CHAPTER 1

The Reign of Leo VI

Leo VI the Wise, emperor of the Byzantines 886–912, broke with three centuries of tradition. He was not a general or even a soldier, as his predecessors had been, but a scholar – a second son who became heir apparent through the untimely death of his older brother on the battlefield and gained a throne taken by his father Basil I (r. 867–86) after murdering Michael III (r. 842–67). It was the religious education he gained under the tutelage of the famous and influential Photios (patriarch from 858–67 and 877–86 CE) that was to distinguish Leo VI as an unusual ruler. The argument of this book is that Leo's Christian Orthodox worldview coloured every decision he made; the impact of his religious faith, traced through his extensive literary output, transformed Byzantine cultural identity and influenced his successors, establishing the Macedonian dynasty as a 'golden age' in Byzantium until the early eleventh century.

Leo's father, Basil I, also known as Basil the Macedonian, was forcibly married in 865 to Eudokia Ingerina, the mistress of the emperor Michael III (r. 842–67). Thus upon Leo's birth in September of 866, his parentage was cast under suspicion, a problem that his older brother Constantine, the son of Basil's first wife Maria and the original heir to the throne, did not have.[1] Contemporary chronicles record that Leo was likely the son of Michael, but modern scholars are divided. Either way, the truth cannot be known. The fact that Leo was born under a cloud of uncertainty is the relevant point, because it meant that this unexpected emperor had to contend with issues of legitimacy, yet was unable to rely upon the tradition of imperial strength through military service. The only possibility available to him was the power of religion, and he used it brilliantly to reinforce his authority over the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

[1] For a discussion of Leo's childhood and educational formation, see A. Vogt, 'La jeunesse de Léon VI le Sage', *Revue Historique* 174 (1934), 389–428. See also S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 110–21.

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His reign has mostly been remembered by scholars as one characterized by the appalling moral failure of his tetragamy, particularly hypocritical in that his third and fourth marriages explicitly violated his own legislation. However, this somewhat lopsided view focuses on the sensational at the expense of one of the distinctive aspects of his rule – that is, its theological character. The advice written to Leo by his father after his promotion to heir apparent in 879 indicates that his education was intended to be based largely on the traditions of the Church, because it does not deal with how to be a good emperor so much as it addresses issues of religion.[2] Moreover, scholars have identified Leo as an important ecclesiastical poet, putting him in the same company with John of Damascus and others of a decidedly theological bent.[3] Although Leo cannot be considered a theologian, strictly speaking, because he was not a churchman writing about doctrine as such, his literary output shows that he was interested in spiritual matters. Thus his writings may properly be classified as theological, because they are concerned with the practical application of religious ideals.

Leo was unique because he was unafraid to address areas in which one might normally think he had no business, like military science and preaching, for example. As a non-campaigning emperor with no training or background in military affairs, one would not expect Leo VI to write a military manual, nor might one expect him to write and deliver homilies, since no emperor before (or after) engaged ecclesiastical practice to this degree. Yet his activity as an emperor reveals a canny mind employing a consciously ideological programme of propaganda, a strength of will that when tested against the Church came out the victor, and a dedication to dynasty-building combined with a solid faith in the sovereignty of God and the teachings of the Church. The writings attributed to Leo VI illustrate his notion of his role as emperor; that is, as a legislator, a spiritual leader, and an organizer concerned with right order. They also reveal a

[2] The two parainetic texts, dated to 879 and 886, have been published in the *Patrologia Graeca* 107: xxi–lvi, lvii–lx. For a critical edition of the first text, see K. Emminger, 'Studien zu den griechischen Fürstenspiegeln. II. Die spät-mittelalterliche Übersetzung der Demonicea, III. Βασιλειου κεφαλαια παραινετικα', dissertation (Munich, 1913), 23–73. For a modern scholarly discussion of both texts, see A. Markopoulos, 'Autour des *chapitres parénétiques* de Basile 1er', in *Eupsychia: mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1998), 2: 469–80; reprinted in *History and Literature of Byzantium in the 9th and 10th centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), xxi, 469–79. See also the conclusions of Antonopoulou on the theological character of Leo's education in T. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, 1997), 5.

[3] See the discussion in Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Leo VI*, 19–20. See also N. G. Popov, *Императоръ Левъ VI. мудрый и его царствованiе въ церковно-историческомъ отношенiи* [The emperor Leo VI the Wise and his reign, from a historical-ecclesiastical point of view] (Moscow, 1892, reprinted 2008), 228–32.

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creative mind that thought deeply about the survival of the Byzantine polity and the promotion of his own family 'mythology', both priorities that were also clearly visible in the extensive literary activities of his son, Constantine VII.

Most important, Leo was a ruler who was convinced of the importance of strong imperial authority, but it is difficult to discern whether his religious convictions were the source or the result of his views on rulership. In any case, this monograph intends to show how these two commitments were intertwined in the philosophy and activities of this unusual emperor.

Leo's Literary Output

Leo's erudition found expression in the great number of writings he produced – orations, military texts, legislation, epistles, homilies, hymns, poetry, and even a work intended for the pastoral care of ascetics.[4] The question of whether the emperor wrote the literary works attributed to him remains difficult to prove definitively; his *modus operandi* as an author is even more obscure and must therefore remain largely conjectural. Indeed, no scholarly commentator on Leo's writings has attempted to describe it. However, the contours of the corpus – the choice of vocabulary and subject matter – indicate that this unusual emperor had a clear influence in shaping the literature attributed to him. In any case, there is little doubt that he engaged in scholarly pursuits, including calligraphy.[5]

For example, his consistent use of Θεός rather than τύχη in the *Taktika* reveals his prioritizing of Christian vocabulary over pagan, even when the sense might be similar. Conversely, in a show of erudition he chooses sometimes to use classical Greek words in homilies in places where one might expect perhaps a more biblical word, like using the classical word for 'errors' (ἀμπλακήματα) instead of 'sins' (ἁμαρτία) in his religious poetry. Even the lost collection of Leo's epistolography is, similarly to his other works, described in Skylitzes' chronicle as extremely didactic and written in an archaic manner, perhaps to reflect his sophistication.[6] Leo sometimes inserted himself into his writings in innovative ways, making

[4] A good and comprehensive summary of Leo's literary output can be found in Antonopoulou, The Homilies of Leo VI, 16–23.

[5] *Life of Blasios*, 666D–E in H. Delehaye, ed., *Acta Sanctorum Novembris Tomus IV* (Brussels, 1925), 656–69. For Leo's interest in books, see A. Markopoulos, 'Ἀποσημειώσεις στὸν Λέοντα ΣΤ τον Σοφο', in *Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1994), 193–201.

[6] Skylitzes 34 in J. C. Cheynet (ed.), *Jean Skylitzes, Empereurs de Constantinople*, tr. B. Flusin (Paris, 2003), 162.

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himself the focus of the piece, by, for example, relating his own story or personal reactions in his orations for the feast day of Elijah and the funeral of his parents.[7] For these reasons, among others, Kazhdan has called Leo a 'controversial' and 'innovative experimenter' in his literary endeavours; it is this quality across the Leonine corpus that perhaps best indicates his authorial signature.[8] The present study will highlight Leo's distinctive articulation of his religious worldview through his literary output, with a particular focus on his *Novellae* (or new laws), some homilies, and pre-eminently, his military manual.

Between Justinian I (r. 527–65) and Leo VI, every Byzantine emperor had personally faced Byzantium's enemies on the field of battle. Since the defeat of Heraclius's forces at the Yarmuk River in 636, every Byzantine emperor had been forced to reckon with the formidable threat of Muslim aggression. Until Leo, none of them had ever thoughtfully considered in any extant writing how to counter that threat. His riposte was in the form of a military manual entitled τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδοσις, or more commonly, *Tactical Constitutions* (hereafter *Taktika*). This book is long, comprising a prologue, 20 chapters or constitutions (διατάξεις) and a lengthy epilogue.[9] A modern critical edition and English translation was published in 2010; the accompanying commentary appeared in 2014.[10]

Why did Leo VI, a non-campaigning emperor, write an innovative military manual? The answer suggested in this book is that he did it not only to bolster morale and revivify military science, as he understood it, but to strengthen the motivation of his generals in terms of their Christian faith commitments, particularly when fighting against the armies of the caliphate. It is nonetheless curious that he would choose to revive an apparently defunct genre of imperial writing, and even more surprising that he would introduce innovations, which Byzantines characteristically and explicitly denigrate.[11] Despite the usual protestations that he was

[7] For more on the homilies, see Chapter 8.

[8] A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, ed. C. Angelidi (Athens, 2006), 65.

[9] Leo's text appears to use only three sources: the first-century *Strategikos* of Onesandros, mostly in the first part; the early second-century *Taktike theoria* of Aelian for definitions; and the late sixth-century *Strategikon* of Maurice for the arrangement of the material. All three are edited into a manual that reflects Leo's ideological worldview. The most original and interesting constitutions are the final three on enemies (including for the first time 'Saracens'), naval warfare, and collected maxims.

[10] G. T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2010). J. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2014).

[11] On the Byzantines' horror of νεοτερισμός, see H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–4 (1969–70), 15–38.

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merely compiling ancient documents to restore a lost body of knowledge, Leo presents a fresh interpretation of Byzantium's ongoing military difficulties.[12] Moreover, he gives an unprecedented solution that involves the employment of Orthodox Christian beliefs and language. His focus was on religion in addition to strategy, and this combination was effective because it reanimated Byzantine Orthodox identity and articulated a blueprint for Christian soldiers in battle. Chapters 2–4 explore these prescriptions for Byzantine warfare and the perspective of Leo's *Taktika.*

Leo's judicial writings indicate an emperor concerned with organizing, codifying, and properly applying wisdom – both his and that of his predecessors – to improve the Byzantine empire. Although Justinian (r. 527–65) promulgated more laws than any other Byzantine emperor (*c.*600), from Justinian to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, emperors established only about 300 new laws.[13] Leo VI wrote 113 of those, making him the most active imperial legislator of the empire's final eight centuries. Not since Justinian had an emperor addressed such a wide range of contemporary issues with a view to improving the functioning of the state. By far his greatest contributions are the legal works. The most encyclopaedic endeavour of his reign, the six-volume *Basilika* was a revision of the Justinianic code, begun by Basil I. Leo also wrote 113 new laws, the content of which reveal his earnest desire to 'cleanse' government and society of the corrupt and obsolete.[14] Chapters 5 and 6 address the content, scope, and significance of Leo's legislative output in the *Novels*.

In the homilies, Leo's view of his role as the spiritual leader of the empire is plainly evident. Antonopoulou observes that the epilogues 'always call for God's protection on the chosen emperor and his people and ... the emperor conceives himself as responsible for the people's spiritual guidance'.[15] The *Book of the Eparch*, a manual for the prefect of Constantinople, details the administration of urban guilds and is conventionally attributed to Leo

[12] On the Byzantines' combination of mimesis and innovation, see H. Hunger, 'The Reconstruction and Conception of the Past in Literature', in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers* (New Rochelle, NY, 1986), 510.

[13] M.-Th. Fögen, 'Legislation in Byzantium: A Political and a Bureaucratic Technique', in A. Laiou and D. Simon, eds., *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 54.

[14] The title of Leo's book containing the 113 novels reveals his purpose: Λεόντος ἐν Χρίστῳ ἀθάνατῳ παντῶν βασιλει εὐσεβούς βασιλέως Ρωμαϊῶν αἱ τῶν νόμων ἐπανορθωτικαι ἀνακαθάρσεις. Literally: 'Leo, in Christ the immortal king of all, pious emperor of the Romans, The purifications for correcting the laws.' For further discussion, see J. Shepard, 'Byzantium in Equilibrium, 886–944', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 1999), 3: 553.

[15] Antonopoulou, The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI, 43.

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VI.[16] Of the many lists that detail relative status in the Byzantine empire, only the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos, promulgated under Leo VI, carried the weight of law by imperial decree – no other such text known to modern scholarship has received such a firm confirmation.[17]

The diversity of his literary production reveals Leo the scholar, a man who fittingly earned the epithet 'the Wise' even during his own lifetime. Wisdom, in the biblical worldview of the Old Testament, is closely allied with law-giving. The wisdom of Solomon, for example, was granted as a gift from God and is illustrated by his wisdom in adjudicating legal disputes.[18] It has been argued that the Macedonian dynasty, in attributing wisdom to Leo, was presenting him as a new Solomon to Basil I's David.[19] Most Byzantine emperors embraced the role of David, a military man whose kingship was based on victory in warfare as well as divine blessing.[20] Basil I drew the parallel based on his rise from obscurity (David the shepherd boy, Basil the stable boy), his accession to the throne after an unpopular king (Saul, Michael III), and the death of his firstborn as an expiation for murder (Uriah, Michael III), leaving his second son to succeed him as 'the Wise' (Solomon, Leo).[21] Like Solomon, Leo was a lover not a fighter, and embraced the role of Solomon as equally biblical, equally powerful, and equally kingly.

As a wise king in the mould of Solomon, therefore, Leo exemplified the role of legislator. This is how he presents the *Taktika* as well. Leo himself did not view this work as a book to be read with mere theoretical interest, but rather as a set of binding regulations, a manual with prescriptive and legal force. In the prologue, he states clearly that the military leaders addressed

[16] The text is formally attributed to Leo in the prologue, calling it Διατάξεις Λέοντος. J. Koder, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* (Vienna, 1991).

[17] N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles: introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire* (Paris, 1972), 28.

[18] Solomon asked for 'a discerning heart to distinguish between right and wrong' which is essentially wisdom for administering justice (1 Kings 3:9).

[19] C. Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'image du pouvoir dans l'art byzantin à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne (867–1056)', *Byzantion* 57 (1987), 441–70. See also P. Magdalino, 'The Bath of Leo the Wise and the "Macedonian Renaissance" Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial and Ideology', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 97–118.

[20] A classic example is Leo's grandson, Basil II, as depicted on the frontispiece of his psalter in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice (Cod. Marc. gr. 17). A. Cutler, 'The Psalter of Basil II [part 2]', *Arte Veneta* 31 (1977), 9–15.

[21] On Basil's identification with David, see A. Markopoulos, 'Constantine the Great in Macedonian historiography', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 159–70. On Leo's identification with Solomon, see S. Tougher, 'The Wisdom of Leo VI', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 171–9.

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in the book are not free to choose which constitutions to apply and which to disregard; the entire work is to have the force of legislation.[22] Predictably, everything Leo writes is to be accepted as imperial instruction, not suggestion, and the language of obligation that he uses makes this clear.[23]

Scope of Argument

Leo VI's innovative focus on religious motivation emerged from a ninth-century context in which Islam continued to present a challenge to Byzantium. By the mid–tenth century, momentum had shifted towards a Byzantine advance.[24] The main objective of this study is to explore the development, uses, and limits of Christian religion as a vital force in Byzantine cultural identity, highlighted in part by changing relations with Muslims. In this light, it is concerned with intellectual history, with militarized politics and an analysis of the viscera of behaviour between Christianity and Islam, and in particular, the development of a consciously Christian political identity in Byzantium. The body of scholarship which approaches Byzantine–Arab relations by taking account of religion has traditionally done so retrospectively, through the lens of the Crusades, viewing the Byzantine use of religious language as a kind of holy war, but this conclusion rests on assumptions that one might argue are not borne out by the Byzantine understanding of Christian faith and practice.[25] Nowhere does a political or military leader in Byzantium call the adherents of Orthodox Christianity to rise up against unbelievers, to forcibly convert them, or to kill them if they do not convert, so that they might gain a spiritual benefit as a result of engaging in this sort of armed conflict.[26] Although religion was employed

[22] *Taktika,* prooimion, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 677C. Ὥσπερ οὖν ἄλλον τινὰ πρόχειρον νόμον ὑμῖν, ὡς εἴρηται, στρατηγικὸν τὴν παροῦσαν πραγματείαν ὑπαγορεύοντες προσεχῶς τε καὶ ἐπιπόνως ἀκούειν ὑμῶν παρακελευόμεθα. Dennis, *Taktika*, 6, lines 60–4.

[23] P. Magdalino, 'The Non-Juridical Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI', in S. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 169–82; J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études sur Léon VI' *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), 229.

[24] E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995). J. D. Howard-Johnston, 'Studies in the Organisation of the Byzantine Army in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries' (University of Oxford, unpublished DPhil thesis, 1971), 188.

[25] The most recent example here would be the latter half of the excellent volume edited by J. Koder and I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion* (Vienna, 2012), especially Kolia-Dermitzakis's contribution.

[26] In fact, whenever Byzantine rhetoric approached this, they quickly reversed themselves out of an unwillingness to be like their Muslim enemies in this way. J. C. Cheynet, 'La guerre sainte à Byzance au Moyen Âge: un malentendu', in D. Balou and Ph. Josserand (eds.), *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte. Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin (XI–XIIIe siècle)* (Toulouse, 2006), 13–32.

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to serve political and military goals, it was shown ultimately to have a clear limit in the Byzantine *mentalité* that stopped short of true holy war.[27]

As one would expect of a state engaged in continual warfare on various fronts, the early medieval Byzantine empire was highly militarized. The consensus of scholars has been that this militarization was undertaken for the primary purpose of protecting Byzantium from conquest by eastern Arabs, themselves newly inspired by the rise of Islam.[28] Indeed, the tsunami of Islam in the seventh century resulted in removing Byzantium as a regional superpower and relegated it to 'a medium sized regional state based on Constantinople, fighting a dour battle for survival'.[29] Most historians have stressed mainly that Byzantium adapted tactical and governmental structures from late antiquity to meet the threat. The cultural factors that kept the army and indeed the Byzantine state from disintegrating in the face of repeated Arab raids have not been as closely examined. Byzantium was a culture steeped in the Orthodox Christian religion, which harnessed both people and emperor to the service of a distinctively Christianized Old Testament deity. It is their religious orientation that was most influential in their culture; war was always seen as a necessary evil. Religion was not a tool in making war. Rather, war was suffused with religious ideas, just like daily life. The role of faith in Byzantine political thinking has been underestimated, and particularly its influence in warfare.[30]

Features of Leo's Reign

At the accession of Leo VI in 886, the Byzantine empire enjoyed peace with all their neighbours except the Arabs.[31] To the north, the Bulgars were ruled by Boris-Michael (r. 852–89), who had converted to Christianity in

[27] Holy war is here defined as offensive warfare proclaimed by a religious authority and undertaken for the purpose of effecting not only a physical or political change, but also a spiritual change in either those practising it or in their opponents.

[28] A. Pertusi, 'La formation des thèmes byzantins', in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress,* I (Munich, 1958), 1–40 (Reihenfolge); G. Ostrogorsky, 'Korreferat zu Pertusi, La formation des thèmes byzantins', in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress,* I (Munich, 1958), 1–8 (Korreferate).

[29] M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), 96.

[30] See for example, A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); A. Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton, 2014); J. Herrin, *Margins and Metropolis: Authority Across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, 2013); D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2006).

[31] For more on the historical background of the reign of Leo's predecessor, see Basilikè N. Blysidou, *Ἐξωτερική πολιτική καί ἐσωτερικές ἀντιδράσεις τήν ἐποχή τοῦ Βασιλείου Α΄.* ἔρευνες γιά τόν ἐντοπισμό τῶν ἀντιπολιτευτικών τάσεων στά χρόνια 867–886 [Ιστορικές Μονογραφίες 8] (Athens, 1991).

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the 860s and inaugurated a new era of peaceful relations with Byzantium. In the west, Italy and Sicily were still nominally under the authority of Constantinople, but trouble was brewing in the form of ascendant Arab sea power. To the east, continual skirmishing with the Arabs along the frontier became increasingly characteristic of the region. But for the first decade or so of Leo's reign, relations with the Arabs were a minor irritant, as his attention and military resources were in demand elsewhere, to the north and west.[32]

The Balkans were to prove troublesome for the first decade of Leo's reign. In 889, Boris-Michael, the Bulgarian king, abdicated, leaving a vacuum of leadership until his younger son, Symeon, took power in 893. Destined to become the greatest ruler of the medieval Bulgarian kingdom, Symeon was driven by a restless ambition. Shortly after he came to power, hostilities broke out between the Bulgars and the Byzantines, ostensibly over a commercial dispute involving a decision made by Leo's highest-ranked advisor, Stylianos Zaoutzes.[33] What followed was a 'disastrous and humiliating war'.[34] Leo recalled distinguished general Nikephoros Phokas from Calabria to take command of the Byzantine defences. Symeon invaded Byzantine territory in 894 but was thwarted by rearguard attacks from Magyars answering the cry for help from their Byzantine allies. Symeon was forced to concede a truce, but subsequently enlisted the aid of the Pechenegs from the steppes north of the Black Sea and decisively defeated the Byzantines, led by Leo Katakalon, in 896 at Bulgarophygon in Thrace, 160 kilometres west of Constantinople. As terms of the peace thereafter (which was to last only 17 years), Byzantium was under obligation to the Bulgarians to pay annual tribute.[35] It was only after this that Leo was able to turn his attention to the east, and indeed, he did not compose his main treatise on military affairs, the *Taktika*, until after the peace with the Bulgars had been finalized.[36]

[32] For a fuller discussion of general relations between Byzantium and its neighbours, see Whittow, Making of Byzantium; Tougher, *Reign of Leo VI*; and A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2, part 2, tr. and rev. M. Canard (Brussels, 1968).

[33] Ostrogorsky summarizes: 'Two Byzantine merchants had been given the monopoly of the Bulgar trade … and had removed the Bulgarian market from Constantinople to Thessalonica and very much increased the duty.' G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999), 256. J. Shepard, 'Bulgaria: The Other Balkan "empire"', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 1999), 3: 567–85.

[34] P. Magdalino, 'Saint Demetrios and Leo VI', *Byzantinoslavica* 51 (1990), 200.

[35] For a general discussion of relations between Constantinople and the Bulgars, see Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 270–98.

[36] The *Taktika* mentions the war with the Bulgars, but no other Byzantine battles after that, providing a *terminus post quem* for the manual of 896 or 897. See Haldon, *Commentary,* 59–60, who discusses

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The eastern frontier legacy Leo inherited from his father Basil I was generally one of weakness, with a few bright spots. From 860 onwards, Arab raids on Byzantine lands were joined by the Paulicians, a Christian sect of Armenian origin – considered heretical by Chalcedonian Christian Byzantines – who had established themselves in the 840s on the Upper Euphrates. They raided as far as Ephesos on the west coast in 867 and were not decisively defeated until 872.[37] The Armenian Bagratuni princes were somewhat easier to persuade, despite their earlier participation in the sack of Amorion in 838.[38] In August of 884, Ashot I was crowned king of Armenia (albeit with a crown given by the caliph) and declared to be a 'beloved son' of Basil I.[39]

Basil I also personally led several campaigns against the Muslims in the east, achieving a few limited victories. In 873, he led an expedition that brought victories over Samosata and Zapetra but failed at Melitene.[40] In 878, he led the army to victories at Germanikeia and Adata, and oversaw the final defeat of the Paulicians at Tephrike. These were duly celebrated in Constantinople with celebrations that perhaps outweighed their importance. He attempted to spin his patchy successes on the eastern frontier into more significant triumphs, celebrating victory parades on at least two occasions, with the 879 parade featuring the display of Muslim captives, various liturgical chants at ten different stations along the triumphal route, and a ceremonial greeting from the patriarch.[41]

McCormick has noted that both celebrations included the obligatory entry through the Golden Gate and a procession from there to the Forum of Constantine, punctuated by acclamations from the people. At the Forum, the emperor (accompanied by his son Constantine) changed from military garb

evidence for original composition no later than 904. See also Dennis, Taktika, 452. Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La mort de Théophano (10 nov. 896 ou 895)' *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 62 (1969), 13–19; reprinted in P. Karlin-Hayter, *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), ch. 11.

[37] A. Lesmüller-Werner and H. Thurn (eds.), *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae 14 (Berlin, 1978), 86.

[38] *Genesios, On the Reigns of the Emperors* III.13, 47, tr. A. Kaldellis (Leiden, 2017). Greenwood says this was a 'rare instance of active service by Armenian forces against Byzantium'. T. W. Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours (600–1045)', in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 349.

[39] Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours', 353.

[40] *Theophanes Continuatus*, 268, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838); P. Lemerle, 'L'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure', *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1969), 108.

[41] J. F. Haldon (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: Three Treatises on Imperial Expeditions*, Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae (Vienna, 1990), Text C, lines 724–807 (pp. 140–7). See the extended discussion in M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 212–26.

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to robes and walked from there to the Hagia Sophia for a eucharistic liturgy.[42] A new feature of this liturgy involved the patriarch Photios crowning the emperor with a crown of victory in a thinly veiled act of ecclesiastical approval for the hegemony of the usurper.

However, these 'victories' faded against the grim losses that befell Byzantium in the waning years of Basil I's reign. The Byzantine army was defeated at Melitene in 882 and crushed at Tarsus in 883, losing the Domestic of the Scholai as well as the *strategoi* of the Anatolikon and Kappadokian themes to fatal wounds.[43] The fortress of Melitene on the plateau west of the Anti-Taurus mountains remained an Arab base, along with Tarsus, for launching raids against Byzantium. From 882 until 891, the emir of Tarsus, Yāzāman al-Khādim, launched not only land attacks on Byzantium, but he was also 'renowned for the raids of his naval squadrons'.[44] The city was therefore viewed as a primary threat to Byzantine defences both by land and by sea. In the *Taktika*, Leo specifically refers to the menace posed by Tarsus, Adana, and other towns of Cilicia that served as forward bases for Muslim attacks.[45]

The Arab geographer Kudama, writing in the 930s but using earlier material, indicates that the Arabs mounted three raids each year against the Byzantines, in late winter, mid spring, and for several months in the summer.[46] According to other Arab historians, annual raids on the Byzantines formed a regular feature in the medieval Muslim frontier calendar.[47] These annual raids demanded Leo's attention for most of his reign; combined with the naval raids of Muslim pirates, this military challenge provoked the composition during the 890s of his ground-breaking military manual, the *Taktika*.[48] Leo also created several new eastern themes and *kleisourai* in a bid to organize the defences of the empire more effectively. He cultivated relations with the Bagratuni

[42] Cf. *De ceremoniis* 1.96; A. Moffatt and M. Tall (eds.) *Constantine Porphyrogennetos, The Book of Ceremonies,* Vols. 1–2 (Canberra, 2012), 438. McCormick, *Eternal Victory,* 156–7.

[43] *Theophanes Continuatus*, 286–8. *Al-Tabarī, History of Al-Tabarī* 270, tr. P. M. Fields (New York, 1987), 37: 143–4.

[44] J. Pryor and E. Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006), 62.

[45] *Taktika*, Constitution 18.125, *Patrologia Graeca* 107.976B. Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.119, pp. 480–2.

[46] E. W. Brooks, 'Byzantines and Arabs in the Time of the Early Abbasids', *English Historical Review* 15 (1900), 730.

[47] Notably Al-Baladhuri (*c.*868), Ibn Wadhih or Al-Ya'kubi (873), Al-Tabari (915), and the work known as 'Kitāb al-'Uyun', or the 'Book of Springs' (late eleventh century).

[48] Dating of such a long text is difficult, but there is reason to believe it was begun in the 890s if not finished until *c.*904. See Haldon's discussion of the dating, including three firm chronological references in the text itself (*Commentary*, 59–66).

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princes of Armenia, sending gifts, appointing *kleisourarchs*, receiving prisoners, and interceding on their behalf with other client rulers.[49] In order to strengthen the eastern frontier, he also sought the support of a number of Armenian *strategoi*, among them the highly successful Melias, promoted to *kleisourarch* of Lykandos, and Manuel, from the mountains north of Melitene with his four sons Panktratoukas, Iachnoucas, Moudaphar, and John.[50]

The eastern frontier was not the only theatre of conflict with Muslim Arabs demanding attention in the late ninth century. Sea-based attacks on Byzantine territories in the Aegean as well as farther afield in the Mediterranean continued to escalate, later becoming one of the primary challenges of Leo's reign. Muslim naval supremacy had been established at the famous Battle of the Masts (Dhat al-Sawari) off the Lycian coast in 655, when the emperor Constans II barely escaped with his life.[51] That rout was foretold in a dream, according to Theophanes, where the emperor dreamed on the night before battle that he was in Thessaloniki. This was interpreted to mean, by way of a pun, 'Give victory to another' (Θὲς ἄλλῳ νίκην).[52] By the ninth century, the Byzantines had to reckon with more than imperial dreams. According to al-Bukhārī, the famous hadith scholar (810–70), Muslim sailors who died fighting the Byzantines would receive double the divine reward available to land-based soldiers who made the same sacrifice.[53] If true, this would have had an impact on the morale of Muslim sailors and may have contributed to the rising incidence of warfare with the Byzantine navy.

[49] For details and a fuller discussion, including relevant bibliography, see Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours', 353.

[50] *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio,* ed. G. Moravcsik, tr., R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington, DC, 1967), §50, 120–5, 152, 156. For more on ties between the Macedonian dynasty and Armenians, see Eleonora Kountoura-Galake, 'The Armeniac Theme and the Fate of its Leaders', in S. Lampakes (ed.), *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th cent.)* (Athens, 1998), 27–38.

[51] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6146, in C. Mango and R. Scott (eds.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), 482. The universal chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233) describes the religious behaviour on both sides during that battle, with the Muslims spending the night reciting verses from the Qur'an, while the Byzantines rang bells. C. J. Tornberg (ed.), *Ibn al-Athīr. Kitāb al-Kāmil fi'l-Ta'rīkh (The Perfect Book in History)*, 12 vols. (Beirut, 1967), 3: 58.

[52] *Theophanes Continuatus*, 482.

[53] Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Jāmi as-Sahīh*, ed. Ludolf Krehl (Leiden, 1864), 2: 199–200. For more on the importance of morale in naval warfare manuals both Byzantine and Arab, see V. Christides, 'Two Parallel Naval Guides of the Tenth Century: Qudāma's Document and Leo VI's Naumachica. A Study on Byzantine and Moslem Naval Preparedness', *Graeco-Arabica* 1 (1982), 51–103.

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Ever since the loss of Crete in 827, the threat of Arab pirates had been a concern for the Byzantines. Arab pirates based on Crete, as well as in Sicily and southern Italy, ravaged the Mediterranean, raiding Dalmatia in 872. In 873, the Byzantine admiral Niketas Ooryphas engaged them off Kardia at the head of the Gulf of Saros, destroying 20 ships.[54] Syracuse was attacked in 869 and 873, finally falling to the Arabs in 878 after a nine-month siege; its population was massacred.[55] In the 880s, Basil I sent his best general, Nikephoros Phokas, to regain control of southern Italy,[56] and attempted to invade Sicily in 888, but was defeated at sea.[57] He created new naval themes to counter the Muslim sea-based threat.[58] However, these measures appear to have been largely ineffective, and Byzantine vulnerability to seaborne warfare visibly increased, despite Basil's efforts. Theophanes Continuatus reports Basil's awareness of the Arab threat from the sea, claiming that the emperor knew an Arab fleet was being built in Egypt and Syria to attack the Byzantine capital. Thus he prepared a fleet to defend Constantinople; at the same time, he provided land-based work for the sailors to prevent a slide in discipline. They were employed building the palace chapel dedicated to Elijah the Tishbite, one of the biblical figures adopted by Basil as divine patron.[59] Thereafter, he remarks that the Arab spy from Syria returned home to report the futility of attacking and therefore the Arab fleet was not launched.[60]

But the growing threat of sea-based attack became a major concern for Leo VI as well. A *strategos* of the maritime theme – itself a recent innovation – was taken prisoner by Arab pirates based on Crete when the island of Samos was raided in 891.[61] In 898, a fleet from Tarsus destroyed a Byzantine fleet, 'capturing numerous ships and beheading 3000 seamen'.[62] This significantly damaged Byzantium's sea-based defences, allowing Muslim ships to attack at will until the fleet could be rebuilt. The Arabs

[54] *Theophanes Continuatus* v.61, 312. Skylitzes 21.181–23.183; Cheynet, *Empereurs,* 152–4. Cf. John Wortley (tr.), *John Skylitzes. A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge, 2010), 175–7.

[55] Theodosios the Monk, Letter, C. O. Zuretti (ed.), 'La espugnazione di Siracusa nell' 880', in E. Besta (ed.), *Centenario della nascità di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910), 165–73.

[56] H. Grégoire, 'La carrière du premier Nicéphore Phocas', in *ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ εἰς Στιλπωνα Π. Κυριακιδην* (Thessaloniki, 1953), 232–54.

[57] *Theophanes Continuatus* v.71, 312–13.

[58] H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer, la marine de guerre, la politique, et les institutions maritimes de Byzance au VIIIe–XVe siècles* (Paris, 1966), 96–9.

[59] *Theophanes Continuatus* v.68, 312. Skylitzes 35.158; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 132. 1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 2:11 for the story of Elijah.

[60] *Theophanes Continuatus* v.68, 312. Skylitzes 35.158, 132.

[61] Skylitzes 9.175; Cheynet, *Empereurs,* 146.

[62] Pryor and Jeffreys, Age of the Dromon, 62. *History of Al-Tabarī* 285 (Fields, 38: 73).

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held Malta and Syracuse, and in August 902 Taormina, the last Byzantine foothold on Sicily, fell to the Arabs, effectively ending Byzantine rule. The Aegean islands and coastal towns were also vulnerable to Arab raids, and in 902, despite stiff resistance, the wealthy city of Demetrias on the coast of Thessaly was destroyed. In the spring of 903, the island of Lemnos also fell, with many of its inhabitants taken as prisoners by the Arabs. Between 909 and 916, inscriptions indicate that the sea walls at Attaleia on the southern coast of Asia Minor were strengthened, with an inner wall added specifically to defend against Muslim pirates.[63]

The late eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes, using a hostile source, writes that Leo continued the practice of his father and used the sailors of the Byzantine fleet as manpower for his building projects in the capital; he blames this preoccupation with building for the failure of the Byzantine fleet to prevent the loss of Taormina.[64] Whether or not this is true, it is still the case that Leo was aware of the threat and moved to address it by strengthening the Kibyrrhaiot maritime theme, promoting naval officers, and devoting an unusual chapter in his military manual to the tactics of naval warfare: the famous Constitution 19.

Ironically, the two most famous admirals of the Arab fleet, Leo of Tripoli and Damianos (emir of Tyre),[65] were both Greeks who had converted to Islam while prisoners of the caliphate.[66] It was they who led the naval expeditions that did the most damage to the Byzantine empire. In the summer of 904, an Arab flotilla of 54 vessels entered the Dardanelles to approach Constantinople, the beating heart of Byzantium. Along the way, Leo of Tripoli sacked Abydos, a well-fortified customs post near the Byzantine capital. The anxiety of Constantinople's inhabitants was assuaged only when the Arab ships turned aside before the massed Byzantine fleet without giving battle. The Byzantines, naturally, credited their deliverance as a decision of God, but Christides thinks the 'attack' on Constantinople

[63] F. Trombley, 'War, Society and Popular Religion in Byzantine Anatolia (6th–13th Centuries)', in S. Lampakes (ed.), *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th centuries)* (Athens, 1998), 125–7.

[64] Skylitzes 21.181, 152. Theophanes Continuatus, who is generally more positive about Leo VI, does not make this comment, but it is well known that Leo continued his father's campaign to repair old and construct new churches in the capital. For the relevant bibliography on Leo's church-building activities, see S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, 118 n.61.

[65] Skylitzes 33.191; Cheynet, *Empereurs,*161.

[66] D. Frendo and A. Fotiou (eds. and trs.), *John Kaminiates, On the Capture of Thessaloniki* (Perth, 2000), §24, 43. Leo of Tripoli is known in Byzantine sources as 'Leo Tripolitis' or 'Tripolitis, a former citizen of Attaleia'. (*Theophanes Continuatus* 366.14; Skylitzes 21.182, 153) In the Arabic sources, he is called Ghulam Zurafa, 'servant of Zurafa'; Zurafa was governor of Tripoli from 863. *History of Al-Tabarī* 283 (Fields 38: 34).

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was just a diversionary tactic.[67] Their primary target, he argues, was always Thessaloniki, situated on the Via Egnatia and endowed with a large port. It was a wealthy and important hub of commercial and cultural life, second only in prestige to Constantinople. Moreover, the Arabs had received information from Byzantine captives that the city had no sea walls and was therefore vulnerable to attack.[68]

News that an attack on Thessaloniki was imminent spurred Leo VI to send, according to Kaminiates, not only one but two generals to oversee the city's defences.[69] Although they had prior warning and attempted to build a sea wall as well as a porporella,[70] lack of time meant that neither was finished by the time the Arab fleet arrived. The city fell after only three days, on 31 July 904. A bloodbath ensued, with the Arabs taking purportedly 20,000 prisoners and vast amounts of booty. Al-Tabarī reports 5000 Byzantines killed, 4000 Muslim prisoners freed, 60 ships captured, and 1000 gold dinars received as booty by each Arab sailor.[71] The threat posed by the Arab fleet was real and the devastating sack of Thessaloniki in 904 proved it.[72]

From every direction, Byzantium was challenged by Muslim raiders for the entire length of Leo VI's reign. Shepard notes the seriousness of the threat from the eastern frontier as well as from the sea:

> In many ways the vigorous jihad waged by the ghazis of the Tarsus region, like the burgeoning piratical fleets operating from Syrian and Cretan ports, were signs of the increased wealth and military capability available to freebooters and true believers of various stripes at the interface between the imperial and Islamic dominions.[73]

[67] *Theophanes Continuatus*, 366–8. V. Christides, 'The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea. Piracy and Conquest', *Byzantion* 51 (1981), 78; V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984), 161.

[68] Kaminiates, §16, 48–9. Kazhdan views Kaminiates's account of the sack of Thessaloniki to be a fifteenth-century composition. See A. Kazhdan, 'Some Questions Addressed to the Scholars Who Believe in the Authenticity Of Kaminiates' "Capture of Thessalonica"', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 71 (1978): 301–14. His arguments have been convincingly refuted by P. Odorico, *Jean Caminiatès, Eustathe de Thessalonique, Jean Anagnostès: Thessalonique, Chroniques d'une ville prise* (Toulouse, 2005), 14–24.

[69] Kaminiates, §17–18, 28–31.

[70] This is a low wall, built in the water of a harbour, designed to prevent ships from approaching the city sea walls. At Thessaloniki, it was being constructed from pagan tombstones. Cf. *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture*, tr. M. H. Morgan, 2nd ed. (New York, 1960) XI.xvi.9.

[71] *History of Al-Tabarī* 285 and 291 (Fields 38: 73 and 148).

[72] For a fuller account of Arab–Byzantine naval encounters under Leo VI, see A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1 (Brussels, 1950), 157–81.

[73] J. Shepard, 'Equilibrium to Expansion (886–1025)', in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 496.

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Leo undoubtedly planned a two-pronged response, following his own counsel in the *Taktika* by launching retaliatory attacks by land and by sea.[74] Two prominent *strategoi*, Andronikos Doukas and Eustathios Argyros, were sent to the eastern frontier in reprisal for the 904 sack of Thessaloniki, achieving 'numerous victories over the Hagarenes',[75] including at Marash in 904, Tarsus in 905, and Aleppo in 906. The effect of these victories on Byzantine morale is visible in the polemical letter of Leo Choirosphaktes, which cited them as evidence of the virtues of Christianity over Islam.[76] The land attack stalled when Andronikos Doukas defected to Baghdad in 907, after being discovered in (or perhaps enticed into) a conspiracy against Leo VI.[77] He subsequently converted (or may have been forced to convert) to Islam, but died not long afterward, so that the Byzantine empire lost a successful and popular military leader.[78]

Leo also mounted a massive naval attack on Arab sea bases in Syria, Cyprus, and Crete. These campaigns were partly successful, but failed to regain Crete for the Byzantines. Among the bright spots in the naval record, Himerios, *logothete* of the fleet, won a brilliant victory over the Arabs in the Aegean in October of 905. He also had a decent run of raids on the Syrian coast in 910, but failed to take Crete in 911.[79] On the voyage home, however, Himerios and his imperial fleet were crushed by Leo of Tripoli and Damianos in a battle off the island of Chios in spring of 912.[80] He subsequently arrived in the capital city late in the spring of 912 after the death of Leo VI.

Leo VI died on 12 May 912, leaving the empire in the hands of his less capable brother Alexander. Leo has a mixed reputation among

[74] *Taktika*, Constitution 18. 138–40, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 980C–D. Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.130–122, pp. 486–8.

[75] Skylitzes 24.183; Cheynet, *Empereurs,* 155.

[76] R. J. H. Jenkins, 'Leo Choerosphactes and the Saracen Vizier', *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 8 (1963), 167–75; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas, Choirosphactes and the Saracen Vizir', *Byzantion* 35 (1965) 475–81. The letter also cites the naval victory of Himerios in 906.

[77] *Theophanes Continuatus*, 371.19–373.11; *Vita Euthymii*, 74.4–76.5; 78.28–31; 82.21–23, ed. P. Karlin-Hayter (Brussels, 1970). Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Revolt of Andronicus Ducas', *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), 23–25. D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968), 17–20. See also M. Canard, 'Deux episodes des relations diplomatiques arabo-byzantines au Xe siècle', *Bulletin des Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas* 18/19 (1949–50), 51–69.

[78] For a fuller story, including bibliography and an account of the dating issues, see D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai,* 16–21.

[79] *De ceremoniis*, 651–664. R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Date of Leo VI's Cretan Expedition', *ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ εἰς Στιλπωνα Π. Κυριακιδην* (Thessaloniki, 1953), 277–81. For further discussion and relevant bibliography on whether the primary target of the 911 expedition was Crete or Syria, see J. Haldon, 'Theory and Practice in Tenth-Century Military Administration. Chapters II, 44 and 45 of the *Book of Ceremonies*', *Travaux et Mémoires* 13 (2000), 202 n.1 and 240–2.

[80] Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1, 196–216.

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Byzantinists. Some have condemned him as incompetent in military affairs, because the historical record appears so dismal. For example, Vasiliev harshly declared that 'à l'époque de Léon VI … la politique byzantine dans ce domain a subi un échec complet'.[81] However, Patricia Karlin-Hayter, one of the staunchest defenders of Leo VI's military acumen, claims that he improved the Byzantine navy to the degree that it was able to counter Muslim naval aggression: 'The naval expeditions, for all the great losses, prevented the Mediterranean from being a Saracen lake. They did not prevent the Saracens from descending again and again in destructive raids. But the Saracens were unable to stop the Byzantines from doing much the same.'[82] Although the record appears bleak, it is true that Byzantium maintained a presence on the Mediterranean, forcing Muslim fleets to reckon with them, even if they could not prevent their depredations.

On the eastern frontier, too, a largely successful foreign policy obtained. Mark Whittow has noted that

> The real achievement of the years between 871 and Leo VI's death in 912 are not to be found in the occasional long-distance raid to sack an Arab city … but in the steady transformation of the frontier zone so that by 912 the Arabs had been pinned back behind the Taurus and Anti-Taurus, while at the same time the Armenian clans who dominated the mountains had been turned from clients of the Arabs into clients of the emperor.[83]

Tougher ascribed Leo's foreign policy challenges to bad luck,[84] while Karlin-Hayter concluded more positively, 'The overall balance is that some territory was added to the Empire, a number of small states were induced to enter more closely the Byzantine sphere of influence, conquests of the preceding reign were consolidated and the frontiers strengthened.'[85] This assessment seems, on the whole, accurate. More than what Leo did, however, what he wrote in the *Taktika* helped to reinforce Byzantine political identity as a Christian state engaged in a battle of great significance against a Muslim aggressor. The analysis that follows seeks to identify Leo's contribution in terms of Byzantine military morale and to uncover the message of the *Taktika* as a whole: that the way to revitalize military science was through a more deliberate articulation of Byzantine Christian identity,

[81] Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1, 218.
[82] P. Karlin-Hayter, 'When Military Affairs Were in Leo's Hands', *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), 39.
[83] Whittow, *Making of Byzantium,* 314–15.
[84] Tougher, *Reign of Leo VI*, 166.
[85] Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 29.

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epitomized by the ideal general.[86] In the decades that followed his reign, the Byzantine empire flourished not only politically, but culturally, in what was to become a remarkable revival, due in part to the influence of this emperor who was known for his divine wisdom (σοφία) as well as the more classical virtue of ruling intelligence (φρονήσις).[87]

Historiographical Scholarship

Modern scholarship of the Christian East typically embraces a bifurcated approach in that it produces either theological or historical studies, but few if any works that synthesize both. Although few would hesitate to affirm the inextricability of Islamic religion and politics, there is a curious reticence about these connections when it comes to Byzantium, despite its status as a closely related contemporary and indigenous Abrahamic religion of the Middle East. This book will argue that the same inextricability of faith and government existed for the Christian empire of the Byzantines. Contrary to Runciman's long-established thesis, first put forward in 1977, that the theocratic constitution of the Byzantine empire remained unchanged for 11 centuries,[88] this book intends to show that Leo VI, more than any other emperor before or after him, reshaped the ideals of 'the Byzantine theocracy' through his writing, his editorial choices, and the extent of his literary output.

This bifurcation of emphasis – an approach that explores either historical or theological themes but not usually both – holds true for published research on the highly unusual emperor Leo VI as well. There are only two studies of his reign, neither of which was intended to provide a comprehensive survey. The first was written more than a century ago by Nikolai Popov, *Императоръ Левъ VI. мудрый и его царствованіе въ церковно-историческомъ отношеніи* (*The emperor Leo VI the Wise and episcopal relations in his reign*) (Moscow, 1892). It was recently republished in Moscow in 2008, reflecting renewed interest in this era of Byzantine ecclesiastical history among a younger generation of Russian scholars. The second was written 20 years ago by S. Tougher, entitled *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997). This very useful study is generally descriptive and covers a broad range of political topics. While both

[86] See more detailed discussion of this in Chapter 4.

[87] On *sophia*, see J. Meyendorff, 'Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting Approaches to a Complex Theme', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), 391–401. On phronesis, see D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), 84–5.

[88] S. Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge, 1977).

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of these works mention Leo's lengthy military manual, the *Taktika*, neither undertakes an in-depth look at the content or significance of the text, nor its theological arguments. Nor do they address in detail other literature attributed to Leo VI, like his legislation, his *Novellae*, or his particular exposition of the idea of the Byzantines as 'chosen people'.

However, scholars have to a large extent explored areas that do impinge directly on issues relevant to Leo's reign in the historical context of early medieval Byzantium. For example, contact between Byzantium and the Arabs has been extensively studied. Kennedy's work on *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* discusses social as well as political changes and is particularly useful in assessing differences between Byzantium and Islam during the period of the 'Abbasid caliphate and its tenth-century successors.[89] Canard's studies on Arab–Byzantine relations explore military, commercial, and some religious contacts between the two powers.[90] El Cheikh has widened the scope with a general description of Arab views of Byzantium.[91] Mavroudi's study on the translation of a Greek dream book into Arabic and back into Greek reveals the mutual interests of ninth-century intellectuals in both the caliphate and Byzantium.[92] In an article on intellectual contact between Byzantium and the caliphate, Magdalino rather emphatically concludes that ninth-century intellectuals in Constantinople 'learned nothing from their encounter with the Arab world'.[93] John Meyendorff has briefly sketched Byzantine views of Islam from a theological perspective.[94] Sidney Griffith has analysed the apologetic writings of Arab Christians under the 'Abbasid caliphate, bringing to light the ways that Christians and Muslims countered one another's truth claims in the early ninth century.[95] Most studies have focused primarily

[89] H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 2nd edn (London, 2004).

[90] M. Canard, 'Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 35–56. See also D. Obolensky, 'Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges', in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIVᵉ Congrès International des études byzantines*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1974) and N. Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xᵉ–XIᵉ siècles et le *Taktikon de l'Escorial*', in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIVᵉ Congrès International des études byzantines*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1974).

[91] N. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

[92] M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and its Arabic sources* (Leiden, 2002).

[93] Paul Magdalino, 'The Road to Baghdad in the Thought-World of Ninth-Century Byzantium', in Leslie Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* (Aldershot, 1998), 195–213.

[94] J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine Views of Islam', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 113–32.

[95] S. H. Griffith, 'Byzantium and the Christians in the world of Islam', *Medieval Encounters* 3 (1997), 241–2; 'The Prophet Muhammad, His Scripture, and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century', in *La vie du prophète Mahomet* (Strasbourg, 1983), 99–146; 'Theodore Abu Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian

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on diplomatic, commercial, or intellectual contact between the caliphate and Byzantium. Apart from Griffith, whose work focuses on solely Arabic sources, none appears to have considered theological differences, or how these may have affected other kinds of interaction. This study will focus on Byzantine sources, mainly in Greek, mining them for evidence of Byzantine attitudes towards Arabs, and in particular towards Arab observance of Islamic principles, contrasting them to Christian ideals of the same period. The analysis of Leo's military manual presented in the following chapters will show that the Byzantines drew stark distinctions between Christian and Islamic piety, and connected Byzantine Orthodoxy – especially where the emperor was concerned – with success in warfare. However, the connection between religion and military practices in Byzantium inevitably turns scholars to discussions of holy war.

Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki's extensive 1991 study sees in Byzantium a unique brand of holy war, different to Western Crusades or Islamic *jihad*, yet nonetheless holy war. It rests on 'this *Kaiseridee* … [whence] originates the competence of the emperor to proclaim such a "holy war", a war that was a political and not an ecclesiastical affair, as it was in the medieval west'.[96] As this study will show, holy war may indeed rest on a valid *Kaiseridee*, but this was not the case in Byzantium, where no emperor had the spiritual authority to issue such a call to arms. Kolia-Dermitzaki connects the Byzantine *Kaiseridee* with the authority to proclaim holy war, which she defines as offensive, despite the Byzantines' own view of these wars as defensive. The definition of holy war is in fact so different to what the Byzantines pursued that she has to change it to resemble Byzantine practice more closely in order to apply the term to Byzantium. Her book is interesting because it is the only full-length study of Byzantine 'holy war', but she does not attempt any assessment of the effectiveness of the concept in terms of military success. Even her 2012 reassessment of these ideas, focused primarily on making a comparison between Western Crusades and the military actions of the Byzantines, concludes that since there is

Writer of the First Abbasid Century' (Tel Aviv University: annual lecture, 1992); see also Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter, Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau, 1930); S. Pines, 'Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem Kalam and to Jewish Thought', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 5 (1976), 115.

96 Cf. A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine 'Holy War': The Idea and Propagation of Religious War in Byzantium* (Athens, 1991), 187f. See the later development of her thought in A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, '"Holy War" in Byzantium Twenty Years Later', in J. Koder and I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion, Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)* (Vienna, 2012): 121–32.

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no widespread agreement on the very definition of holy war, it is difficult to assign the label to Byzantium. However, her analysis provides a lucid account not only of the variations in definition offered by well-known scholars, but also a nuanced description of Byzantine warfare as a 'particular kind of Holy War [that is a] subcategory of Just War'.[97] This application of Tyerman's dictum that 'all holy wars are just, but not all just wars are holy'[98] is interesting, but assumes the truth of the dictum; on the contrary, it can be shown that some holy wars are entirely unjust. Even Tyerman notes that 'Byzantine warfare remained a secular activity, for all its divine sanction, never a penitential act of religious votaries.'[99] The present study, while disagreeing with Kolia-Dermitzaki that the Byzantines practised even a sort of holy war, will analyse not how Byzantium pursued war but why and what impact their religion had on Byzantine militarized politics.[100]

Those scholars less focused on religion have customarily approached Byzantine military history from a purely functional perspective, studying its development,[101] organization,[102] logistics,[103] and

[97] Kolia-Dermitzaki, '"Holy War" in Byzantium Twenty Years Later', 132. Haldon also does not see holy war as a Byzantine category, *Commentary*, 367.

[98] C. Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (London, 2007). Tyerman's definition of just war is conditioned on a view of justice according to the warrior who fights it, but this seems dubious because it makes an absolute concept function in an arbitrary way.

[99] Tyerman, God's War, 35.

[100] Related studies include J.-Cl. Cheynet, 'La guerre sainte à Byzance au moyen Âge: un malentendu', in D. Baloup and P. Josserand (eds.), *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte. Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin (XIe–XIIIe siècle), Colloque international de la Casa de Velásquez, Madrid 11–13 avril 2005* (Toulouse, 2006): 13–32; T. Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire' *Byzantion* 68 (1998), 194–221; V. Laurent, 'L'idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantine' *Revue historique du sud-est européen* 23 (1946), 71–98; N. Oikonomides, 'The Concept of "Holy War" and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories', in T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1995), 62–86; G. Michaelides-Nouaros, 'Ὁ δίκαιος πόλεμος κατὰ τὰ Τακτικὰ Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ', in *Σύμμικτα Σεφεριάδου* (Athens, 1961), 411–34; M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

[101] E. McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors* (Toronto, 2000); Magdalino, 'The Non-Juridical Legislation of Leo VI'; James Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), 75–100.

[102] Howard-Johnston, *Studies in the Organisation of the Byzantine Army*; W. Treadgold, 'Notes on the Numbers and Organisation of the Ninth-century Byzantine Army', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21 (1980), 269–88; J. Haldon, 'The Organisation and Support of an Expeditionary Force: Manpower and Logistics in the Middle Byzantine Period', in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium at War (9th-12th c.)* (Athens, 1997), 111–51.

[103] J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (London, 1999), 99–106; J. Haldon, 'Theory and Practice'. On the Roman road network and its use for the army, see J. Haldon, 'Roads and Communications in the Byzantine Empire: Wagons, Horses, and Supplies', in John Pryor (ed.), *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades: Proceedings of a Workshop*

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financing.[104] Others have examined the daily operations and discipline of the Byzantine army but they have most often taken a comparative approach that assesses differences to the pagan Roman past, simply noting the religious symbols related to Byzantine practice, but not analysing their theological significance in any detail.[105] Others have delineated military prayers and liturgies, noting the ways in which these practices aligned with Eastern Orthodox Christianity, without discussing how these patterns contrasted with other religious traditions.[106] Developments in tactics and strategy to explain the victories of the tenth century have been explored by Alphonse Dain,[107] Gilbert Dagron,[108] and, more recently, George Dennis[109] and Eric McGeer,[110] but this is only one part of the picture. Tactics, however well designed, do not work if soldiers are unwilling to execute them. Like city walls, military strategy no matter how expertly constructed will fail if soldiers cannot be induced to put their lives on the line without giving way to fear.

Beyond this, John Haldon has written at length on the Byzantine army and its recruitment practices, use of technology, and tax-based funding, thus exploring how the Byzantine army solved typical military problems

held at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 30 Sep-4 Oct 2002 (Aldershot, 2006), 131–58; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1997), 92–124; D. H. French, 'The Roman Road-System of Asia Minor' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 7.2 (1980), 698–729; D. H. French, 'A Road Problem: Roman or Byzantine?', *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 43 (1993), 445–54. For some useful data on army supplies in an earlier period, see J. P. Roth, *The Logistics of the Roman Army at War (264 BC–AD 235)* (Leiden, 1999), 16–67.

[104] W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine State Finances in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (New York, 1982), 51. Although the Byzantine empire allocated approximately 69 per cent of its annual budget to military expenditures, according to Treadgold, it apparently could not afford to pay its regular soldiers a living wage. Cf. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284–1081* (Redwood City, CA, 1995), 197.

[105] J.-R. Vieillefond, 'Les pratiques religieuses dans l'armée byzantine d'après les traités militaires', *Revue des études anciennes* 36 (1935), 322–30; P. Goubert, 'Religion et superstitions dans l'armée byzantine à la fin du VIe siècle', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 13 (1947), 495–500.

[106] Y. Stoyanov, 'Eastern Orthodox Christianity', in G. M. Reichberg and H. Syse (eds.), *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (Cambridge, 2014), 164–234.

[107] A. Dain, 'Inventaire raisonné des cents manuscrits des 'constitutions tactiques' de Léon VI le sage' *Scriptorium* 1 (1946), 33–49; A. Dain and J.-A. Foucault, 'Les stratégistes byzantins' *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 317–92.

[108] G. Dagron and H. Mihaescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris, 1986).

[109] G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, DC, 1985).

[110] McGeer, Sowing the Dragon's Teeth. He mentions morale only twice, once in a description of the silence of the advance of the heavy cavalry (p. 302), and twice briefly while discussing the inspirational piety of Nikephoros II Phokas (pp. 326–7, 364).

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like manpower, training, and budgets.[111] He has also investigated Byzantine attitudes towards warfare.[112] His essay on diplomacy and warfare, or 'blood and ink', observes that 'Byzantine culture developed no theory of warfare as a necessary element in its ideological self-image'.[113] Haldon argues that this was the case because elites in Constantinople were more influential in defining that self-image than were the frontier warriors and magnate clans who led the army. In a thought-provoking chapter titled 'Fighting for peace: attitudes toward warfare in Byzantium', he touches on the general themes of this study. There he argues for a political justification of warfare that characterized it as 'a struggle between good and evil, between Christianity and its enemies', yet does not qualify as a specific doctrine of holy war.[114] He goes on to explore how Byzantium's religio-political values were realized in practice, in terms of how they affected Byzantine strategy on the battlefield. In his 2014 *Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI*, Haldon also addresses some of the features of Leo VI's ideological approach to military writing.[115]

Because it is the contention of this book that religion has been undertheorized in Byzantium, this study will put the accent more on religious principles and less on military tactics, in order to examine more closely the development and employment of Byzantine values in the context of conflict. I will argue that Byzantium forged a new self-identity as a distinctively Christian empire during the tenth century, creatively combining the Constantinian legacy of military victory and Christian faith in a new way that suited their changed circumstances, particularly at crisis points where the political survival of an emperor with tenuous authority was at stake.

In a groundbreaking 1986 study, Michael McCormick examined the significance of the Byzantine *Kaiseridee*, arguing that 'triumphal ceremonial, propaganda and public display celebrated and confirmed the

[111] J. Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army c.550–950* (Vienna, 1979). Haldon, 'Some Aspects of Byzantine Military Technology from the Sixth to the Tenth Centuries', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1 (1975), 11–47; Haldon, 'Military Service, Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993), 1–67.

[112] J. Haldon, '"Blood and Ink": Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes Towards Warfare and Diplomacy', in Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* (Aldershot, 1992). He also discusses ideology and warfare in Warfare, State and Society, 13–34.

[113] Haldon, 'Blood and Ink', 292.

[114] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* 21.

[115] Haldon, Commentary, 22–38. This is a deft summary of the argument of my 2010 doctoral thesis, cited by Haldon (n. 54, 55) and citing much of the same literature, and expanded to include scholarship published after 2010.

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victorious rulership of the emperor'.[116] He sees the Byzantine imperial concept as one rooted in a pagan belief in Roman eternal victory, but does not consider the ways in which this idea was transformed in Byzantium and adapted from a pagan Roman idea into an equally universal Christian worldview. As this monograph will show, God and not the emperor was the focus of tenth-century triumphal celebrations, partly because Leo VI, Romanos I, and Constantine VII were not soldiers (and all had issues of legitimacy to contend with) and partly because the emperor's power was not absolute but subject to limits imposed on him by the patriarch, even in military matters. Basil II appears to have dealt with the latter problem simply by not appointing a patriarch for several years (980–4) during his reign. The emergence in the middle Byzantine era of non-imperial (usually military) participants in triumphal celebrations, while interesting, neglects the critical if subsidiary role of the patriarch and thus the importance of the Church and the Orthodox Christian faith as the source of legitimation. The development of liturgies with prayers for imperial victory does not show Byzantine views on victory so much as the distinctive Byzantine embrace of Orthodox Christian religion.

Bissera Pentcheva has recently published an insightful study on the military qualities of the Mother of God in Byzantium.[117] She has demonstrated that Theotokos icons were adapted to serve in the context of war, both on the battlefield as a sign of victory and in conjunction with military saints. Her study combines religion, politics, and art, and the crux of her argument is that 'the Virgin Mary and the warrior saints upheld the imperial theory of power based on victories in battle'.[118] In other words, the icons of Mary were associated with the ancient Victory, and therefore gave legitimacy to the emperor-generals of the tenth century. The study is thorough and interesting, but sees the significance of the religious iconography the wrong way round. Byzantine emperors did not receive legitimacy because they were victorious, as Pentcheva has argued, but because they were seen as blessed by God. Victory was one obvious way to determine God's approval, but the problem of Byzantine sin, not imperial illegitimacy, was

[116] McCormick, Eternal Victory, 5. This idea was first analysed by Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee im höfischen Zeremoniell* (Jena, 1938) and for the earlier classical period, see W. Ensslin, 'Gottkaiser und Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden', *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Abteilung* (Munich, 1942).

[117] B. V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006).

[118] Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 69.

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more likely to be considered the cause of defeat.[119] As a *strategos* and bringer of victory, Mary was powerful because she was the progenitor of Christ, who brings life through love and sacrifice. As such, Christ is the model martyr-soldier for Byzantines, and this image is powerfully brought forward by the use of battle standards and icons of crosses. Mary's importance is therefore derivative; her power comes from her virginal motherhood, not from her personal virtue. The necessary framework for the power of Marian iconography is that of basic Orthodox Christian doctrine, but this has yet to be worked out comprehensively. Recent research into the relationship between text and art points to a consistent animating system of belief that guided the creation of religious icons generally in Byzantium, but how this worked for military icons needs further study.[120]

Mark Whittow in his thoughtful book *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* argues that 'the survival of Constantinople in the face of Arab attack and their continued membership of an empire ruled from Constantinople was important because their hope of salvation depended upon it'.[121] Although he presents a persuasive picture of the central ecclesiastical authority of the patriarch over bishops in the provinces, he does not present any evidence for his assertion that Byzantines believed their spiritual salvation was contingent upon the safety of the capital city. His analysis treats only the political function of the Church, explicitly the union of Church and state in the authority of emperor and patriarch. What is lacking from this approach is consideration of the deeper implications of Orthodox theology and specifically in terms of the distinctively theological Byzantine worldview.

The most important study that impinges on the interplay of politics and religion remains Gilbert Dagron's brilliantly subtle *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, which argues that the nature of the imperial office was not only political but sacerdotal, and therefore presented difficulties because of inherent theological tensions between Church and palace.[122] The Byzantine emperor was viewed as an Old Testament David *redivivus*, a priest in the order of Melchizedek, and therefore the possessor of acute spiritual power.[123] However, Dagron

[119] George the Monk attributes Byzantine defeat not to the emperor's military failures, but to his impiety, showing that theological considerations trumped political ones. C. De Boor (ed.), *Georgii Monachi Chronicon* (Stuttgart, 1904), 2: 699.

[120] Cf. L. James (ed.), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2007).

[121] Whittow, *Making*, 126.

[122] G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003). Originally published in French as *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le 'césaropapisme' byzantin* (Paris, 1996).

[123] Melchizedek – whose name (מלכי זדק) literally means 'my king is righteousness' – was an Old Testament king and pre-levitical priest who blessed Abraham (then Abram) in Gen 14:18 and was

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notes, 'an emperor was nothing if he was not everything, and in particular if he was not the providential mediator between his people and God.'[124] The distinctively Byzantine problem of 'the quasi-episcopal sacrality of a sovereign' has direct influence on the authority of an innovative military manual, as well as the Byzantine embrace of the self-image propagated by Leo VI and his successors.[125]

Primary Sources and Methodology

The source materials studied in this monograph have thus been chosen for their ideological content across a range of genres: court ceremonial (*Kletorologion*), military strategy (*Taktika*), civil legislation (*Novellae*), and ecclesiastical authority (canon law, homilies, and scripture). The texts that have been chosen for this investigation are examined for common ideas and shared language. Ideas routinely found in Leo VI's worldview include a conviction that Christianity is the one true religion, that Islam is a false religion, that the God of the Christians is sovereign over everything (including military conflict) and will eventually be vindicated by the events of history as the one true God and conqueror over all. In the legislation particularly, one finds Leo's view that the children of this one true God ought to live in a way that honours the divine, obeys the church, and presents a visible orthodoxy to others.

These ideas are rooted in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and the Old Testament in particular, which Byzantium read in the Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX).[126] This biblically shaped worldview evinces itself in the shared language of Byzantine writers, who, regardless of their education or social status, demonstrate an awareness of their identity as inheritors of the Old Testament status of 'chosen people'.[127] Because the Septuagint provides the metanarrative of their collective identity, it forms a crucial part of Byzantine self-understanding. It is through the stories,

thereafter invoked as the precursor of Jesus Christ as king and non-levitical priest in the New Testament (cf. Heb 7:1–18).

[124] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 113.

[125] Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 309–10.

[126] The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament begun in the third century BC in Alexandria by 70 (or 72) translators, according to legend, hence the abbreviation LXX to indicate the text. It includes many books which are considered deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic church, but the inspiration of these books was challenged by Jerome and John of Damascus.

[127] Whittow, *Making*, 161–5.

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laws, and ideals of the Old Testament that Byzantines made sense of their world.[128] This study will identify biblical source materials, both ideas and direct quotations, where they occur in the primary sources, showing how the Christian worldview and language of Byzantium permeates the culture and provides the key for decoding the impact and significance of religious ideologies in the early medieval period.

Using biblical language or quotations was an integral part of demonstrating a text's congruence with authoritative norms and ideals. The usual practice of modern interpreters has been to discard the religious language as chaff, almost as superficial cultural 'noise', while seeking a kernel of useful (i.e. non-theological) historical material. However, for a Byzantine, the core presence of religious vocabulary and biblical allusion gave weight and validity to the content of a book. Crucially, these things also gave authority and acceptability to the author of a given text. This legitimacy was sought even (or perhaps chiefly) by emperors eager to demonstrate their divine chosenness, since imperial authority was bestowed in a variety of ways in the ninth and tenth centuries.[129] That is to say, with so many varied protocols for legitimating imperial authority such as hereditary succession or divine anointing or popular acclamation, other means became necessarily important. What better source for proving legitimacy than the religion shared by all (or at least most) of the populace?[130] In many ways, even until the end of Byzantium, 'religion was the politics of the Byzantine people.'[131]

In a pre-modern state such as the Byzantine empire, political boundaries were not the differentiating factor, nor could mere geography determine one's loyalties. Difference was marked, rather, in the realm of religion. It was a category that transcended race and language and incarnated the unity of the Byzantine polis. That is not to say that there were not numerous and heated differences among Christians of varying christological beliefs, but

[128] For a discussion of apocrypha and their role in the Byzantine world view, see J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. 99–112.

[129] Dagron considers Macedonian-era imperial authority granted through a 'legitimacy of rupture' (for usurpers) as well as a 'legitimacy of continuity' (for porphyrogenneti). Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 35.

[130] In assessing the impact of Orthodox Christianity in Byzantium, I am in agreement with Tia Kolbaba, who concludes her study on East/West religious differences by showing that 'religion and the rest of society are inseparable, and … the debate about religion versus other factors is sterile' (T. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Chicago, 2000) 171).

[131] D. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1979), 6.

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by far the more distinct boundary was the overarching one of religion. A person in the ninth century was, above all else, either a pagan, or a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Christian. Distinctions within religious groups are as numerous as the members of that group, but the lines were clear between the different religions. It is in this sense that religious language is used therefore as a distinguishing mark, a linguistic signpost that identified the writer as 'one of us'.[132] It was not a mere social convention, but a sign of genuine 'Byzantine-ness' that revealed a shared cultural outlook. In the language of anthropology, their common experience 'shaped the spiritual consciousness' of the Byzantines.[133]

The methodological approach for this analysis bears some resemblances to the theory of redaction criticism, developed by New Testament biblical scholars in the mid twentieth century.[134] This theory considers the authors of the four canonical Gospels to be 'creative thinkers rather than unimaginative cut-and-paste people'.[135] In the same way, the argument of this book presents Leo VI as an independent thinker to a degree not usually associated with Byzantine authors, who were generally well known for having a horror of innovation. However, Leo's approach to editing the literature of his day might be said to bear the marks of a redaction critic, perhaps even shading into narrative criticism, which focuses on the author as something of an artist who shapes his material for an underlying theological purpose. One might go so far as to say that Byzantine studies already employs an approach similar to the approach of social location theory, used by New Testament scholars, because Byzantinists often query the reception of historical texts by readers. To a certain extent, the argument of this book examines the redaction and creation of literature by Leo VI through the lens of his social location as a religiously educated emperor facing aggression from without as well as the usual insurrections from within.

[132] J. Shepard has suggested that further exploration of the extent to which the Greek language itself comprised a Byzantine circle of influence would be fruitful. This monograph has less ambitiously chosen a subset of that circle for examination, i.e. religious language. Cf. Shepard, 'Byzantium's Overlapping Circles', in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Vol. I: Plenary Papers* (Aldershot, 2006), 16.

[133] C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966, reprinted 2004) 28. This essay discusses how religion does not merely interpret reality, but shapes it on a cultural scale.

[134] Personal communication with C. K. Rowe, Professor of New Testament, Duke Divinity School, 31 July 2015.

[135] M. Goodacre, 'Redaction criticism', in Paula Gooder (ed.), *Searching for Meaning. An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (Louisville, 2008), 38–46, at 39.

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Plan of Argument

The argument of this book seeks to join together previous research, particularly that of Dagron and Haldon, with consciously ideological texts attributed to Leo VI, in order to examine the thought-world of early medieval Byzantium under the lens of religion. In so doing, this study must reckon with what Anthony Cutler has called a 'process of sedimentation – the accumulation of layers of meaning the very weight of which served to convert the original stratum of significance [which is] more obvious between the ninth and the eleventh century than in the following era'.[136] This book is particularly concerned to illuminate the influence of ideology on imperial thinking. Averil Cameron has recently remarked that 'as long as religious language and theological rhetoric in Byzantine texts remain so understudied and undertheorized, they will continue to be accepted at face value, or conversely, ignored as irrelevant.'[137] This comment describes a problem rarely addressed by Byzantinists, although some new work is beginning to be published.[138] The problem thus far is that religious language has been either uncritically accepted, or, more often, it has been dismissed as irrelevant. However, more detailed study, and indeed, some attempt at theorizing the uses and abuses of this religious language will help to lift our scholarly understanding of the theological context of Byzantium beyond the usual caricature of 'an exotic and unchanging other'.[139]

Chapters 2–4 of this book concern the *Taktika (τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδωσις)* of Leo VI. As a military manual written, unusually, by an author with no military experience and also the first manual to consider explicitly the military threat posed by Muslims, Leo's book presents some new and fascinating material.[140] It uses older material in ways designed to exploit an original consideration of the connection between religion and politics. Previous studies have approached the ideological divide as a purely political one, but Leo's *Taktika* indicates that the

[136] A. Cutler, 'Πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραήλ: Ezekiel and the Politics of Resurrection in Tenth-Century Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), 47.

[137] A. Cameron, 'The Very Model of Orthodoxy?', in her Byzantine Matters, 111.

[138] C. Rapp, A. Külzer, Ch. Gastgeber (eds.), *The Bible in Byzantium: Text and Experience* (Göttingen, forthcoming 2018); D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (eds.), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2016); Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2010).

[139] Magdalino and Nelson, *Old Testament in Byzantium,* 111.

[140] For a different view, see I. Eramo (ed.), *Siriano. Discorsi di Guerra* (Bari, 2010), 14–23. On the contested date of Syrianos *magistros*, see P. Rance, 'The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister (formerly the Sixth-Century Anonymus Byzantinus)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100.2 (2007), 701–37.

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Byzantines also viewed it as a religious struggle. The earlier manual of the emperor-general Maurikios (r. 582–602) considers how to fight enemies of various ethnicities, but Leo is the first to consider an enemy identified primarily by religion and only secondarily by ethnicity, and his work was to have far-reaching influence in the military engagements of the tenth century.[141] Furthermore, in his epilogue, Leo added a new and explicitly theological approach to making war that became the definitive framework for the reconquest of eastern lands in the tenth century.

Chapter 5 surveys the range and scope of Leo's unusually large legal corpus, noting where he produced new legislation or transformed old legislation. It addresses the social context of his laws, where known, and compares Leo's legislation with similar earlier legal material. This chapter argues that Leo's specific approach to law-making included a four-point plan for the updates and purification he wanted to achieve: new laws are justified on the basis primarily that Byzantium is a Christian empire, and as such ought to be ruled by divine law, interpreted through the God-ordained emperor. Leo therefore pursues a legislative agenda that preserves good laws, invalidates old ones, affirms contemporary customs as laws, and creates entirely new laws now necessary for the flourishing of a Christian polity.

Chapter 6 attends to the theological prolegomena of Leo's *Novels,* because they generally reveal his motivations for the new laws he is promulgating. This chapter analyses the content of these novels with a view towards understanding what Leo's religious language reveals about his perspective on Christian rulership and corporate identity of all members of the *oikumene* under his pastoral care and divine fatherly protection.

Chapter 7 examines Leo as a homilist, because he is unique for the number as well as the content of his 42 extant sermons. The historical context of these compositions and their content will be surveyed in this chapter, and some commentary offered on the imperial political ideology they reveal. In particular, they tie religious observance to civil obedience, and draw on Old Testament exegesis to justify these exhortations.

Chapter 8 explores the well-known but little examined conviction held by the Byzantines that they were the 'chosen people' written about in the Hebrew scriptures. This self-image affected their exegesis of the Septuagint

[141] The anonymous author of the manual known as the *Rhetorica militaris* discussed shared religion (both Christian and pagan) as a means to raise morale among soldiers. However, the dating of the manual is uncertain; proposed dates range from the sixth to the tenth centuries. See further discussion in Chapter 3.

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and New Testament, and formed their political identity. Little has been written on the 'chosen people' concept comparing Christian and Jewish theological beliefs. This chapter will argue that middle Byzantine culture – based on the notion of sacred order, that is, *taxis* or *eutaxia* – shaped the emperor Leo VI, who in turn promulgated this ideal of the Byzantines as chosen people. Analysis of the vocabulary used by Leo VI, particularly concerning his own 'chosenness' as the Solomonic son of a 'new David', echoes scriptural terminology and will help to theorize his new approach to the notion of 'chosenness' among the Byzantines by demonstrating how the faith of the emperor ensured the safety and flourishing of the citizens of the *oikoumene* as the people of God. Indeed, Leo VI implicitly enriched the ideal of Orthodox Christians as chosen people by explicitly asserting his own divine chosenness, appealing to earlier canonical decrees regarding correct behaviour for a Christian *politeia*, and expanding Orthodox political identity to include an appropriation of the Old Testament history of the people of Israel, whose bellicose God saved his chosen people from all danger and ensured victory over their enemies.

Finally, Chapter 9 focuses on Byzantine Christian statecraft and offers a conclusion, including the impact of these works in the tenth century, and proposing a new trajectory for thinking about Byzantium as a Christian polity in the early medieval period. In a delightfully provocative way, Anthony Kaldellis has noted that 'in Byzantine studies, ideology is largely drawn from texts, and it is rarely brought into the analysis of political history.'[142] This is precisely what this book is intended to do: analyse the political history of Leo VI by means of investigating his ideology as expressed in his decisions and reflected in his writings. In so doing, one's understanding of this much-maligned emperor and his contribution to the political and religious identity of the middle Byzantine *oikoumene* may thus be enriched.

[142] Kaldellis, The Byzantine Republic.

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