantine empire, it is clear from the historical record that the emperor did not sequester their lands on a permanent basis, either during or after their revolt. Instead, those Skleros adherents who surrendered to the emperor in 979 at the end of the first revolt were merely fined.¹⁷⁴ Because of his importance to relations between the Hamdanids of Aleppo and the empire, one of Skleros' key

¹⁷² Zepos and Zepos, *Ius*, i, 265

¹⁷³ See above, pp.127-131, 137

supporters, Kouleïb, the *basilikos* of Melitene, did not even suffer this fate. Rather, he was pardoned for his role in the revolt, and allowed to keep the estates he had been awarded when he had first entered Byzantine service in 975.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, when the inner core of the Skleros party finally surrendered to the emperor in 989/90, they too may have been allowed to keep their estates. Psellos tells us that they were allowed to retain their offices, titles and *kteseis*.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the emperor does not seem to have been a direct material beneficiary of the end of the Skleros insurrection.

Furthermore, despite the draconian tone of the emperor's legislation, the extent to which Basil's other political opponents suffered a substantial loss of landed estates is not at all certain. Even the Phokas family do not seem to have been entirely dispossessed in the aftermath of the 987-9 revolt. The Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivert noted that Nikephoros, the son of Bardas, was deprived of his official commands in 989, but says nothing of his lands. Yahya ibn Sa'id claimed that Nikephoros actually received new estates from the emperor.¹⁷⁷ Since the Phokas family were so closely identified in the *scholium* to the 996 novel with the Maleinoi, whose estates certainly were confiscated, it seems likely that the emperor may have appropriated at least some of the Phokas lands as well. However, this punishment may not have involved the complete sequestration of the Phokas patrimony, but instead a judicious reduction.

The fate of Lekapenos property in the period after the fall of the *parakoimomenos* certainly supports the idea that for all his bluster, the emperor's practical measures

¹⁷⁴ Al-Rudhrawari, p.23

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.23-4; see below, pp.331-2, for Kouleib and his role within Byzantine government on the eastern frontier.

¹⁷⁶ Psellos, p.16

were often more moderate. For example, Michael Psellos gives a dramatic account of Basil's decision to demolish a monastery patronised by Basil Lekapenos at the time of the *parakoimomenos*' fall.¹⁷⁸ Yet, the destruction of this monastery was never fully completed. In 985, the year of the dismissal of Lekapenos, the monastery continued to produce manuscripts.¹⁷⁹ Seals indicate that the foundation survived until the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.¹⁸⁰ Even Psellos himself hints that the destruction was partial:

The emperor now wished to raze this edifice to the ground. However, since he was careful to avoid the charge of impiety, only certain parts of the monastery were removed, and not all those at once.¹⁸¹

In fact Basil only removed the mosaics and the interior furnishings.

The idea that the reign of Basil II may not have seen an exponential increase in fiscal estates in many parts of the empire, receives some support from the sigillographical evidence. There is little sign from the lead seal record, for example, that the fisc controlled vast swathes of the heartland of Asia Minor during the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Although it is true that large numbers of seals were issued by the central, Constantinopolitan bureau of the *epi ton oikeiakon* in this period, it is noteworthy that very few of these items belonged to officials based in Anatolia.¹⁸² While it is difficult to rationalise this mismatch between the small

¹⁷⁷ Aristakes, p.17; Yahya, *PO* 18, p.427

¹⁷⁸ Psellos, p.13

¹⁷⁹ Crostini, 'The Cultural Life of Basil', p.63

¹⁸⁰ Laurent, *Église*, nos.1141, 1185-7

¹⁸¹ Psellos, p.13 (translation: Sewter (adapted), *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, p.39)

¹⁸² Some rare examples include: from the *Thrakesion*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.871; *Boukellarion*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.283, Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.556; *Opsikion*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.39.6; *Optimatoi*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.28; *Charsianon*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2822; *Paphlagonia*: Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.159.

number of lead seals in the Anatolian provinces, and the large number produced by the bureau in the capital, there is one plausible explanation for the anomaly. This would argue that the growth of the agency based in Constantinople was connected more to the longstanding problem of what to do with deserted lands in the Balkans, than with the management of confiscated lands elsewhere in the empire.

In this context it is worth noting that the only substantial local evidence for the development of fiscal lands and state *paroikoi* in the tenth and eleventh centuries comes from the archives of the monasteries of Mount Athos, located on the Chalkis peninsular east of Thessalonika.¹⁸³ Yet, the amount of land in the hands of the fisc may have been much higher here than elsewhere in the Byzantine empire, not least because this region in southern Macedonia had been vulnerable to hostile attack by external enemies for much of the tenth century, and as a result, to persistent desertion by cultivators. These problems continued during the reign of Basil. Until the annexation of Bulgaria in 1018, raids into Macedonia and western Thrace conducted by the forces of Tsar Samuel Kometopoulos were frequent, particularly during periods of domestic unrest in Byzantium.¹⁸⁴ In an order issued by the patriarch Nicholas Chrysoberges, which united the defunct monastery of Gomatou near the Macedonian town of Hierissos with the Athonite monastery of the Lavra, reference is made to the damage caused to the theme of Thessalonika by Bulgar raids. This order was dated to 988, the period when the rebel armies of Bardas Phokas were encamped on the Asian side of the Bosphoros.¹⁸⁵ The testimony of Skylitzes indicates that such Bulgarian incursions continued until at least 1014, and probably only came to an end when Basil II annexed the empire of John Vladislav in 1018. Nor were regions along the Byzantino-Bulgarian frontier merely raided.

¹⁸³ Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, pp.160-88

¹⁸⁴ See above, pp.116-8

They were also the victims of depopulation. Skylitzes' account contains several references to the forced removal of inhabitants from imperial territory to Bulgaria during the reign of Basil.¹⁸⁶ Nor were the Bulgars the only threat. The islands and shores of the Chalkis peninsular were plundered by Arab pirates during Basil's reign. One attack in 993 left the islands of Gymnopelagisia deserted.¹⁸⁷ Disorder in the locality was even fomented by those forces fighting for the Byzantine army. At some point between 986 and 1005/6, while Basil II was campaigning in the Balkans, some *hegoumenoi* from monasteries on Mount Athos were attacked by a group of Hungarians, mercenary soldiers [*hypospondoi*] in the pay of the Byzantine army.¹⁸⁸

Yet, while it is easy to see how this unstable political situation in Macedonia resulted in large numbers of deserted lands, or *klasmata*, which had to be sold or managed by the fisc, the situation in the themes of Anatolia could hardly be more different. Secure from external attack and increasingly prosperous, these were regions where the number of *klasmata* must have been significantly lower than in the regions around Thessalonika. If there were few *klasmata* to manage, and if, as we have argued above, relatively few large estates were confiscated from the emperor's political opponents, then it is hardly surprising that only a small number of officials connected to the *epi ton oikeiakon* seem to have been active in the core themes of Anatolia.

¹⁸⁵ *Actes de Lavra*, pp.115-118, doc.8

¹⁸⁶ General references to Bulgar raids against Macedonia and western Thrace: Skylitzes, pp.330, 339, 341, 350; references to forced removal of populations: Skylitzes, pp.330, 363

¹⁸⁷ *Actes de Lavra*, doc. 10; G.Ostrogorsky, 'Une ambassade serbe auprès de l'empereur Basile II', *B* 19 (1949), pp.187-8, 192-3. See also *Actes d'Iviron*, doc. 16: in 1010 a widow sold a field of eighty *modioi* to raise money to ransom her son Basil who had been taken prisoner by Agarenes (Arabs).

c. Crown lands

Another branch of the Constantinopolitan civil administrative machinery which appears to have been overhauled in the later tenth or early eleventh century was the management of crown lands. In contradistinction to fiscal lands which provided revenue to the state, crown estates were part of the private domain of the emperor. Their income was used to support his personal expenditure.¹⁸⁹ In addition, many crown lands also bore the running costs of those imperial foundations (*oikoi*) established in Constantinople, which fulfilled monastic, charitable, and memorial functions.¹⁹⁰ During the ninth and tenth centuries management of all these estates had been relatively diffuse. Contemporary administrative *taktika* suggest that in this period there were two officials at the helm of the management of most of the properties owned and directly cultivated by the crown: the *mezas kourator* and the *kourator* of the Mangana. Each had agents in the localities, including managers of individual estates, *episkeptitai* (inspectors), and regional co-ordinators, *kouratores* or *basilikoi*.¹⁹¹ Yet, as Michel Kaplan has pointed out, these two officials did not have a monopoly on the administration of crown lands. Any bureau within Constantinopolitan central government during the ninth and early tenth centuries could be in administrative control of imperial lands anywhere in Byzantium.¹⁹²

By the eleventh century, however, the administrative organisation of crown lands seems to have been centralised and consolidated. In the case of the estates which financed the imperial *oikoi*, control in Constantinople passed from the *mezas*

¹⁸⁸ Saint Athanasias, ch.210

¹⁸⁹ This distinction between fiscal and crown lands is drawn by Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', pp.136-8; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.310-325; P.Magdalino, 'Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*', *Speculum* 58 (1983), p.340

¹⁹⁰ Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System*, pp.100-103

¹⁹¹ Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.103, 107, 123, 318

¹⁹² Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.323: the lands of a village granted by Constantine Monomachos to the monastery of Nea Moni on Chios had previously been split between the Mangana and the Genikon.

kourator to the *megas oikonomos* of the *euageis oikoi*.¹⁹³ Circumstantial evidence connects this change in the organisation of the central, official hierarchy to an expansion in the number and activities of imperial *oikoi* during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Hebdomon was founded by the mid tenth-century emperor Romanos Lekapenos (920-44).¹⁹⁴ Basil II himself established a new monastic foundation at the Hebdomon dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist just outside the walls of Constantinople.¹⁹⁵ Romanos III Argyros (1028-34) patronised the Peribleptos; Michael IV (1034-41), the Anargyroi; Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-55), Saint George at the Mangana.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, at the same time as the administrative apparatus concerning the land of the imperial *oikoi* was consolidated, the management of those other crown estates not attached to specific imperial foundations was centralised under the control of the *ephoros* of the imperial *kouratoriai*.¹⁹⁷ The fact that the last references in written sources to the *megas kourator* and the first to the *oikonomos* of the *euageis oikoi* are to be found in the early eleventh century, suggests that it may have been Basil II himself who was responsible for the reorganisation of crown estate management in Constantinople.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative", p.138; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.319

¹⁹⁴ Theophanes Con., pp.403-4

¹⁹⁵ When Basil died he chose to be buried at the monastic complex he had sponsored at the Hebdomon (Skylitzes, p.369; Yahya (Cheikho), p.249; Pachymeres (George): *Georges Pachymérés: relations historiques*, ed. A.Failler and trans. V.Laurent (CFHB XXIV, Paris, 1984), pp.175-7). The surplus revenues of the estates which supported the imperial *oikos* of the Hebdomon were a highly prized financial reward for leading court figures during the eleventh century. Nikephoritzes, the chief advisor to Michael VII, was one recipient of this grant (known as a *pronoia*). In the reign of Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078-81), the empress Mary of Alania was another beneficiary (Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.140).

¹⁹⁶ Psellos, i, 41-4, 55, 71-2; ii, 61-4

¹⁹⁷ Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.138; Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands', p.88.

¹⁹⁸ The office of the *megas kourator* is still mentioned in the later tenth-century 'Escorial Taktikon' (Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.270). It is mentioned for the last time in an Athonite document of 1012. The first mention of the *oikonomos of the euagoi oikoi* occurs in a document issued by the patriarch

There is some evidence from Anatolia that centralisation in Constantinople directly affected the organisation of crown properties in the provinces. This evidence comes from the western littoral of Asia Minor. This was an area where crown lands are attested as early as the tenth century. The *kourator* of an imperial estate is mentioned in the life of Saint Paul, a mid tenth-century abbot of the monastery of Xerochoraphion, located near Priene just north of Mount Latros.¹⁹⁹ The life of Saint Nikephoros, metropolitan of Miletos in the 960s and 70s, indicates that estates belonging to the Myrelaion, the foundation sponsored by the emperor Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), were to be found in the region around Miletos.²⁰⁰ However, it is clear from documentary evidence contained in the archive of the monastery of St John on Patmos, that by the eleventh century estates located in the Miletos region were routinely managed by the new bureau of the *euageis oikoi*. In 1072 Andronikos Doukas, the brother of the emperor Michael VII Doukas, was granted the *episkepsis* of Miletos, part of the *episkepsis* of Alokepai, and the estate (*proasteion*) of Barys. The former managers of these properties had been local representatives of the *euageis oikoi*.²⁰¹ At about the same date, another imperial estate under the control of the *euageis oikoi*, was given to the monastery of Xerochoraphion near Mount Latros. In this instance the local official charged with

Sisinnios (1002-19) (Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.138; *Régestes*: V.Grumel, *Les régestes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, (Paris, 1947) Vol. 1, no.822).

¹⁹⁹ Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.323-4; Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor', pp.413-4. See Map 3 for place names connected to imperial estates in western and central Anatolia.

²⁰⁰ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor', pp.408-9; Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, p.58.

²⁰¹ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor', pp.387-394. The status of the estate of the Alopekon as crown property in the eleventh century is confirmed by the seal of a contemporary *episkeptites* of these lands (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.5.1).

the administration of the properties was Niketas Chalkoutzes the *episkeptites* of the Maeander.²⁰²

A paucity of evidence makes it difficult to know to what extent other crown lands in Anatolia came under the jurisdiction of the new centralised bureaus in Constantinople concerned with estate management. However, the sigillographical archive indicates that crown estates were to be found all over Anatolia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Seals belonging to *kouratores* and *episkeptitai* survive from almost every theme in western and central Asia Minor.²⁰³ Moreover, the geographical designations on these seals indicate that imperial estates were located in regions ideally situated to reap the benefit of the growing commercial prosperity of Anatolia. The eleventh-century seal of an *episkeptites* and *xenodochos* from Nikaia suggests that *xenodochia* (hostels for merchants) in north-west Asia Minor, which had been managed by the bureau of the *megas kourator* in the late ninth century, remained imperial possessions.²⁰⁴ As a result imperial authorities were in a perfect position to benefit from any increase in commercial trade which passed through north-west Asia Minor.²⁰⁵

²⁰² N. Wilson and J. Darrouzès, 'Restes du cartulaire de Hiéra-Xérochoraphion', *REB* 26 (1968), pp.5-27. There is an extant seal of Niketas Chalkoutzes in his office as *episkeptites* of the Maeander (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.25.1).

²⁰³ From the *Anatolikon* a *kourator* who also held the office of *horreiaros* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.86.22; see above, p.195, n.151 for discussion of the office of *horreiaros*); from the *Opsikion*, a *megas kourator* of the Mangana and *basilikos* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.39.10); from *Seleukeia* a *megas kourator* and *krites* (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.2063). *Basilikoi* from the *Armeniakon* (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F821) and from the *Optimatoi* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.2). *Episkeptitai* from the *Armeniakon* (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2904), from the *Kibyrrhaiotai* (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, ii, no.59.5) and from *Seleukeia* (Zacos II, no.729; Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.271, no.4). From the *Thrakesion* a *notarios* of the estates [*ktemata*] of the theme (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.250, no.1)

Furthermore, imperial camps (*aplekta*) located on the western edge of the plateau, where imperial armies had been accustomed to muster in the ninth and tenth centuries on their way east to campaign against the Arabs, seem to have remained imperial *episkepseis* during the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Thus, Malagina located on the Lower Sangarios, identified in the ninth century as the first staging post for the armies marching eastwards, was an *episkepsis* during the reign of Romanos IV (1068-71).²⁰⁶ In the early stages of the first Skleros revolt, the battle of Rhageai was fought near the imperial estate of Dipotamon/Mesanukta in the region of the Pisidian Lakes.²⁰⁷ An eleventh-century seal points to an *episkepsis* at Dorylaion, another ninth-century *aplekton* and key fortress town on the western edge of the plateau. The editors of this seal suspect that the owner may have controlled those estates [or *mitata*] in Phrygia which once bred livestock for imperial expeditions.²⁰⁸ Given their position on key route systems and their stocks of good grazing ground, it is possible that the imperial *aplekta* may have been turned into farms which raised livestock for the commercial market.

Yet, while there is strong evidence to suggest that imperial estates were to be found everywhere in Asia Minor during the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is impossible to know whether the stock of crown land in Anatolia increased substantially during

²⁰⁴ The *xenodochia* controlled by the state, according to the late ninth-century *taktikon* of Philotheos, were located in Nikomedia, Pylai and on the Sangarios river (Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.122-3). For the Nikaia seal see Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.250, no.1

²⁰⁵ See above, 173-80, 193-8.

²⁰⁶ *Military expeditions*: Haldon, p.75. Attaleiates mentions that Malagina was the site of an *episkepsis* in the reign of Romanos IV under the control of a *chartularios* (Attaleiates, p.124). For an eleventh-century seal of a *chartouarios* of Malagina see Ebersolt, *Musées impériaux ottomans*, no.325.

²⁰⁷ Skylitzes notes that the imperial estate was called Dipotamon, but that the local inhabitants called it Mesanukta (Skylitzes, p.320). The sillographical record contains the contemporary seals of a *protokourator* and an *episkeptites* of Mesonukta (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, nos.58.1-2)

²⁰⁸ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.22

this period, or whether it was more intensively exploited.²⁰⁹ In other words, it is impossible to tell whether the greater centralisation of administrative practice was necessarily matched by a marked increase in the revenues received by the crown from its estates in the provinces. In the absence of detailed archive documents this is a question which will have to remain unanswered. However, it is worth pointing out that there is some evidence which countermands the idea that the greater centralisation of the management of crown estates necessarily precipitated a large increase in revenue. When Andronikos Doukas received the imperial estate of Barys near Miletos in the early 1070s, the property was said to be very run down, with vines, olives and orchards overgrown.²¹⁰ These observations are most surprising given the general prosperity of this coastal region in the eleventh century. In these circumstances it is tempting to argue that imperial authorities may not have possessed the resources of capital or manpower to exploit their immovable assets to the full.

iii. Conclusion

Any attempt to reconstruct the administrative history of Anatolia during the reign of Basil II is hampered by a lack of written source materials. The thin historical record provides little more than the names of a handful of local *strategoï*. Other literary sources, such as saints lives, imperial novels and military manuals, provide only occasional references which are of direct relevance to bureaucratic developments in Anatolia. However, once these literary clues are examined in the light of the more substantial sigillographical record, some preliminary conclusions about the administration of this region during the later tenth and early eleventh

²⁰⁹ For the argument that there was a substantial growth in the stock of crown land elsewhere in the Byzantine empire during the second half of the tenth century, above all in the former emirates of the eastern frontier, see the next chapter, p.328.

centuries can be drawn. Above all, it becomes clear that Basil's reign represented the continuation of many deep-seated administrative trends which were already underway long before the emperor himself came to the throne in 976. The most fundamental of these trends was the shift away from an administration based on the needs of defence, towards a form of government devoted to the exploitation of local resources by imperial authorities in Constantinople.

In the sphere of local military administration, the long-standing absence of a hostile threat to Anatolia from the east meant that theme armies continued to reduce in size, with many theme soldiers choosing to commute their military service to a fiscal due. As the burden of military endeavour within Byzantium was increasingly borne by the centralised armed forces, many military positions within the secretariat of the *strategos* gradually disappeared. Although theme armies do not appear to have vanished entirely, either before or during Basil's reign, local garrisons in Anatolia were increasingly likely to be staffed by professional soldiers recruited from outside the empire. Meanwhile, some soldiers from the Anatolian themes were organised into full-time professional *tagmata*, which served with the centralised field army in campaigns against the empire's overseas adversaries, or were stationed on the frontiers.

The greater frequency with which military service was commuted during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries is one sign of how the imperative behind local administration began to move away from the provision of defence, towards the greater financial exploitation of the resources of Anatolia by the emperor in Constantinople. Another sign of the desire of central government to tap into the

²¹⁰ Whittow, 'Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor', pp.388-9

growing prosperity of Asia Minor is the greater prominence within thematic government of a variety of officials with revenue-raising responsibilities. Many senior army commanders took on tax-raising duties, while civilian officials, including judges and the managers of fiscal and crown lands, became more prominent in local administration. However, the surviving sigillographical record suggests that an important distinction needs to be drawn. Although civil officials of all guises emerge with greater frequency in the Anatolian leads seals of the later tenth and eleventh centuries, it is those functionaries responsible for the indirect exploitation of the locality rather than those charged with the direct management of immovable resources, who seem to have been more ubiquitous. Thus, the sigillographical record suggests that the civil administration of Anatolia seems to have been characterised more by judges than by officials attached to the office of the *epi ton oikeiakon* or the *euageis oikoi*.

Until further research into the sigillographical record of tenth- and eleventh-century Anatolia can be conducted, this perceived imbalance within the incidence of civil officials can be no more than impressionistic. However, if substantiated by subsequent investigation, this finding has important repercussions. It suggests, in the first place, that the imperial authorities in Constantinople preferred to extract material gain from the growing prosperity of Anatolia by the indirect means of taxation rather than by the direct management of resources. This, in turn, implies that during the tenth and eleventh centuries most assets of land and manpower in Anatolia remained in private hands, and were not subsumed by the Byzantine state. It is also a conclusion which clearly countermands the notion that Basil II himself brought large swathes of privately-owned property under the direct management of the fisc, by confiscating the lands of his principal political opponents and those individuals who disobeyed legislation prohibiting the illegal acquisition of estates

by the 'powerful'. As this chapter has demonstrated, there is little strong evidence for the widespread confiscation of landed property during the reign of Basil. Instead, sequestration was a judiciously employed political tool rather than part of a sustained policy to enhance the property-base of the state. In the day-to-day governance of the Anatolian themes, tenth- and eleventh-century emperors, including Basil II, preferred to exploit the localities through the use of taxation rather than through the direct management of imperially-owned assets.

Chapter Six

Administration and Imperial Authority on the Eastern Frontier

I. Introduction

In the second and third quarters of the tenth century Byzantine armies had taken advantage of the demise of the Abbasid caliphate, and extended the empire's territorial boundaries over the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains into Cilicia, northern Syria, and northern Mesopotamia, thus territorially redefining a Byzantine east that for the previous three centuries had been limited to the Anatolian plateau. Yet, when Basil himself came to the throne in 976, few of these annexations had been consolidated. Melitene, conquered in 934, the oldest of the great territorial gains of the tenth century, had been under Byzantine suzerainty for less than half a century. Most permanent conquests were even more recent. Cilicia, absorbed in 964-5, had been under Byzantine rule for little more than a decade. Antioch in northern Syria had only surrendered to the Byzantines in 969. Other sites in northern Syria, such as Barzouyah and Saoune, ceded to the Byzantines during the emperor John Tzimiskes' last eastern campaign in 975, had been under imperial rule for less than a year when Basil assumed the imperial purple.¹

This chapter considers how imperial authority was consolidated in these eastern territories during Basil's reign. The first part of the chapter will deal with military arrangements on the frontier. The second with those matters traditionally perceived

to be civilian. The principal question asked will be whether Constantinople sought to control the periphery according to rigid preconceived administrative formulae, or whether, in the context of the heterogeneous nature of the local populations of these regions, it admitted a more flexible and devolved relationship. Although discussion will be primarily concerned with institutions and processes within the empire itself, the chapter will begin with a brief overview of Byzantine relations with its eastern neighbours, the crucial military and diplomatic backdrop against which administration on the frontier developed.

II. Byzantium's eastern neighbours

i. Muslim neighbours

When Basil came to the throne in 976, the most threatening of the empire's eastern neighbours were the Fatimids, a militant Shia dynasty from north Africa, who not only possessed a powerful land army composed of Berber forces from the Maghrib, but also a large fleet.² In 969/70 this expansionist Muslim power had invaded and occupied Egypt. By the autumn of 970, Fatimid armies had seized Palestine and Syria, and their sights were set on Byzantine northern Syria. During the winter of 970-1 they besieged Antioch for five months. Although this siege was swiftly disbanded once a Byzantine relief force arrived, Fatimid armies constituted a perennial threat to Byzantine security in northern Syria during the first half of Basil's reign, with competition between the two powers focused on two strategic targets: first, the coastal ports of northern Syria and Lebanon, such as Laodikeia,

¹ See Map 6 for all place names and geographical references in this chapter.

² For a detailed discussion of imperial relations with Fatimid Egypt and Aleppo, Byzantium's client state in northern Syria, in Basil's reign, see: Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.416-423, 478-557; W.Farag, 'The Aleppo Question: a Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interest in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century', *BMGS* 14 (1990), pp.44-60; Bikhazi, 'Hamdanid Dynasty of Mesopotamia and North Syria', pp.973-80; Schlumberger, *L'Épopée byzantine*, i, chapter 9; ii, chapters 2,3,7; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.367-9, 379-82; H.Kennedy, *The*

Balantias, Tripoli, Tyre, and Beirut; and second, Aleppo, the Hamdanid emirate in northern Syria which had become a Byzantine, tribute-paying, client state in the year 969/70.

During Basil's reign the most sustained Fatimid offensive in northern Syria occurred during the first half of the 990s. In this period Aleppo was repeatedly besieged, and Byzantine armies based at Antioch under the leadership of Michael Bourtzes were defeated in open battle in 992 and 994. The second of these reverses was so serious that Basil II marched from Bulgaria with a detachment of the Byzantine field army, crossed Anatolia in a little over two weeks, and arrived unexpectedly in northern Syria in the early spring of 995. The Fatimid army fled in his path. However, this was not the only occasion during the Byzantino-Fatimid conflict of the 990s that Basil was forced to intervene personally. In 998 Byzantine forces based at Antioch under the command of Damian Dalassenos suffered another defeat in open battle. A year later Basil once again marched east. This time he ravaged Fatimid-held territory in the southern reaches of the Orontes valley before cutting westwards to the coast in order to invest Tripoli. Although the siege was unsuccessful, Basil's swift military response to the defeat of Dalassenos persuaded the advisors surrounding the young Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim, to come to terms. The resultant peace lasted without serious rupture from 1000 to 1016. It was unshaken even by al-Hakim's destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1009. Although competition was renewed after Fatimid forces occupied Aleppo in 1016, this rivalry appears to have remained highly localised,

Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates (London, 1986), pp.282-4, 318-338. See above, pp.226-7, for the dangers presented by the Fatimid fleet.

and did not disintegrate during the remainder of Basil's reign into the full-scale, armed hostilities which characterised the pre-1000 period.³

Further east, in the Djazira, on the frontier which stretched along the Upper Euphrates and Upper Tigris rivers, stiff military resistance could still be offered to Byzantium at the beginning of Basil's reign by local Muslim powers in Mesopotamia and northern Iraq.⁴ For example in 973, less than three years before Basil came to power, the Hamdanid emirate of Mosul defeated a Byzantine field army at a battle near Amida, in the Diyar Bakr, south of the Anti Taurus mountains. In the course of the engagement, the general at the head of the Byzantine army, Melias, the *domestikos of the scholai*, was taken captive, and subsequently died in prison. Although the Hamdanids were expelled from Mosul and the Diyar Bakr cities of Mayafariqin and Amida in 978-9, shortly after Basil's reign began, they were replaced by a more potent military threat: forces loyal to Adud al-Dawla. Adud was a member of the Shia Buyid clan which controlled most of the Iranian plateau. He himself was the emir of Fars in southern Iran. After ousting his cousin Izz al-Dawla from power in Baghdad in the spring of 978, he also controlled Iraq. For the next five years, until he died in 983, Adud threatened to unify a vast territorial land-mass, which stretched from Persia in the east to the Diyar Bakr in the west. More important, although Adud's hegemony was brief, it occurred at the very beginning of Basil's reign, when the emperor himself was threatened by the first revolt of Bardas Skleros. Indeed, Adud was enthusiastic to exploit his imperial neighbour's insecurity for his own territorial gain. He gave Skleros sanctuary in Baghdad when the Byzantine rebel general had been defeated by imperial armies in

³ See above, p.201, and n.172 for discussion of the trade embargo which accompanied the local deterioration of relations after 1016.

⁴ Relations between Byzantium and Buyid Iraq are outlined in: Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.393-416, 478-557; Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiscès', pp.99-108; idem., "Deux documents arabes sur Bardas Sklèros", pp.55-69; Whittow,

979. Adud's hope was that he could use Skleros as a pawn either to recover a series of mountain fortresses in the Diyar Bakr from the Byzantines, or to realise an even greater territorial ambition, control over Aleppo in northern Syria. Even after Adud died, Buyid Baghdad still sought to use Skleros as a political pawn. When the general returned to Byzantium in 987 he was sponsored by Buyid gold.⁵

Nonetheless, by the time that Skleros left Baghdad and re-entered the empire, Buyid power on the Byzantine frontier was disintegrating in the face of pressure from Arab and Kurdish nomad tribes. The last Buyid governor left Mosul in 996, and henceforth this city was under the control of the bedouin Uqalids. Meanwhile, the Diyar Bakr was absorbed within a Kurdish emirate founded by Bad ibn Dustuk. This emirate not only encompassed regions south of the Anti Taurus, but also a variety of urban sites on the northern shores of Lake Van in Armenia. The military potency of this new Kurdish power was visible during the revolt of Bardas Phokas, when Bad took advantage of the mayhem inside Byzantium to raid the plain of Muş in Taron, an Armenian principedom annexed by the Byzantine empire as recently as 966/7.⁶ It was only in 992/3, after Bad's death and a series of Byzantine punitive raids around Lake Van, that Basil was able to negotiate a lasting peace with the Kurdish emirate.⁷ In 1000 this deal was further solidified when Basil II offered Bad's nephew, ibn Marwan, the title of *magistros*, the office of *doux* of the east, and the promise that imperial troops from Taron and western Armenia would assist the Marwanids if they came under outside attack.⁸

Making of Orthodox Byzantium, pp.365-7; Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, pp.225-236.

⁵ See above, chapter three, *passim*.

⁶ Stephen of Taron p.141; see below, p.291.

⁷ Al-Rudhrawari p.262; Stephen of Taron pp.200-3

ii. Christian Caucasia

In western Caucasia Byzantium's neighbours were predominantly Christian princes, who rarely threatened the empire directly, but whose political confidence and economic prosperity were both growing in the later tenth century.⁹ Their prosperity was based on their ability to tax the international trade routes that ran north-south and east-west through their domains.¹⁰ They then invested these revenues in extensive building programmes: constructing churches, monasteries and even cities.¹¹ Their confidence sprang from their increasing military success, particularly against the Muslim emirates of Lake Van and even, on occasion, against the more powerful emirs of Azerbaijan. Foremost of these princes, when Basil came to the throne, was David of Tao. His authority among his princely peers in Caucasia, whether Armenian- or Georgian-speaking, Chalcedonian or Monophysite, was such that he frequently acted as an arbiter in regional disputes, and as the co-ordinator of military action against Islamic foes.¹² David's role as a key political player on the eastern frontier was at its most apparent, as far as

⁸ Yahya, p.260; Stephen of Taron, p.210; Elias of Nisibis, p.138; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, pp.381-2

⁹ For relations between Byzantium and the Caucasian princedoms in Basil's reign see: Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.464-478, 557-581; C.Tourmanoff, 'Armenia and Georgia', in J.Hussey (ed.), *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. IV, Pt. 1, *The Byzantine Empire: Byzantium and its Neighbours* (Cambridge, 1967), pp.615-620; idem., 'The Bagratids of Iberia from the Eighth to the Eleventh Centuries', *Le Muséon* 74 (1961), pp.37-42; V.Minorsky, 'New light on the Shadaddids of Ganja (951-1075)', *Studies in Caucasian History* (London, 1953), pp.14-20; A.Ter Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia* (Lisbon, 1976), pp.101-121.

¹⁰ Manandian, *Trade and Cities of Armenia*, pp.136-172; see below, p.282, n.19

¹¹ C.Tourmanoff, 'Armenia and Georgia', pp.615-6. In the first half of the tenth century the Artsruni princes of Vaspurakan constructed several palace complexes of which the most famous was that at Aght'amar, situated on an island in Lake Van. The palace church is still extant (Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, trans. R.W.Thomson (Detroit, 1985), pp.355-61; A.Manoukian (ed.), *Documents of Armenian Architecture/Documenti di Architettura Armena* (Milan, 1974), Vol.8). Later in the tenth century the Bagratids of Širak sponsored the construction of a new, walled city at Ani in northern Armenia (Stephen of Taron pp.138, 192, 213; Manoukian, *Documents of Armenian Architecture*, Vol. 12). Within Georgian-speaking Caucasia enthusiastic sponsors of churches and monasteries included David of Tao (d.1000) and Bagrat III of Abasgia (d.1014) (W.Z.Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjet'i and Šavšeti* (Stuttgart, 1992); Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, pp.336-349); see below, pp.280-3 for the careers of David and Bagrat.

¹² Stephen of Taron, pp.138, 192; Georgian Royal Annals, pp.272-7. He was the only Georgian-speaking member of the Ibero-Armenian Bagratid family to mint his own coins (C.Tourmanoff, 'The Bagratids of Iberia from the Eighth to the Eleventh Centuries', *Le Muséon* 74 (1961), pp.40)

¹³ See above, p.114, 119-20.

Byzantium was concerned, during the revolts of the first thirteen years of Basil's reign. In 978/9 he supplied Basil II with a large cavalry force which enabled imperial armies to crush the first Skleros revolt.¹³ Among David's rewards was the stewardship for his lifetime of key imperial territories on the north-eastern reaches of the frontier, including the city of Theodosiupolis and the plain of Basean.¹⁴ In the 980s, he used his position of local authority on the frontier to participate in the Phokas revolt on the side of the rebels.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the failure of this revolt he was forced to make the emperor Basil II the legatee of his principedom of Tao. This agreement destroyed a previous arrangement according to which David's adopted son Bagrat III of Abasgia had been nominated as his heir.¹⁶ Yet, David remained a powerful force within Caucasian politics until his death in 1000. In the final decade of the tenth century he not only seized Manzikert near Lake Van from its Muslim overlords, but also constructed a Christian Caucasian armed alliance which defeated Mamlan the Rawaddid emir of Azerbaijan in 998/9.¹⁷

When David died in 1000, Basil II marched to the north-east frontier to collect the inheritance of Tao in person. Having dispersed token resistance to the Byzantine take-over from the local Iberian nobility, the emperor then garrisoned the key fortresses of his new territory. During the same expedition he also accepted obeissance from a variety of neighbouring Caucasian princes, Muslim as well as Christian, who were rewarded with imperial titles. The following year, one of these

¹⁴ Stephen of Taron reports on the territorial rewards offered to David (Stephen of Taron, pp.141-2). Some of the regions granted to David, such as Theodosiupolis (referred to as Karin, its Armenian name, by Stephen) and the plain of Basean were within the north-eastern frontier regions of the empire (see above, pp.160, 222; see also, Map 6). Others, such as Harkh and Apahunikh, north of Lake Van, were not under the direct political control of the empire in 979. In the case of these territories Byzantium seems merely to have acknowledged David's right to launch military attacks against the Muslim emirates of the Lake Van region. Other areas named within the grant have yet to be accurately identified. For further analysis see Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', pp.464-78, which summarises not only the primary evidence but also the extensive and contradictory secondary literature concerned with the 979 grant.

¹⁵ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.424, 429, 460.

¹⁶ Georgian Royal Annals, pp.273-4

princes, Gurgen of Iberia (K'art'li), unhappy that he had only received the title of *magistros*, invaded Byzantine Tao. His attempts were thwarted by a Byzantine army led by Nikephoros Ouranos, the *doux* of Antioch.¹⁸ Yet, despite this Byzantine victory, consolidation of imperial control in Tao was soon eclipsed. While Basil was busy fighting the Bulgarians in the west, a powerful Georgian state began to emerge on the north-eastern stretches of the frontier. In part this greater Georgian political presence was underpinned by dynastic politics: in 1008 Bagrat III ruler of Abasgia, and erstwhile adopted son of David of Tao, inherited Iberia (K'art'li) from his natural father Gurgen, thus uniting under a single crown a region extending from the eastern shore of the Black Sea, to the foothills of the Caucasus mountains beyond the river Kur. Yet, this regional Georgian hegemony was also forged through conquest. Among territory gained by the sword was the remote Georgian principedom of Kakhetia, which lay to the north east of the emirate of Tiflis. Bagrat also managed to acquire the city of Ardanoutzin, situated a little to the north of Tao which, as a result of its immense customs revenue, had been coveted by successive Byzantine emperors throughout the tenth and early eleventh centuries, including Basil II himself.¹⁹ When he died in 1014 Bagrat left his son

¹⁷ Stephen of Taron, pp.202-5

¹⁸ See below, p.313

¹⁹ The appeal of Ardanoutzin (Artanuji) was summarised by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (945-59): "the commerce of the region of Trebizond, and of Iberia and of Abasgia and from the whole country of Armenia and Syria comes to it, and it has an enormous customs revenue from this commerce". Earlier in the tenth century, during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44), the empire had unsuccessfully tried to occupy the city (*DAI* p.216). Much later in the tenth century Bagrat III of Abasgia (d.1014) occupied Ardanoutzin after expelling his cousins, Bagrat and Demetrios, members of a cadet branch of the Iberian Bagratids. These cousins took refuge with Basil II in Constantinople. During the reign of Constantine VIII (1025-8) a Byzantine army tried unsuccessfully to retake the city on their behalf (*Georgian Royal Annals*, pp.287, 375; Tourmanoff, 'The Bagratids of Iberia', nos.58 and 59).

²⁰ Relations with Tao, Iberia and Abasgia between 990 and 1025 are covered briefly and with confusion by Skylitzes, pp.339, 366-7; more sustained accounts are to be found in the *Georgian Royal Annals*, pp.281-4, 374; Stephen of Taron, pp.141-2, 209-12; Aristakes, pp.2-3, 7-8, 11-21; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.424-9, 460; Yahya (Cheikho), pp.239-43.

George a considerable legacy, including a longstanding claim to those territories of David of Tao which were in Byzantine hands.

It was in the context of disputes over Tao that relations with Christian Caucasia rose to the top of the Byzantine foreign policy agenda during the final decade of Basil's reign. With the accession of George in 1014, a disagreement immediately broke out between Basil and the young Abasgian ruler about the patrimony of David of Tao. Having warned George to stay out of David's former principality, Basil sent an imperial army to crush Iberian resistance in 1014. These Byzantine forces were decisively defeated. However, once the annexation of Bulgaria in 1018 released Byzantine military energies from the Balkans, preparations for a larger-scale campaign were set in train, beginning with the refortification of the frontier city of Theodosiopolis. Three years later Basil himself arrived on the north-eastern frontier with the imperial field army. Although his first incursion into Iberia in the autumn of 1021 proved to be inconclusive, another offensive in the spring of 1022 resulted in a crushing victory. In return for peace, George surrendered his son Bagrat as a hostage to the emperor and handed over several fortresses.²⁰

Meanwhile, Basil's empire-building in Caucasia at the end of his reign did not stop with the Georgian frontier. It also extended into Armenia. In the winter of 1021/2 John Smbat, prince of the northern Armenian kingdom of Ani, made Basil his heir. Although the reasons for this decision are not clear, his actions may have been precipitated by conflict with members of his own Armenian Bagratid family, above all his brother Ashot IV who was supported by George of Abasgia.²¹ John Smbat's

²¹ Aristakes, pp.10, 15-16

²² Aristakes, pp.46-55; Skylitzes, pp.435-37

inheritance was finally secured by Byzantine armies in 1042 nearly two decades after Basil's death.²²

However, of greater significance to the expansion of the Caucasian frontier during the reign of Basil, was the voluntary decision taken by Senecherim, the Artsruni prince of Vaspurakan, to surrender to Byzantium his hereditary lands in the region south and east of Lake Van. In return he received a miscellany of rewards including titles, offices, and estates.²³ Many of the details of this handover remain obscure. For example, although it is clear that Senecherim took his decision in the last decade of Basil's reign, the exact date of the surrender has yet to be established.²⁴ Furthermore, the strategic context of the surrender of Vaspurakan is also difficult to pinpoint. Although later Armenian historians, most notably the early twelfth-century chronicler Matthew of Edessa, assert that raids by marauding Turkomen precipitated Senecherim's departure from Lake Van, there is little other evidence to support this view. Indeed, it is unlikely that Turkish raids began in Vaspurakan before the 1030s. Instead, pressure on the Artsruni probably came from other Muslim neighbours: either the Marwanid emirs of northern Lake Van and the Diyar Bakr, the Shaddadids of Dvin, or, the most likely candidates, the Rawaddids of Azerbaijan. That the Rawaddids were the principal danger is suggested by the course of action which Basil took after he had defeated George of Abasgia in 1022.

²³ Skylitzes, pp.354-5; Aristakes, p.19; Matthew of Edessa, p.41, 44-6; Bar Hebraeus, p.179; Yahya (Cheikho), p.240

²⁴ Skylitzes, for example, favours a date of 1016; Aristakes, 1018-19; and Yahya ibn Sa'id, 1021/2 (see note above, for page references). Reconciling these contradictions may, in fact, be impossible. The accounts of Aristakes and Yahya both refer to the handover of Vaspurakan in undated digressions contained within their main narratives of Basil's campaign against George of Abasgia. Meanwhile, Skylitzes' account of the surrender is contained within one of his characteristic summary chapters, in which several events which happened at different times are telescoped into the same passage of prose. Thus, the hand-over of Vaspurakan is included in a section of text which begins with a joint Russo-Byzantine naval expedition to Cherson. It is this campaign which is dated to 1016. However, it is uncertain whether the same date should also be attributed to the Vaspurakan episode; see above, p.26, n.15, and below, p.318, n.134.

²⁵ Aristakes, pp.23-5.

²⁶ See above, pp.228-9 for discussion about the origins of these small themes.

When he left Tao, he marched southwards towards his newly acquired Armenian territory of Vaspurakan. He then headed east to the plain of Her, which was located between Lake Van and Lake Urmia. Although the emperor was forced to turn westwards when his army was caught out by early autumn snows, it seems likely that the original target of this expedition was the emirate of Azerbaijan located to the east of Lake Urmia.²⁵

III. Military administration

i. The 'Escorial Taktikon'

It is usually argued that by the time Basil II came to the throne in 976, a framework for military administration on the frontier was already well-established. Following a model proposed by Nicholas Oikonomides over two decades ago, many historians have argued that during the reigns of Basil's imperial predecessors, Nikephoros Phokas (963-9) and John Tzimiskes (969-76), the numerous small themes which had sprung up in the eastern reaches of the empire as the result of Byzantine military expansion over the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains, were placed under the authority of overarching regional units called duchies or katepanates.²⁶ Each of these regional authorities was commanded by a senior officer from the Byzantine field army who was called either *doux* or *katepan*. This senior officer was located at a key fortress on the frontier at the head of a large garrison of troops drawn from the central field army. In addition to their military duties, these supreme commanders exercised gubernatorial powers over the localities under their command, with the result that civil affairs also came under their jurisdiction. By the time Basil came to the throne in 976, there were three regional katepanates, centred on Antioch in the south, Mesopotamia in the south-east and Chaldia in the north-

east respectively. To these would be added during Basil's reign, the katepanate of Iberia created after the absorption of Tao, and the katepanate of Vaspurakan, which came into being after the annexation of the eponymous Armenian principedom south of Lake Van.²⁷

The basis for the belief that a sophisticated and schematised system of military administration was already in place on the eastern frontier by the time Basil came to the throne in 976, is the fact that the *doukes* of Chaldia, Mesopotamia and Antioch are recorded in the 'Escorial Taktikon', a list of precedence dated by its editor, Nicholas Oikonomides, to the years 971-75. Yet, the primacy given to the 'Escorial Taktikon' in many attempts to reconstruct the history of the eastern frontier in the later decades of the tenth century may be misplaced. At the very simplest of levels, it should be remembered that lists of precedence by their very nature are not administrative handbooks, which explain in detail the responsibilities of contemporary Byzantine bureaucrats. Instead, they are seating plans drawn up by imperial officials who organised banquets within the Great Palace. As such they constitute occasional and approximate outline sketches of the hierarchy of the principal office holders within the Byzantine empire, as that hierarchy was perceived by palace functionaries in Constantinople. However, they cannot reflect accurately those *ad hoc* administrative arrangements which might prevail on the ground in moments of rapid political change, either at the centre of the empire, or in the provinces.²⁸ This lack of sensitivity to the day-to-day compromises of bureaucratic practice, means that such documents are of only limited use in the reconstruction of the administrative history of regions which were subject to

²⁷ Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale', pp.285-302; idem., *Listes*, pp.344-6, 354-63; idem., 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.148; Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.158-69; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284-1081*, pp.114-5

²⁸ The same point is made by F.Winkelmann in respect of lists of precedence from the ninth century such as the 'Kleterologion' of Philotheos (*Byzantinischen Rang- und Ämterstruktur im 8. Und 9. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1985), p.28).

frequent political and military upheaval, such as the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire in the second half of the tenth century.

More important, however, is the fact that the methods by which such manuals were composed, make both the manuals themselves, and the information they contain, extremely difficult to date. For example, such *taktika* often continue to list positions which have long fallen into desuetude, while failing to record innovations. As a result it is impossible to use either the inclusion or omission of administrative offices as dating criteria. This difficulty is clearly illustrated by the case of the theme of Mauron Oros. This theme was established, as we saw in the last chapter, in the Amanos mountains in 968. However, it is not listed in the 'Escorial Taktikon'.²⁹ If omission was a reliable dating clue, the 'Escorial Taktikon' must perforce ante-date 968. Yet, since the 'Escorial Taktikon' includes both Antioch, which fell in 969 to the Byzantines, and an array of small Bulgarian themes such as Preslav and Dristra conquered by the emperor John Tzimiskes in 971, it was clearly composed *after* 968 and thus *after* the creation of the theme of Mauron Oros. In this case it is clear that the official responsible for drawing up the list simply forgot to include the new theme of Mauron Oros. Unfortunately, it is according to the principle of inclusion and/or omission of administrative offices, that the dates of the composition of the 'Escorial Taktikon' have been established. For instance, the *terminus post quem* of 971 has been justified by the fact that the *taktikon* includes those small Balkan themes which were conquered by Tzimiskes in 971; the *terminus ante quem* of 975 by the omission of those minor themes in northern Syria, such as Laodikeia and Balanias, which were absorbed into the empire during Tzimskes' final military campaign in the east in the summer of 975.³⁰ Yet, as the case of Mauron Oros indicates, the omission of the Syrian themes may

²⁹ See above, pp.229-30, n. 72

simply reflect a failure on the part of a Constantinopolitan official to include these offices in the list, rather than the fact that the 'Escorial Taktikon' was produced before 975.

Once the context in which the 'Escorial Taktikon' was produced is understood, it becomes apparent that this document cannot categorically be said to pre-date the period 975, nor, by extension does the information it contains necessarily reflect the administrative superstructure of the Byzantine state before the death of John Tzimiskes in 976. As far as the eastern frontier is concerned, the 'Escorial Taktikon' cannot be used as incontrovertible evidence that a rigid system of frontier governance based around the three *doukes* of Chaldia, Mesopotamia and Antioch, was complete and universally applied on the Byzantine eastern periphery before Basil came to the throne. Instead, the most that can be said is that this *taktikon* offers an approximate, and idealised outline of Byzantine governance in the decades which followed the fall of Antioch in 969, and the conquest of eastern Bulgaria by John Tzimiskes in 971.

For a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the development of the military organisation of the eastern frontier in the later tenth- and early eleventh- centuries, it is necessary to set the stark blueprint offered by the 'Escorial Taktikon' against contemporary literary and sigillographical evidence. In the discussion which follows the frontier katepanates will be examined one by one in the light of this broader spectrum of evidence. Although interesting parallels could be drawn between the development of the katepanates in the east with those in the western half of the empire, such as Thessalonika, Adrianople, Italy, and Bulgaria, such a

³⁰ Oikonomides, *Listes*, pp.258-61

comparison lies outside the scope of this study and will not be attempted here.³¹ Neither will attention be paid to the frontier arrangements which prevailed once Edessa was annexed by the empire shortly after Basil's death during the reign of Romanos III (1028-34).³² Nonetheless, from the evidence under analysis in this discussion it will become clear that far from resembling the rigid picture presented by the 'Escorial Taktikon', the military organisation of the frontier was a piecemeal, *ad hoc* process, constantly reshaped by changing political, diplomatic, and military circumstances.

ii. The Katepanate of Chaldia

Although problems with dating the 'Escorial Taktikon' mean that it is difficult to use this document to describe the exact geographical trajectory of the eastern frontier when Basil II came to the throne in 976, nonetheless by identifying some of those small themes named in the *taktikon*, it is possible to gain some idea of the contours of the Byzantine borders with the east in the final quarter of the tenth century. Thus, before the annexation of the Ibero-Armenian principedom of Tao in 1000, the most northern section of the eastern frontier began at Soteropolis, an isolated outpost on the Black Sea coast, located on the left bank of the lower Coruh (Akampsis) river. Having crossed the Pontus mountains east of Trebizond, the border then traversed the Basean plain, centre of the former emirate of Theodosiupolis. It passed the fortification of Hafdjidj (Chauzion) on the north-west flank of the Bingöl Dağı, and headed south towards the erstwhile Armenian principedom of Taron.³³ It is this sector of the frontier that is usually seen as the responsibility of the *doux* of Chaldia.³⁴

³¹ For the western duchies see Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.207-240; von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien*, pp.45-50

³² Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt*, pp.90-1, 100

³³ See Map 6, and above, pp.160-2; the outlines of the frontier at the beginning of Basil's reign are also sketched out by Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', p.371.

³⁴ Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.263, 354

A lack of primary written materials makes it difficult to know when a commander officially designated as the *doux* of Chaldia first appeared. Sigillographical and literary evidence suggests that such an office certainly did not exist in the first half of the tenth century, when the region known as Chaldia was still a theme governed like the rest of Anatolia by a *strategos*.³⁵ Instead, it is only with the more ambitious eastern military enterprises which characterised the middle of the tenth century, that commanders began to appear in Chaldia with broader authority than that of a mere *strategos*. These signs emerge for the first time during the conquest of the emirate of Theodosiupolis in 949, when the victorious Byzantine military commander, Theophilos Kourkouas, the brother of the general John Kourkouas, and the grandfather of the emperor John Tzimiskes, is described as *monostrategos* of Chaldia, a position which appears to imply greater seniority than that of a mere thematic *strategos*.³⁶

Stronger signs of the concentration of regional military power in the hands of a single individual occur during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas. According to both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes, the emperor's nephew Bardas held the position of *doux* of the border region of Chaldia and of Koloneia. The latter location was a theme established in the mid-ninth century on the eastern fringes of the Anatolian plateau.³⁷ It is important to note that this is the first mention of the position of *doux*

³⁵ Many of the seals of these tenth-century *strategoi* are listed in Bryer and Winfield, *Monuments of the Pontus*, p.316; see also Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.290, nos.2-3; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.1412-3 and 58.106.2115. One *strategos* of Chaldia who appears in the literary sources was Bardas Boilas. He rebelled against Romanos Lekapenos in the third decade of the tenth century (Theophanes Con., p.404).

³⁶ Theophilos is described as *monostrategos* of Chaldia by the tenth-century historian Theophanes Continuatus. The *De Administrando Imperio*, compiled c.952, names him as *strategos* of Theodosiupolis. However, this appellation may indicate that he was commander in Chaldia with his main base at Theodosiupolis (Theophanes Con., p.428; *DAI*, p.212).

³⁷ Skylitzes, p.284; Leo the Deacon, p.96; Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.354; Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.184-5. Skylitzes also mentions that Bardas Phokas was a *doux* on two other occasions. The first reference is to be found in his coverage of Bardas Phokas' revolt against the emperor John

in a frontier context in the historical record. Yet, it would be premature to assume that this appointment necessarily represents a radical and permanent reorganisation of the administration of the whole of the eastern frontier. Instead, it can be persuasively argued that the appointment of Bardas Phokas was driven by short-term military pressures both within and outside the empire. Thus, on the one hand the greater focus of regional military authority in the hands of Phokas may reflect the demands of internal security. Bardas' uncle Nikephoros needed a strong and loyal hand in the furthest reaches of north-eastern Anatolia, a region where the authority of rival families such as the Lekapenoi and Kourkouai had traditionally been strong.³⁸ Equally Bardas' appointment may also reflect a growth in the intensity of Byzantine diplomatic and military relations with neighbouring regions in western Caucasia during the reign of Nikephoros. In 966-7 Bagrat and Gregory, the princes of the neighbouring Armenian principdom of Taron, handed over their territories to Nikephoros Phokas in return for the title of *patrikios* and estates within the Byzantine empire.³⁹ In 968/9 Byzantine raiding armies passed through Taron on their way to raid the Arab emirates of Lake Van.⁴⁰

When Nikephoros Phokas was murdered by John Tzimiskes in 969, his nephew Bardas was removed from his position as *doux*. A lack of written evidence means that it is impossible to know exactly what happened next in Chaldia. However, using the evidence provided by tenth- and eleventh-century lead seals, it is clear that administrative power had yet to become settled when Bardas was dismissed. Instead, frontier authority in Chaldia was consistently characterised throughout the

Tzimiskes in 971. In a passage of direct speech Bardas recalls his former position as a *doux*, although without specifying the geographical location of his responsibilities (Skylitzes, pp.293-4). The second reference occurs during Skylitzes' account of the first Skleros revolt, when he notes that David *archon* of Tao and Bardas Phokas had become friends while the latter was *doux* in Chaldia (Skylitzes, p.326).

³⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, pp.216, 321-4

³⁹ Skylitzes, p.279

tenth and eleventh centuries by a high degree of flexibility. One sign of the *ad hoc* nature of this authority is the frequency with which commanders could exercise responsibility for more than one region. This principle of overlap had, of course, been visible in the career of Bardas Phokas himself, in his control of both Chaldia and Koloneia. A similar phenomenon can be detected on the eleventh-century seal of a certain Nicholas *patrikios*, who was *katepan* of both Chaldia and Mesopotamia. This seal indicates that on occasion the supreme regional military commander of the northern-most section of the frontier, could also exercise authority over Mesopotamia, the border region lying further south among the plains and mountains of the Anti Taurus, and the Upper Euphrates and Upper Tigris rivers.⁴¹ Moreover, the seals of several non-military officials in the later tenth and eleventh centuries indicate the extent to which administrative authority based principally in Chaldia could be linked with neighbouring districts. For example, several *protonotarioi* and *kritai* exercised authority over Chaldia and Derxene, a region lying to the west of Theodosiopolis.⁴² Other *kritai* exercised jurisdiction over the theme of Koloneia as well as Chaldia, thus mirroring the geographical scope of Bardas Phokas' authority as *doux*.⁴³ Meanwhile, in a case not directly involving Chaldia, but still pertinent to the administrative history of the northern-most sector of the frontier, a certain Leo, *protospatharios*, was both *strategos* of Derxene and Taron in the last years of the reign of John Tzimiskes.⁴⁴

Evidence for the development of the office of *doux* in Chaldia during the reign of Basil II is extremely meagre. It is impossible to know which of those officials

⁴⁰ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.825; Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiskès', p.100.

⁴¹ Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.400; see below, pp.296-7, for the possibility that Skleros may have held joint command over Chaldia and Mesopotamia.

⁴² *Protonotarios*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F3159; *kritai*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.5114; 55.1.2933; 55.1.252; F400

⁴³ *Krites* of Chaldia and Koloneia: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.806; *krites* of Chaldia, Derxene, and Koloneia: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.806.

whose seals are discussed above held office during Basil's reign itself. Meanwhile, the only literary evidence for the history of the Chaldia region during the reign comes from the Miracles of Saint Eugenios. This hagiographical source notes that during the revolt of Nikephoros Xiphias and Nikephoros Phokas in 1022, a certain Basil was *doux* of Chaldia and Trebizond.⁴⁵ While this example demonstrates that Chaldia remained a duchy/katepanate during the first quarter of the eleventh century, it is possible that shortly after this date Chaldia reverted to the status of a theme. There are several seals of the *stratego*i of Chaldia which appear datable to the eleventh century.⁴⁶ One reason why Chaldia might have reverted to thematic status in the eleventh century would have been the gradual expansion of the new neighbouring katepanate of Iberia.⁴⁷ An alternative reason for the incidence of eleventh-century *stratego*i could be that the original theme of Chaldia continued to exist alongside the regional duchy of the same name throughout the later tenth and eleventh centuries. With command over a much smaller area than the entire duchy, the *strategos* of Chaldia would have been subordinate to the regional *doux* or *katepan*.⁴⁸

iii. The Katepanate of Mesopotamia

By the end of the third quarter of the tenth century the central sector of the eastern frontier, broadly known in Byzantine literary sources as Mesopotamia, comprised those isolated plains and passes in the Anti Taurus mountains annexed by John Kourkouas in the middle of the tenth century. With the fertile plains of Melitene

⁴⁴ Matthew of Edessa, pp.27-8

⁴⁵ Panagiotakes, 'Fragments of a Lost Eleventh-Century Byzantine Historical Work', p.356. This Basil was probably the *gawar* (governor) of Chaldia referred to by Aristakes Lastivert, who was instructed to sell as slaves the prisoners of war taken during Basil's campaign against George of Iberia and Abasgia in the autumn of 1021 (Aristakes Lastivert, p.12). Another late tenth- or early-eleventh century *doux* of Chaldia seems to have been the *protospatharios* Niketas (Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.158a).

⁴⁶ Cheynet, Morrisson Seibt *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.174; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F3845 and 55.1.2937 (see also, Bryer and Winfield, *Monuments of the Pontus*, p.316).

⁴⁷ See below, pp.317-23

and the Anzitene at its heart, the central sector of the frontier extended as far south as Germanikeia (Maras) on the Ceyhan (Pyramos) river, and Samosata on the Euphrates.⁴⁹ Yet, despite its size, there is little evidence that this frontier region was governed by a supra-thematic military commander such as a *doux* or a *katepan* before the reign of Basil II began. Instead, during the reign of Basil's predecessor John Tzimiskes, the only reference to a military commander of Mesopotamia concerns the *strategos* of Mesopotamia. Thus, when the Fatimids attacked northern Syria during the winter of 970-1, an anonymous *strategos* of Mesopotamia was sent to deal with the incursion.⁵⁰ This *strategos* was almost certainly the military governor of the theme of Mesopotamia which was established in the Anti Taurus region north of Melitene during the first decade of the tenth century. The theme itself covered a considerably smaller geographical area than the central sector of the frontier as a whole.⁵¹ Moreover, sigillographical evidence also suggests that *strategoï* of the theme of Mesopotamia continued to be appointed throughout the second half of the tenth century.⁵²

The persistence of the office of *strategos* of Mesopotamia does not mean in itself, of course, that a *doux/katepan* could not have existed at the same time. As we saw above in the case of Chaldia, it is possible that a *doux* and *strategos* could exercise office simultaneously, with the latter being subordinate to the former.⁵³ Yet in the case of Mesopotamia there is no evidence that a supra-thematic senior regional commander, such as a *doux* or *katepan*, was appointed to the central sector of the frontier during the reigns of either Phokas or Tzimiskes. Instead, it is only at the beginning of the reign of Basil II that the first signs of an overarching military

⁴⁸ This is a hypothesis first volunteered by Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.48

⁴⁹ See Map 6, and above, pp.222-3 for the campaigns of Kourkouas

⁵⁰ Skylitzes, p.287; Farag, 'The Aleppo question', p.47; P.E.Walker, 'A Byzantine Victory over the Fatimids at Alexandretta (971)', *B* 42 (1972), pp.431-440

⁵¹ *DAI*, p.239

⁵² Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.288; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished: F666, F1218; 55.1.2824

authority in this region start to emerge. On this occasion the evidence comes from the 'Synopsis Historion' of John Skylitzes, and his report that Bardas Skleros was appointed *doux* of Mesopotamia shortly after Basil came to the throne. Yet, any understanding of the nature of Skleros' appointment is, unfortunately, prejudiced by Skylitzes' working methods, and his use and abuse of underlying texts. In this case Skylitzes' use of a pro-Skleros source in his account of the reign of Basil II means that it is Skleros' justification of his revolt, rather than the wider strategic context on the eastern frontier, which underpins the analysis of this appointment in the 'Synopsis Historion'.⁵⁴ Thus, according to Skylitzes/Skleros' account, Basil Lekapenos, the *parakoimomenos*, was so distrustful of Skleros' political ambitions, that he released the general from his position of *stratelates* (supreme commander of the field army), and installed him instead as "*doux* of the *tagmata* in Mesopotamia". In Skleros' place he appointed Peter the eunuch as *stratopedarches* of all the *tagmata* of the east. Meanwhile, Skleros was so vexed by this series of events, "... that he was not able to conceal to himself his grief magnanimously, but protested out loud."⁵⁵

Yet, it would be a mistake to use Skylitzes' interpretation of Skleros' appointment as evidence that a duchy/katepanate of Mesopotamia was already well-established

⁵³ See above, p.293

⁵⁴ See above, pp.134-40

⁵⁵ Skylitzes, pp.314-5. Skleros was originally appointed *stratelates* of the east by John Tzimiskes in 970 in order to deal with the Rus invasion of Thrace (Skylitzes, p.288). The rest of Skleros' career during the reign of Tzimiskes is obscure. He was still in charge of the eastern army at the battle for Dristra in 971 (Skylitzes, p.300). However, by 972-3 the general in charge of the eastern army was Melias (Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimisces', p.102). It is possible that Skleros had been deprived of control over the eastern army by Tzimiskes as the result of an unsuccessful conspiracy. According to a brief allusion in Skylitzes' testimony, Skleros had been accused of plotting against Tzimiskes at an unspecified point in the reign (Skylitzes, p.314). However, the fact that Skleros once again held the office of *stratelates* of the east by the end of Tzimiskes' reign suggests that he was rehabilitated before Tzimiskes' death. He may have been rehabilitated after Melias was taken prisoner by the Hamdanids of Mosul in 973 (Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.35; see above, p.278).

in 976, or that it had come to represent a regional backwater.⁵⁶ Instead, this was a frontier which had seen recent and bloody warfare. In 972 the emperor John Tzimiskes had led an expedition from the Anzitene in Byzantine Mesopotamia into the Djazira to raid the cities of Edessa and Nisibis. So convinced were the inhabitants of Baghdad that Tzimiskes' real target was Iraq that they rioted in the streets.⁵⁷ In response to this Byzantine attack the Hamdanids of Mosul launched a counter strike through the Bitlis pass, laying waste to the Byzantine territory of Taron in western Armenia, which had only recently been annexed in 966/7.⁵⁸ Another Byzantine offensive followed swiftly, as the *domestikos of the scholai* Melias set out from the Anzitene in the summer of 973 and arrived at the gates of Amida in the Djazira. It was at this battle that Melias was taken captive by the Hamdanids.⁵⁹

With such a recent legacy of bloody military encounters, it is clear that this frontier in 976 was a highly sensitive region to which only the most competent and trusted commander, with highly effective and professional troops, would have been dispatched. Indeed, Skleros' appointment makes more sense when it is interpreted in this light rather than in terms of a demotion. It is noteworthy that the only other historian to report on Skleros' arrival on this stretch of the eastern frontier, Yahya ibn Sa'id, does not consider his appointment a demotion. Instead, he merely notes that Bardas Skleros was appointed the 'governor' of Bathn Hanzit and Khalidiyat.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Most modern historians have followed Skylitzes in interpreting Skleros' appointment as *doux* in 976 as a demotion to the margins of the military and political hierarchy: Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p.36; Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id', p.375.

⁵⁷ See above, p.117

⁵⁸ See Map 2

⁵⁹ See above, p.278; Ibn Miskawayh, pp.326-8; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.353-8; Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiscès', pp.99-108.

⁶⁰ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.372. The term for 'governor' used by Yahya is the Arabic, 'wali'. Controversy still persists about the exact geographical regions that Yahya believed to be under Skleros' command. It is generally agreed that Bathn Hanzit denotes Mesopotamia. This is the Arab name for the region known in Greek as the Anzitene, the plain in the Anti Taurus at the centre of Byzantine Mesopotamia. Identification of al Khalidiyat, however, has proved more difficult. Seibt (*Die Skleroi*,

Moreover, Skleros was not simply given command over the light cavalry and infantry forces of the small, peripheral Armenian themes (*Armeniaka themata*). Instead, as even Skylitzes notes, he was placed in charge of *tagmata*, or field army troops. The most likely context for his appointment as *doux* of Mesopotamia, was that he was expected to continue the struggle against the Hamdanids of Mosul, which had been set in motion by the campaigns of Melias and John Tzimiskes. However, instead of fighting the Muslim enemy, Skleros took advantage of his control over the field army troops and rebelled against the emperor. Forced to justify his decision to turn the Byzantine field army under his command on Constantinople rather than on the Djazira, he manufactured the excuse that he was disappointed with his treatment by the imperial authorities. It is then this excuse which then enters the historical record via Skylitzes.

Although the military administrative history of Mesopotamia at the beginning of Basil's reign has to be analysed through the distorting lens of Skylitzes' testimony, certain conclusions can still be drawn about the development of regional authority in the central sector of the Byzantine frontier in the later tenth century. First, the position of *doux* appears to have been novel at the time Skleros was appointed. It was not a well-established office within a highly developed system of frontier administration put in place by Basil's predecessors John Tzimiskes or Nikephoros Phokas.⁶¹ Second, the position was connected to command over troops from the

p.36) has argued that it should be identified with Kaloudia, one of the small frontier themes on the west bank of the Euphrates downstream from Melitene. Intuitively, however, it seems most likely that al-Khalidiyat denotes Chaldia. As noted above, there is sigillographical evidence to support the idea that command over both the northern and central sections of the frontier could be vested in a single individual. See above, p.292.

⁶¹ This viewpoint contrasts with Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.182-3, who believes that Nikephoros Phokas was responsible for instituting the katepanate of Mesopotamia. However, Kühn's argument is based on supposition. Having attributed the creation of the katepanates of Chaldia and Antioch to Nikephoros Phokas, he argues that Mesopotamia must have been given this status at the same time since any other decision would have left a hole in the organisation of the frontier. However, Kühn's argument demands that the katepanates of Chaldia and Antioch were

centralised army in pursuit of military victory over neighbouring adversaries. At this point the office of *doux* was not a sedentary administrative position with authority over a strictly defined geographical area.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know how the military administration of the central sector of the frontier evolved after Bardas Skleros revolted in 976, since the only information available comes from undated seals. However, the very fact that seals of the *katepan* of Mesopotamia continued to be produced during the eleventh century indicates that the office persisted during the less bellicose conditions which followed the peace deal struck between the emperor and the Marwanid emirs of the Diyar Bakr in the early 990s. It also seems to have survived the annexation of Vaspurakan in the final decade of Basil's reign.⁶² Moreover, the survival of this office in the more peaceful circumstances of the eleventh century suggests that this position gradually became associated with wider duties than simple command over *tagmata*, field army troops, stationed on the frontier. Thus, by the end of Basil's reign, the *katepan* of Mesopotamia may have been more akin to a provincial governor than a military general. Nonetheless, even in the eleventh century a large degree of flexibility was still associated with command over this geographical area. This flexibility is at its most visible in the frequency with which such officials were assigned responsibility for more than one region. Thus, just as Bardas Phokas held command in Chaldia and Koloneia, and the *patrikios* Nicholas was able to exercise power as *katepan* of Chaldia and Mesopotamia during the eleventh century, so in the later 1040s or early 1050s Gregory Pahlawuni simultaneously exercised power

fully developed by Nikephoros Phokas, an assertion which, as I demonstrate in this chapter, is unsustainable.

⁶² Seibt, *Bleisiegel*, p.260 (Constantine Parsakoutenos; dated by the editor to the 1020s or 1030s); D.Theodoridis, 'Theognostos Melissenos, Katepan von Mesopotamia', *BZ* 78 (1985), pp.363-4; *Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished*: 58.106.2022 (Michael *vestarches*); 58.106.3498 (Leo *anthypatos, patrikios*). The sigillographical evidence from the eleventh century refutes Kühn's view that the katepanate of Mesopotamia withered after the annexation of Vaspurakan (Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, p.183).

as *katepan* of Mesopotamia, Taron, and Vaspurakan.⁶³ The fundamental principle that one commander could hold an array of regional commands seems to have remained constant between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries.

iv. The Katepanate of Antioch

The best evidence for the development of a supra-thematic, regional, military authority on the eastern frontier during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries comes from Antioch, where the sigillographical record is supported by epigraphical evidence and a variety of literary texts. Foremost among the literary evidence is the history of Yahya ibn Sa'id, the Arab Melkite Christian who arrived in northern Syria in 1014-15, and was an eyewitness of Byzantine rule in the final decade of Basil's reign.⁶⁴ Taken together these sources all emphasise the *ad hoc*, piecemeal, and flexible nature of the development of Byzantine military administration on the southernmost section of the eastern frontier. As the forthcoming discussion will indicate, malleability of military command was at its most visible in the early decades of Byzantine rule, when this region faced a series of challenges to imperial authority both from within and outside the empire. In contrast, by the final decades of Basil II's reign, greater political and military stability within the empire and on the frontier meant that administrative practice could stabilise. The responsibilities of the *doux/katepan* of Antioch become clearer and more firmly established. However, even at this point the katepanate of Antioch was not a rigid institution, but instead retained the flexibility to be able to respond to political and military pressures when the need arose.

⁶³ See above, pp.290-2, for Bardas Phokas and Nicholas. For an analysis of the positions held by Pahlawuni on the eastern frontier see K.N.Yuzbashian, 'L'administration byzantine en Arménie aux Xe et XIe siècles', *REArm* 10 (1973-4), p.147. Yuzbashian expressed doubts about whether a single individual could have held all three commands at once. However, the evidence produced in this chapter repeatedly demonstrates that several eastern frontier commands, whether military or non-military, could be held simultaneously across several regions by the same individual.

It is frequently alleged that Antioch was put under the command of a *doux* or *katepan* by the emperor Nikephoros Phokas when it was conquered by Byzantine armies in October 969.⁶⁵ Yet, evidence from within the literary and sigillographical records does not support such an early dating. As long ago as 1962, Laurent pointed out that neither of the commanders who led the victorious armies in 969, namely Peter the *stratopedarches* and Michael Bourtzes, became *doux* of the city when it fell.⁶⁶ Instead, Peter left Antioch at the head of the imperial field army and proceeded to besiege Aleppo.⁶⁷ Nor did he return to Antioch after the siege of Aleppo. Instead, he next appears in the historical record as leader of the *tagmata* of Thrace and Macedonia during John Tzimiskes' campaign against the Rus at Dristra in Bulgaria in 971.⁶⁸ Meanwhile in 969, Bourtzes travelled back to Constantinople, where he incurred imperial displeasure over his actions during the conquest of Antioch.⁶⁹ He joined the co-conspirators of John Tzimiskes, and participated in the assassination of Nikephoros Phokas in December 969.⁷⁰ An inscription on a late tenth-century reliquary suggests that rather than Bourtzes or Peter, the first commander of Antioch was the *anthypatos* and *patrikios* Eustathios Maleinos. Yet, this epigraphical evidence makes it clear that Maleinos did not hold the position of

⁶⁴ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.708; Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id al Antaki', p.1

⁶⁵ N.Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.354; Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.170-1.

⁶⁶ V.Laurent, 'La chronologie des gouverneurs d'Antioche sous la seconde domination byzantine', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth* 38 (Beirut, 1962), p.227

⁶⁷ Skylitzes, pp.271-2; Yahya, *PO* 18, pp.816-7, 823-4

⁶⁸ Skylitzes, p.300; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.227

⁶⁹ The reason why Bourtzes incurred imperial displeasure is uncertain. According to Skylitzes Bourtzes exceeded the orders he had been given during the course of the siege. Originally appointed *strategos* of Mauron Oros, a small theme based in the Amanos mountains, he was commanded merely to raid the countryside surrounding Antioch (see above, p.229). However, in search of personal glory, Bourtzes took the unilateral decision to occupy one of the upper towers of the circuit walls of Antioch. When his position became desperate, he was forced to send for emergency help from the imperial field army under the leadership of Peter the *stratopedarches*. When the field army arrived, Antioch itself fell. However, as a result of his earlier disobedience Bourtzes was dismissed from his position as *strategos* of Mauron Oros (Skylitzes, pp.271-3). Yahya ibn Said conveys a slightly different story. Although Bourtzes was rewarded for his role in the fall of Antioch, his recompense was much smaller than expected. This was because Nikephoros Phokas was angry with him for allowing Antioch to be burned (Yahya, *PO* 18, p.825). Leo the Deacon confirms that Bourtzes led an advance party into Antioch and set the city on fire (Leo the Deacon, pp.81-2).

⁷⁰ Leo the Deacon, p.85; Yahya, *PO* 18, p.829; Skylitzes, p.279

doux. Instead he was *strategos* of Antioch and Lykandos.⁷¹ As we saw in chapter four, Lykandos was a theme established in the early tenth century in the interim zone between the eastern plateau and the western reaches of the Anti Taurus mountains.⁷²

The appointment of Maleinos to command in Antioch is paradigmatic of how short-term political considerations often underpinned appointments in the immediate aftermath of eastern conquests. In the first place, close family ties between the Maleinos and Phokas families made Eustathios a commander whom the emperor Nikephoros Phokas could trust.⁷³ Members of both families had frequently fought side-by-side during battles with the Hamdanids in the mid-tenth century. For example, in 960, Sayf al-Dawla was ambushed by a Byzantine army led by Leo Phokas, Nikephoros' brother, and Constantine Maleinos, Eustathios' father.⁷⁴ Eustathios' uncle Leo, meanwhile, had been killed in 953/4, in an engagement near Germanikeia during which Nikephoros' brother Constantine was taken captive.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the fact that Maleinos was the member of a family with a distinguished track record in eastern warfare gave him an invaluable degree of natural authority within the Byzantine field army. Finally, Maleinos' position as *strategos* of Lykandos indicates that he did not simply have to rely on his family's pedigree to exert his authority, but was also able to call upon his own standing as military commander and administrator. Taken together it was Maleinos' status as a relative and political ally of the Phokas family, and as the governor of a prosperous

⁷¹ Saunders, 'The Aachen Reliquary', pp.211-219.

⁷² See above, p.185, for foundation of the theme of Lykandos in the early tenth century

⁷³ Eustathios Maleinos and Nikephoros Phokas were cousins. Nikephoros' mother was Eustathios' aunt (Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, p.268). Blood ties between the two families were strengthened by spiritual ties. Eustathios' uncle was Michael Maleinos, the *hegoumenos* of a monastery on Mount Olympos in Bithynia, who was also a spiritual advisor to the emperor Nikephoros. Indeed, the night Nikephoros was killed by Tzimiskes and his henchmen, he was lying on a rough covering he had been given by Michael (Skylitzes, p.280).

⁷⁴ Theophanes Con., p.479; Kaplan, 'Les grands propriétaires de Cappadoce', p.145

⁷⁵ Yahya, *PO* 18, p.771; Canard, 'Quelques noms de personnages byzantins', p.456

and well-established eastern Anatolian theme, which determined his appointment at Antioch.⁷⁶ As such Maleinos' position at Antioch demonstrates the extent to which military experience, high-standing within the army, and political loyalty to the emperor, underpinned the military organisation of the frontier, rather than a mechanistic adherence to an abstract administrative blueprint such as the 'Escorial Taktikon'. Furthermore, Maleinos' command over both Lykandos and Antioch once again illustrates the frequency with which command over several regions in the Byzantine east could be vested in a single individual.

Powerful analogies exist for Maleinos' position in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of Antioch. Sigillographical evidence suggests that the first commander of Anazarbos and Mamistra (Mopsuestia), the Cilician cities conquered by Nikephoros Phokas in 964, was a certain George Melias *protospatharios*, the *strategos* of Tzamandos.⁷⁷ Just as at Antioch, therefore, the new conquests of Mamistra and Anazarbos were put under the command of an officer who already exercised military command on the eastern-most reaches of the plateau, in this case Tzamandos. Moreover, George Melias also exercised considerable authority within the Byzantine army. Like Maleinos, he could call upon a considerable family pedigree of service in the eastern plateau region. It was his eponymous ancestor, Melias, who had been responsible for establishing Byzantine control over Lykandos and Tzamandos early in the tenth century.⁷⁸ Sigillographical evidence indicates that

⁷⁶ See above, p. 185, for the later tenth-century prosperity of Lykandos.

⁷⁷ Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p. 671. Seibt, *Bleisiegel*, p. 261 and Stephenson, 'A Development in Nomenclature', p. 195, n. 43, have cast doubt on the transcription of this seal, arguing that since Tzamandos lay outside Cilicia, this must be a misreading. Instead, they have argued that the owner was *strategos* of Anazarbos, Mamistra and Adana, that his name was Melissenos, and that the seal, on epigraphical grounds should be dated to the eleventh century. However, there are stronger arguments for supporting a tenth- rather than an eleventh-century dating. First, the title of *protospatharios* would appear to be too lowly for a commander of three themes in the middle of the eleventh century. Moreover, as the Maleinos reliquary indicates, it was not unusual for military commanders in the chaotic conditions of the tenth-century frontier to exercise command both in the eastern plateau and in newly annexed regions.

⁷⁸ See above, pp. 184-5

the family continued to exercise military command in the eastern plateau throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁷⁹ Moreover, if George, the owner of the seal, can be identified with the Melias who rose to the position of *domestikos* of the *scholai* of the east by 973, then his authority, just like that of Maleinos, was built on his own military skills as well as the reputation of his ancestors.⁸⁰

However, while the appointment of officials such as Melias and Maleinos was driven by short-term domestic and external political needs, such imperatives could also make their tenure of command on the frontier very brief. Thus, within a year of the death of his political ally Nikephoros Phokas in December 969, Eustathios Maleinos found himself transferred from Antioch to the position of *strategos* at Tarsos in Cilicia.⁸¹ His place at Antioch appears to have been taken by Nicholas the eunuch. He was sent east at the head of an imperial field army by the new emperor John Tzimiskes during the winter of 970-1 to deal with an attack from Fatimid

⁷⁹ Apart from George Melias, there also exists a seal of Theodore Melias, *kandidatos*, who was *taxiarches*, infantry commander, of Lykandos (Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.224a; Dédéyan, 'Mleh le grand', pp.101-2) The Zacos collection contains an eleventh-century seal of a *strategos* called Melias (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.572). In 1991 a seal dated to the first half of the eleventh century appeared at auction which belonged to a Basil Melias, *strategos* (Oikonomides, *SBS* 3, p.189). In neither of the two latter seals is the geographical region under the command of these *strategoï* indicated.

⁸⁰ See above, p.278. It is possible that at an earlier point in his career Melias may have been the *strategos* of the small theme of Chortzine which lay north-west of the plain of Muş in Taron (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.227; Oikonomides, *Listes*, p.359). Melias may have come to Tzimiskes' attention in the context of the Cilician campaigns of Nikephoros Phokas. As *domestikos* of the *scholai* in the mid-960s, Tzimiskes was a leading protagonist of warfare in Cilicia (Skylitzes, pp.267-8; Yahya, *PO* 18, p.793). Certainly fresco decoration of the Great Pigeon House church in Cappadocia indicates that the two men had already developed close connections during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas. This church was decorated by local adherents of the Phokas family during the reign of Nikephoros, and depicts Nikephoros Phokas and the empress Theophano in the north apse. On the north wall of the church, the forty martyrs of Sebasteia are represented as line of infantry soldiers. At the head of line ride John Tzimiskes and Melias on horseback (Rodley, 'The Pigeon House Church at Çavuşin', pp. 301-339; Thierry, *Haut Moyen-âge en Cappadoce*, i, 56).

⁸¹ Saunders, 'The Reliquary of Aachen', pp.215-6. As governor of Tarsos during the reign of Tzimiskes Maleinos was responsible for arresting those inhabitants of Antioch who had murdered Christopher the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch in 966 (Canard, 'Une vie du patriarche melkite d'Antioche', p.565). Maleinos still occupied this post at the beginning of Basil's reign (Yahya, *PO* 23, p.373).

Egypt.⁸² However, it is unlikely that Nicholas was in Antioch for long, since as soon as the Fatimid threat was contained, the imperial field army was recalled to deal with the Rus in Bulgaria. Thereafter, although the picture of the organisation of military administration in Antioch is exceptionally unclear, no commander appears to have exercised control in the city for longer than a few months. During the reign of Tzimiskes, the only mention of a senior military official at Antioch after the departure of Nicholas the eunuch, concerns Michael Bourtzes. According to Yahya, when a severe earthquake caused considerable damage to the circuit walls of Antioch, Bourtzes was dispatched to the city by Tzimiskes in order to oversee the necessary repairs.⁸³ Unfortunately his position of command within the Byzantine hierarchy at this time is not specified. Yet, he does not seem to have been given a permanent office or called *doux*. Instead, when the refortification was completed, Bourtzes returned to active service within the mobile Byzantine field army. According to Skylitzes, when John Tzimiskes died Bourtzes commanded the *tagma* of the *stratelatai* within the army led by Bardas Skleros.⁸⁴

Indeed, the very first mention of the office of *doux* in an Antiochene context only occurs after the death of John Tzimiskes in 976 at the very start of Basil's reign. Once again this first citation occurs in the testimony of Skylitzes, who reports that at the same time as Skleros was named *doux* of Mesopotamia, Bourtzes was appointed "*doux* of Antioch-on-the-Orontes".⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the exact nature of Bourtzes' responsibilities as *doux* at Antioch is obscured by the fact that Skylitzes interprets his deployment on the eastern frontier within the wider context of Skleros' appointment as *doux* of Mesopotamia. Thus, Skylitzes claims that

⁸² Yahya, *PO* 23, p.350; Skylitzes, p.287; Saunders, 'The Aachen Reliquary', pp.211-2; Walker, 'A Byzantine Victory over the Fatimids', *B* 42 (1972), pp.431-440; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', pp.227-8.

⁸³ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.351

⁸⁴ Skylitzes, p.315; see above, p.221, for the *tagma* of the *stratelatai*.

⁸⁵ Skylitzes, p.315

Bourtzes was sent to Antioch so that he would not conspire with Skleros against the emperors in Constantinople. Reading Skylitzes' interpretation of events, it is tempting to see Bourtzes' appointment as part of a broader imperial decision in 976 to marginalise the leading figures of the Byzantine field army. Yet, such a view would be misconceived. Indeed, just as it has been demonstrated that military and diplomatic relations with neighbouring Muslim powers to the east, rather than imperial fears of revolt, underpinned Skleros' deployment on the central sector of eastern frontier, a similar model can be outlined for Bourtzes' appointment. That is to say, just as Skleros was appointed *doux* so that he could lead Byzantine field army detachments on campaigns against the Hamdanids of Mosul, so Bourtzes was given command at Antioch so that he could keep up the offensive against the principal Muslim adversary on his sector of the frontier, namely the Fatimids.

That such strategic thinking underpinned Bourtzes' appointment is supported by the testimony of Yahya ibn Sa'id. He notes that at the beginning of Basil's reign, Bourtzes led an invasion of Muslim territory. During an exploratory expedition in the spring of 976 the Byzantines raided the coastal town of Tripoli returning to Antioch with lots of booty. Plans were soon afoot for a second expedition.⁸⁶ Clearly, this military action was part of a wider strategy to apply pressure to Fatimid positions on the coast of northern Syria and the Lebanon. As such it represented a continuation of the tactics of the latter stages of the last eastern campaign of John Tzimiskes. This campaign had taken place in the summer of 975, less than a year before Bourtzes' appointment as *doux* in Antioch. The most colourful element of Tzimiskes' incursion into Muslim territory had been his march into central Syria, and his appearance outside the walls of Damascus.⁸⁷ Yet, in

⁸⁶ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.372

⁸⁷ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.368-9; Canard, 'Les sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles', pp.293-5 (testimony of Ibn al-Kalanisi)

many ways the more strategically significant component of the 975 campaign was its conclusion. Having devastated the interior of Syria, Tzimiskes returned northwards along the litoral of the Levant, raiding or rendering tributary port towns such as Sidon, Beirut, Djubayl, Tripoli, Djabala and Balanias. The ambition of this campaign must surely have been to deprive the powerful Fatimid fleet of as many strategic points on the coast as possible.⁸⁸ When he was appointed *doux* of Antioch in the spring of 976, Bourtzes was expected to continue this strategy.

However, while Michael Bourtzes' appointment as *doux* of Antioch in 976 makes more sense if it is set against the background context of military and diplomatic relations with the Fatimids, rather than political machinations among palace officials in Constantinople, it should be stressed that Bourtzes' frontier role seems to have been limited to his command over a military force. There is little sign that he was appointed as a permanent governor with responsibility for civilian as well as military matters on the frontier. Instead, in Yahya's brief narrative coverage of frontier warfare around Antioch in the spring of 976, the city itself appears as little more than a convenient garrison base for troops leading the offensive against the Fatimids. Bourtzes himself was simply the commander in charge of that garrison.

When the Skleros revolt broke out in the spring of 976, Bourtzes was instructed to leave Antioch, join forces with Eustathios Maleinos the *strategos* of Tarsos, and prevent rebel armies from progressing westwards across the Anti Taurus.⁸⁹ From this point onwards the military administrative history of Antioch becomes very obscure. For a short while after Bourtzes left the city, command was held by his

⁸⁸ The outlines of this coastal campaign are reported in Yahya, *PO* 23, p.369. The most detailed account, however, comes from Tzimiskes' own letter to Ashot III Armenian king of Ani, which is transmitted in the twelfth-century Armenian history of Matthew of Edessa (Matthew of Edessa, pp.31-2). The campaign itself is analysed in detail by P.E.Walker, 'The "Crusade" of John Tzimiskes in the Light of New Arabic Evidence', *B* 47 (1977), pp.301-327.

⁸⁹ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.372

son. However, as soon as Bourtzes himself decided to defect from the emperor and join the Skleros party, he instructed his son to leave Antioch and entrust the city into the hands of the *basilikos* Kouleib.⁹⁰ During the remaining years of the Skleros revolt, the most significant figures in the governance of the city of Antioch were first Kouleib, and later Oubeïdallah, two Christian Arab administrators, both of whom held the office of *basilikos*. The significance of this office and the responsibilities undertaken by Kouleib and Oubeïdallah will be discussed in the final section of this chapter dealing with civilian administration on the eastern frontier.⁹¹ However, for now it is worth noting that it is only in September 985, six years after the end of the first Skleros revolt, that the historical record once again makes mention of the office of *doux*.

In 985 the holder of the office of *doux* was the general, Leo Melissenos.⁹² Yet, there is little about his appointment which suggests that the office he held had become a permanent gubernatorial position. Instead, nearly ten years into Basil's reign, the office was still an *ad hoc* position shaped by short-term political and military exigencies. According to Yahya ibn Sa'id, Melissenos's original appointment was made in the context of a particular, and clearly-defined, military goal: the siege of the coastal town of Balanias which had recently been occupied by the Fatimids. However, a conjunction of more pressing political and military conditions both within and outside the empire ensured that Melissenos' tenure of the position of *doux* was brief. For after he had captured and fortified Balanias, he was swiftly recalled to Constantinople. In part Melissenos' recall was motivated by the distrust he had inspired in the emperor while he had been on active service in the east. He had briefly called a halt to the siege of Balanias when he thought that Basil was

⁹⁰ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.373

⁹¹ See below, pp.330-3

⁹² Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.416-7

about to be deposed by Basil Lekapenos the *Parakoimomenos*. He had only resumed military operations after the emperor commanded him to continue with the siege or face having to pay the soldiers' wages out of his own pocket. However, another reason for the recall of Melissenos was that Basil II needed this general's expertise during his forthcoming campaign against Bulgaria, planned for the summer of 986.⁹³

The flexible and *ad hoc* nature of command on the eastern frontier is further demonstrated by the history of the Antiochene region in the year which separated Leo's departure from Antioch and the outbreak of the revolt led by Bardas Phokas in August 987. In some senses Leo was replaced at Antioch by Bardas Phokas. According to Yahya, at the same time as Leo was recalled to Constantinople in 986, Bardas was relieved of his position of *domestikos* of the *scholai* of the east, supreme commander of the field army. Instead he was appointed "*doux* of the east and governor of Antioch and the provinces of the east".⁹⁴ Yet Yahya's description of Phokas' appointment suggests that unlike Leo Melissenos' limited responsibilities as *doux*, Bardas' new duties were extremely broad, and not purely confined to military matters or to command over the immediate environs of Antioch. So vast, indeed, is the geographical scope implied in this title, that Phokas' role may have been that of an imperial plenipotentiary on the frontier.

⁹³ Ibid., p.417; Skylitzes, p.330. Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.232. It is possible that during the Bulgarian expedition Melissenos fulfilled the position of *domestikos* of the *scholai* of the west. This argument has been advanced by Jordanov on the basis of two seals belonging to Leo Melissenos *domestikos*, which have been found during excavations at Preslav in eastern Bulgaria. On one seal Leo is attributed with the title *magistros*; on the other *patrikios* (Jordanov, 'Molybdobulles de domestiques des scholes du dernier quart du Xe siècle', pp.208-9). However, it should be noted that Skylitzes maintains that Stephen Kontostephanos was the *domestikos* of the west during the 986 Bulgarian campaign. Skylitzes relates that Melissenos was given responsibility for guarding the city of Philipoupolis during the expedition (Skylitzes, p.331). As yet there is insufficient evidence to resolve who led the field army of the west and the exact nature of Melissenos' command.

Such an interpretation would be compatible with the broader military position of the empire at the time. With a summer campaign against Bulgaria planned, a large part of the professional field army stationed on the eastern frontier was required to return to Constantinople to fight in the west. Leo Melissenos was among their commanders as we have seen. In these circumstances there was little sense in leaving Bardas Phokas in the position of *domestikos* of the *scholai* when there were few *scholai* to lead. Instead, Phokas was given wide-ranging powers to supervise the eastern frontier while Basil himself was on campaign in Bulgaria. Yet, even Phokas' appointment proved to be an *ad hoc* provision which had to be hastily rearranged when new external and internal political and military pressures arose.⁹⁵ These pressures were the ignominious failure of Basil's 986 invasion of Bulgaria, and the appearance of a new threat in the east, namely the arrival in February 987 of Bardas Skleros, recently released by Buyid authorities in Baghdad. With the need for a greater armed presence in the east, Phokas was restored to the position of *domestikos* at the head of the mobile field army. However, once the imperial field army returned eastwards to deal with Skleros, Phokas himself rebelled.⁹⁶

Ambiguity about the nature of command at Antioch persisted throughout the Phokas revolt itself and during the last decade of the tenth century. For example, according to Yahya, Leo Phokas, the son of Bardas, took his father's place at Antioch in 987 when the rebellion first broke.⁹⁷ However, Leo's exact position is unclear. It is impossible to know whether Leo was his father's replacement as *domestikos* of the *scholai*, or as *doux*. Unfortunately there are only two narrative

⁹⁴ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.417. Laurent sees Bardas' position as simply *doux* of Antioch (Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.233).

⁹⁵ This is not to say that Phokas was happy with this division of military command. One of the reasons for Phokas' revolt in 987 was that he had been left behind from the Bulgarian offensive (Skylitzes, p.332).

⁹⁶ Skylitzes, pp.330-34; Leo the Deacon, pp.171-5; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.418-421; Stephen of Taron, pp.186-90

⁹⁷ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.425; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.233

passages concerned with Leo's role in the rebellion. It is, therefore, difficult to interpret the nature of his command from the historical written record. In the first Yahya shows Leo tricking Agapios, patriarch of Antioch, whom the Phokades suspected of treachery, into leaving the city.⁹⁸ The second episode occurs in Yahya's account of the very end of the Phokas rebellion after Bardas' death at Abydos in April 989. According to Yahya, Leo continued the Phokas insurrection in Antioch until November 989. Then he surrendered to the citizens of Antioch and was handed over to Basil's new lieutenant in the city, Michael Bourtzes. At the time of Leo's surrender he was supported by a small armed force, which included Armenians and Muslims. Together they had mounted last gasp resistance from a tower in the city walls.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, such a meagre shard of evidence from the final, embattled stages of the revolt, does not enable us to reconstruct the nature of Leo's power earlier in the rebellion.

Equally confusing is the nature of military command in Antioch between the end of the Phokas revolt in 989 and the early 990s. It is clear that by 992 Michael Bourtzes had taken control. When Byzantine armies were defeated by Fatimid forces in 992, and later in 994, it was Michael who was at their head.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the situation during the three years before 992 is less clear. Usually it is argued that Bourtzes was appointed *doux* of Antioch when he arrived in the city in 989 to arrest Leo Phokas.¹⁰¹ However, a reference in Stephen of Taron's account to an engagement in 991 in the Antioch region between a Fatimid army and a small force led by Romanos Skleros, the son of the former rebel Bardas, persuaded Werner Seibt to argue that Skleros was *doux* in the city between 989 and 991. Seibt believed that

⁹⁸ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.425

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.427-8

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.438-440

¹⁰¹ Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', pp.233-4

Bourtzes only took over as *doux* in 992.¹⁰² However, modern historians may be creating a false problem here. In the context of the intensified warfare between Fatimid and Byzantine armies which characterised northern Syria in the last decade of the tenth century, it is possible that responsibilities for the defence of the southern sector of the frontier were shared among a number of senior military officers, all with experience of warfare in the Byzantine east. Indeed, the narrative of Yahya illustrates this principle of multiple command in action. When the Byzantines were defeated in 994 by the Fatimids in the Ruj valley north of Apameia, their army was led by Bourtzes, but also contained fresh troops recently sent from Constantinople under the command of Leo Melissenos, himself a former *doux* of Antioch.¹⁰³ It is possible that an analogous position pertained in the early 990s, with Romanos Skleros being sent to the eastern frontier with responsibility for a similar mobile relief force. Thus, c.991-2 Romanos may have held an office such as *domestikos* of the *scholai* at the head of *tagmata* dispatched from Constantinople, while Bourtzes was, at the same time, *doux* of Antioch.¹⁰⁴

Clearer than the nature of the command exercised by Bourtzes in the early 990s is the fact that his conduct in office did much to dissatisfy the emperor Basil. Not only did Bourtzes lose two major field army engagements with the Fatimids (in 992 and 994), forcing Basil II himself to campaign in northern Syria in 995, he was also accused of exacerbating the conflict by imprisoning a Fatimid envoy.¹⁰⁵ By 995 Basil had tired of Bourtzes, and replaced him with Damian Dalassenos.¹⁰⁶ However, Damian's duties are also difficult to interpret. Little can be resolved from the historical record, since a variety of labels are used to describe his position. He is called '*Doux* of the East' by Yahya, in a phrase which echoes the

¹⁰² Stephen of Taron, p.199; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.63-4.

¹⁰³ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.440

¹⁰⁴ This is the solution also offered by Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, pp.21-2.

plenipotentiary position held by Bardas Phokas in 986-7.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand when two later Arab historians, whose common source was the eleventh-century Iraqi historian Hilal al Sabi, comment on the death of Dalassenos in battle against the Fatimids in 998, they merely call him *doux*.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, the Armenian historian Stephen of Taron refers to Damian by his title, *magistros*, rather than by his office.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, with characteristic vagueness Skylitzes notes that Damian “ruled” in Antioch.¹¹⁰ Although no sigillographical evidence has ever been directly linked to Damian Dalassenos, it is possible that he was the owner of an unpublished seal in the Dumbarton Oaks collection belonging to a Damian *doux*.¹¹¹ Yet, even this seal does not add much to any understanding of the nature of Damian’s command at Antioch. More information is forthcoming from the description of Damian’s actual responsibilities in Yahya ibn Sa’id’s narrative. This indicates that Damian’s position was still primarily that of an active military commander. For two years after his appointment he led raids down the north Syrian coast to Tripoli. In the third year his attacks were focused further inland, as he tried to capture the town of Apameia on the east bank of the Orontes, then in Fatimid hands. However, when the Fatimid governor of Damascas arrived to relieve Apameia in July 998, Damian was killed in battle.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.438

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.443-4; Laurent, ‘Gouverneurs d’Antioche’, p.234

¹⁰⁷ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.444; Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, p.77

¹⁰⁸ Al-Rudhrawari, pp.239-40 (writing in the later eleventh century); Ibn al-Kalanisi (writing in the mid-twelfth) in Canard, ‘Les sources arabes de l’histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles’, pp.299-300; Forsyth, ‘The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa’id al Antaki’, pp.101-139.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen of Taron, pp.201-2

¹¹⁰ ὅς ἴσχυεν Ἀντιοχείας (Skylitzes, p.340); see above, pp.67-8, 75 for the difficulties of using Skylitzes to discuss administrative history.

¹¹¹ Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.4100. This seal is not discussed by Cheynet and Vannier in their discussion of Damian’s career (*Études prosopographiques*, pp.76-8).

¹¹² The most detailed account of this battle is that preserved in the history of Ibn al-Kalanisi (Canard, ‘Les sources arabes de l’histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles’, pp.297-300).

Damian's replacement was Nikephoros Ouranos, who took up command late in 999.¹¹³ For the four years prior to his arrival in Antioch he had been *domestikos* of the *scholai* of the west on active service in the Balkans, where he had gained universal renown as the result of an unexpected, but convincing, victory over a Bulgarian army at Spercheis near Thermopylae in 997.¹¹⁴ Moreover, it is clear that despite the peace that was agreed between Byzantine and Fatimid authorities in 1000-1, military affairs continued to dominate Ouranos' attention once he arrived on the eastern frontier. Shortly after his appointment to command in Antioch he accompanied Basil II on his campaign to annex the Ibero-Armenian principdom of Tao in the spring of 1000.¹¹⁵ During the following year he returned to Tao to repel the incursion led by Gurgun of Iberia.¹¹⁶ Several years later in 1006/7 Ouranos marched from Antioch to Sarudj in the Diyar Mudar, where he won a victory over an Arab dervish insurrectionist called al-Acfar and his bedouin allies the Banu Noumeir and the Banu Kilab.¹¹⁷ Several letters sent by the contemporary *krites* of Tarsos, Philetos Synadenos, to Ouranos while he was stationed in Antioch, praise him for his military valour and may refer to this campaign of 1007.¹¹⁸

However, it is clear from both literary and sigillographical materials that Ouranos' responsibilities were broad in their definition and extended over a vast geographical area. According to the seals he issued while stationed in Antioch he was:

¹¹³ Skylitzes, p.345; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.400, 460, 466-7; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', pp.235-6

¹¹⁴ Ouranos' campaigns in the Balkans are described by Skylitzes, pp.341-2, 364, and Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.446-7. Several seals belonging to a Nikephoros, *magistros*, *domestikos* of the west have been attributed to Ouranos (Jordanov, 'Molybdobulles de domestiques des scholes', pp.210-11, mentions two such seals: one found at Preslav in eastern Bulgaria, the other at Dristra on the Lower Danube; see also Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.863). Leo, metropolitan of Synada wrote to Nikephoros congratulating him on his success against the Bulgarians while he himself was serving as the imperial envoy to the Ottonians in the later 990s (Leo of Synada, letter 13).

¹¹⁵ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.460

¹¹⁶ Stephen of Taron, p.212

¹¹⁷ Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.466-7

¹¹⁸ Synadenos, letters 8-13; McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos', p.131

"Nikephoros Ouranos, *Magistros* and Ruler of the East".¹¹⁹ The amorphous and universal nature of Ouranos' power is reflected in the fact that most contemporary literary sources, including Yahya ibn Sa'id, Stephen of Taron, and Philetos Synadenos, simply refer to Nikephoros by his title of *magistros*.¹²⁰ Indeed, when addressing Ouranos, Synadenos was apt to reflect on the august nature of Ouranos' position with the superlative invocation, *peribleptos magistros*.¹²¹ The seniority, ambiguity, and idiosyncratic nature of the office fulfilled by Ouranos on the eastern frontier suggests that Nikephoros may have been invested with plenipotentiary powers, which extended far beyond control over Antioch and field army which was garrisoned there. It is likely that after he had resolved a peace with the Fatimids in 1000-01, Basil was able to concentrate his full resources on warfare with Bulgaria.¹²² Therefore, just as he had appointed Phokas as his plenipotentiary in the east during the Bulgarian campaign of 986, he now used Ouranos in this broad-based eastern office while he himself campaigned in the Balkans. The difference, however, between Phokas and Ouranos was that the latter was unquestionably loyal to the emperor, whereas the former had betrayed him.¹²³

The history of command on the eastern frontier in the region of Antioch is much less full for the second half of Basil's reign than the first. This is mainly because

¹¹⁹ Νικηφόρῳ μαγίστρῳ τῷ κρατοῦντι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς τῷ Οὐρανῷ (Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.99.11; also published in McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos', pp.139-40)

¹²⁰ Yahya refers to Ouranos as *magistros* in the context of his expedition against al-Acfar (Yahya, *PO* 23, p.367). However, in his testimony for the period 1000-1 he calls Ouranos *doux* (*ibid.*, p.460). Stephen of Taron refers to Ouranos in 1000 by his title, *magistros*, and by the responsibility he had fulfilled in imperial service during the early 980s, *epi tou kanikleiou* (keeper of the imperial inkstand) (Stephen of Taron, p.212); see below, p.336.

¹²¹ Synadenos, letters 8-13, especially letter 11.

¹²² Although Skylitzes' coverage of Basil's Balkan campaigns is extremely inconsistent, his testimony does contain several dated entries which suggest that Byzantine armies were engaged in military action in eastern Bulgaria and on the Middle Danube during the early 1000s. For example, in 1000 Theodorokan and Nikephoros Xiphias seized Preslav and Pliska. The following year Basil himself campaigned in Thessaly. A year later he conducted a siege of Vidin on the Danube (Skylitzes, pp.343-6). Yahya notes that Basil's peace in 1000 with the Fatimids allowed him to launch a four-year campaign in Bulgaria (Yahya, *PO* 23, p.461).

Yahya ibn Sa'id's coverage of the events in northern Syria is very thin between the years 1000 and 1016.¹²⁴ The most that can be said of this largely unrecorded sixteen-year period is that Ouranos held power between at least 1000 and 1007, the year when he campaigned against al-Acfar.¹²⁵ By 1011 one Michael *koitonites* was *doux* of Antioch, indicating that Ouranos had lost power in Antioch by the end of the first decade of the eleventh century.¹²⁶ However, the very fact that Ouranos was in command at Antioch for more than seven years signals an important change in administrative practice on the frontier. Whereas during the first thirty years of Byzantine rule in Antioch, external and internal political pressures had entailed a series of *ad hoc* military commands and a very rapid turnover in office holders, now, in the predominantly peaceful conditions which followed the 1000-01 accord with the Fatimids, short-term expediency was able to give way to a greater degree of permanent command. Moreover, it is possible that this was not a phenomenon restricted to the eastern frontier, but was also practised on Byzantium's western borderlands. Although the evidence which supports this argument comes from Skylitzes' chronologically-confused account of Basil's Bulgarian wars, nonetheless, it suggests that many of the emperor's senior commanders in the Balkans often served in the same post for many years. For example, according to Skylitzes Nikephoros Xiphias was appointed as *strategos* of Philippoupolis c.1000. He was still *strategos* of the same place in 1014.¹²⁷

¹²³ See below, pp.335-7, for Ouranos' earlier career in imperial service and his responsibilities in Antioch.

¹²⁴ In most of his coverage for these years Yahya is concerned with Egyptian history (*PO* 23, pp.462-520). In particular he concentrates on the eccentric behaviour of the contemporary Fatimid caliph al-Hakim, who was responsible for persecuting and expelling some members of the Egyptian Christian and Jewish communities, including Yahya himself. Most infamous of his attacks on the Christian communities under his authority was his destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1009 (Yahya, *PO* 23, p.492; Forsyth, 'The Chronicle of Yahya ibn Sa'id al Antaki', chapter 5; M.Canard, 'La destruction de l'Église de la Resurrection par le Calife Hakim et l'histoire de la descent du feu sacré', *B* 25 (1955), pp.16-43).

¹²⁵ See above, p.313

¹²⁶ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.501; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.236.

To return to the east, by the final decade of Basil's reign, there are further signs of the consolidation of military administration on the frontier, most notably in the regularity with which the contemporary literary and sigillographical records refer to the senior commanders at Antioch as either *doux* or *katepan*. For example, in 1016 Yahya ibn Said mentions an anonymous *katepan* of Antioch who allowed the former emir of Aleppo, Mansour ibn Loulou, to settle in northern Syria. In 1024 he cites Constantine Dalassenos as the *katepan* who offered assistance to the Mirdasid rulers of Aleppo when the emirate was threatened by Fatimid attack.¹²⁸ The seal of Niketas of Mistheia, who took command in Antioch between 1030 and 1032, indicates that he was *patrikios*, rector and *katepan*.¹²⁹ Another individual identified by sigillographical evidence as a *doux* is Theophylact Dalassenos (1032 to 1034).¹³⁰ Sigillographical evidence has added the *protospatharios* Pankratios (whose term in office has been dated to the reign of Basil himself), the *anthypatos* and *patrikios* Leo, Constantine Bourtzes *magistros*, and Michael Kontostephanos *magistros* to the list of early to mid eleventh-century *doukes/katepanes*.¹³¹ Further sigillographical evidence that the office only became more stable towards the end of Basil's reign is provided by the fact that the Seyrig collection, with its impressive array of tenth and eleventh-century seals from the eastern frontier, contains seven

¹²⁷ Skylitzes, pp.345, 348-9; see above, p.237, n.96

¹²⁸ Yahya (Cheikho) pp.214, 246; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', pp.237, 239

¹²⁹ Oikonomides, *Dated Lead Seal*, no.80. Both Yahya and another Arab historian, Kemal al-Din, report that Niketas was the *katepan* of Antioch (Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.239). It should be noted, however, that Skylitzes retains a characteristic vagueness when he reports on Niketas' frontier command. On one occasion he merely states that Niketas was the "leader" of Antioch: ἀπαίρων δὲ τῆς Συρίας δομέστικον μὲν τῶν σχολῶν ἀποδείκνυσι Συμειὼν τὸν τοῦ πενθεροῦ αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντίνου θεράποντα, ἡγεμόνα δὲ Ἀντιοχείας Νικήταν τὸν ἐκ Μισθείας (Skylitzes, p.382); on another, the "ruler" of Antioch κατόπιν δὲ ἦλθε καὶ ὁ Πινζαράχ, προπεμπόμενος καὶ δυροφορούμενος παρὰ τοῦ χρηματίσαντος ἄρχοντος Ἀντιοχείας Νικήτα τοῦ ἐκ Μισθείας (Skylitzes, p.383).

¹³⁰ Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.156: *anthypatos*, *patrikios* and *doux* of Antioch; Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, p.84.

¹³¹ Pankratios (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.664); Leo (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.309); for both see also Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, p.114. Constantine Bourtzes (Cheynet, 'Sceaux byzantins des musées d'Antioche et de Tarse', no.48; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.237); Michael Kontostephanos (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3105; (*The George Zacos Collection of Byzantine Lead Seals, I* (Auction 127, Spinks catalogue, 7 October 1998), no.43).

seals of the *doux/katepan* of Antioch: none predates Theophylact Dalassenos (1032-4).¹³²

Yet, this stability in the structure of frontier command may only have been a temporary phenomenon limited to the first half of the eleventh century. By the middle of the century, internal and external political and military pressures once again rendered the office of *doux/katepan* more flexible. Evidence of this greater flexibility is visible in the Antiochene career of Romanos Skleros, the great-grandson of the rebel Bardas. In 1054 Romanos held the position of *doux* of Antioch. However, when he was reappointed to command in Antioch in the latter part of the decade he held the joint position of *stratopedarches* of the east and *doux* of Antioch. Two contexts can be suggested for the widening of his responsibilities: first, that Skleros was appointed to this enhanced military position as reward for supporting Isaac Komnenos' revolt in 1057; and second, that as Turkish invasions became more frequent and dangerous, reaching as far as Melitene in 1057, and Sebasteia in 1059/60, more flexibility was required of the Byzantine military presence across the whole eastern frontier.¹³³

v. *The Katepanates of Iberia and Vaspurakan*

The only significant territorial expansion achieved by the Byzantine empire during the reign of Basil II in the east was in western Caucasia. In the north of this region this extension comprised the annexation of the Ibero-Armenian princedom of Tao in 1000, and the territorial gains added in 1022 following Basil's campaigns against George of Abasgia. In the south, it amounted to the absorption of the territories of the Artsruni princedom of Vaspurakan south and east of Lake Van. Broadly

¹³² Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, nos.156-62.

¹³³ Laurent, *Vatican*, no.94; Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*: nos.158, 159; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp.79-83; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.242; C.Cahen, *Pre-*

speaking it was from these new territories that the katepanates of Iberia and Vaspurakan were created.

Unfortunately, fundamental problems of geography and chronology hamper any attempt to reconstruct the origins and development of these katepanates. In the north debate centres on two issues: first, the extent of the lands ceded to Basil by David of Tao in 1000 and those added in 1022; and second, whether a katepanate existed as early as 1000, or was only first established in the early 1020s. In the south, the most intractable problem is ascertaining the date of the surrender of Vaspurakan.¹³⁴ Furthermore, a lack of reports about these katepanates in the historical record means that even after annexation itself, the early years of Byzantine rule are often opaque. It is only with the absorption of the northern Armenian principedom of Ani in the early 1040s that the primary sources, above all the historical accounts of Skylitzes and Aristakes, begin to dedicate more sustained coverage to the Caucasian katepanates. Thus, a fuller picture of frontier command only begins to emerge in the historical record fifteen years after the death of Basil II.¹³⁵

Despite these problems a certain amount of scholarship has been dedicated to the history of the Caucasian katepanates, with useful contributions coming from Yuzbashian, Janssens, Seibt, and Arutjunova-Findanjan.¹³⁶ However, many issues

Ottoman Turkey: a General Survey of the Material and Spiritual Culture and History, (trans. J.Jones Williams) (London, 1968), pp.69-71

¹³⁴ See above, pp.26, 284 n.24

¹³⁵ An analysis of political and military relations on the north-east frontier during the 1040s has been expertly pieced together by Shepard, 'Scylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s', pp.296-311.

¹³⁶ K.N.Yuzbashian, 'L'administration byzantine en Arménie aux Xe et XIe siècles', *REArm* 10 (1973-4), pp.139-83; F.Janssens, 'Le lac de Van et la stratégie byzantine', *B* 42 (1972), pp.388-404; W.Seibt, 'Die Eingliederung von Vaspurakan in das byzantinische Reich (etwa Anfang 1019 bzw. Anfang 1022)', *Handes Amsorya* 92 (1978), pp.49-66; V.A.Arutjunova-Fidanjan, 'Sur le problème des provinces byzantines orientales', *REArm* 14 (1980), pp.157-69; idem., 'The Social Administrative Structures in the East of the Byzantine Empire', *JÖB* 32.3 (1982), pp.21-34; idem., 'Some Aspects of Military Administrative Districts in Armenia During the Eleventh Century',

remain unexplored, most notably how these katepanates should be interpreted in the wider history of the organisation of the Byzantine eastern frontier in the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹³⁷ Although this thesis is not the occasion to write such a broadly-based history of the Caucasian katepanates, some brief remarks about the early history of the organisation of the Byzantine eastern frontier in Caucasia are included here, because they reflect many of the developments in frontier command already observed in the cases of Chaldia, Mesopotamia, and Antioch. Above all, they demonstrate the over-riding principle that the military administration of the Byzantine east was always organised on a highly flexible footing, particularly in the immediate aftermath of annexation.

Of the two katepanates the origins of Iberia are the most obscure. Not only is it difficult to ascertain whether Byzantine rule extended into Tao on a permanent basis in 1000 or only after 1022, it is also impossible to identify any commander in Iberia before the appointment of Niketas of Pisidia in 1025/6.¹³⁸ In contrast, the early history of imperial rule in Vaspurakan is less opaque. Although the exact date of the surrender of the southern Lake Van is difficult to establish, it is at least

REArm 20 (1986-7), pp.309-20; idem., 'The New Socio-Administrative Structure in the East of Byzantium', *Byz Forsch* 19 (1993), pp.79-86

¹³⁷ A rare, but brief, attempt to interpret the katepanates of Iberia and Vaspurakan within the wider military command structure of the frontier is undertaken by Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.186-193.

¹³⁸ Skylitzes p.370: Niketas' office is identified as that of *doux* of Iberia (Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, p.188). It was probably Niketas who was the anonymous *katepan* who returned Bagrat, the son of George of Abasgia, to his homeland in 1025 (Georgian Royal Annals, p.284). Bagrat had been taken hostage as part of the peace agreement reached between Basil II and George after the emperor's campaigns on the north-east frontier in 1021-2. It is possible that he was also the owner of a seal in the Zacos collection belonging to a Niketas, *patrikios* and *katepan* of Iberia (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.1026). For Yuzbashian, however, Romanos Dalassenos was the first *doux* of Iberia, appointed in 1023 in the aftermath of Basil's Georgian campaigns ('L'administration byzantine en Arménie aux Xe et XIe siècles', p.156, 183). Yet, this identification comes from an inscription on the Iberian gate at Theodosiupolis/Erzerum which is now lost. The inscription itself was dated to 991-2, a date which historians have traditionally rejected because of their belief, largely founded upon evidence of silence, that the katepanate was founded by Basil in 1023. With the disappearance of the inscription, it is impossible to know when Romanos exercised authority over Iberia. On the basis of sigillographical evidence Cheynet and Vannier (*Études prosopographiques*, pp.83-4) believe that Romanos' brother Theophylact may have been one of the earlier *katepanes* of Iberia, perhaps in 1021. Once again this is a view which cannot be solidly substantiated.

possible to identify the first two commanders in this region from the testimony of John Skylitzes, although it should be noted that with characteristic vagueness Skylitzes fails to mention either the date of their appointment or their exact office:

Basil Argyros, *patrikios*, having been sent out to rule this land, and having failed in all respects was released from office. And Nikephoros Komnenos, *protospatharios*, was sent as his replacement, who through using a mixture of force and persuasion on his arrival there, made the land subject to the emperor.¹³⁹

Despite his lack of specificity about the office exercised by Komnenos and Argyros, Skylitzes provides some useful clues about the nature of frontier command in this region of the Byzantine east, particularly when his testimony is aggregated with evidence from other historians. In the first instance, Skylitzes' observation about Komnenos' use of force to exert Byzantine rule, as well as more peaceful methods, demonstrates that military action was at the centre of a commander's responsibilities. This impression is confirmed by the Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivert, who comments on the brigades of Cappadocian troops under Komnenos' command.¹⁴⁰ As we saw in the last chapter these Cappadocians were almost certainly soldiers recruited in central Asia Minor who were sent to the frontiers as fulltime, professional troops.¹⁴¹ As the commander of a full-time garrison prepared to fight to impose Byzantine authority, Komnenos' role in Vaspurakan closely resembled that of commanders on the Antiochene frontier during the first half of Basil's reign, such as Michael Bourtzes and Damian Dalassenos.

¹³⁹ ἢς ἄρχειν ἀποσταλεῖς Βασίλειος πατρίκιος ὁ Ἀργυρὸς καὶ τοῖς ἄλοις πταίσας παραλύεται τῆς ἀρχῆς. καὶ διάδοχος αὐτοῦ πέμπεται Νικηφόρος πρωτοσπαθᾶριος ὁ Κομνηνός, ὅς κατὰ χώραν γενόμενος καὶ τὰ μὲν πειθοῖ, τὰ δὲ βία χρώμενος ὑπήκοον τῷ βασιλεῖ τὴν χώραν ἐποίησεν (Skylitzes, p.355)

¹⁴⁰ Aristakes, pp.26-7

¹⁴¹ See above, p.242

Furthermore, Aristakes' evidence demonstrates the importance which military experience and authority within the army itself assumed in the deployment of commanders to the frontier. Just as these attributes were fundamental to the command exercised by Eustathios Maleinos and George Melias in Antioch and Cilicia during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas, so they underpinned the appointment of the eleventh-century *katepanes* of Vaspurakan. According to Aristakes, Komnenos was a brave and bellicose man. He had made himself famous by his, "..... courageous actions and boldness..... and had become renowned through all the east".¹⁴² Meanwhile, Basil Argyros was also a military figure with considerable experience in the field. At the beginning of the second decade of the eleventh century he had been dispatched to deal with the revolt of Meles in southern Italy while he was *strategos* of the maritime theme of Samos.¹⁴³ The frequency with which experienced veterans of the Balkan wars of Basil's reign, both Byzantine and Bulgarian, later held command in the Caucasian katepanates, indicates the degree to which military competence remained an essential quality for commanders on this stretch of the eastern frontier. For example in 1034, Nicholas Chryshelios served as *katepan* of Vaspurakan.¹⁴⁴ He was the member of a family of local notables who had surrendered Dyrrachion to Byzantine control in 1005 and had been rewarded with titles within the Byzantine hierarchy.¹⁴⁵ The military pedigree of the Chryshelioi is demonstrated by the fact that an eleventh-century member of the family became *domestikos* of the Optimatoi.¹⁴⁶ Although, Nicholas was removed as *katepan* of Vaspurakan in 1035, his replacement was another Balkan war veteran. This was Niketas Pegonites, who had led the Byzantine army in the battle outside Dyrrachion in 1018 at which John Vladislav, the last Bulgarian

¹⁴² Aristakes, pp.26-7

¹⁴³ See above, p.236

¹⁴⁴ Skylitzes, p.388; Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt*, p.123

¹⁴⁵ Skylitzes, pp.342-3

¹⁴⁶ Theodore Chryshelios, *protospatharios*: Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.71.12

tsar, had been killed.¹⁴⁷ Other mid eleventh-century *doukes/katepanes* of Iberia and Vaspurakan included at least two of John Vladislav's sons, Aaron and Alousianos.¹⁴⁸

However, while military pedigree was a prerequisite for command in the Caucasian katepanates, it is clear that martial experience alone did not guarantee a long career in one location. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the early history of the katepanate of Vaspurakan outlined above is the rapid turnover in senior commanders, a characteristic already observed in other sections of the frontier during the first half of the reign of Basil. Yet, as the careers of Argyros, Komnenos, and Chryshelios illustrate, a variety of factors propelled this high turnover. Basil Argyros was removed from office during the reign of Basil himself on the grounds of incompetence. Here we can detect clear echoes of the replacement of Michael Bourtzes at Antioch in 995.¹⁴⁹ Incompetence was also the reason why Chryshelios was dismissed in 1035. He was blamed for allowing the Lake Van city of Perkri, which had only recently come under Byzantine control, to fall once again into the hands of local Muslims.¹⁵⁰ Yet, the reason for the short duration of Komnenos' command at Vaspurakan was rather different. Nikephoros Komnenos was removed from office not by Basil, but instead by Constantine VIII, either in 1026 or early in 1027. The reason for Komnenos' dismissal was that he was accused of wishing to rule 'the east', and allying with George of Abasgia in an attempt to further his

¹⁴⁷ Skylitzes, pp.357, 388; Grégoire, "Nicétas Pegonitès, vainqueur du roi bulgare, Jean Vladislav", pp.289-91. The office held by Niketas in 1018 appears to have been *strategos* of Dyrrachion.

¹⁴⁸ Aaron: *katepan* of Vaspurakan (Skylitzes, pp.448-52; Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.352); *magistros* and *doux* of Ani and Iberia (Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.2179); Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp.189-94; Alousianos: described by Skylitzes as a *strategos* in Theodosiupolis in 1040 (Skylitzes, p.413). His location in the town of Theodosiupolis in the far north-east of Anatolia indicates that he almost certainly held the position of *katepan* or *doux* of Iberia. Theodosiupolis appears to have been the centre of the katepanate of Iberia before the annexation of Ani in 1042. See above, pp.96-7, for further analysis of the role of the sons of John Vladislav within eleventh-century Byzantine political society and administration.

¹⁴⁹ See above, p.311

plans.¹⁵¹ Thus, just as dismissals and appointments at Antioch and Mesopotamia during the second half of the tenth century had often been shaped by political tensions between generals on the frontier and the emperor in Constantinople, so in the short turbulent reign of Constantine VIII, distrust between centre and periphery also contributed to a high turnover in staff on the borderlands.

vi. Conclusions

Any understanding of the military organisation of the Byzantine eastern frontier under Basil II must through paucity of evidence, particularly outside Antioch, remain hazy and incomplete. However, some broad final conclusions can be drawn. With the exception of Chaldia, no military officer on the frontier can be identified as a *doux* or a *katepan* before the death of John Tzimiskes. The earliest identification of such officials outside Chaldia occurs in the first year of Basil's reign in the shape of Michael Bourtzes and Bardas Skleros, *doux* of Antioch and Mesopotamia respectively. However, as *doukes*, commanders like Skleros and Bourtzes should be viewed as military leaders of mobile units of field army troops conducting warfare against the empire's eastern adversaries, rather than as governors of clearly-defined geographical regions. The military context to many appointments meant that commands were arranged on an *ad hoc* basis, with senior officers often exercising authority over more than one geographical area. On occasion the senior commander on the frontier could be invested with plenipotentiary powers. This was most likely to happen when the military energies of the empire were concentrated on warfare in the Balkans. In the first half of the reign, the interplay of internal and external political pressures dictated a swift turnover in staff. Very little is known about the organisation of katepanates in the

¹⁵⁰ Skylitzes, p.388. Aristakes claims that Perkri was lost because the troops left to guard the city became drunk (Aristakes, p.36).

¹⁵¹ Aristakes, pp.26-7; Skylitzes, pp.371-2

period between 1000 and 1015/6. However, the finalisation of a peace with the Fatimids in 1000-01 may have brought more stability to the organisation of the eastern frontier, particularly in the office of *doux/katepan*. The origins of the *katepanates* of Iberia and Vaspurakan are very unclear. Nonetheless, some of the features of their early histories display striking parallels with developments elsewhere on the frontier in earlier periods. Taken as whole, supra-thematic military command over the frontier during Basil's reign was always more flexible than administrative blueprints such as the 'Escorial Taktikon' imply.

IV. Civil administration

Administration in all regions of the Byzantine empire was not simply about the principles and logistics underpinning military defence and attack. Instead, imperial authority was also articulated in the localities through the provision of justice and the exploitation of resources. However, the question of the civil administration of the eastern frontier during the tenth and eleventh centuries has attracted much less interest among modern scholars than the structures of military organisation on the periphery. Comment has usually been limited to reflections on the apparent lack of a civil bureaucracy in the eastern-most regions of the empire, or to generalised assumptions that functionaries from the former regimes were absorbed within the superstructure of the Byzantine state.¹⁵² Such a lack of interest is curious. For the second half of Basil's reign, and the reigns of many of his eleventh-century successors, peaceful conditions prevailed on the eastern frontier, particularly in regions bordering Muslim states. In these circumstances it might be expected that military matters assumed a relatively low administrative significance. In contrast, as we saw in chapter four, peace facilitated the economic expansion of the east,

contributing to a prosperity which the emperors in Constantinople were clearly eager to foster and exploit.¹⁵³ Any understanding of the Byzantine administrative presence on the eastern frontier during the tenth and eleventh centuries must, therefore, include an investigation of the bureaucratic structures and processes which facilitated the exploitation of this local prosperity by the Byzantine state.

The final section of this chapter represents a preliminary investigation of civil administration in the Byzantine east, in particular in those areas which had been wrested from Muslim control during the second and third quarters of the tenth century. On the basis of both literary and sigillographical evidence it will be argued that governance in the east differed markedly from that in other areas of the empire, such as the themes of Anatolia. Instead of introducing alien administrative practices and practitioners into these newly conquered regions, imperial authorities were willing to acknowledge the logic that in regions where the everyday language of economic and fiscal exchange was not Greek, maximum benefit was likely to accrue from minimal administrative change. The administrative practices followed by imperial authorities in this period had the effect of establishing a quasi tribute relationship between the heterodox populations of the periphery and Constantinople. Moreover, although this relationship was subject to tighter control by the imperial capital during the second half of Basil's reign, a principle of administrative devolution still pertained during this period and, indeed, during the decades which followed the emperor's death.

One sign that civilian administration in the eastern frontier regions, especially in those areas which belonged to the former Muslim emirates, differed radically from

¹⁵² See, for example, Cheynet, Morriison, and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig*, p.120

¹⁵³ See above, pp.188-93, 203-07

contemporary bureaucratic structures in the Anatolian themes, is the paucity of extant lead seals which belonged to officials with judicial and fiscal responsibilities. For example, while a plethora of lead seals suggests that judges were a burgeoning administrative phenomenon in the western and central themes of Asia Minor, seals of judges in the eastern regions of the empire are much less frequently discovered. They are also much less conspicuous than those of their military counterparts, the *doukes/katepanes*.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, even when they do appear within the sigillographical record, it is clear that the authority of a single judge was very thinly spread over a vast geographical distance. Most of the surviving seals of judges belonged to officials whose authority coincided with one of the great katepanates such as Mesopotamia, Iberia, or Antioch, or with the former emirate of Melitene.¹⁵⁵ On occasion their authority could range even further, extending into neighbouring districts as well. Single judges could preside over joint themes in the interim area between the eastern plateau and the Anti Taurus such as Lykandos and Sebasteia, or Lykandos and Melitene.¹⁵⁶ Equally the small border themes known as *Armeniaka themata* do not appear to have had their own judges.¹⁵⁷ Instead, these areas were grouped together under the jurisdiction of a single judge.¹⁵⁸ Finally, the lack of seals of judges is mirrored by a more general paucity in eastern regions of seals

¹⁵⁴ For instance the Seyrig collection contains the seals of seven *doukes/katepanes* of Antioch and only one of a *praitor* of the region (Cheynet, Morriison, and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig*, nos.156-62 and 163). There are no seals of Antiochene *kritai* in the collection.

¹⁵⁵ *Melitene*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.952; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.4365; *Mesopotamia*: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3327; Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.155g; *Antioch*: Cheynet, Morriison and Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins: Henri Seyrig*, no.163; *Iberia*: Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.387; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished F577 and 58.106.865; Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.177a

¹⁵⁶ Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.803; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.5399. The designation of two frontier regions to the authority of a single judge has been noted by Ahrweiler. She cites examples of the "twinning" of Melitene and Mesopotamia, Lykandos and Melitene, and Iberia and Mesopotamia (Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', p.85). She also observes the more general phenomenon of a lack of judges in the east (*ibid.*, pp.84-5).

¹⁵⁷ There are very occasional exceptions: for example the Dumbarton Oaks Collection contains the seal of a *krites* from Hexakomia, one of the *Armeniaka themata* located south-west of Melitene: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 58.106.4285; Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale', p.290

¹⁵⁸ Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.296; Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.503; Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3222; 58.106.5582.

belonging to other civilian officials, which are so frequently found in western and central Anatolian contexts. In the course of my research into the sigillographical record of the former emirates, I have only found one seal belonging to a customs' official (*kommerkiarios*),¹⁵⁹ one seal pertaining to an official concerned with fiscal lands (*epi ton oikeiakon*),¹⁶⁰ and one seal of a *protonotarios*.¹⁶¹ The absence of *kommerkiarioi* is particularly surprising given the importance of trade to the Byzantine eastern frontier and the post-conquest economic revival in this region.¹⁶²

However, the general absence in the former emirates of lead seals belonging to officials usually associated with the civilian administration of the locality, should not be taken as evidence of a lack of civilian administration in these regions. Instead, when other sigillographical and literary materials are examined, it becomes clear that the civilian administration of the east was simply configured in different ways from that in the Anatolian themes. Whereas the west and centre of Asia Minor in the tenth and eleventh centuries was characterised by the penetration of large numbers of civilian officials dispatched from Constantinople, the Constantinopolitan presence in the east was on a much smaller scale. This was because bureaucracy on the eastern frontier was more indirectly managed. Local administration, above all the collection of taxes, largely remained in indigenous hands and was articulated according to indigenous practices. These indigenous functionaries were then responsible to a thin tier of senior Byzantine officials appointed by the emperor in Constantinople. As a result, the centrally appointed official was more like a guarantor of tribute than the collector of fiscal dues or the manager of imperial assets.

¹⁵⁹ *Kommerkiarios* of Antioch: Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, p.312, no.7

¹⁶⁰ Autoreianos, *protonotarios* of the *oikeiakon*, which was found at Adana in Cilicia (Cheynet and Morrisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', p.124).

The starting point for this hypothesis of a tribute-based form of local governance is a very particular phenomenon in the sigillographical record which has often been observed by historians, but only recently investigated in much greater detail by James Howard-Johnston. This phenomenon concerns the marked incidence of seals of one particular variety of civil official in many locations along the entire length of the eastern frontier, namely *kouratores* or *episkeptitai*.¹⁶³ As we saw in the last chapter, elsewhere in the empire these officials are usually identified with the direct management of crown estates. And indeed, historians seeking to explain the incidence of such seals in this more eastern context, including Howard-Johnston himself, have hitherto worked within this paradigm of administration. As a result it has been widely assumed that these seals demonstrate that large areas of the eastern emirates, in particular those lands deserted by Muslims fleeing Byzantine conquest, were turned into imperial estates and directly managed for the crown in Constantinople.¹⁶⁴ Yet, there are reasons to doubt this interpretation. First, given the marked paucity of civilian officials in all other spheres of local government on the eastern frontier, it seems odd that the imperial authorities had the manpower to place such emphasis on a single and relatively specialised area of administration. Second, when the seals of these officials are set in the context of the historical texts which record the annexation of former Muslim emirates, it makes much more sense to see their owners as the guarantors of tribute rather than the managers of estates.

¹⁶¹ *Protonotarios* of Antioch: Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished 55.1.3266

¹⁶² See above, pp.198-203

¹⁶³ Oikonomides, 'L'évolution de l'organisation administrative', p.138; Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, pp.316-7; Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority', pp.75-100 especially p.88 ff. Howard-Johnston's list of officials includes: *kouratores* from Melitene, Chaldia, Derxene, Rachais/Rachab, Hafdjidj (Chauzion), Artze, Taron, Manzikert and Inner Iberia, Tarsos, Antioch, Artach, Mesopotamia; *episkeptitai* from Seleukeia, Mesopotamia, Arabissos, Podandos, Abara, Rodandos and Tephrike (ibid., pp.89 to 91, nn.41 to 57). To this list should be added: John, *spatharokandidatos* and *kourator* of Antioch (Cheynet, 'Sceaux byzantins des musées d'Antioche et de Tarse', no.47); Euthymios Karabitziotis, *exaktor*, *krites* of Hippodrome, Seleukeia and *kourator* and *anagrapheus* of Tarsos (Oikonomides, *SBS* 3, p.192); John Hexamilites *krites* of Seleukeia and *kourator* of Tarsos (Nesbitt and Braunlin, 'Selections from a Private Collection of Byzantine Bullae', no.13).

¹⁶⁴ Kaplan, *Les Hommes et la terre*, p.316; Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority', pp.91-2

The strongest support for the idea that *kouratores* and analogous officials were the collectors of tribute comes from the only historical account to mention an eastern *kouratoria*. This is the description of the turning of Melitene into a *kouratoria* when the city was annexed by the Byzantines in 934. According to Theophanes Continuatus:

They [the Byzantine army] reduced Melitene to such shortage, that they suddenly captured it, and razed it to the ground, and not only Melitene but also its neighbouring cities and districts which were highly productive and very fertile and <could> yield many other revenues. Having then turned Melitene into a *kouratoria*, the emperor had many thousands of [pounds?] of gold and silver raised annually in revenues from there.¹⁶⁵

Here, the crucial term indicating that many of the *kouratoriai* of the Byzantine east were compatible with a tribute paradigm of local government, is the verb used for the raising revenues: *δασμοφορεῖσθαι*. The principal meaning of *δασμός* in Greek is "tribute".¹⁶⁶

Although no other literary source comments explicitly on the imperial *kouratoriai* in the Byzantine east, there is other unambiguous literary evidence that the payment of tribute was how the imperial authorities most readily conceived of the reward they could expect from the conquest of Muslim regions. This expectation is most clearly stated in the case of the Byzantine military manoeuvres which preceded the fall of Antioch in 969. As this thesis has already demonstrated, the final fall of Antioch to Byzantine control was prefaced by the fortification of key forward

¹⁶⁵ εἰς τοσαύτην στένωσιν τὴν Μελιτινὴν περιέστησαν ὥστε αὐτὴν συντομώτατον ἐκπορθῆσαι καὶ ἕως ἐδάφους καταστρέψαι, οὐ μόνον δὲ ταύτην ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ὁμόρους αὐτῇ πόλεις καὶ χώρας πολυφόρους τε καὶ πιστάτας οὕσας καὶ οἷας πολλὰς παρέχειν προσόδους. ταύτην οὖν τὴν Μελιτινὴν εἰς κουρατωρίαν ἀποκαταστήσας ὁ βασιλεὺς πολλὰς χιλιάδας χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργυρίου ἐκείθεν δασμοφορεῖσθαι ἐτησίως πεποίηκεν Theophanes Con., pp.416-7).

¹⁶⁶ H.G.Liddell and R.Scott (H.S.Jones and R.McKenzie), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968, second edition), p.370

attack bases in the mountains and roads that surrounded the city. From these bases Byzantine commanders were encouraged to raid the countryside around Antioch itself each day, thus persuading the inhabitants within the city to surrender.¹⁶⁷

However, in a tribute-related context, Leo the Deacon's account of the strategic reasoning behind this attritional strategy is particularly striking. In a passage of direct speech which Leo attributes to the emperor himself, Nikephoros Phokas is to be found arguing that the object of his military policy was to compel Antioch to become *tributary (hypospondos)* to the Byzantines.¹⁶⁸

A tribute relationship between centre and locality in the civil administration of the eastern frontier also helps to explain the important but rather ambiguous position of officials described in the historical record as *basilikoi*. Whenever *basilikoi* are discussed by modern historians they are usually attributed with a general role in fiscal and judicial administration. Sometimes they are seen as analogous to *kouratores*. Yet, their role is rarely discussed in detail, and it is widely assumed that they were lower-ranking functionaries subordinate to more senior officials such as the provincial *krites*.¹⁶⁹ However, the position of *basilikoi* on the eastern frontier in the aftermath of the tenth-century Byzantine conquests was of much greater significance than this modest definition implies. Instead, as the careers of two very famous *basilikoi* from the later tenth-century frontier demonstrate, these were the figures on whom the emperor in Constantinople, and even usurpers such as Bardas Skleros, had to depend in order to mobilise the resources of the great former emirates.

¹⁶⁷ See above, pp.229

¹⁶⁸ὥστε καθ' ἐκάστην ἐπεξέλαισι καὶ καταδρομαῖς, καὶ ἐπιτιτηδείων διαρπαγαῖς τὴν Ἀντίοχου ταπεινώσωσι, καὶ εἰς ἀμυχανίαν δεινὴν κατακλείσαντες καὶ ἄκουσαν ἀναγκάσωσι Ῥωμαίοις γενέσθαι ὑπόσπονδον (Leo the Deacon, pp.73-4) [Translation: so that with daily attacks and raids, they [the Byzantine troops] should lay Antioch low by depriving it of essential supplies; and having reduced the city to a state of desperate helplessness, they should compel it against its will to become tributary to the Romans]

One of these *basilikoi* was Kouleïb, whose career is predominantly known from the historical testimony of Yahya ibn Sa'id.¹⁷⁰ He was a Christian Arab and Hamdanid servant who surrendered the fortresses of Barzouyah and Saoune in northern Syria to John Tzimiskes in 975, during that emperor's last great eastern campaign. In return Tzimiskes gave him the title of *patrikios* and the office of *basilikos* of Antioch.¹⁷¹ During the Skleros revolt Kouleïb surrendered Antioch to the rebels, and was appointed *basilikos* in Melitene instead.¹⁷² When Skleros fled to Baghdad in the aftermath of the failure of his revolt, Kouleïb did not go with him. Instead, he retained his position at Melitene. When Skleros returned to the empire from Baghdad in 987, nearly a decade later, Kouleïb still exercised authority in Melitene.¹⁷³

However, it is when other evidence is aggregated with Yahya's testimony, that Kouleïb's role as a lynch-pin of eastern politics and diplomacy becomes particularly manifest. In 981 the Buyid envoy Ibn Shahram travelled westwards from Baghdad to Constantinople, as part of the long-running negotiations between the empire and Adud al-Dawla concerning the captivity in Iraq of Bardas Skleros. On his journey he met Bardas Phokas, the *domestikos of the scholai*, at Charsianon in eastern Anatolia. Among the members of Phokas' party was Kouleïb. In his account of his meeting with Phokas, Ibn Shahram indicates that Kouleïb was the key intermediary between the imperial military high command in the east and Aleppo, the Hamdanid emirate in northern Syria which was a Byzantine client state.

¹⁶⁹ Ahrweiler, 'Recherches', pp.73-4. Cheynet, 'L'apport arabe à l'aristocratie byzantine', pp.141-2, discusses Kouleïb in this light.

¹⁷⁰ According to the spelling of Arabic names in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (the system to which this thesis has usually adhered), the name 'Kouleïb' should be rendered as 'Kulayb'. However, since the form 'Kouleïb' is used by the editors of Yahya ibn Sa'id, I have retained it for ease of future cross-referencing.

¹⁷¹ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.369

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.373

It was Kouleïb, for example, who was able to ensure the annual delivery of the tribute of Aleppo. As a result of these intermediary skills, he alone of Skleros supporters had received a pardon when the first Skleros revolt had collapsed in 979. Moreover, he had been allowed to keep the estates he had been granted by John Tzimiskes in 975.¹⁷⁴

Further signs that Kouleïb was a high profile figure in the frontier world who was well rewarded by authorities at the centre, can be detected in an early eleventh-century monastic chronicle from Melitene, which Michael the Syrian inserted into his history in the twelfth century. According to this contemporary chronicle, Kouleïb, who was also known by his Greek name and title Eutychios the *patrikios*, sponsored the monastery of Bar Gagai near Melitene in 987/8.¹⁷⁵ It is even possible that Kouleïb and his family were so important to relations between the centre, the periphery, and the emirates beyond the empire's eastern border, that they survived the turmoil of the second phase of Skleros insurrection (987-9) and continued in the service of the Byzantine state after 989. The Zacos Collection contains a seal belonging to Bardas the son of Kouleïb.¹⁷⁶

Another *basilikos* of critical political importance at the start of Basil's reign was Obeïdallah, another Arab Christian.¹⁷⁷ In 976 he was *basilikos* of Melitene. By

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.420; Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', p.231

¹⁷⁴ Al-Rudhrawari pp.23-4; see above, pp.260-1

¹⁷⁵ Michael the Syrian, pp.125-6. The date 987/8 is that provided by Michael the Syrian's account. However, according to the much later testimony of the thirteenth-century historian Bar Hebraeus (who used Michael the Syrian as one of his sources) Kouleïb supported Bar Gagai a decade earlier in 977/8. Given that Michael is the more contemporary source, his is probably the account to be accepted. Bar Gagai rapidly became a great centre of Syrian learning. A manuscript from the monastery dated to 994 is to be found at the monastery of Saint Mark in Jerusalem. Another manuscript, now found at Mosul, was copied at Bar Gagai in 1013 (Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques', pp.192, 197)

¹⁷⁶ Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.371; Cheynet, 'Du prénom au patronyme', pp.60-2; Guiland, *Recherches*, p.288

¹⁷⁷ According to the spelling of Arabic names in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the name 'Obeïdallah' should be rendered as 'Ubayd Allah' However, since the form 'Obeïdallah' is used by the editors of Yahya ibn Said, I have retained it for ease of future cross-referencing.

surrendering the city to the rebel forces of Bardas Skleros, he enabled Skleros to sequester the fiscal revenues of the former emirate, and openly declare revolt against the emperor. Still in the service of Skleros, Oubeidallah became Kouleib's successor as *basilikos* of Antioch.¹⁷⁸ Basil II was only able to regain Antioch for the imperial "side" in 977/8 by promising Oubeidallah the position of "governor" for life.¹⁷⁹ Yahya ibn Sa'id's account of Oubeidallah's actions during the civil war at Antioch make it clear that the *basilikos* not only exercised civilian responsibilities, but even some degree of military power. For example, once he had defected to the emperor, Oubeidallah defended Antioch against armed attack by two senior Skleros lieutenants: Sachakios Brachamios and Ibn Baghil. Furthermore, he suppressed a revolt by local Armenians. Although Yahya ibn Sa'id claims that the citizens of the city were his chief source of political support, his ability to beat off attack by leading Skleros commanders such as Brachamios indicates he must also have had some authority over an armed garrison.¹⁸⁰

Yet, while Kouleib and Oubeidallahs' authority as *basilikoi* may have been heightened by the exigencies of civil war, the very broad nature of their jurisdiction is echoed in the responsibilities of other *basilikoi* who exercised power in the former emirates, but who are only known through the sigillographical record. At least three such seals are extant: Chosnis, *basilikos* of Tarsos; John, *krites* of the central Constantinopolitan court of the Hippodrome, *basilikos* of Melitene and the *Armeniaka themata*; and Solomon, *basilikos* of Melitene, and *megas chartoularios* of the main Constantinopolitan tax-collecting bureau of the *Genikon*.¹⁸¹ The wide range of responsibilities exercised by the owners of last two examples, John and Solomon, demonstrate the judicial and fiscal authority of *basilikoi*, competences

¹⁷⁸Yahya, *PO* 23, p.373

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.375-7. The term used by Yahya to denote "governor" is the Arabic "wilaya". Laurent, 'Gouverneurs d'Antioche', pp.231-2 .

which as we have seen were practised by Oubeïdallah and Kouleïb. However, it is worth noting the Constantinopolitan affiliations of the judicial and fiscal offices held by these eleventh-century *basilikoi*, a connection which was absent from the careers of *basilikoi* active in the tenth century such as Kouleïb or Oubedeillah. This development suggests that greater political stability within the empire itself, and peaceful relations with the eastern neighbours during the eleventh century, meant that the key intermediary functionaries on the eastern frontier could increasingly be drawn from Constantinople, rather than from former Hamdanid servants or other local notables.

A brief examination of the ecclesiastical and secular history of northern Syria and Cilicia indicates that the greater use of Constantinopolitan officials in the exercise of intermediate power on the eastern frontier almost certainly began in the last decade of the tenth century, during the reign of Basil II himself. Central to an understanding of this change is the career of Agapios, the later tenth-century patriarch of Antioch, another key figure on the frontier whose authority originally sprang from his ability to mediate between imperial authority in Constantinople and the local populations of the Byzantine east. Agapios' rise to power began during the first Skleros revolt with the death of the incumbent patriarch Theodore in May 976. Motivated by ecclesiastical opportunism Agapios, the local bishop of Aleppo, travelled to Constantinople to persuade the emperor to appoint him as Theodore's replacement. In return he promised to persuade Oubeïdallah, the rebel *basilikos* of Antioch, to declare for the emperor.¹⁸² Despite Agapios' relatively junior status as the bishop of Aleppo, Basil and his advisors were so desperate to regain political

¹⁸⁰ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.378

¹⁸¹ Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.108; *Dumbarton Oaks Unpublished* 58.106.5326 and F928

¹⁸² Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.375-6

control of Antioch that they agreed to this plan.¹⁸³ Agapios returned to Antioch, entering the city secretly. He came to terms with Oubeidallah, and was installed as patriarch in January 978.¹⁸⁴ During the next decade he used the authority he had been granted by Constantinople to secure his own position in the locality. At the heart of Agapios' policy was the promotion of the Antiochene Melkite church at the expense of the Syrian monophysite faith. According to later Syrian historians Agapios burnt the books of Syrian churches, forced local notables to have their children rebaptised as Chalcedonians, and then deployed these converts as local clergy in rural northern Syria.¹⁸⁵

However, Agapios' power as a mediator between locality and centre, living on the periphery of the Byzantine empire was short-lived. Twelve years later in the aftermath of the Phokas revolt, Basil II decided to extricate himself from dependence on local figures such as Agapios. Accused of colluding with the Phokas family, Agapios was summoned to Constantinople and secluded in a suburban monastery.¹⁸⁶ As the emperor's authority strengthened during the 990s, he began to extend his authority even more energetically into the localities. In 996 Agapios was officially deposed. His replacement was a Constantinopolitan, John the *chartophylax* of the Hagia Sophia.¹⁸⁷ Soon John was joined in the east by other Constantinopolitan officials, including his friends and correspondents, Philetos Synadenos, *krites* of Tarsos, and most famous of all, the supreme military commander in the east, Nikephoros Ouranos.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Eli, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, consistently refused to recognise Agapios as patriarch of Antioch on the grounds that he was far too junior to have been granted such a lofty position (Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.378-89).

¹⁸⁴ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.377

¹⁸⁵ Michael the Syrian, pp.131-2

¹⁸⁶ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.428

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp.445-6

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Ouranos arrived in Antioch in 1000/01 as *kraton* of the east with plenipotentiary powers over the whole eastern frontier.¹⁸⁹ At the most basic of levels this was a military position. Yet, in other respects, Ouranos' appointment as plenipotentiary represented an imperial desire to use a Constantinopolitan official to fulfil the intermediary position previously occupied by local functionaries such as the *basilikoi* Kouleïb and Oubeïdallah. Certainly Ouranos was ideally suited to such a wide-ranging role. In addition to his impressive military pedigree, Ouranos was also able to call upon extensive experience in administrative and diplomatic affairs, competences that had been fundamental to the authority of Kouleïb and Oubeïdallah. Ouranos' early professional life had been spent in Constantinople within the imperial palace and the upper echelons of central administration. By 982 he was keeper of the imperial inkstand, a position which required him to become competent in the handling of sophisticated documents including imperial chrysobulls.¹⁹⁰ His knowledge of the administrative practices and court politics of Constantinople was so well-regarded that at some point during the mid- to later 980s, while he was still keeper of the imperial inkstand, he was appointed *epitropos*, or lay guardian, of the Athonite monastery of the Lavra.¹⁹¹ In the exercise of this responsibility Ouranos must have gained valuable experience in acting as an intermediary between the interests of a locality and central government. Moreover, his early career also brought him into contact with the machinations of high politics and diplomacy with Byzantium's eastern neighbours. During the early 980s he was involved in the intense diplomatic

¹⁸⁸ For letters exchanged between John, Nikephoros and Philetos, see Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins, passim*.

¹⁸⁹ See above, p.313

¹⁹⁰ Several of Nikephoros' own letters seem to date from the period when he was still keeper of the imperial inkstand (Ouranos, letters 3-6; Laurent, *L'Administration centrale*, p.102). In his letter to Anastasios, the metropolitan of Laodikeia, he displays his familiarity with the handling of imperial chrysobulls (Ouranos, letter 3). He asks the metropolitan to submit all the chrysobulls of the see for his perusal. It is possible that a seal of Nikephoros, *anthypatos, patrikios* and *epi tou kanikleiou*, may have belonged to Ouranos (Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, no.861).

negotiations with the Buyids which surrounded the exile of Bardas Skleros in Baghdad. He became a close acquaintance of the Buyid envoy ibn Shahram during the latter's mission to Constantinople over the winter of 981/2. When ibn Shahram returned to Baghdad, Ouranos travelled with him as the Byzantine ambassador to the court of Adud al-Dawla. Shortly after his arrival in the Buyid capital, Adud al-Dawla died, and Ouranos found himself, like Skleros, confined to prison.¹⁹² He was eventually released early in 987, the date when Skleros himself returned to the empire.¹⁹³ However, even these relatively barren years may not have been wasted. As a result of his friendship with ibn Shahram and his captivity in Iraq, it is possible that he even learnt some rudimentary Arabic. All these skills would have stood him in good stead for his plenipotentiary role on the frontier in the first decade of the eleventh century.

Moreover, there is clear evidence in both the sigillographical and epistolographical records that Ouranos may not have been the only official from the capital drafted into a frontier role that demanded a full portfolio of competences. After Ouranos was posted to Antioch, he summoned Philetos (possibly Philaretos) Synadenos to Tarsos.¹⁹⁴ Although *krites* of Tarsos is the office attributed to Synadenos in the later eleventh- or early twelfth-century manuscript in which his letters appear, the responsibilities he undertook when he arrived in the east may have extended more widely than those of a judge.¹⁹⁵ If, for example, Synadenos held the same offices indicated on the seals of many other senior officials at Tarsos in the tenth and eleventh centuries, then it is likely that his real responsibilities were as *krites* of

¹⁹¹ Ouranos' appointment must post-date 984 and pre-date 999 (*Actes de Lavra*, pp.19-20, 45-6, 52, and doc. 31; McGeer, 'Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos'. pp.130-1).

¹⁹² Al-Rudhrawari, pp.25-34; Skylitzes, p.327; Yahya, *PO* 23, pp.400-02

¹⁹³ Yahya, *PO* 23, p.420

¹⁹⁴ "Ouranos [the heavenly one] made me come": Synadenos, letter 11. The exact date of Philetos' arrival in Tarsos is uncertain. But he must have been in the east by 1007 since he wrote to Ouranos congratulating him on his victory over the Arabs in this year; see above, p.313.

Seleukeia and *kourator* of Tarsos.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, it is possible that he was the owner of a seal belonging to Philaretos “*Krites* of the East, *Exaktor*, and *Illoustrios*”.¹⁹⁷ Much like the office of *krites*, the office of *exaktor* was concerned with both the provision of justice and the exercise of fiscal responsibility. As both a *krites* and *exaktor*, the owner of this seal clearly exercised a host of judicial and financial competences over a wide geographical area, a formula typical of administration on the eastern frontier. Furthermore, while it is dangerous to read substantive meanings into the elusive literary artefacts which passed between senior officials such as Synadenos and Ouranos, it is possible that an elliptical allusion to the incompatibility of learning and the bearing of arms contained in one of Synadenos' letters to Nikephoros, may reflect the wide range of duties, including military service, that officials on the frontier were expected to undertake in imperial service. If this is so, Philetos implies Ouranos was better equipped than himself:

On the one hand I have lost the capacity to be wise and to be called wise, and on the other, I am completely inexperienced in the bearing of arms, the rattling of a spear, the moving and shooting of an arrow, and the shaking of a spear against the enemy, and as much as is required to make war against the foe - for I am not hardhearted or very daring, but someone undaring and feeble - I have failed at both: for I am now neither wise, nor daring, in the face of the enemy. And so tell me who I am, wise *Strategos*. As for me, what I had I have thrown away, what I had not, I am unable to take hold of, and that which I am, as you see, I have lost.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Synadenos' letters appear in manuscript 706 from the monastery of Saint John on Patmos (Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins*, pp.9-12).

¹⁹⁶ Eustathios Romaios, *krites* of Seleukeia and *megas kourator* of Tarsos (Konstantopoulos, *Molybdoboulla*, no.147a); see above, p.328, n.163 for Euthymios Karabiziotis *exaktor*, *krites* of the Hippodrome and Seleukeia and *kourator* and *anagrapheus* of Tarsos and John Hexamilites, *krites* of Seleukeia and *kourator* of Tarsos.

¹⁹⁷ Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii, no.86.34. The editors believe that the owner of the seal was merely the *krites* of the theme of the Anatolikon on the grounds that the responsibilities of a single judge could not have extended over an area as great as the “East”. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, individuals in both military and civilian offices in the eastern-most regions of the Byzantine empire customarily exercised authority over very large regions indeed.

It is clear from Philetos' self-pitying statement that officials appointed to act as intermediaries on the frontier experienced a profound sense of frustration and bewilderment at the panoply of commitments which greeted them on their arrival from Constantinople. Yet, paradoxically, their trauma is also very strong evidence of the relatively limited nature of the administrative changes set in train by Basil II during the second half of his reign. For while it is true that officials such as Ouranos and Synadenos represented a new Constantinopolitan presence in the locality, nonetheless by acting intermediate plenipotentiaries they continued to exercise the same role once fulfilled by local notables such as Kouleïb and Oubeïdallah. While the appointment of such Constantinopolitan figures indicates that the role of intermediary was subject to greater control from the centre after 1000, there is little sign that their presence represented a profound shift in the governance of the locality at an everyday level. There is no evidence, for example, to suggest that during the second half of the reign of Basil there was any change in the basic tribute relationship between locality and centre. Instead, during the eleventh century, eastern regions continue to be characterised by the lack of seals of civilian officials found elsewhere in the empire. This trend within the sigillographical data militates against the possibility that new fiscal and judicial administrative structures and practices were imposed on the frontier region, or that large numbers of officials from the capital began to arrive in the east to take up junior positions within provincial bureaucracy. Instead, it seems more likely that underneath a thin tier of centrally appointed officials such as Ouranos and Synadenos, the quotidian management of the frontier remained in the hands of indigenous officials.

¹⁹⁸ Synadenos, letter 8

Until further research into the little-studied history of the civil administration of the Byzantine eastern frontier can be undertaken, these conclusions must remain provisional. However, it is worth noting the evidence from a frontier region north of the former Muslim emirates, which suggests that Byzantine administration continued to depend on indigenous officials during the eleventh century. This evidence comes from the Caucasian katepanate of Iberia. During the reign of Constantine Doukas (1059-67), the *katepan* of the east, Bagrat Vxkac'i, introduced a series of tax concessions for the northern Armenian city of Ani. Notice of these arrangements was inscribed on the west wall of the city's cathedral. The inscription itself was written in contemporary vernacular Armenian, and could thus be read by the local inhabitants. More important, the inscription tells the citizens that the will of the *katepan* is to be executed by a series of officials called *tanuter-s*, all of whom are identified as local Armenians: Mxit'ar *hypatos*, Grigor *spatharokandidatos*, and Sargis *spatharokandidatos*. Modern Armenian historians have suggested that these *tanuter-s* were the managers of local economic and fiscal affairs, whose duties resembled those performed by functionaries known as *ra'is* within Islamic towns. That is to say, they acted as the spokesmen for their own communities within different quarters of the city, and were responsible for managing the fiscal relationship between those communities and the local representative of centralised authority.¹⁹⁹ As such they were the key intermediaries around whom a tribute-based system of taxation could operate smoothly.

Although the tax-raising machinery operating at Ani in the reign of Constantine X must be amplified with other examples before it can be unconditionally accepted as typical of Byzantine civil administration on the eastern frontier in the eleventh century, it does offer some support for the idea that the Byzantine presence in these

¹⁹⁹ Yuzbashian, 'L'administration byzantine en Arménie', pp.179-181

eastern regions continued to be typified by a tribute relationship between centre and locality. From the middle of the reign of Basil II onwards, the vital intermediary representatives of the centre in that locality were usually nominees dispatched by Constantinople. Yet, the indirect, tribute-paying relationship over which they presided remained essentially unaltered from arrangements first established in the tenth century. These arrangements appear to have persisted until the arrival of the Turks in the second half of the eleventh century. Thus, successive tenth and eleventh-century emperors, including Basil II himself, acknowledged the logic that in order to exploit the prosperity of the eastern localities, it was essential to utilise local officials.

Conclusion

The long reign of Basil II (976-1025) and his brother Constantine VIII represents the apotheosis of Byzantium as a medieval territorial power. When Basil died in 1025 Byzantium was the most powerful state in the eleventh-century Near East, rivalled only by Fatimid Egypt. Yet, despite its significance to the history of Byzantium, and indeed to the history of medieval Europe, this long reign has attracted very little attention from modern historians. No major analysis has appeared since the publication of Gustave Schlumberger's *L'Épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle* at the end of the nineteenth century.

This dissertation has developed the preliminary stages in the composition of a new analytical study of Basil's reign. Although the compilation of a sustained narrative must be the eventual ambition of this fresh appraisal, this thesis has not been primarily concerned with piecing together a new chronology. Indeed, it has been argued that until a new narrative source in the medieval historical record is discovered, a strictly chronologically-driven analysis is unlikely to expand significantly on the portrait of the reign offered by Schlumberger a century ago. Instead, in a series of six studies, this thesis has looked below the chronological surface of the reign, at the structures and processes of power within later tenth- and early eleventh-century Byzantium. Fundamental to each study has been a keen sensitivity to the potential and limitations of the surviving evidence, both literary and material. In many respects, this thesis has explored how historians should exploit and deploy evidence in the writing of early medieval history, particularly for periods when the surviving sources are extremely fragmentary and heterodox in nature.

The first half of the thesis analysed the medieval historians who report on Basil's reign. This analysis has been predicated on the belief that in order to understand the political history of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries, it was first necessary to establish the background to the historical writings which report on this period. However, rather than devoting only superficial and partial coverage to all the principal medieval historians in question, this historiographical discussion focused on the 'Synopsis Historion' of John Skylitzes, the late eleventh-century text which contains the first Greek narrative appraisal of the entire reign. Three inter-linked studies looked in detail at the text itself and at the contexts in which it was written. Skylitzes' working methods, his use of source materials, his purpose in writing, and his audience were examined. In the course of this investigation it was suggested that Skylitzes' text was compiled in accordance with the interests of an elite audience in the Constantinopolitan court of the emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118). These contexts underpin the text's middling- to elevated language level, its close affiliation with high-style histories, its stress on military valour, and its overwhelming interest in the deeds and pedigrees of leading aristocratic families, especially those which were still politically important at the end of the eleventh century. The Balkan conflicts of the first two decades of Alexios' reign also explain Skylitzes' detailed coverage of earlier Byzantine wars in Bulgaria, especially those of John Tzimiskes and Basil II.

Skylitzes' idiosyncratic, anachronistic, and aristocratic treatment of the Byzantine past reflects the development of elite political culture during the second half of the eleventh century. It illustrates how political action in both the past and the present had come to be expressed in terms of family rivalry. It illuminates how the past was used and abused by the early Komnenoi to justify a contemporary pro-Balkan

policy. Yet, for the historian of Basil's reign, the later eleventh-century concerns which condition Skylitzes' testimony pose significant problems. The aristocratic slant to his text means that it is very easy to misjudge the balance of power within the Byzantine polity during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. The third chapter of this thesis illustrated the extent to which the pro-Skleros source, which underpins both Skylitzes' and Michael Psellos' coverage of the first thirteen years of Basil's reign, distorts the relative importance of the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, overstating the significance of Skleros, and underplaying Phokas. More significantly, Skylitzes' emphasis on the deeds of the aristocrats means that his text seriously underestimates the contemporary authority of the emperor. This marginalisation of the emperor's role is particularly visible in Skylitzes' Balkan coverage.

In order to gain a more accurate view of the structures and processes of power operating within Byzantine elite society during Basil's reign, the second half of this thesis looked beneath the veil of the later eleventh-century Greek historical record at other forms of literary and material evidence. In chapters four to six the main subject matter was the articulation of imperial authority in the eastern half of the empire during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. However, before considering the reign of Basil II itself in detail, two key background contexts were considered. The first of these discussions, dedicated to the economy, demonstrated that all regions in the eastern half of the Byzantine empire experienced a significant increase in prosperity during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The second discussion, devoted to administration, argued that the expansion of the empire's territorial borders across the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains during the tenth century had two principal ramifications: the demilitarisation of the core Anatolian

themes, and the development of a new, mobile, centralised army. However, in both analyses important structural constraints on the penetration of imperial authority into the locality were observed. One limitation was the fact that the Anatolian plateau lacked the demographic and capital resources necessary to repopulate and revivify the economy of eastern Anatolia and the eastern frontier. Another constraint was the expense of the more aggressive Byzantine military enterprises of the second half of the tenth century. Nonetheless, before Basil himself came to the throne in 976, active imperial responses to both these problems were already visible. On the one hand, imperial authority sought to work with, rather than against, the demographic trend, by encouraging non-Greek speaking and non-Chalcedonian communities to settle in the eastern regions. On the other hand, the army was refinanced. Military service in the more prosperous western themes of Anatolia was commuted to a fiscal levy. This tax was then used to subsidise troops on active service in the east.

A lack of written source materials makes it difficult to examine how these tenth-century trends in administrative practice developed during Basil's reign. However, by setting occasional literary references against the much more extensive evidence provided by lead seals, some outlines of the articulation of imperial authority in the east during the later tenth and early eleventh centuries have emerged. In the Anatolian themes the *longue durée* trends of demilitarisation and centralisation continued throughout Basil's reign and into the eleventh century. The extent to which local administration was typified by a civil officials, or military functionaries with civil responsibilities, is particularly conspicuous. By the end of Basil's reign it is clear that the principle underpinning local governance had finally shifted from the provision of defence to the exploitation of resources. However, both

sigillographical and literary evidence suggest that the exploitation of the localities was usually indirect rather than direct, concerned with the raising of taxes rather than with the direct management of assets. There is some evidence to indicate that the state lacked the manpower and the capital resources to administer large amounts of immovable property profitably. As far as Basil's reign is concerned, these observations suggest that despite the rhetoric of his novel of 996, only modest amounts of private land passed into the hands of the state permanently.

In the east, beyond the Taurus and Anti Taurus mountains, Basil inherited a highly fluid political, diplomatic, and military situation. This fluidity demanded a more flexible and *ad hoc* administrative response than has sometimes been acknowledged by Byzantine historians. In terms of military administration, political pressures both within and outside the empire dictated a rapid turnover in senior commanders, and considerable malleability in the duties they were expected to perform. Civil administration was left largely in the hands of local intermediary figures, who supervised a quasi tribute relationship between the eastern periphery and Constantinople. Greater stability of military command was only achieved in the second half of Basil's reign, when a series of diplomatic settlements with Muslim powers brought peace to the eastern frontier. The most important of these settlements was the peace agreement of 1000-01 with the Fatimids of Egypt. These more peaceful conditions also enabled civil administration to be supervised more closely by imperial authorities in Constantinople. However, there is little sign that the fundamental tribute relationship between centre and locality was altered significantly either during Basil's reign, or later in the eleventh century.

Taken as a whole the administration of the Byzantine east during Basil's reign is marked by very conspicuous differences between the Anatolian themes and the eastern periphery. The themes were significantly demilitarised, whereas, even after 1000, the eastern frontier remained a militarised zone. In the sphere of civil administration the themes were typified by the conspicuous penetration of officials from Constantinople into the locality; this Constantinopolitan presence on the eastern frontier was always much less visible. However, underpinning these differences there is a conspicuous common theme. Fundamental to both systems was the willingness of the state to work within practical administrative constraints in order to extract maximum financial gain.

By looking primarily at administrative structures and practices, the second half of this thesis has traced the contours of imperial authority in the eastern half of the empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, in order to understand how that imperial authority was translated into practical government on the ground, future research into the reign of Basil II will have to deal more directly with the use and abuse of that imperial authority by its executors within elite political society. Fundamental to such an investigation will be a detailed understanding of the prosopography of the reign, and an analysis of the structures which underpinned elite authority in this period. In the case of prosopography, the historian must look beyond the Greek historiography of the reign, which as this thesis has shown, is all too often conditioned by the literary, social and political contexts of the later eleventh century. In addition to the testimony of Skylitzes, other literary sources will have to be scoured, and the evidence of lead seals deployed widely. In order to penetrate the workings of elite political society, the research of Jean-Claude Cheynet into the Byzantine aristocracy will be of fundamental importance. However, the most important research will involve more rigorous examination of

those tenth- and eleventh-century texts which reflect on the appropriation and manipulation of imperial power by the servants of the emperor. Such sources include the 'poor' versus the 'powerful' legislation, the will of Eustathios Boilas, the advice manual of Kekaumenos, and the letters of imperial functionaries such as Nikephoros Ouranos, Leo of Synada, and Philetos Synadenos. The broad economic and administrative surveys undertaken in the second half of this thesis should provide the key contexts against which these rather isolated texts can be better understood.

This research remains to be undertaken in the future. However, in these concluding remarks, I would like to outline the provisional picture of political society during the reign of Basil II, which has emerged during the course of this dissertation. In the first place, there is little evidence to suggest that Basil's reign represented an elemental clash between the private interests of the greater families and the public authority of the emperor. That is to say there is little support for the argument first proposed by Michael Psellos, and thereafter expanded by more modern historians, that having suffered the overweening power of a dominant aristocracy for the first thirteen years of his reign, Basil defeated Skleros and Phokas, and then suppressed the greatest families of the empire. Instead, it seems more likely that there was no monolithic class of over-mighty landed magnates, either to challenge the emperor, or to be oppressed by him. With the exception of a small number of families, such as the Phokades and the Maleinoi, elite power was not based on the tenure of private immovable resources. Rather, as the analysis of the Skleros revolt in chapter three indicates, the authority of most members of the political elite stemmed from their position of command within the Byzantine army. The fact that there was no unitary, major landowning class in Byzantium in the later tenth century also explains why there was no wholesale emasculation of the Byzantine political elite

after 989. As chapter five indicated, although Basil confiscated some landed property from his political foes, sequestration was confined to a small number of families. It was used for the purposes of example rather than as a systematic policy. Meanwhile, it is clear that those members of the political elite, whose authority had once been vested in the army, often returned to public duties. This principle is visible in the careers of Romanos Skleros (son of Bardas), Michael Bourtzes and Leo Melissenos, highlighted in the discussion of the katepanate of Antioch in chapter six.

Yet, while control of land was not the principal cause of political convulsion during the reign of Basil, there was still a structural problem within the senior echelons of political society with which the emperor had to deal if domestic insurrection was to be prevented. That structural problem was control of the army. As the third and sixth chapters of this thesis demonstrated, the unstable military and diplomatic situation on the eastern frontier, during the first half of the reign, presented senior army generals with levers of immense political power. Located on the frontier, generals such as Skleros, Phokas, Bourtzes, and Melissenos, regardless of their personal wealth, had access to potent tools, including control of a large mobile army, and the capacity to construct diplomatic alliances with neighbouring powers. While usually used to prosecute warfare against Byzantium's external foes, these tools were all too easy to turn against the emperor in Constantinople. In this context, the key political change of Basil's reign was not the defeat of Skleros and Phokas in 989, but the peace of 1000 with the Fatimids. As long as relations between Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours remained hostile, senior commanders and large armies would be needed to garrison the eastern borderlands. From this 'hot' frontier, another powerful general could always emerge, threatening Basil's authority in Constantinople. However, with peace in the east, this threat was

dissipated. Instead of having to employ experienced army generals, many of whom had much better military records than the emperor himself, Basil could now deploy Constantinopolitan bureaucrats in eastern commands, such as Nikephoros Ouranos and Philetos Synadenos, men with a record of proven loyalty. Meanwhile, the Byzantine field army and its principal commanders could be relocated to the Balkans to fight the Bulgarians under the close tutelage of the emperor himself.

The centrality of the peace with the Fatimids indicates clearly the extent to which the domestic political history of the reign of Basil II was conditioned by the empire's diplomatic and military relations with its geographical neighbours. While this thesis has concentrated on the east, future research must expand to include the Balkans, and above all, Basil's dealings with the first Bulgarian empire of the tsar Samuel Kometopoulos. Only then will it become possible to write the critical narrative appraisal of the reign of Basil II, which has been lacking for so long in the secondary literature of the history of medieval Byzantium.

Appendix

Translation of the *Prooimion* of the 'Synopsis Historion' of John Skylitzes

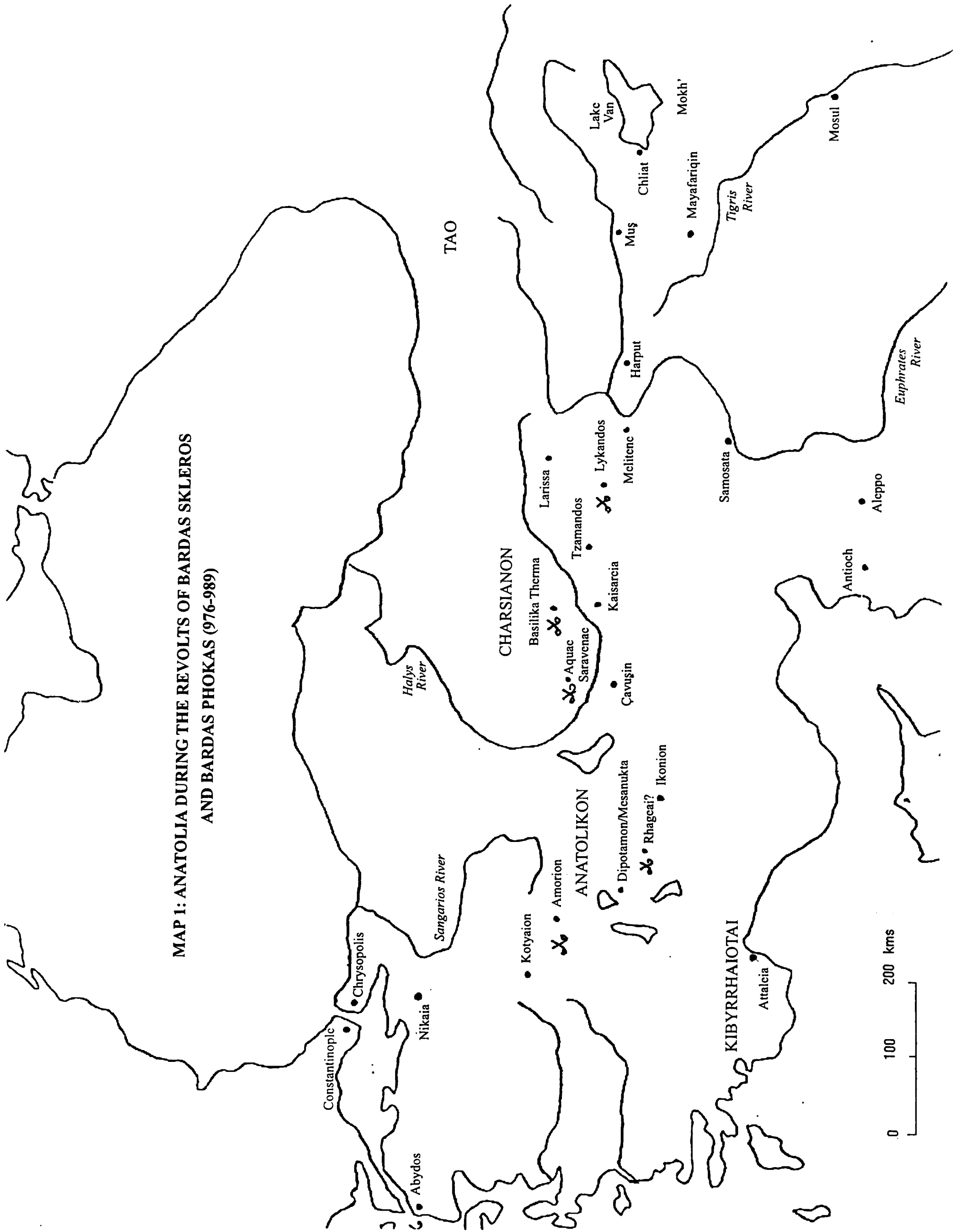
SYNOPSIS OF HISTORIES BEGINNING FROM THE SLAYING OF THE EMPEROR NIKEPHOROS, THE FORMER *LOGOTHETE* OF THE *GENIKON*, UP TO THE REIGN OF ISAAC KOMNENOS, COMPOSED BY JOHN SKYLITZES, *KOUROPALATES* AND FORMER *MEGAS DROUNGARIOS* OF THE *VIGLA*

First the monk George, who also served the most holy Patriarch Tarasios as *synkellos*, and after him the *homologetes* Theophanes, the *hegoumenos* of the Agros [monastery], made an *epitome* of history excellently in the style of the ancients, having very persistently pursued historical books, and having summed them up in a language which was simple and uncontrived, indeed being concerned only with the essence itself of what happened. One of them, that is George, began from the Creation and reached the usurpers, I mean Maximianos and his son Maximinos. The other, that is Theophanes, having made George's end point his beginning, abridged the rest of the chronography, and having arrived at the death of the emperor Nikephoros, the former *Logothete* of the *Genikon*, stopped his account. After him no-one else has dedicated himself to such an enterprise. For some have tried, such as the *didaskalos* Sikeliotēs, and the *hypertimos* Psellos, *hypatos* of the philosophers in our own time, and others in addition to them. But having undertaken the task in a desultory way, they both lack accuracy; for they disregard very many of the more important events, and they are of no use to their successors, since they have made merely an enumeration of the emperors and indicated who took imperial office after whom, and nothing more. For even if they seem to

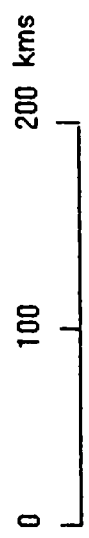
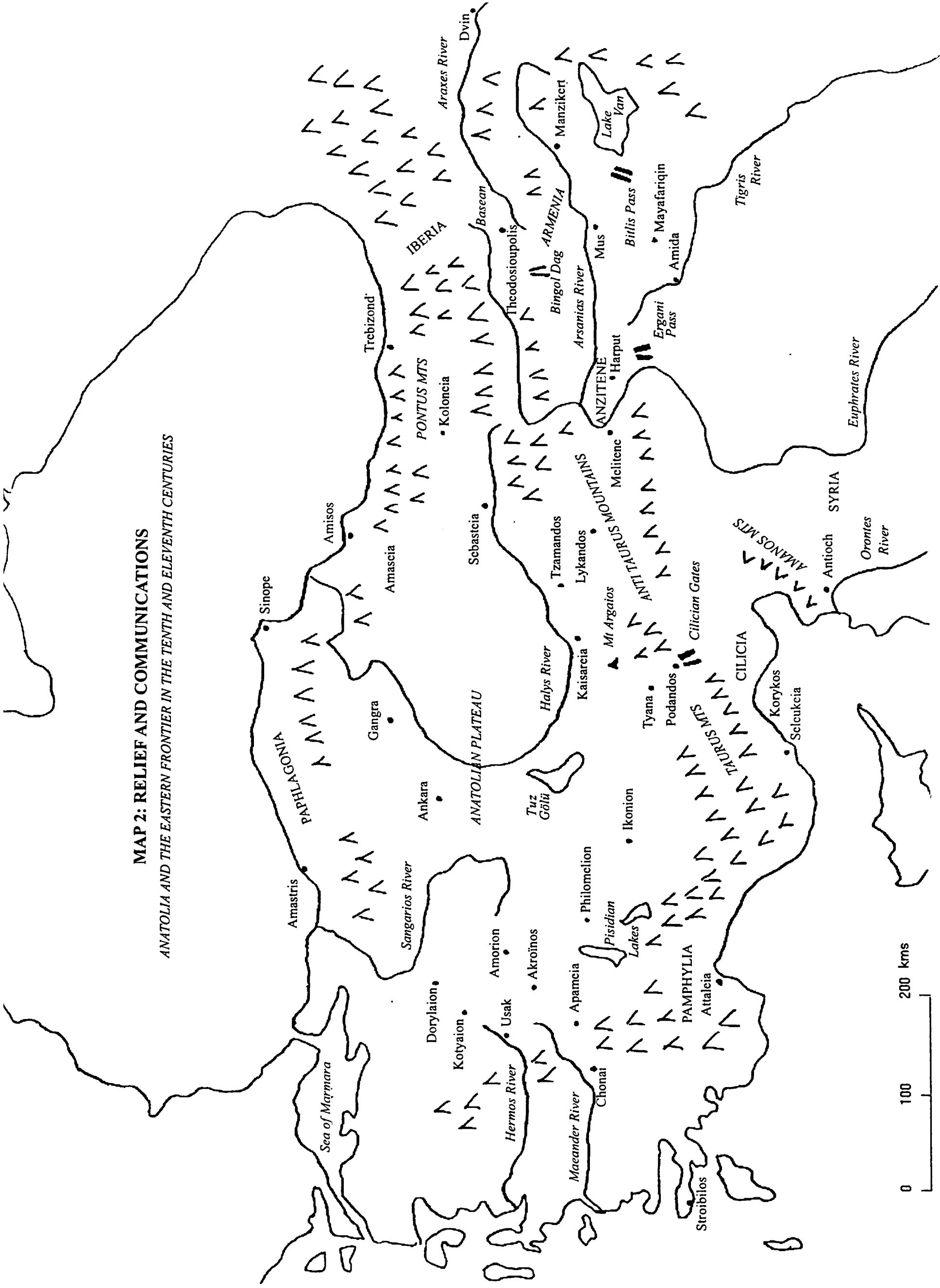
mention certain actions, even then, since they have narrated them without accuracy, they hinder those who chance upon them [ie. later readers] and have not helped. For Theodore Daphnopates, Niketas the Paphlagonian, Joseph Genesios and Manuel, [that is] Byzantines [ie. Constantinopolitans], and Nikephoros the deacon of Phrygia, and Leo the Asian, and Theodore of Side who became *proedros* [ie. archbishop], and his nephew and namesake [Theodore] archbishop of the church in Sebasteia, and in addition Demetrios of Kyzikos, and the monk John the Lydian, each has had his own agenda, the one proclaiming praise of the emperor, the other a *psogos* of the patriarch, another an encomium of a friend; but while each one fulfils his own purpose in the guise of history, each has fallen short of the intention of those aforesaid men inspired by God [ie. George and Theophanes]. For they wrote histories at length of the things which happened during their times and shortly before: one sympathetically, another with hostility, another in search of approval, another as he had been ordered. Each one composing their own history, and differing from one another in their narrations, they have filled the listeners with dizziness and confusion. Having found pleasure in the labour of the aforesaid men [ie. George and Theophanes], we have hoped that a synopsis would be of not inconsiderable profit for those who love history and most of all for those who prefer that which is very easy to that which is more wearisome; [a synopsis which] gives a very shortened account of the events in different times, which is free from the weight of documentation. We have read the histories of the writers mentioned above carefully, and have removed that which was written in a state of emotion or in search of approval, and have disregarded differences and disagreements, and have shaved off whatever we have found which is too close to legend, and have gathered that which is suitable and whatever does not result from rhetoric, and have also added whatever we have learnt from old men by oral testimony. Having put them together into one [unit] rapidly we have left behind for posterity nourishment

which is soft and finely ground in language, so that on the one hand those who are acquainted with the books of the aforesaid historians [Theodore Daphnopates etc.] may have a record by using and approaching this book as a travelling companion - for reading can foster recollection, and recollection can nourish and increase memory, just as in contrast neglect and idleness foster forgetfulness, which Lethe follows, dimming and confusing the memory of deeds completely. [We have also left this nourishment] on the other hand so that those not yet acquainted with histories may have this *epitome* as a guide, and by examining that which is written with a wide perspective may receive a more complete knowledge of what happened. But let me now begin.

MAP 1: ANATOLIA DURING THE REVOLTS OF BARDAS SKLEROS
AND BARDAS PHOKAS (976-989)



MAP 2: RELIEF AND COMMUNICATIONS
ANATOLIA AND THE EASTERN FRONTIER IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

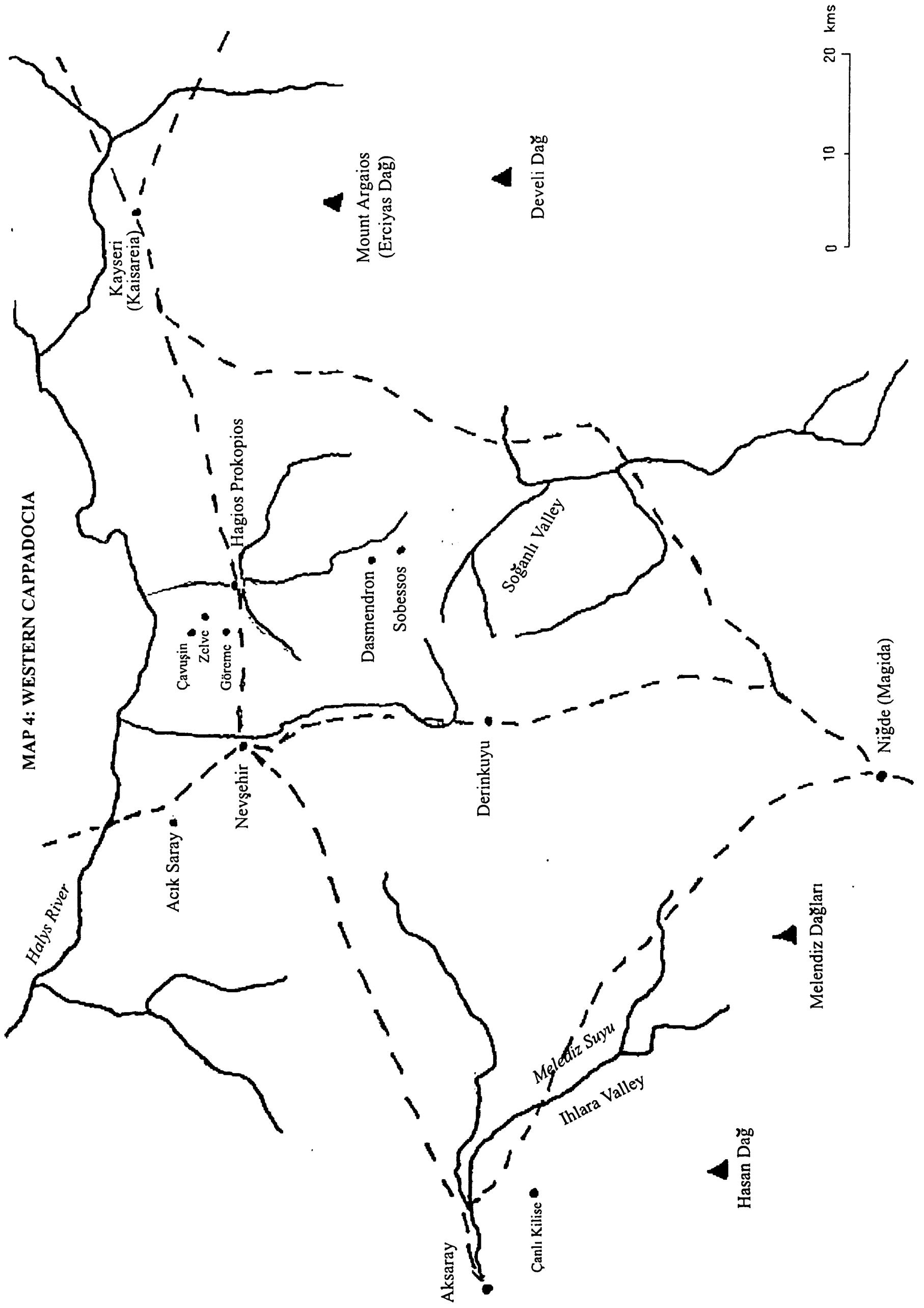


MAP 3: ECONOMY AND TRADE

ANATOLIA AND THE EASTERN FRONTIER IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

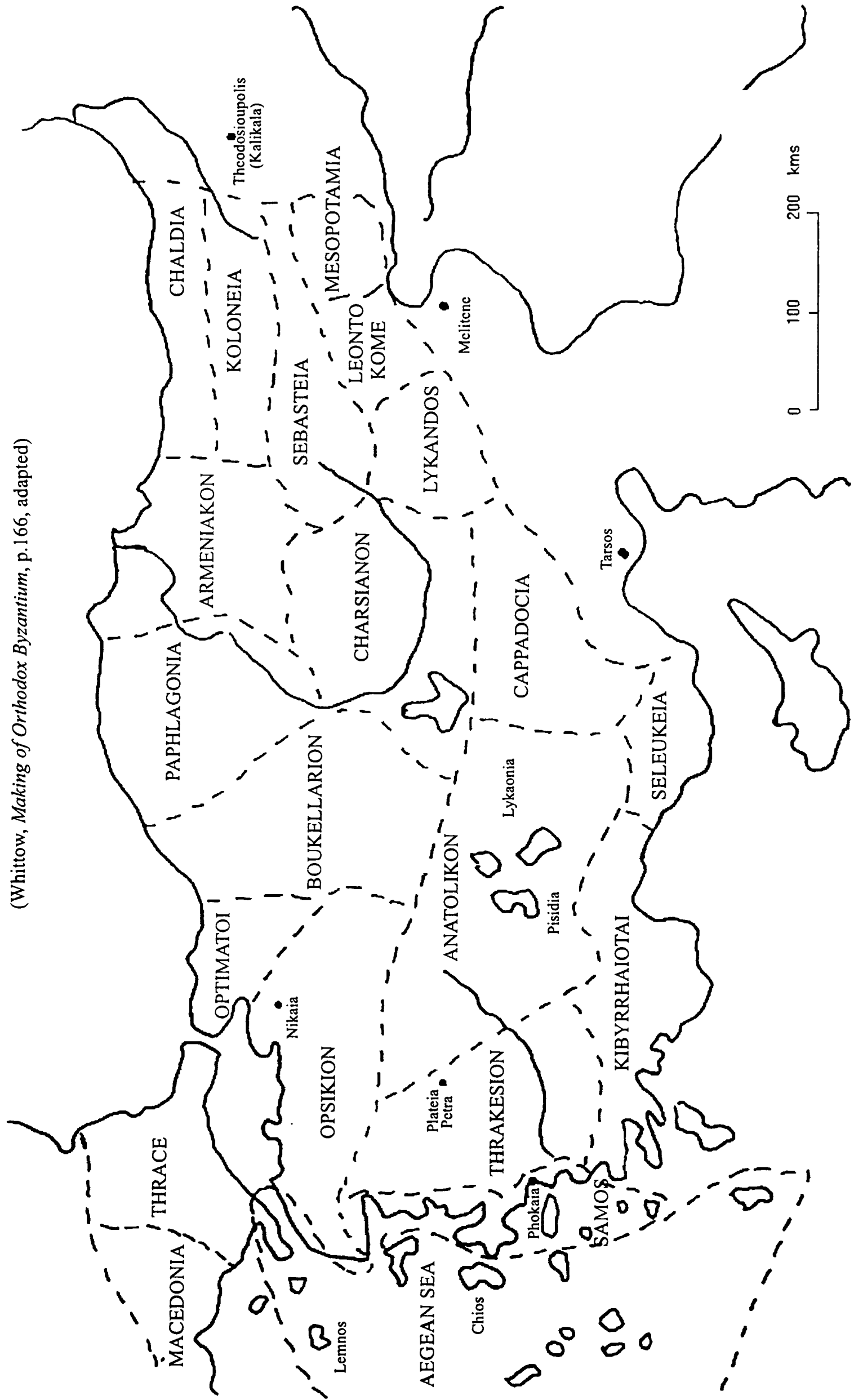


MAP 4: WESTERN CAPPADOCIA



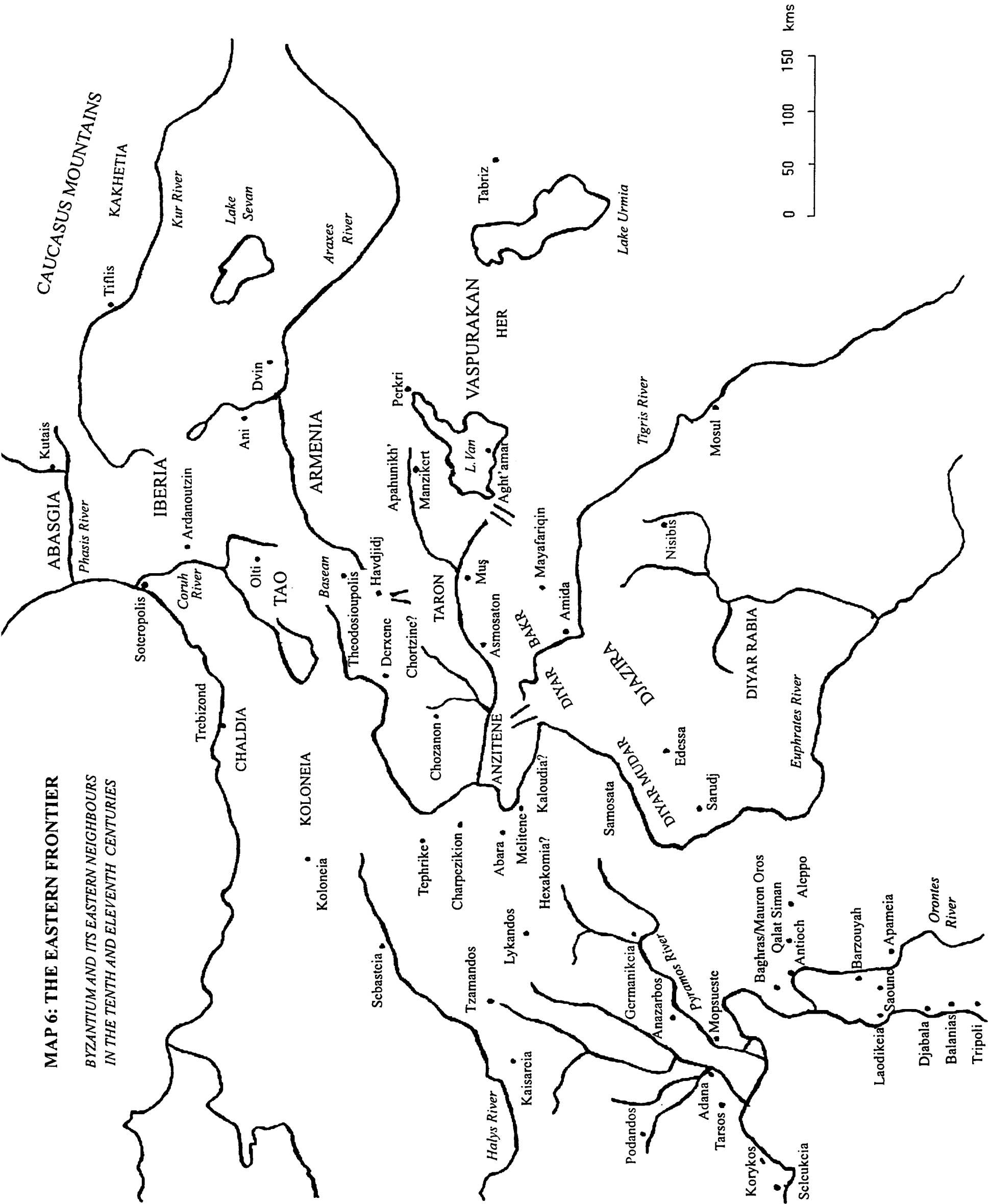
MAP 5: THEMES AND KLEISOURAI OF ANATOLIA c.917

(Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p.166, adapted)



MAP 6: THE EASTERN FRONTIER

*BYZANTIUM AND ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOURS
IN THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES*



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