



● FROM THE BYZANTINE ANNALS:

## BASIL I. THE ARMENIAN

(Emperor of Byzantium 867-886)

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It was a brutal murder which took place on the fourth of September, 867, in the midst of a convivial orgy at the Imperial Palace of S. Mamas, Byzantium. The Palace was located on the opposite bank of the Golden Horn, the present Galata which at the time was a suburb of the city. Emperor Michael was wont to break the monotony of his solitude by staging periodic bacchanalian orgies.

This was to be the last revelry which the voluptuous Emperor was destined to enjoy. Intoxicated with wine and utterly exhausted from excessive indulgence, the Emperor retired to his bed chamber. He had plunged into his sleep when the murderous conspirators rushed inside with a resounding crash. They were a company of Armenians led by Basil. The Emperor woke up, as if to witness the tragic ending of his still too young life. The deathly swords flashed and the hapless victim collapsed. He was dead.

While the murdered man's mother, the dethroned Theodora, and his black-clad sisters were weeping over the bloody corpse, the assassins hurriedly crossed the Golden Horn. It was a dark stormy night and the furious sea was lashing against the little dories which were taking the conspirators to the other side of the water where their confederates were waiting for them. From here the joint force raced to the Bucoleon, the pier of the Grand Palace where, again, confederates were waiting. Then they moved to the great palace and seized it unopposed.

Basil unanimously was proclaimed Emperor.

The new Emperor owed much to Michael. To kill one's benefactor is an ungrateful and serious thing. However, there is a deeply-rooted universal notion that a deed should be judged by the results. Basil's crime marked the beginning of a glorious

era which brought Byzantine civilization to its pinnacle. No one condemned the bloody hands. The best pages of history, the most illustrious achievements and the most ambitious dreams have almost invariably been drenched in blood.

Like many others Basil was innocent. They say he was not responsible for his deed, but as he was the obedient servant of Providence, he was doing only the bidding of the invisible power. This is the way Basil has been presented to us by the very first tale in which he appears on the scene of history for the first time. This is the way the legend runs.

When still a lad, Basil left his father's home and took the road to the capital where he hoped to find work with which to help his mother and his young brothers and sisters. Staff in hand, his knapsack on his shoulder, he trudged the long road until he reached the walls of the capital. He stopped at the Golden Gate where stood the Monastery of Saint Diomedius. It was evening and the sun was gathering its rays. Soon dusk fell. The traveler, weary of the long journey, lay under the monastery wall and fell asleep.

In the middle of the night a divine voice awakened one of the monks, "Arise and go invite the Emperor in." According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus the monk was none other than the Abbot of the Monastery and the mysterious voice came from Saint Diomedius. The monk went out but saw no emperor there, instead, a dusty peasant wayfarer. He returned and went to sleep.

The voice repeated the command the second time and the monk again rose up and went out to inquire, but again seeing no emperor, he shut the door and went back to sleep. Before long a powerful blow on the side woke him and it was the same command, "Go bring him in who is lying at the gate. He is the Emperor."

The devout monk went out and invited the poor traveler in. The next day he gave him a bath, dusted off his clothes, attended to his needs with pious solicitude, and concluded a pact of brotherhood with him.

Thus the chosen of Providence entered the city from the Golden Gate with a golden dream, and advanced to imperial heights through the guidance of the same hand.

Who was this mysterious traveler sent by God, whence did he come? It is not definitely known. Could it be that his past was far from being lustrous, and thus it was cloaked by the veil of obscurity? Or was it because Basil ascended the throne so swiftly, without having made a name for himself either in valor or statesmanship, which left no time nor occasion to be interested in his past?

Whatever the reason, the first period of Basil's life, his birth, his family conditions and his childhood have remained obscure, or at best under a very hazy light. This chapter of his life is unknown even to his grandson Constantine Porphyrogenitus the Emperor who worshipped his grandfather and spared no effort to write his complete history. The unknown and the obscure, in turn, have given rise to the imagination and various tales to satisfy the aroused interest. Such tales, unconfirmed reports and artificial interpretations have been incorporated in the authentic material which Porphyrogenitus the historian amassed with great care, classified it, and wove of it a solid and compact story, dignifying it with the stamp of his authority.

The grandfather's history is written with a definite purpose, "so that, succeeding generations shall know the real source and fountain of the Imperial house, the long chian" which is Basil. He "must serve as an example to his heirs, an example of valor, a model whom they shall follow and emulate."

Biased writings are never impartial. Driven by the urge to present Basil as an ideal character, his devoted grandson often resorts to artificial means, the varnish of the novelist. To bring out the real image, one must remove all the extraneous, superimposed and spurious painting. Fortunately, we are in possession of sources which enable us to follow the pen of Porphyrogenitus, to correct certain pages and to throw new light on what has been said.

In this connection, especially memorable is the continuer of the story, Gevorg the Monk. Gevorg brought his story down to the first years of Theodora's reign in 843. From then on an unknown author has brought the story down to 950. It is presumed that this unknown author was Simeon Metaprastus.

What these authors relate about Basil's birth and childhood runs more like a novel rather than history. Basil, according to them, was born in a neighboring village of the City of Adrianopolis, Macedonia, in the days of Emperor Michael Rhangabe (811-813). It was in his time that the Bulgars under King Krum (Crumm) invaded the empire and laid siege to the capital. Emperor Michael lost his crown and was succeeded by Leo the Armenian in 813. The Bulgars were forced to raise the siege and retire. When they reached Adrianopolis they sacked the city and took their captives, tens of thousands of men and countless women and children, to the other bank of Danube where they settled. The prisoners, although from Thrace, were regarded as Macedonians and their new settlement, likewise, was called Macedonia.

Basil's parents were among the captives and Basil himself was an infant in his swaddling clothes at the time. Krum's invasion took place in 813, therefore, Basil must have been born either that or the preceding year, about 812-813. The deportees were repatriated in the days of Em-

peror Theophilus, including Basil and his parents. At that time Basil was 25 which locates the date of the repatriation at 837-38.

The story of the repatriation is interesting, although Basil's crowned biographer has said nothing about it. The leader of the prisoners at the banks of Danube, or the Macedonian general, in the words of our author, was a man named Cordylis. He had a son named Vard who was known for his proven valor. Relying on his ability, Cordylis left his son Vard in charge while he himself through some stratagem sneaked into the capital to tell the Emperor that the deported population wanted to return to their former homes. The Emperor ordered his fleet to transport the prisoners back into the capital.

At that time the king of the Bulgars was Vladimir, the grandson of Krum. When "Michael the Bulgar" marched on Thessalonika, the captives decided to take advantage of the situation and carry out their plan. They crossed the Danube and headed for the shore where the imperial fleet was waiting for them.

"The Macedonians," or the captives, therefore, had elected Cordylis as their leader, who, as it appears, after fulfilling his mission at the capital, had returned to his people. The Bulgars tried to stop the escape of the captives but were defeated in the battle. A neighboring people first called Hungarians, the second time Turks, and the third time Huns, came to the assistance of the Bulgars but the defenders staved them off for three days and the fourth day they succeeded in boarding the ships. There was one last sally by the enemy but a brave youth named Leo Comosd, at the head of a company of fighters, repelled them. Later, this Leo was made Captain of a regiment which consisted of "federates", namely, a foreign legion.

As apparent, this story is drawn from

an authentic source, although the historian has confused many things. At the time of Theophilus the Bulgar king was not Vladimir but Malamir, the grandson of Krum, whereas Vladimir was Boris' son and successor.

In all probability Vladimir is the result of misreading. At the same time mention is made of Michael the Bulgar, or the king of the Bulgars. Michael is the Christian name of Bocoris (Boris) who was Malamir's cousin and successor. It is quite possible Michael was mistaken for Malamir in the reading, if only we are reluctant to suppose that Michael Bocoris could have been the leader of the invasion and not king, a general at the time of Malamir's reign. Michael Bocoris ascended the throne probably in 852. Therefore, he could not have taken part in the events of 837 as king.

The leaders of the captives are Armenians. Cordylis is an Armenian, as proved by the name of his son Vard. An Armenian is also Tzantzis which sounds like an Armenian word. This man was appointed by Cordylis as his lieutenant and there's no mention as to what happened to him later. During the escape the generals who are mentioned were Cordylis and Tzantz. Could it be that Vard was killed in the battle? There is no mention of this. It is highly probable that Tzantz or Djandj was this same Vard. Of the double names one is the real name and the other the surname.

We won't be far from the truth if we assume that Leo Comosd too was an Armenian. The foreign legion was made up largely of Armenians.

In 813 the Bulgars took tens of thousands prisoners from Adrianopolis. We know from other sources that the following year the Bulgars ravaged the country and deported a population of 50,000. That not an inconsiderable number of these captives were Armenians is apparent from the fact

that their leaders, as we have seen, were Armenians, and in the booty special mention is made of "Armenian textiles, precious rugs, clothing and bronze utensils."

Included among the captives of Adrianopolis was Manuel, the Bishop of the city, Basil's parents and the infant Basil himself. Krum's successor Mutraco, however, antagonized the Bishop, and after a vain attempt to force him to renounce the Christian faith, inflicted upon him a martyr's death. "Many of Basil's relatives, too, were martyred, thus sharing the immortality of Christ's witnesses," adds the historian.

There was another man among the captives whose name was Kinamon who at first won the favor of Omurdak (the same Murdak) the Bulgar King, but later he was imprisoned for refusing to become an apostate and later, in the reign of the next king Malamir he too met a martyr's death. Kinnam (on) is a Parthian word, *Kinnama*, meaning sulky, surly or spleenish, best expressed by the Armenian word *Kinakhuntir*. It must be supposed that Kinam was an Armenian. So probably was Bishop Manuel which, although a Scriptural name, in its present form is more like Armenian, a name which was adopted by the Mamikonian clan from earliest times. The victims of the captivity, as it appears, were largely Armenians.

When Basil returned to his native country he entered the service of the Macedonian General who is known to us by the name of Tzantz. From this it follows that Basil was an Armenian.

In the geneological work of Photius the Patriarch Basil's ancestors are represented as having first settled in the City of Nice, Macedonia, and then moved to the City of Philippi, likewise in Macedonia. When Basil became rich through Lady Danelis he bought large estates in Macedonia, thus insuring the security of his relatives. These developments clearly prove

that Basil's initial residence was in Macedonia, and this, perhaps, is the reason why the captives of Adrianopolis have been called Macedonians, including Basil's parents. It is permissible to suppose that the word Macedonia is used in a broad sense, including Thrace, as proved by the following quotation from an ancient Armenian Bible dated 1011: "In the Province of Macedonia in the City of Antrnabavlis (Adrianopolis) in the reign of Basil."

However, in the Ninth Century Macedonia and Thrace were separate provinces, excluding the possibility of confusion. It seems the identification of Adrianopolis with Macedonia has a connection with the geneology of Basil. According to Patriarch Photius, Basil's mother was a native of Adrianopolis, a Macedonian. The contrary theory that the duality of the geneology might have had a bearing on the history of the captivity is less acceptable. The priority here does not belong to the Patriarch who, probably, was familiar with the original source from which our historian drew his passage of the captivity.

The real birthplace of Basil is not clear; however, at all events, Macedonia has a greater claim to the honor than Adrianopolis. To what extent the captivity of his parents is connected with the events of Adrianopolis is highly doubtful. Basil could not have been born in 812, if that's the aim of the story. As we shall see further on, there is more valid reason to suppose that he was born during the repatriation from captivity in 836-37.

That Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Basil's Biographer, does not know or has ignored the story of the captives' return is indeed noteworthy. He does mention that Basil's parents were among the captives in 813, including the infant Basil, but he considers their return as having taken place in peace time and not so late. The

Bulgar King, "bowing before the Imperial might," has permitted the captives to return to their native land.

When the captives were making ready to depart the Bulgar King noticed the infant Basil among the multitude, a healthy lad with a noble face, and offered him an extraordinarily large apple. The lad, without cringing, approached the King, and kneeling down, showed such an exquisite delicacy of manner that the King marveled at him, even though his entourage frowned upon the whole scene. The conclusion is, Basil was still a lad at the time of the return from the captivity, and not at the time of the captivity.

The parents returned to their native home together with the child. One day, as they went to the fields to join the harvesters and to watch over them, the mother wove a canopy of bramble to protect the child from the sun's burning rays. Suddenly an eagle descended from the skies, and spreading its wings, made an umbrella over the child. Fearful that the bird might hurt the child, the mother chased it away with rocks, but before long the bird again returned and the mother again drove it away. The bird returned for the third time and posed over the child. "There are many such prophetic signs," the biographer says, "but I do not want to dwell long upon them."

His childhood scarcely over, Basil lost his father, leaving the burden of caring for the family upon his shoulders. He had to provide for his mother and brothers. Seeing there was no money in farming he thought of going to the city. Great cities, observes his biographer, enable the individual to bring to the fore his talents, something which small villages stifle. At first the mother was reluctant to part with her son but a series of dreams forced her to bow to the will of God and to send him into exile with her blessing.

One day the mother had a dream. Like the mother of Cyrus, she saw a full grown tree, taller than the house, in full bloom and loaded with fruit. The trunk of the tree was of gold and the branches and the leaves, likewise, looked like gold. A bystander, who knew how to interpret dreams, told her that the dream meant her son would have a great and illustrious future. Another time she saw in a dream an old man blowing flame from his mouth who told her plainly and clearly that her beloved son Basil would some day become an emperor. When the astonished mother asked who he was, the man said: "I am Elijah," and disappeared. After these divine inspirations the mother agreed to let her son go.

Basil's biographer does not mention that his grandfather, before his coming to the capital, had served under the Macedonian General Tzantz.

Basil headed for the capital from "Thracian Macedonia." Worthy of attention are the quotes whereby the author wants to resolve the manifest geographical anomaly.

The lad stopped at the Golden Gate of the Monastery of Saint Diomedius. The name of the friar who had the dream about him was Nicolaius. This man had a physician brother who was attending on Prince Theophylis, a relative of Vard and Empress Theodora, and therefore an Armenian. The physician who at the time was visiting his friar brother at the monastery, when he saw Basil he marveled at his magnificent physique, and curious, wanted to know who the lad was. His brother told him about his dream and asked him to keep his secret.

One day, as the physician and Theophylis were at dinner, the latter casually remarked that he needed a brave equerry for his stables, whereupon the physician, without hesitation, recommended Basil, and the Prince sent for him at once. Theophylis

liked Basil the minute he saw him — a tall handsome youth with curly hair and a large head for which reason he called him *Kephalas*, large-headed. He could not have dreamed of a better stable-man. Theophylis appointed him *Protostrator*, his chief equerry.

Michael the young Emperor had just become a bridegroom and, on the occasion, the Strategos of the Bukelarian Theme had sent him a present of a thoroughbred fiery stallion. Intending to race the animal at the circus, the Emperor wanted to give a physical check — the teeth, the age, temperament etc. But the animal was so fiery neither the Emperor nor anyone else could come close to him. Theophylis who was a spectator said to the Emperor that there was a youth in his service, a brave and trained horseman, who alone could subdue the animal. Michael ordered his Seneshal to repair to the Iron Gate (*Sideraplya — Demir Kapou*) and bring Basil on the instant. Basil approached the horse, held the reins in one hand and started to stroke behind the animal's ear with the other. The furious stallion instantly became as tame as a lamb. The Emperor was pleased and took the youth into his service as his equerry, and at the same time ordered Andreas, the Commander of the Foreign Regiment, to take Basil into his regiment.

## II

The sequel writer of Gevorg mentions the incident of the stallion for the first time after Michael's marriage. The encounter with the stallion took place soon after the marriage. Michael was born in 839 and, to marry, he should have been at least 15, even after making full provision for the historian's statement that he reached maturity at an early age. Accordingly, the marriage must have taken place not before 854-855. Let us suppose

that the stallion incident took place in 855.

Theophylis, in recommending Basil to the Emperor, calls him *neotheron*, which means a young lad. If Basil was born in 812 he should have been 43 at the time, something which makes the qualification of *neotheron* preposterous. It is not likely that the 15 year old young Emperor hired a man of 43 as his equerry. It is obvious that Basil could not have been born in 812. If we place the date of Basil's birth at 836, the year of the return from captivity as I have affirmed before, Basil would be Michael's senior only by three years, a lad of 19, of the same age with Michael, and truthfully a *neotheron*. When Michael presented his new equerry to his Empress Mother, he said, "See, Mother, I have brought you a brave lad — *Agouron*. *Agouron* means young, newly-sprouting. It was on this occasion that the Empress Mother, as the historian would have us believe, prophesied saying: "This lad, my son, will destroy our home."

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, too, is familiar with the stallion incident but his version is different. Emperor Michael had a horse which was beautiful but exceedingly headstrong. In all other aspects the animal was perfect — tall, lovely, a racer and a thoroughbred. It had only one fault. Once he was stripped of his reins he was uncontrollable, no one could come close to him.

Once the Emperor mounted this steed and went hunting. During the race the animal stepped on a rabbit and killed it, and as the Emperor dismounted to retrieve the rabbit the horse ran away. Men chased him but could not catch him. Enraged, Michael ordered the animal's hind legs cut off the minute they caught him, but Caesar Vard importuned the Emperor not to destroy such a wonderful animal for such a trifling cause. Just then Basil whispered to

his master Theophylis if the Emperor would be angry if he were to race his horse to the animal and mount him on the flight, without dismounting from his horse. The Emperor assented and Basil caught the animal. The amazed Emperor then asked Theophylis to lend him this brave youth to be his Imperial Strator, stableman. Basil won the Emperor's favor and was appointed Protostrator — Imperial Equerry.

This is a sample of how Porphyrogenitus the historian alters and decorates with inventive details a simple and artless incident, thus endangering the historical truth. A common and realistic incident of subduing a horse has been so disfigured by Constantine's pen that it has lost its true colors. No mention is made here that the incident took place after Michael's marriage. The question which interests us is: when did Basil enter Michael's service as equerry?

The Michael who went on hunting expeditions must have been at least 14-15 year old, therefore, approximately at the age when he married. On the other hand, if it is true that Vard accompanied him on these expeditions, it must have been not before 856 when Michael and Vard seized the power following the assassination of the Eunuch Teotist. We know that in 858, when an attempt was made on Vard's life, Basil already was made Protostrator. It is quite probable that Basil was made Strator in 856 as a result of a great palace revolution, when Basil was nearly 20.

Basil continued in the service of Theophylis for several years. He came into prominence the first time as a result of his wrestling prowess in Imperial circles. Emperor Constantine recounts this feat before the incident of the stallion.

Vard's son Antigone had received invitations to the Imperial Palace for a recep-

tion in honor of his father. Vard attended the affair, accompanied by senators, close friends, and among others, some Bulgarians who were at the capital as ambassadors. Included among the invited guests was Basil's master Theophylos or Theophylis as a relative. Another guest was Constantine the Patrician, the father of the historian Genesisius. As the Bulgars became inebriated with the wine they waxed arrogant and started to brag that they had a wrestler among them whose shoulders had never been pinned to the mat. Just then Theophylis approached Caesar Vard and warned him that it would be a great insult and a scandal to be thus humiliated by the Bulgars, that the latter would return to their land and boast that they are invincible. He proposed to send for Basil who was a stableman in his service who alone could silence those haughty Bulgars.

In no time at all Basil was on hand. Constantine the Patrician was very solicitous of Basil as an Armenian, and as a precautionary measure, he ordered a bedding of straw on the floor lest his compatriot slipped and fell during the wrestling. The minute the wrestlers came to grips, Basil seized his antagonist with a crushing grip, hoisted him high in the air as if he were a sheaf of hay or a sack of light wool, and slammed him to the mat. The spectators were agape with astonishment and Basil's fame rang the rafters.

It must be supposed that there is a grain of truth in this incident, although our sources give an entirely different picture of the affair, casting doubt even on that small grain of truth.

The historian Genesisius knows two incidents of the wrestling. The first of these took place in the presence of Theophylis, and not Antigon. It was Theophylis who invited to dinner Antigon, Constantine the Patrician and the historian's grandfather.

Theophylis, as well as Vard and Emperor Michael had their own wrestlers. That day Theophylis' wrestlers were defeated by the wrestlers of Vard and Michael. Then Basil redeemed the honor of his master. Constantine the Patrician appears in the same role as recorded by Porphyrogenitus. He covered the ring with a bedding of straw to prevent Basil from slipping. The Bulgar could not lift Basil but the latter not only lifted his antagonist but he whirled him in the air — *hata podrezan* — and brought down with a crushing body slam. The Bulgar passed out and had to be revived by pouring water on his face.

Antigon reported Basil's victory to his father and the latter told it to Michael, whereupon, the Emperor sent for Basil and two other wrestlers. Of the three the Emperor liked Basil best, especially for his magnificent physique, rewarded him with gifts and honors and appointed him Strator. It was on this occasion that Empress Theodora, staring at Basil, exclaimed, "My son, would that I had not seen this day. This man will ruin our home as your father prophesied."

The second incident, according to the same chronicler, took place when Basil already was on the throne.

The King of the Bulgars had a famous wrestler who was considered invincible. Emperor Basil could not stand the thought of a foreign wrestler staining the Roman name, therefore, he posed as the champion in his disguise. The "Scythian," namely the Bulgarian tried to lift the Macedonian but could not. Whereas, Basil hugged him in his powerful arms, hoisted him up, and brought him down with an overhead whirl and body slam with such force that the Bulgar passed out and they had to revive him with "much water, drops of wine and rose-water. Blood was dripping from his nose and ears."

The Emperor's wrestling, as such, is in-



credible, the whole story being nothing but the echo of the first incident. The historian's grandfather Constantine the Patrician was present at the match and conceivably the grandson had definite information as to what actually took place. It seems, the grandson preferred to be rather pleasing than truthful. To please Porphyrogenitus, by whose order he recorded the story, he has exaggerated his zeal in praise of Basil by inventing new proof of his wrestling prowess.

It is worthy of note that Theodora's prophetic apprehension after the wrestling bout is attributed by Porphyrogenitus to entirely different circumstances. According to him, the sports-loving Michael one day went on a hunting expedition at a place called Armamentaria where he ordered a great banquet, inviting his mother, his relatives and the senatorial dignitaries. Among the invited was Basil who at the time was Protostrator. As Basil sat at the table the Empress Theodora fixed her eyes upon him, as if trying to penetrate his innermost soul. Suddenly she was seized with a convulsion and fainted. They revived her with water and rose-water. The guests retired. Michael approached his mother and asked the reason for her fainting.

It was at this time that the excited Empress revealed her premonition in regard to Basil. "It seems to me," she said, "this is the man who will destroy our home. I have heard from your father that someone will destroy it. All signs indicate that Basil will be our heir. It seems I see with my own eyes the downfall of our home. It was this feeling which disturbed me and caused me to faint."

The Emperor quieted his Mother saying, "Your suspicions are groundless, Mother. This man is a common churl, endowed only with his physical strength like Samson, nothing more. He is an Enoch or a Nimrod born in our times. You need have no fear."

Thus, by the grace of God, Basil was spared a disaster, concludes his historian grandson.

The reference to Theophylis is connected with a prophecy which an Arab fortune teller woman made to him, that his reign would be followed by his wife and son, after which the power would pass to the House of Martiniak. It is instructive to note the degree of freedom with which the historians treat the same subjects, authentic or unconfirmed. Each has drawn a circle according to his taste in which to rearrange all the current hearsay. It is a novelistic approach, rather than a historian's, and the reason is not merely the tendency to deify Basil, but the paucity of authentic information.

Nor are we impressed with the legend of Basil's friendship with Lady Danelis, as related only by his grandson Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Once Theophylis journeyed on a state mission, at the instance of Michael and Vard, and Basil accompanied him. In the Achaean city of Patras Theophylis visited the temple of the Apostle Andreas (Andrew) and prayed there. Being occupied at the time, Basil did not accompany him but visited the same temple soon after.

The entertaining friar showed no particular interest or respect toward Theophylis and his fellow pilgrim, but when Basil appeared he met him and welcomed him like a king. Those were on the scene marveled at this unique homage, and the news reached a resident wealthy noblewoman, a widow who was called Danelis after her husband. Knowing the Friar to be a man of prophetic gift, Lady Danelis summoned him and asked why he had shown such extraordinary courtesy and homage to a stranger while denying the same to either her son or grandson? The Friar told her that the stranger was not an ordinary man and that he had seen in a vision the great

Roman Emperor, the Chosen of God, and such men should be respected.

Having completed his mission Theophylis returned to the city while Basil, owing to illness, could not accompany him and stayed behind for a while.

Meanwhile Lady Danelis was friendly and respectful of Basil, "as one who sows the good seed in fertile soil so that he could reap a rich harvest when the time came." She conferred upon him costly presents, gold, clothing, and 300 servants. In return for her generosity she expected nothing but his troth of spiritual kinship with her son John. Basil reluctantly accepted the gifts and promised to make her heir of certain of his estates when he became Emperor as the Friar had prophesied. It was this unexpected fortune which enabled Basil to purchase his estate in Macedonia, thus insuring the security of his family. "He who was rich in virtue thus became rich in money and possessions," the historian comments.

The core of this story consists of the explanation it offers of Basil's sudden acquisition of wealth, to which end, Lady Danelis' resources have been magnified to fabulous limits. The conclusion is that Basil really was a rich landowner in Macedonia, giving rise to the Cinderella story of how a poor lad, of his own initiative and toil, worked his way from poverty to the throne of an empire.

After the stallion incident, as we have seen, Basil was appointed Imperial Strator or stableman, approximately in 856. According to Genesisius this took place after the wrestling incident. After the abortive attempt upon Vard's life at the instigation of Theodora and the active participation of the Emperor's Protostrator, the Emperor punished the latter by replacing him with Basil in 858. The following remarkable feat is ascribed to this period of Basil's life.

One day Emperor Michael went hunting at a place called Philopation. According to the accepted custom, Basil, the Protostrator (Equerry) was leading the party, his inseparable *bardoukion* hanging from his belt. Upon the alarum of the trumpeteers and the barking of the hounds, suddenly there emerged from the forest a huge wolf, throwing consternation all around. But Basil calmly hurled his *bardoukion* at the beast and cleanly clove its head in two. Caesar Vard who was in the Emperor's party turned to his friends and said, "This man will put an end to our dynasty."

It is related that Vard, uncertain of his future, often would ask the great philosopher, Leo who was an Armenian and Chancellor of the University, in regard to the future. "I see," the philosopher would reply, "that your dynasty shall be destroyed by a very young person — *neanischos*." But when he saw Basil, pointing at him with his finger he said, "That's the one who will be your heir."

Thereafter Vard started to plot against Basil but all to no avail, because, as the historian thinks, nothing could change what was ordained by higher providence. The tale itself is immaterial; what counts are the words ascribed to the philosopher that the one who will overthrow Vard will be a very young man, an additional proof confirming the fact that Basil was comparatively young when he ascended the Byzantine throne, all of which further confirm our previous doubt and correction. In the light of the preceding calculations, in 866 when Vard was assassinated, Basil must have been 30.

The Protostrator Basil, steadily advancing, finally attained to the high office of Imperial Chamberlian — *Parakoimonenos*. The Eunuch Damianos who had occupied that post had helped Vard in the assassination of the most powerful minister Theotist and to take the helm of the government.

Having been denied his expected reward, Damianos had broken with Vard, was dismissed from his post by order of the Emperor, and had retired to the seclusion of the monastery. His place was taken by Basil. At the time of Damiano, dismissal Vard already was Caesar, having attained to that honor on April 26, 862. With his post of Chamberlain, Basil also was promoted to the rank of Patrician. He soon won the Emperor's friendship and favor, and Vard, who was a man of sufficient experience and perceptive ability, could not help but feel what a formidable foe the new Chamberlain would be. The latter, on the other hand, could clearly see that the real power in the Empire was not the Emperor but the powerful Caesar. He alone could pose as an obstacle to his ambitious designs.

Presently the moot rivalry between the two champions is on. Basil succeeded first in separating Vard from Sembat, a man close to Vard, his son-in-law, and holder of the post of grand *logoteth* — Speaker. Sembat was blinded by Basil's promise of promotion to the rank of Caesar after the overthrow of Vard.

Through Sembat Basil poisoned the mind of Michael that the Caesar was secretly plotting against him in the hope of seizing the throne. It was a despicable lie, of course, nevertheless the Emperor succumbed to its venom and naively made common cause with the enemies of his own uncle and strongest support, ruthlessly destroyed him without realizing that he not only was committing a crime but a fatal error which inevitably would lead to his own destruction.

The circumstances of Vard's assassination are repulsive. In the spring of 866 Emperor Michael marched to the Province of Thrace and camped at a plain called Kippi near the River Meander. It had been announced that the Emperor was marching against the Moslem government of the Island of Crete.

Was this a serious invasion or a mere pretext for the pre-planned crime? It is not known. Vard was assassinated here perfidiously. Suffice it to mention here that the author of the sequel to Gevorg attributes the crime to Sembat and Basil, Genesis does not mention Basil's name, while Constantine Porphyrogenitus puts the whole blame on Michael. Genesis ascribes the same role to Constantine the Armenian. Both historians favor their grandfather but not the truth.

Emperor Michael wrote from his camp to Patriarch Photius in regard to the murder and the farsighted Patriarch advised the Emperor at once to return to his capital. He no doubt had no faith in Basil and feared that the Emperor would be the next victim of his ambition. Michael returned to the capital. In less than thirty days Basil was proclaimed Emperor, joint ruler with Michael.

### III

Vard's son-in-law Sembat III who, for his complicity in the plot had hoped to be rewarded with the rank of Caesar, was bitterly disillusioned when he saw that he had been but a plaything in the hands of Basil and was filled with hatred and bitterness. He took counsel with George, the Stratelate who was Bekan's son and asked to be appointed Strategos the next day which meant being in charge of a Theme. The "next day" was understood to mean the day which followed the consultation, and not the coronation.

Sembat's request went unheeded. On the contrary, he was stripped of his office of Logothet which went to one Kumer. George was offered the Opsikian Theme. Both were dissatisfied and rebelled against the government. They started to incite the people, burn the fields and the vineyards, in protest against Basil's promotion. The two emperors issued orders to the strategi of the other themes to suppress the revolt. The task of destroying the rebellion was com-

mitted to General Niciphor Maleyin. This man moved cautiously, distributed circular letters among the military to work in secret, and to crush the revolt more by subtle methods rather than by open force, to prevent the movement from spreading and deteriorating into civil war. Soon George Bekan was arrested, and by orders from above, the City Eparchus Constantine Myares gouged out his eyes in the public square and forced him to beg alms from the passersby.

Thirty days later the same Maleyin arrested Sembat in an inn in the Province of Yegeghiatz (Erzinka) and presented him to the Emperor in his Palace of St. Mamas. Sembat was subjected to the same indignities, being blinded in one eye and forced to solicit alms like a common beggar. Three days later Sembat and Bekan were released and sent to their homes under strict surveillance.

According to another source, Sembat, refusing to stay in the city any longer, asked for the strategosate of Thrace which he received, while Bekan was given the Opsikian Theme. Niciphor Maleyin's name is not mentioned, nor is the Province of Yegeghiatz. Sembat was arrested at a fortress called Lainakar (Illateya Petra), a place which is now unknown, in all probability somewhere in the Province of Thrace. Bekan fled to Katuaion, apparently present day Keotahia. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the source of this information, would have us believe that Basil pardoned the culprits and even invited them to his Imperial table. Genesisius makes no mention of the Sembat-Bekan affair.

The joint rule of the two emperors did not last long. Scarcely one year and a few months had passed when Basil assassinated Michael and became sole ruler of the empire.

Michael was not a man of good character. From early childhood he had surrendered himself to a licentious life. In the days of

Vard he had very little to do with state affairs, his mad orgies having taken precedence over state business. He was especially fond of horse races. The Palace of St. Mamas had a special arena in which he personally took part in the races. It is related that once, in the midst of the races, fire signals announced that the enemy had invaded the empire. The Philosopher Leo the Great had invented a signal system which flashed the news from Cilicia to the capital that the Arab had invaded the land. The Emperor held back from the public the news until the race was over.

It is difficult to believe the absurd gossip which has been woven around the pleasure loving emperor's pastime. They used to play childish pranks and jokes on him. His closest companion and associate was his favorite court jester Theophil, his surname Swine — *Ghryllos*. Michael called him Himerios which in Greek means dear. The pranks sometimes were positively indecent, almost sacrilegious. Himerios would appear in the attire of the Patriarch while Michael posed as the Archbishop of Cologne. Eleven others, attired as bishops, would burlesque the ceremonies of ordination or divestiture. They carried their vulgarity to such an extent that they even ridiculed the mystery of Holy Communion by offering mustard and vinegar as sacraments. They did not even spare the Patriarch. One day, as Patriarch Ignatius, heading a church procession, was proceeding toward the nearby suburb, suddenly he came face to face with a caricature Patriarch mounted on a donkey and surrounded by his retinue, Emperor Michael in their very midst. With music and ribald songs, the comedy actors faced the Patriarch as if they were singing psalms, and with their raucous voices disrupted the real procession.

Michael did not even shrink from insulting the devout feelings of his own mother. Once he fooled his mother by tell-

ing her the Patriarch was waiting for her in the Palace to give her his blessing. As a matter of fact the Patriarch was none other than the Swine Theophil, the Court Jester who in his patriarchal vestments was seated on a throne beside Michael. The Empress really showed up, mistaking the buffoon for the real Patriarch, and bowed before him for his blessing. Just then the phony patriarch exposed his derriere to the Empress. Mortified with shame, the Queen ran away cursing her unworthy son.

They say Michael was wont to repeat that Himerios was his patriarch, Potius was Caesar's (Vard), and Ignatius the Patriarch of the Christians.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus has described Michael in such black colors in order to justify Basil's crime. The gossip about Michael's unseemly behavior he collected, although highly colored, was not without basis. We have the testimony of other independent sources in regard to vulgarities which were perpetrated in the capital.

The author of the sequel of George the monastic, who is wholly immune to the influence of the Imperial house, makes no mention of Michael's buffooneries but gives a detailed description of his assassination.

Michael was staging a horse race at the palace arena which was attended by Patrician Constantine the Armenian, the grandfather of Genesisius the historian, and two other persons named Acalia and Crusas. The Emperor was a partisan of the Blues, Constantine, the Whites, Acalia the Greens, and Crissa the Reds. The Emperor was the victor in the races. To celebrate the occasion he gave a banquet to which were invited Basil and his wife Eudocia, a former mistress of the Emperor. During the banquet a patrician named Basiliskian started to flatter the Emperor for his skill in horsemanship. Of course, nothing could have been more pleasing to the Emperor's vanity.

Intoxicated with the praise, Michael commanded Basiliskian to take off his Imperial red shoes — *Zangia* — and put them on himself. Basiliskian hesitated, looking in the direction of Basil. This angered the Emperor who barked at him to obey his command. Although Basil gave no sign of approval, Basiliskian put on the shoes all the same. Thereupon, the Emperor said to Basil, "By Heaven, the shoes suit him better than they do on you. Have I no right to make another Emperor just as I made you one?"

Seeing the Emperor was angry at Basil and was about to do something foolish, Eudocia importuned him tearfully: "The Imperial honor, my Lord, is a sublime thing and we are unworthy of wearing it; nevertheless, it is unseemly to degrade the Imperial honor to this extent."

The Emperor's reply was far from comforting. "Do not grieve," he said, "I want to make Basiliskian an emperor."

Basil's anger and chagrin had no bounds. The relations of the two emperors became strained with each passing day, destroying their mutual trust. Perhaps this was what gave rise to the rumor that one day, when Michael went on a hunting trip, an unknown friar approached him and handed him a piece of paper which warned the Emperor against Basil's intrigues.

Michael was seized with fear and hatred, and in turn, he resolved to put an end to Basil's life, but the latter acted more swiftly.

On September 24, 867, Michael invited Basil and his wife Eudocia to dinner at his Palace of St. Mamas. Michael was fond of drinking. When the wine started to take its effect, Basil left the table, went to the Imperial bedchamber and with his powerful hands twisted the latch so that no one could close the door. He then returned to his seat at the table.

Michael, now wholly intoxicated, arose from the table, and leaning on Basil's arm, headed for his bedchamber. Basil kissed

his hand and withdrew. Standing guard at the sleeping room was Basiliskian in place of the first chamberlain Rendak. The latter was on a hunting expedition and had orders from the Emperor to announce the result to Queen Mother Theodora who had been invited to dinner the following day.

Ignatius the chamberlain wanted to secure the door but saw that its latch had been tampered with. He was seized with suspicion, sat upon the bed and started to tear his hair. Dead drunk, the Emperor was deep asleep. Suddenly with a tumultuous noise, in rushed Basil together with his companions. The door was open. Trembling with fear, Ignatius rushed to the door to stop the intruders. Petros the Bulgarian, one of the conspirators, sneaked past Basil toward the imperial bed but was stopped by Ignatius.

The Emperor awakened from the commotion. One of the conspirators, Hovhannes Khald, drew his sword and cut off the Emperor's hand. The other conspirator, Hagovpik (Iachivitzis) the Persian Apelatis wounded Basiliskian with his sword and repulsed him. Basil's two brothers, Marian and Sembat, and his cousin Acila (Acilamus), another man named Vard and Constantine Toxar were guarding the main entrance, as a result of which none of Michael's servants knew what was going on in the bedroom.

The conspirators hesitated a moment, not knowing what to do, whether to kill the Emperor or leave him maimed. Acila was of the opinion that if the Emperor was spared none of them could hope to stay alive. To please Basil, he rushed to the bedroom where he saw Michael, with his hands cut off, lying on the bed and begging them to take pity on him, to have mercy, and to spare him. Acila paid no attention, came close, and with one stroke of the sword ripped open his entrails.

The conspirators now hurried to the pal-

ace to seize it. The sea was stormy. They descended to the bank of the Golden Horn, entered the home of Yevlok the Persian, and together made off toward the Pier of Bucoleon and from there entered the palace. Yevlok in his language said to Artavazt, the Commander of the foreign regiment, that Michael had been slain by the sword, and ordered him to open the gates to receive the new Emperor. Artavazt ran to the palace guard, grabbed the key, and opened the gate. Basil made his entry unopposed. His first act was to deliver the keys to the new *Papias*, a man named Grigor Philemon.

Basil immediately sent messengers to his wife Eudocia, to bring her in with imperial homage. At the same time, he sent John the Chamberlian to the other Eudocia, Michael's wife, to take her to her parents. He ordered the other chamberlain whose name was Pavlos, to go bury Michael's body. When Pavlos entered the palace of Mamas he saw that hapless victim's body was wrapped in his beloved horse's blanket, his entrails hanging out. He saw Michael's mother and sisters weeping and wailing over him. He hauled the body to a boat and took it to the Monastery of Christopol on the Asiatic shore where he buried it.

Thus, Basil became sole ruler of the Byzantine Empire.

The new Emperor appointed Marian, the son of Petron, *Eparchos* of the capital and ordered him to go to the forum and announce that Basil is the only Emperor. Petron was the brother of Caesar Vard and Empress Theodora. It must be supposed that Marian, too, was one of the conspirators.

Our historian would have us believe that the conspirators came to a sorry ending, punished, as if, by divine providence. Hagovpik, the slayer of Basiliskian, during a hunting expedition with the Emperor, as he was dismounting his horse to retrieve

his sword, the horse ran away and he fell to the ground dead. Hovhannes Khald who had cut off Michael's hinds was appointed strategos of Khaldik. Having defied the Emperor, at the latter's command, he was impaled at the hand of Andreas the Stratelat. Acila (on) was exiled to a suburb of the capital called Khardophilak, fell out with his servants who killed him one night. Apelat(is) the Persian died with the worms. Constantine Toxar(is) fell by the sword. The Emperor's brother Marian was wounded on the foot and died with worms.

It's important to note that all of Basil's conspirators were Armenians. Sembat, Vard's son-in-law, was an Armenian prince, probably a scion of the Bagratids. Gevorg Pekan likewise was an Armenian. Pekan — Pighyanis — is the Persian word Paigan which means infantryman, used as a surname. Petros the Bulgar and his cousin Leo the Assyrian were likewise Armenians. The appellations Bulgar and Assyrian have no connection with their origins. Bulgar's cousin cannot be an Assyrian. Hovhannes Khald and Constantine Toxar, in all probability, likewise were Armenians. He is called Khald for having been born in Khaldik or having served there.

Hovhannes Khald may have been a Chaldian, namely a Laz, but since his other companions are Armenians we presume he too was an Armenian. Constantine is called Toxar, precisely Toxara. Lucian the Samostracian mentions a Sythian scientist by the name of Toxaris. If this is the same name, in all probability it was tacked on Constantine as a nickname. Without doubt it's an Iranian word, perhaps known on the Khaldian shores.

The most important among the conspirators are Basil's brothers Marian, Sembat, and his cousin Acila. We think he had a third brother named Vard. According to the historian, among the assassins of Emperor Michael were "Maranus and Vardas,

the father of Rector Basil, and Sembatius, the brother of Basil, and Acilaion, cousin of Basil."

Two of the conspirators, Yevlok and Apelatis are called Persians, but they are not Persians, but Perso-Armenians. That's the way Byzantine Armenians were called. In the Ninth Century, during the Arab domination, it is difficult to imagine a Persian in the service of the Byzantines, having accepted Christianity. Apelatis is not a proper name.

Another confederate of Basil was Artavazt, the commander of the foreign regiment. Basil's brother Marian was the Commander of the Imperial cavalry. These were the commanders of the two most powerful forces in the Empire, and therefore, once their support assured, it was easy to cause a revolution. The above-mentioned persons were friends of Basil, undoubtedly from the time he was serving in the foreign regiment under Andreas. The palace revolution was not a chance accident but a planned venture which enjoyed the confidence of the military circles. Enemies, no doubt, were not lacking, who did their best to distort the nature of the revolt and to disfigure the image of Basil.

The confused information and the biased gossip which has come down to us, woven around the name of Basil with good or bad intentions, either to praise or to discredit him, have clouded his real origin and the causes which contributed to his success.

The tales pertaining to this origin are associated with the name of Patriarch Photius. The first year of Basil's reign Photius lost the patriarchal throne but was reinstated in 877, after the death of his antagonist Ignatius. The real cause of Photius' dethronement was Basil's ecclesiastical policy which, to keep the peace with the Rome, forced him to sacrifice Photius who was an inveterate foe of the Pope and

was the principal cause of the schism. The fallen Patriarch tried hard to retrieve his loss, but to do this it was first necessary to rewin the Emperor's favor.

The biographer of Ignatius, Nicitus the Paphlagonian relates, to please the Emperor, Photius forged a geneology highly flattering to the Emperor. This was done when the former Patriarch was an exile at the Monastery of Skep. The forged document traced Basil's origin to King Tiridates, the celebrated collaborator of Gregory the Illuminator. Photius was an intimate friend of a monk named Theophanus Sbenodemon, the librarian of the Imperial Library, a man of vast knowledge and wisdom. Through him, Photius inserted his false geneology into the Imperial Library. It was a parchment inscribed in Alexandrian letters which the author had contrived to give it an ancient look. The geneology reaches down to Basil's father who, it said, would have a son, such as Basil, whose name would be BEKLAS.

The word BEKLAS, according to Nicitus the Paphlagonian, is made of the initial letters of Basil, his wife Eudocia, and their sons Konstantine, Leo, Alexander and Stephan.

One day Theophanus, while searching for a book the Emperor wanted, reported to him that he had accidentally come across a book written in ancient letters, very difficult to decipher. Theophanes was referring to Photius' book. While showing the book, Theophanus added that there was only one man who could read it, and that was the exiled Patriarch Photius. Seized with curiosity, the Emperor summoned Photius to his palace. Photius read the mysterious book as if inspired by an angel, to the Emperor's great satisfaction. This was how Photius rewon Basil's favor.

The only grain of truth in this insipid tale was the fact that Photius made an attempt to trace the Emperor's geneology. The rest

is sheer fabrication. As a man of great learning, and as an Armenian himself, being the nephew of Arshavir Kamsarakan and the intimate friend of Vard the Caesar, Photius was familiar with Armenian circles, and naturally, was in a position to verify Basil's geneology. The Patriarch, noted for his erudition, was not so devoid of ingenuity as not to be able to offer the Emperor a more plausible and convincing explanation than this pitiful play on words BEKLAS. On the other hand, Basil was not so naive as to swallow the obvious fraud. The tale even lacks the freshness of originality.

From all appearances Photius never broke with the Emperor to have any need of a reconciliation. Even after his dismissal he continued to enjoy the Emperor's affection and respect as a learned and virtuous man. By order of the Emperor, Photius was installed at the Palace as private instructor of his sons.

Basil removed Photius from his patriarchal throne out of political considerations, unwilling to strain his relations with the Pope whose good will he needed for his planned conquests. Nor had he any personal enmity, although he had reason to suspect him as the friend of Vard the Caesar.

There have been various legends woven around the name of Basil, attempting to prove his royal origin, most of them based upon the document ascribed to Photius, or at best influenced by that document, but all of which have been rejected by historians. Only one Arab chronicler, Tabar, has agreed with Photius that Basil was a scion of a royal dynasty but he traces him to Slavic origin because his mother was Slavonic. The word Slav, however, does not necessarily denote racial origin, but merely indicates that Basil's mother was a native of Adrianopolis. At that time Thrace and Macedonia were inundated with Slavic



peoples, and consequently, they often are referred to as Slavonia.

Patriarch Eudocius of Alexandria, a contemporary of Tabar (923) and known by the name of Sayid-ibnul-Patrick (940) claims that Basil was not a royal scion because he was a Slavon. Massoud (950) repeats the same and at the same time seconds Tabar that Basil was called a Slavon because his mother was a Slav.

The word Slavon, was used, in the same sense that Basil was called a Macedonian. Testimonies of this kind are of no intrinsic value since they are mere hypotheses which explain why Basil was called a Macedonian. It was not merely because his mother was a Macedonian but there was also the presumption to liken Basil with Alexander the Macedonian. The mother, at all events, was not a Slav by race but, at best, came from a Slavic country, namely Adrianopolis.

There is another tradition among Armenian circles in regard to Basil's descent which has been preserved by Asoghik: "They say of him he came from the village of Til in Taron." These words need not necessarily convey the idea that Basil was a common peasant. The idea that Basil was of obscure or lowly origin, as Byzantine writers are inclined to prove, must be dismissed once and forever. All those Armenians who became actors in the Byzantine drama almost exclusively belonged to the Armenian nobility, most of them being Mamikonians. When in the 8th century the Mamikonians ceded the arena to the Bagratids they were forced to retire to Byzantium. But even before that they had been attracted to the west by that great Christian state.

Anciently Taron was the property of the Mamikonians but later it passed into the hands of the Bagratids. By the 8th century, as a result of political developments, the region of Taron was completely under Bagratid domination. Here reigned Ashot

Bagratouni, the son of Issac, the same Ashot who opposed the rebellion. The new capital of Taron was the City of Khlat.

It is quite probable that the last remnants of the Mamikonians still lingered in Til and from there, pressed by the Bagratids, withdrew to Byzantium. If the man called Humayyak, mentioned by Photius, is not a figment of the imagination, he must have come from the village of Til in Taron. In the contrary event, if Humayyak is not a historic figure, the family which migrated from Til must have been Bagratids.

Thus, the Arshakuni (Arsacid) origin of Basil is historically indefensible, because that house was extinguished long before. There were only two ancient and outstanding princely families on the scene, the Mamikonians and the Bagratids, one shining in Byzantium and the other in Armenia. In all probability Basil's family stemmed from these. The name Humayyak is reminiscent of the Mamikonians, while Sembat, which is the name of Basil's brother, inclines toward the Bagratid house.

The Macedonian cities and Adrianopolis were merely temporary residences of Basil's parents. In the battles fought in this arena it was customary for the military to sharpen their swords and carve their way into higher posts, not even excepting the imperial throne.

There are scholars who, while rejecting Basil's Arsacid origin, go even farther and indiscreetly deny his Armenian origin. Especially the Slavic historians are inclined to detect in Basil Slavic blood. Some of them have insisted that Basil was a pure Slav, or had descended from a Hellenized Slavic family.

These biased opinions were given the knife once and for all by a new source, *The Life of Eudemius*, in which it is said, "Stilianos, Armenian name Zaoudzas, was a Macedonian but Armenian in origin, the same as the Emperor himself. This man was

the favorite of Basil and his son and successor Leo, and during the latter's reign attained to a high post, being called Father of the Emperor. Besides, his daughter married Emperor Leo. Some have identified Stilianos' Armenian name of *Zaoutzas* with the (Turkish) word *Chavoush* but this is wrong. It seems Stilianos is the son or close relative of Strategos Tzantzis which is familiar to us. *Zaoudzi* should be read *Tzantzis*. We have already seen that he was a Macedonian Strategos under whom Basil served. The explicit testimony of the *Life of Eudemius* leaves no doubt as to Basil's origin.

There are ancient rumors also in regard to Basil's family or marital life, to be precise. Basil ascended the throne under circumstances which precluded him from enjoying wide sympathy. The crime he had committed was enormous and its effect still fresh, a circumstance which provided a fertile soil for enemies. Basil's enemies did not hesitate to blemish his name and family honor with wanton gossip.

Basil was married when he befriended Michael. It is related that Michael separated him from his wife whose name was Mariam and married him to Eudocia Inger who was his concubine or mistress. It is also related that Michael made it a condition with Basil that this was only a nominal wife, leaving the right to marital intercourse to Michael himself. As a compensation, he put his sister Thecla at the disposal of Basil.

Basil had four sons and four daughters. Evil tongues spread the rumor that the first two sons, Constantine and Leo were fathered by Michael and not Basil. Constantine was engaged to be married to Louis' daughter Hermingart, and in this connection Louis' ambassador already was in Constantinople. Constantine died in 879 while the engagement took place in the years 870 or 871. At this time Constantine

should have been at least 15 to be eligible for marriage, which means he should have been born in 855, whereas Basil married Eudocia shortly before Caesar Vard's assassination, about 865. The question is what connection could Constantine, born some ten years before Basil's and Eudocia's marriage, have had with that marriage? It is plain that Constantine was born of the first wife Mariam, and not Eudocia, and therefore, the malicious gossip was without foundation. While recording these rumors, the historians have deemed it more probable that Constantine was Basil's son.

Equally groundless is the rumor about Leo. If we believe the historians, Emperor Michael had intimate relations with Eudocia Inger before her legal marriage. It was in order to sever this relation that Empress Theodora and the Eunuch Theoctist decided to marry Michael to another Eudocia who was more modest, coming from the Decapoli family. Theoctist was assassinated in 856 which places Michael's marriage at 855 or 854, whereas, Basil married Eudocia Inger, as was mentioned, in 865 or shortly before. Michael lived with his wife more than ten years and had no children from her, nor from his legal wife. Eudocia married Basil in 865 and on September 1, 866, she gave birth to Leo. Thereafter she gave him two more sons and four daughters. Can there be any doubt that he was their father, and not Michael? Of course not, if we do not want to sin against integrity.

Moreover, this whole story about Eudocia is pure slander. She suffered because she had tied her fate with Basil. It was to hurt Basil that Eudocia was represented as Michael's mistress. If Emperor Michael was really in love with Eudocia, what prevented him from marrying her instead of delivering her to another, reserving to himself the right of a clandestine and illicit love under such an unnatural and more than comical pretext?

These frivolous tales in the capital had spread as far as Alexandria. Patriarch Eutyches relates that, when they asked Basil why he killed Michael, the latter gave the following explanation. Michael was presumably in love with a woman and commanded him to marry her on condition he, Michael would have the sole right of approaching her. He did not want his wife to know of this illegal tie; on the other hand he could not marry her while his real wife still lived. Basil carried out the Emperor's command but later regretted it and killed him.

This argument is wholly valueless. The Byzantine Court was not a garden of virtue, nor of legal scrupulosity. Michael himself was a model of the licentious and profligate prince. If he really wanted it, he could easily have deserted his wife and taken another women, as done by the emperors before and after him. Neither his wife nor his mother could have stopped his caprice. Even the patriarchs were impotent to restrain the emperors in such matters.

Eutyches' story proves another thing, that is, according to rumors a political revolution had taken place because of a love affair. In other words, Michael had an illicit passion for Basil's wife and was punished by her husband. That circumstance lends force to our suspicion that Eudocia was never such a frivolous woman as she has been represented to us, and that she

never was Michael's mistress. Eudocia chose Basil of her own will, and not at the command of Michael. Otherwise the latter, after ascending the throne, would never have kept her.

Basil's life needs more critical study and impartial elucidation than it has been given to date. The history which has come to us is an accumulation of gossip, slander and distortion. It needs critical examination with an unbiased eye to separate the wheat from the chaff. The question of Basil's origin and the likes of him is not a superfluous quibble for history, as it may seem to many. Byzantinism, as distinct from its preceding civilization, was due to the united cooperation of various nationalities under one state. To determine the contribution of each nationality element means the elucidation, the true understanding of Byzantinism.

Speaking of the Armenians specifically, it is our aim to clarify the role of Armenian state figures who distinguished themselves in Byzantine history with such extraordinary vigor of mind and arms. Were these mere blackguards of fate, knight errants who, persecuted and driven from the fatherland, were in quest of adventures on the high roads without reckoning the consequences, or were they on the contrary, the bearers of the Armenian constructive spirit, dedicated souls who spared no effort to rebuild the empire and who rightly became its true architects?