

The Problem of the Marriage of the Emperor Theophilus

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THE MARRIAGE of the Emperor Theophilus (A.D. 829–42) took place in the year 830 according to Symeon the Logothete, the only primary source to mention the event. In 1901, however, E. W. Brooks redated the marriage to 821/22. Brooks noted that Theophanes Continuatus has the youngest of the emperor's five daughters marry at least by 839, while a passage in the *De Ceremoniis* seems to assume the daughter was married by 831; Brooks conjectured that this daughter was the eldest and married at nine.¹ Though Brooks' date of 821/22 for Theophilus' marriage has gone unchallenged, its implications, especially for Theophilus' coinage, have been argued over ever since.² I believe that a resolution of the controversy is impossible under Brooks' theory, but the date and account of the Logothete, if accepted, can lead not only to solving the chronological problem but also to explaining some peculiar facts about Theophilus' life and reign.

A survey of the sources will show the attractiveness of believing the Logothete. Except for the chronicle of George the Monk, which has mostly invective against iconoclasm to contribute, Symeon's chronicle is probably the earliest literary source for the reign of Theophilus. According to Bury, Symeon finished writing in either 944 or 948 and made use of the "Lost Amorion Chronicle" of an adherent of The-

¹ E. W. Brooks, "The Marriage of the Emperor Theophilus," *BZ* 10 (1901) 540–45. I would like to thank Professor Ihor Ševčenko of Harvard, in whose seminar I wrote an earlier version of this article, for many references and suggestions, and Professor Philip Grierson of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, for reading the typescript and giving me his views on it.

² See W. Wroth, *Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum I* (1908) xlii–xliii; J. B. Bury *History of the Eastern Roman Empire* (1912) 465–68; G. Ostrogorsky and E. Stein, "Die Krönungsordnungen des Zeremonienbuches," *Byzantion* 7 (1932) 224–33; A. R. Bellinger, "The Emperor Theophilus and the Lagbe Hoard," *Berytus* 8 (1944) 102–06; A. I. Dikigoropoulos, "The Constantinopolitan Solidi of Theophilus," *DOPapers* 18 (1964) 353–61; rev. of Dikigoropoulos by D. M. Metcalf, *HBN* 20 (1966) 680–82; I. Rochow, *Kassia* (1967) 6–19; P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection III.1* (1973) 406–23.

ophilus' son, Michael III (842–67).³ Symeon relates events in a slightly modified chronological order that Romilly Jenkins has established to be free from error in a later part of the chronicle.⁴ Unfortunately, no complete edition of the Logothete's chronicle exists. Only three of thirteen known mss. have been published, of which two are plagiarizations of Symeon by Leo the Grammarian and Theodosius of Melitene and the third has been interpolated into the chronicle of George the Monk.⁵ Of these, Leo's version seems to be the best.⁶

There are three other chronicles. The 'Pseudo-Symeon' is a paraphrase of the real Symeon with some additional, often valuable material.⁷ The compiler has also added dates by regnal years, but these are arbitrary fabrications of his own.⁸ Joseph Genesisius, dated by Bury between 944 and 948, is interested mostly in military history, for which he mechanically retells his sources, including some he himself considers unreliable.⁹ Bury dated Theophanes Continuatus to 949–50 and observed that the compiler probably used both Genesisius and some of Genesisius' sources.¹⁰ Since the Continuer's organization is topical, he is able to avoid chronological questions. In addition to these chronicles, the scholar-Emperor Constantine VII (918–59) gives some incidental information in his *De Ceremoniis*, compiled in 956 or later.¹¹ But this is a manual of imperial protocol with some historical examples, not a work of history.

These late and sometimes contradictory sources can be checked in two ways. First, the *De Ceremoniis* includes a catalogue of the imperial tombs in Constantinople, presumably compiled from first-hand

³ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 455–59.

⁴ R. J. H. Jenkins, "The Chronological Accuracy of the 'Logothete' for the Years A.D. 867–913," *DOPapers* 19 (1965) 91–112.

⁵ For a list of the mss. and a full edition of a later part of Symeon, see G. Moravcsik, "Sagen und Legenden über Kaiser Basileios I," *DOPapers* 15 (1961) 110–22.

⁶ G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*³ I (1958) 516, prefers Leo on the ground that he used both hypothetical redactions A and B of the first part of Symeon, while the other two used only A.

⁷ Cf. R. J. H. Jenkins, "The Supposed Russian Attack on Constantinople in 807: Evidence of the Pseudo-Symeon," *Speculum* 24 (1949) 403.

⁸ For example, according to Ps.-Symeon, Michael II married Euphrosyne in 820 or later, their son Theophilus married Theodora in 830, and their daughter Maria married in 832 (ed. Bonn 1838 as "Symeon Magister," 620, 625, 630).

⁹ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 460.

¹⁰ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 460–61.

¹¹ J. B. Bury, "The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogenetos," *EHR* 22 (1907) 222.

observation. This supplies a trustworthy list of the members of Theophilus' family. Second, many of the coins of Theophilus' reign bear images of members of his family, and most of the coins of Theophilus' father, Michael II (820–29), bear the image of Theophilus. If correctly ordered and dated, the coins would supply information about the births, deaths and ages of the people they portray. To win credence, any solution of the problem of the marriage of Theophilus must be compatible with the evidence of the imperial tombs and coins.

The first event mentioned by the Logothete and Ps.-Symeon after Theophilus' accession with his stepmother Euphrosyne (2 October 829) is the new emperor's bride-show.¹² According to the chroniclers, Euphrosyne brought together beautiful girls from all the themes of the empire so that Theophilus might choose a wife from among them. The empress held the show in the Triclinium of the Pearl, where she gave her stepson a golden apple to present to the girl of his choice. Passing over a beautiful contestant named Cassia because she parried a tactless and unmetrical verse of his with an apposite verse of her own, Theophilus gave the apple to a Paphlagonian named Theodora, whom he married on Pentecost. Apparently this means Pentecost 830 (June 5), so that there would have been eight months during which Michael II was mourned and the contestants were assembled. Cassia, the chroniclers continue, retired to a convent and became a writer; in fact, her poems have survived to the present. Euphrosyne, the chronicles conclude, voluntarily gave up her co-regency after the marriage and retired to a convent of her own called the Gastria.¹³

In redating the marriage, Brooks relied on the texts of the Logothete supplied by Theodosius of Melitene and the interpolated George the Monk, which say that Theophilus "crowned Theodora in the Oratory of St Stephen, being himself crowned with her by the

¹² Other bride-shows were held in 788, 807, 855 and 881. See M.-H. Fourmy and M. Leroy, "La vie de S. Philarète," *Byzantion* 9 (1934) 135–43; Theophanes (ed. C. De Boor) 485; *Vita S. Irenes, Acta Sanctorum* 33, July VI (1868) 603–04, and A. Vogt and I. Hausherr, "Oraison funèbre de Basile I," *Orientalia Christiana* 26.1 no.77 (Rome 1932) 54; Eduard Kurtz, "Zwei griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano," *MémAcadPetersbourg* SER. 8, III.2 (1898) 21.

¹³ Leo Grammaticus (ed. Bonn 1842) 213–14 = Theodosius Melitenus (ed. T. Tafel 1859) 147 = Georgius Monachus (ed. Bonn 1838) 789–90, Ps.-Symeon 624–25. Not just in this story but throughout, the Logothete and Ps.-Symeon make Euphrosyne Theophilus' mother, though his real mother was Michael II's first wife, Thecla (*cf. De Ceremoniis*, ed. Bonn 1829, 645). The problem is probably the pro-Amorian nature of Symeon's source. After Thecla's

Patriarch Antonius with the crown both of marriage and of empire.”¹⁴ Since Theophilus’ imperial coronation is known to have taken place in 821 or 822, Brooks dated the marriage to the same period.¹⁵ But Leo the Grammarian and Ps.-Symeon omit the phrase *καὶ τῷ τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῷ τῆς βασιλείας στέφει*. Without it, Symeon’s participle *στεφθεὶς* would obviously mean only ‘crowned with the crown of marriage’.¹⁶ Since Leo’s is the best of the texts of the Logothete and the Ps.-Symeon was probably compiled early, it is less likely that they omitted the phrase than that the others interpolated it. But present knowledge of the text of Symeon does not permit certainty on such a point without confirmation.

This is provided by the *De Ceremoniis*, which shows that in 821 or 822 the ceremonies described would have violated imperial protocol in four ways. First, since all crowned emperors crowned a new empress (*Cer.* 209), Michael II should have joined in crowning Theodora, even assuming that the implication that Theophilus was not yet crowned is misleading. Since coronations of emperors were held in St Sophia, Theophilus should not have been crowned emperor in the Oratory of Stephen, which was the proper place only for being crowned with the nuptial wreath and crowning empresses.¹⁷ Since co-emperors were crowned by the senior emperor (*Cer.* 194), Michael again, not the patriarch, should have crowned Theophilus emperor. Finally, the imperial crown was always called the *στέμμα* or *διάδημα*, but this crown is a mere *στέφος*—evidently the nuptial wreath with which any

death, despite the Byzantines’ disapproval of second marriages, Michael had married Euphrosyne—who was then a nun. The anti-Amorian Continuer exploits this scandal for all it is worth (Theophanes Continuatus, ed. Bonn 1838, 78–79, 86). By contrast, Symeon’s pro-Amorian source seems, understandably, to have omitted the whole episode, for Symeon is ignorant of it. But this means that the Logothete read in his source that only Euphrosyne was Michael’s wife, while Theophilus was Michael’s son. His natural conclusion that Euphrosyne was Theophilus’ mother hardly discredits his story.

¹⁴ *στέφει δὲ Θεοδώραν ἐν εὐκτηρίῳ τοῦ ἁγίου Στεφάνου, στεφθεὶς καὶ αὐτὸς ἅμα αὐτῇ ὑπὸ Ἀντωνίου πατριάρχου [καὶ τῷ τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῷ τῆς βασιλείας στέφει].* Antonius I Cassimatus (ca Jan. 821–Jan. 837) could have performed the marriage at either date. See V. Grumel, *La Chronologie* (Paris 1958) 435.

¹⁵ Brooks, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 541–42.

¹⁶ Cf. Symeon’s reference to Michael III’s nuptial, but not imperial, coronation (Leo Gram. 230=Theod.Mel. 160=Georg.Monach. Add. 816, Ps.-Sym. 655).

¹⁷ *Cer.* 192, cf. 196–97, 208–09. More precisely, the coronation of the empress was held just outside the Oratory of Stephen, which she and the emperors entered immediately afterwards.

common bridegroom was crowned.¹⁸ It is almost impossible that such a confused ceremony could have been held at the court of Michael II, or that a knowledgeable imperial official like the Logothete could have reported it so erroneously.

There are even more problems with the date 821/22. According to Theophanes Continuatus (143–44), the Triclinium of the Pearl, where the bride-show was held, was not even built by 821/22; it was built during Theophilus' reign, presumably in the months before the show and probably for the occasion. The Continuer also dates Euphrosyne's retirement, which is part of Symeon's story, near the beginning of Theophilus' reign.¹⁹ Finally, it is unlikely that Symeon would have dated Theophilus' imperial coronation to 830 about a page after dating the same event to 821. All the versions of the Logothete say that Michael II crowned his son in St Sophia, in accordance with protocol, before the revolt of Thomas the Slav, which began in late 821.²⁰ To my mind, this settles the question of whether Theophilus was crowned in 821 or 822. But Symeon mentions no marriage in 821.

Therefore the phrase in question can be demonstrated to be an interpolation by a misunderstanding copyist—no surprise in a text that has been tampered with as much as Symeon's. Consequently there is no more reason to date the story to 821/22 than to any other year. All internal evidence confirms the clearly implied date of 830.

But Symeon's bride-show story must still be reconciled with the supposed marriage of the emperor's daughter Maria. The Continuer and apparently the Logothete himself believed that Maria was married to a certain Alexius Musele, whom Theophilus, having no sons living, gave the rank of Caesar and thus made his heir. But Byzantine law forbade women to marry before the age of twelve.²¹ Since Theophilus died in 842, none of his daughters could have been of marriageable age during his reign if he married in 830. Furthermore, since Maria was either the fourth or the fifth daughter and

¹⁸ Cer. 191–216 *passim*. Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 80 n.5, is mistaken that the nuptial crown is a *στεφάνωμα*; that is the ceremony of nuptial coronation. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961). For the nuptial coronation of laymen, see Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτικὸς* IV (Athens 1951) 46–47.

¹⁹ Theoph.Contin. 86. The Continuer says Theophilus forced Euphrosyne's retirement, but I reject this, following Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 125–26.

²⁰ Leo Gram. 211 = Theod.Mel. 146 = Georg.Monach. Add. 783, Ps.-Sym. 621.

²¹ K. Zachariä von Lingenthal, *Ecloga Leonis et Constantini, Epanagoge Basilii, Leonis et Alexandri* (Leipzig 1852) 24 and 107.

died before her father, she could scarcely have lived past early childhood, much less have reached twelve.

Her marriage aside, there is some independent evidence for Maria's age that scholars seem to have overlooked. Both Symeon and Theophanes Continuatus record that when Maria died, Theophilus buried her in a magnificent coffin.²² In the *De Ceremoniis*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus describes this coffin as it was in his time, when it lay in the Church of the Holy Apostles next to the coffin of Maria's brother Constantine. Philip Grierson has deduced that Constantine died in infancy from the fact that the Porphyrogenitus calls his tomb a *λαρνάκιον*—a *little coffin*.²³ But Maria's tomb is also described as a *λαρνάκιον*. She seems therefore to have died well before she reached full growth, compatibly with Symeon's date for her father's marriage.²⁴

Either Maria was married as a child or she was only betrothed. Either case can be paralleled. The Continuer and Ps.-Symeon, supported by Symeon, attest an underage imperial marriage in their own time. Though the law forbade men to marry before fourteen, in 943 the future emperor Romanus II was married at four or five to a Provençal princess. Since she died five years later, the marriage could never have been consummated, like Maria's marriage if it was one.²⁵ If Maria was only betrothed, a later imperial engagement provides an even better parallel. In 1163 Manuel I betrothed his eleven-year-old daughter, also named Maria, to Prince Béla of Hungary, later Béla I.²⁶ Manuel, like Theophilus, had no male heirs or daughters of marriageable age at the time, and Béla, like Alexius, was a mature man who was made heir to the empire at the time of his betrothal. Under such circumstances, a marriage and an engagement would amount to much the same thing and could easily be confused, especially by chroniclers writing more than a century after the event.

Because Maria would have had to be very young indeed at the time, I am inclined to think that she was only betrothed. But as long as

²² Leo Gram. 216–17 = Theod. Mel. 149 = Georg. Monach. Add. 794, Ps.-Sym. 630, Theoph. Contin. 108.

²³ Grierson, *op. cit.* (*supra* n.2) 407; *cf.* Cer. 645.

²⁴ Cremation was unknown in Byzantium (Koukoules, *op. cit.* [*supra* n.18] IV 193–95).

²⁵ *Cf.* Theoph. Contin. 431 and 469, Ps.-Sym. 748 and 757, Leo Gram. 325 = Theod. Mel. 234 = Georg. Monach. Add. 917 (Symeon's chronicle ends before the reign of Romanus II). For the marriageable age for men, see passages cited in n.21.

²⁶ Nicetas Choniates (ed. Bonn 1835) 147. *Cf.* CMH² IV.1 (1966) 230–31 and 582–83.

the evidence of her coffin is taken into account, the question of whether Maria was 'married' or not is of little importance for the present study. In either case the union between Alexius and Maria could not have been consummated, since he soon departed for a long-term command in the West without taking her along, and she died in Constantinople during his absence.²⁷ And in either case, her father could have been married in 830.

There remains one avoidable but disturbing problem with 830 as the date of Theophilus' marriage. In the *De Ceremoniis*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus gives some historical examples to illustrate the proper manner of receiving an emperor returning from a campaign. In one of the examples Theophilus is returning to Constantinople after defeating the Arabs. The title of the example says that Theophilus had defeated the Tarsans, Mopsuestians and others; the Arab chronicler al-Ṭabarī dates a defeat of the Tarsans and Mopsuestians to 831.²⁸ Once in the passage (*Cer.* 505) a 'Caesar' is mentioned, riding beside Theophilus. Since Alexius is the only Caesar attested for this period, Brooks, followed by Vasiliev and others, drew the apparently inevitable conclusion that Alexius was already Caesar in 831.²⁹ If he was, he must have been betrothed to Maria by then. But in order to be betrothed, Maria had to be born, and there was time between 830 and 831 for Theodora to be pregnant only once. The problem can be avoided by rejecting the sources and assuming Maria to have been the eldest daughter, as Brooks did, but this seems an answer of desperation.

The birth of Maria aside, however, there are grave problems with assuming Alexius to have been Caesar in 831. First, this would contradict the chronology of the Logothete. The latest datable event he puts before the 'marriage' of Maria and Alexius is the desertion of Theophobus to the Byzantines in early 834, and even this is followed by some undatable material before the marriage; it and related events then immediately precede the successful campaign of Theophilus against Sozopetra in 837.³⁰ Bury therefore dated Maria's 'marriage' to

²⁷ See passages cited in n.22. I pass over the divergencies between the Logothete and the Continuer on the course of Alexius' career since they are not strictly related to the present problem. I am strongly inclined to believe the Logothete rather than the Continuer.

²⁸ *Cer.* 503-08; al-Ṭabarī, *Annales* ed. M. J. de Goeje, SER. 3, II (Leiden 1883/84) 1104.

²⁹ Brooks, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 540-41; A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* I (Brussels 1935) 105-06.

³⁰ Vasiliev, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.29) 440.

836.³¹ In addition, supposing Alexius to have been Caesar in 831 contradicts what modern scholars have reconstructed about Alexius' career. The Continuer says (108) that Theophilus made Alexius Caesar just before he sent him to the West. But Fr Dvornik has concluded from the *Life of St Gregory the Decapolite* that Alexius stopped in Macedonia in 837 on his way to Sicily, and Henri Grégoire has confirmed this from an inscription; Vasiliev put Alexius in Sicily by 838.³² If this is right, Alexius was made Caesar only in 837, compatibly with the Logothete but incompatibly with the *De Ceremoniis*.

Since Alexius was first imprisoned and then degraded when he returned from Sicily, these calculations mean that the only year in which the Caesar could have taken part in a triumph at Constantinople was 837. In fact, in that year Theophilus took Sozopetra and celebrated his only known triumph besides that of 831.³³ The conclusion that the two triumphs have been confused in the *De Ceremoniis* is almost unavoidable. The Porphyrogenitus does not give a separate description of the second triumph but only notes that, with one minor exception, Theophilus celebrated it "in the same manner as the first one."³⁴ This suggests that the Porphyrogenitus conflated his sources' two descriptions of the two triumphs, which—Byzantine protocol being what it was—must have resembled each other closely. But one can scarcely be confident that the Caesar, who appears once in five pages, was a part of both original descriptions. There is no reason to doubt that he appeared in the description of the triumph of 837, but there are strong reasons to believe that he did not appear in the description of the triumph of 831. I believe that Constantine VII, who was in any case interested in protocol rather than history, mistakenly assumed that the Caesar who had appeared in the triumph of 837 had also appeared in 831.³⁵ Thus Maria was presumably betrothed about 836, which is not a problem.

³¹ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 467.

³² Vasiliev, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.29) 136, 144, 440; F. Dvornik, *La vie de S. Grégoire le Décapolite* (*Travaux InstÉtSlaves* 5, 1926) 35–40; H. Grégoire, "Les sources épigraphiques de l'histoire bulgare," *Byzantion* 9 (1934) 761 (n.1 on that page should read "pp.644–45").

³³ Leo Gram. 221 = Theod.Mel. 152 = Georg.Monach. Add. 798–99, Ps.-Sym. 634.

³⁴ *ὁμοίως τοῦ προτέρου σχήματος*, *Cer.* 507–08.

³⁵ Dikigoropoulos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 359–60, has argued that the main description is of 837, but the title is misplaced. This leads to the same conclusion as my argument, but runs up against two problems: the first sentence of the description states that the emperor was returning from Cilicia, where Tarsus and Mopsuestia are but Sozopetra is not, and the last paragraph explicitly refers to Theophilus' *second* triumph, presumably that of 837.

Confidence can be put in the preceding arguments only if they square with the numismatic evidence and result in a plausible chronology. Under Brooks' theory, the coins have been shuffled into almost every possible order, and many have been conjectured to be irregular 'ceremonial' issues. Some problems have been solved but others persist.

In his catalogue of the coins in the Dumbarton Oaks and Whittemore Collections, Grierson has listed five types of Constantinopolitan *solidi* minted under Theophilus, in this order and thus dated:

CLASS I: Theophilus alone (829–30/1)

CLASS II: Theophilus (*obverse*) and Constantine (*reverse*) (830 or 831)

CLASS III: Theophilus (*obverse*) and Michael II and Constantine (*reverse*) (830/1–40)

CLASS IV: Theophilus, Theodora and Thecla (*obverse*) and Anna and Anastasia (*reverse*) (date uncertain)

CLASS V: Theophilus (*obverse*) and Michael III (*reverse*) (840–42)³⁶

Unlike previous scholars, Grierson argued that at the time of Class III Constantine, like Michael II, was dead and being commemorated on the coins, and that all the classes with the possible exception of Class IV were substantive, not ceremonial issues. But Class IV, he suggested (pp.409–10), "may well be a ceremonial issue, since it is hardly likely to have been a substantive issue cut short by the birth of Michael III." He added of the coins of Class IV (p.415), "It is impossible to determine when or why they were struck."

Although the rejection of Brooks' theory has no effect on this ordering of Classes I, II, III and V, it makes possible an ordering and explanation of Class IV: it was a substantive issue cut short by the birth not of Michael but of Constantine. The three daughters appear because they were recently born and newly crowned. Constantine does not appear because he was not yet either born or dead, and the remaining daughters Maria and Pulcheria, who must have been born after Constantine, were not born either. This means that the proper order for the coins, using Grierson's numbering, is I, IV, II, III, V. Therefore Theophilus' first four children were, in order, Thecla, Anna, Anastasia and Constantine.

This much agrees with lists of the daughters in an anecdote told by Ps.-Symeon (628–29) and Theophanes Continuatus (90–91), but the

³⁶ Grierson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 424–33. Considering Alexius to have been Caesar in 831, Grierson concluded that Constantine had both been born and died before then.

two chroniclers disagree about whether Maria or Pulcheria came next. According to this anecdote, either Theophilus' stepmother Euphrosyne or Theodora's mother Theoctista used to teach the girls to venerate icons at the Convent of the Gastria. Learning of this, the ardent iconoclast Theophilus questioned his daughters about it. Four of them considered carefully and evaded his questions, but Pulcheria, described as "a mere baby in both age and sense," gave away the secret, babbling that Euphrosyne/Theoctista had taken "dolls" from a box and held these up to their heads and faces. If this story reflects the ages of the daughters correctly, it means that Pulcheria was the youngest, as Ps.-Symeon says, since Maria was one of the other, older and wiser daughters who evaded their father's questions. It also makes clear that Pulcheria was old enough to talk, at least barely, before Maria died.

A conjectural chronology is now possible. Theophilus' first six children must have been born during the eight years between February 831, nine months after his marriage, and March 839, ten months before the birth of Michael III (9 January 840).³⁷ Within this period, the evidence suggests that the children's births came earlier rather than later. First, the relative rarity of the coins of Theophilus alone indicates that his first three daughters were born early in his reign. Second, the subsequent coins of the three daughters and of the living Constantine are very rare and presumably of brief issue.³⁸ Third, Constantine must have died (and Maria been born) before Maria's betrothal in about 836, when Theophilus needed an heir.³⁹ Finally, since Maria died before Alexius' recall, which Vasiliev put in 839, that is the latest possible date for the story of the 'dolls'. By then Pulcheria

³⁷ C. Mango, "When Was Michael III Born?" *DOPapers* 21 (1967) 253–58.

³⁸ Grierson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 78 Tab. 8 and 428–29 n., mentions 32 Constantinopolitan solidi of Class I, 3 of Class IV, 4 of Class II, 92 of Class III, and 3 of Class V. Grierson's suggestion that Class 3 of the folles, which corresponds to Classes III and V of the solidi, may have been continued under Michael III until 866 seems to me the easiest way to explain the frequency and variations of this class; but the interpretation of these folles is highly controversial (see Grierson 413–15). I have avoided guessing the dates of the children's coronations, but I assume that they were very early, like Michael III's (see Mango, *op.cit.* [*supra* n.37] 258). It is conceivable that Anna and Anastasia were twins, but, having no sufficient reason to think so, I disregard that possibility here.

³⁹ Dikigoropoulos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 353 n.9, makes the highly probable suggestion that Theoph.Contin. 88 refers to Constantine's drowning in a cistern at the Blachernae Palace. Theophilus consoled himself by laying out gardens on the spot.

could talk and was therefore not much younger than three nor born much after 836.⁴⁰

Thus Theophilus and Theodora seem to have had a child every year, or very nearly, between their marriage and 836. If Pulcheria was born shortly after Maria's betrothal, the Continuer's mistake (107) in making Maria the youngest daughter can be explained: he was misled by a report that Maria was the youngest at the time of her betrothal. The chronology that results from the preceding arguments is summed up in a table at the end of this article.

The conjectural birthdate for Thecla, 831, is a marked historical improvement over that provided by the theory of Brooks. In early 866, Michael III the Drunkard married his pregnant mistress Eudocia Ingerina to his Paracoemomenus Basil, later the Emperor Basil I. At the same time Michael gave Basil his sister Thecla for a mistress, presumably to distract Basil's attention from Eudocia.⁴¹ After Basil had murdered Michael and acquired the use of Eudocia, Thecla found herself another lover, John Neatocometes, much to Basil's chagrin.⁴² Bury, following Brooks' dating of Theophilus' marriage, calculated that Thecla was "about 43 years old" when she became Basil's mistress.⁴³ Though Basil and Neatocometes may have preferred older women and Thecla may have remained well-preserved into her forties, an age of 35 seems more in keeping with her part in this tale of Byzantine home life.

Thus a plausible chronology for Theophilus' children and coins can be constructed by accepting Symeon's date of 830 for his marriage. But how old was Theophilus himself in 830? Since he was eager to have an heir, as his frequent children and appointment of Alexius show, one would expect him to have married early. His son Michael married at fifteen.⁴⁴ To guess Theophilus' age it is necessary to look at his career before his accession and marriage.

Three things that Theophilus did during his father's reign are not

⁴⁰ Vasiliev, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.29) 137.

⁴¹ Leo Gram. 242 = Theod.Mel. 169 = Georg.Monach. Add. 828, Ps.-Sym. 675; cf. C. Mango, "Eudocia Ingerina, the Normans, and the Macedonian Dynasty," *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 14-15 (1973) 22-23.

⁴² Leo Gram. 256 = Theod.Mel. 178 = Georg.Monach. Add. 842; Ps.-Sym. omits.

⁴³ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 169 n.4.

⁴⁴ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 157, dates the marriage to 855.

disputable. First, he took lessons from John the Grammarian.⁴⁵ Second, he was crowned, as has been shown, in 821. Third, during the siege of Constantinople in 822 he carried a fragment of the wood of the True Cross in a votive procession around the city walls.⁴⁶ These are things a child could have done.

Two other alleged deeds cannot be believed. First, at the end of his account of Michael II's reign, Genesisius (50) gives a report, followed by Theophanes Continuatus (48), that Theophilus martyred St Euthymius of Sardis. Bury has shown from the *Acta Davidis* that this event actually took place in Theophilus' own reign.⁴⁷ Second, the Continuer (64) lists Theophilus, in a bare genitive absolute, among those who made sorties during the siege of 822. But this is obviously taken from an anonymous, short and garbled account of the siege that even Genesisius rejected, though, as is his custom, he gives it in full before rejecting it (34, cf. 35). These are evidently attempts by later generations to supply the early exploits of Theophilus that were so conspicuously lacking.

As Bury observed at the beginning of his chapter on Theophilus, "For eight years Theophilus had been an exemplary co-regent. Though he was a man of energetic character and active brain, he appears never to have put himself forward, and if he exercised influence upon his father's policy, such influence was carefully hidden behind the throne. Perhaps Michael compelled him to remain in the background."⁴⁸ In short, the energetic Theophilus did nothing worth mentioning before he became emperor. Even when Theophilus ascended the throne, he did so with his stepmother as co-regent.⁴⁹ Other emperors had reigned jointly with their mothers only when they were quite young, as in the cases of Heraclius' sons, Constantine VI, Michael III, Constantine VII, and Basil II and Constantine VIII.

The coins of Michael II, most of which bear Theophilus' image also, may be of use here. Unfortunately, images on coins of this period are conventional and not portraitive, but they do give some indication of the subject's age. Children are slightly smaller, larger-eyed and

⁴⁵ Theoph.Contin. 95-96; I cannot find the previous reference the Continuer says he made.

⁴⁶ Genesisius (ed. Bonn 1834) 39, Theoph.Contin. 59.

⁴⁷ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 139 n.3.

⁴⁸ Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 120.

⁴⁹ Leo Gram. 213 = Theod.Mel. 147 = Georg.Monach. Add. 789, Ps.-Sym. 624.

rounder-cheeked than adults; adolescents are beardless; male adults are bearded. A few coins seem to show Theophilus as a child. Most seem to show him as an adolescent. Only one specimen in Grierson's catalogue, which the editor assumes to be "very late in date," shows Theophilus bearded.⁵⁰ Michael II had no reason to make his only son and heir look younger on the coins than he really was. The logical inference is that Theophilus began to be shown bearded on coins when he was old enough to grow a beard. That time seems to have been very late in Michael's reign, probably 829.

There does not seem to be any direct evidence for Theophilus' birthdate, but there may be a piece of indirect evidence. Genesis, in a description of Leo V's political arrangements at the beginning of his reign (11 July 813) says, "The Emperor Leo, having been publicly proclaimed, . . . honored Michael, whose son he adopted from the sacred font, with the rank of patrician and Excubitor."⁵¹ "Michael" here is Michael the Amorian, the future Michael II. The ambiguity is in the aorist verb *υιοποιήσατο*. It could be used in place of a pluperfect, meaning that Leo had stood godfather for Michael's son before he became emperor, but Michael and Leo do not seem to have been on good terms then.⁵² Alternatively, the verb could be a true aorist, and mean that the emperor tried to assure the loyalty of the resourceful Amorian, who later overthrew him anyway, not only by appointing him to high office but by standing godfather for his son. The only son of Michael's who is attested is Theophilus. Therefore Theophilus could have been baptized in July 813. Since Byzantine children were usually baptized within a few months of their birth, that would mean that Theophilus was born in early 813 or possibly late 812.⁵³

This somewhat speculative argument needs to be checked against the evidence. If Theophilus was born in 812/13, he was crowned at eight, carried the fragment of the Cross at nine, grew his first beard and took power with his stepmother at sixteen, and was married at seventeen. This explains the indications of his youth, yet makes him

⁵⁰ Grierson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 389 and pl. xx.

⁵¹ Ἀναρρηθεὶς δὴ δημοσίᾳ Λέων ὁ βασιλεὺς . . . Μιχαήλ, οὗ τὸν παῖδα πνευματικῆς ἐκ κολυμβήθρας υιοποιήσατο, τῇ πατρικίῳ καὶ ἐκκουβίτου τιμῇ διεσέμνυνεν, Genes. 12.

⁵² The Continuer (23–24) seems to have taken it in this sense; cf. Ps.-Sym. 609–10. Michael had threatened to kill Leo when he had delayed his plot against Michael I Rhangabé (Genes. 5, Theoph.Contin. 16–17).

⁵³ Cf. A. Vogt, "Le jeunesse de Léon VI le Sage," *RHist* 174 (1934) 392, and Koukoules *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) IV 46–47.

eighteen by the time of his first military expedition in 831. Not only does the conjectural birthdate of 812/13 fit the evidence, but a date a few years earlier or later would not.

Theophilus, then, learned generalship young, like his son Michael, who made his first campaign at nineteen.⁵⁴ Also like his son, who was murdered at 27, Theophilus died young at 28 or 29. Cyril Mango has defended Michael III from the charge of inactivity on the ground of his now-established youth.⁵⁵ Though Theophilus' limited accomplishments do not measure up to his reputation for energy, ability and brilliance, the same defense of youth and inexperience can be made for him. Theophilus was a promising young ruler, but he never had a fair chance to fulfil his promise.

Since Theophilus was only seventeen at the time of his bride-show, his stepmother and co-regent Euphrosyne was in a position to exercise strong influence upon his choice of a bride. The show seems to have been her idea; by holding it she was carrying on the tradition begun when her father, the Emperor Constantine VI (780–97), had chosen her mother, Maria of Amnia, in 788.⁵⁶ Considering Euphrosyne's power, which was supported by her prestige as the daughter and widow of emperors and confirmed by the oath of the Senate, it would not be surprising if Theodora was more Euphrosyne's choice than her stepson's (Theoph.Contin. 78).

Two things would have recommended Theodora to Euphrosyne. First, Theodora's family, like Euphrosyne's, was of the provincial nobility of Paphlagonia. The empress's mother, with whom she had spent most of her life in a convent, had been raised in the village of Amnia in that province, where her grandfather, St Philaretus the Almsgiver, had been a rural magnate.⁵⁷ Theodora came from the Paphlagonian village of Ebissa, where her father Marinus had also been a provincial noble (Theoph.Contin. 89). Members of such families probably felt a common bond.

The second and more important reason that Euphrosyne would have wanted to choose Theodora is that she, like the Augusta, was an iconophile. Euphrosyne was the great-granddaughter of an iconophile saint, the granddaughter of the first restorer of the icons St Irene, and

⁵⁴ *CMH*² IV.1 110.

⁵⁵ Mango, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.37) 258.

⁵⁶ Theoph.Contin. 79, *Cer.* 647; Fourmy-Leroy, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.12) 135–43.

⁵⁷ Fourmy-Leroy, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.12) 135.

the daughter of an iconophile emperor. She had grown up in an iconophile convent, encouraged in her devotions by the iconophile champion St Theodore of Studium.⁵⁸ St Theodora, of course, was the second and permanent restorer of the icons. Incidentally, Cassia, the only other bride-show contestant named by Symeon, was also an iconophile.

Though Euphrosyne was no politician and voluntarily retired to her convent of the Gastria after the marriage, the two iconophile empresses still collaborated behind the iconoclast emperor's back. It is not difficult to demonstrate that it was Euphrosyne, not Theodora's mother Theoctista, who taught Theophilus' daughters to venerate icons in her convent. First, the Logothete corroborates Ps.-Symeon's statement that Euphrosyne founded the Gastria, not Theoctista as the Continuer says.⁵⁹ The list of tombs at *De Ceremoniis* 647 connects Euphrosyne with at least Theodora's daughter Anna, who was eventually buried next to her step-grandmother. Further, since Ps.-Symeon was ignorant of Euphrosyne's background and believed she was the iconoclast emperor's real mother, he had no reason but the story itself to think she was an iconophile.⁶⁰ But Theophanes Continuatus, who twice (78–79, 86) reviles Euphrosyne for breaking her monastic vows and marrying Michael II, had no wish to show her furthering the iconophile cause and knew that she was not the daughters' real "grandmother," as Ps.-Symeon calls her. It was natural for him to substitute the name of the daughters' maternal grandmother for that of their paternal step-grandmother. But in the correct version of the story, Theodora regularly sent her daughters to the nearby Gastria to venerate icons with Euphrosyne until Pulcheria gave the scheme away about 839.⁶¹

Though Euphrosyne's subsequent rôle is obscure, if she had chosen Theodora and trained her children she must be given some credit for

⁵⁸ A letter from Theodore to Euphrosyne and her sister Irene (*cf. Cer.* 647) is in Migne, PG 99, 1360D–61C.

⁵⁹ The fact, known to Symeon, that Theodora and her daughters were later relegated to the Gastria is perfectly compatible with this, given their close connection with Euphrosyne (Leo Gram. 237 = Theod. Mel. 165 = Georg. Monach. Add. 790, Ps.-Sym. 658, Theoph. Contin. 174).

⁶⁰ See n.13 *supra*.

⁶¹ For the location of the Gastria, see the first folio map in R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin* pt.1, III (Paris 1953); it is at 8-C, labeled "Sancakdar Mes[cidi]" (see text, p.73).

the restoration of the icons in 843. During Theophilus' reign she had had to keep her actions secret, and afterwards misunderstanding of the circumstances and iconophile prejudice against the lapsed nun and widow of Michael II kept her part from becoming known. But Theophilus' choice of an iconophile bride was evidently not an accident. Euphrosyne either made or encouraged the choice deliberately.

In summary, Symeon the Logothete, probably the most reliable source for this period, gives an account of the marriage of Theophilus that is plausible and self-consistent. Theophanes Continuatus gives no account of the marriage. The only evidence against Symeon's story is the report of the marriage of Theophilus' daughter Maria. But, since Maria's coffin is reported by a first-hand source to have been child-size, she was either married as an infant or, more probably, only betrothed. Therefore Symeon should be believed.

If he is, a plausible chronology for Theophilus' family history can be constructed, including an ordering of his coins without resort to the hypothesis of ceremonial issues. This reconstruction can explain two historical anomalies: Theophilus was inactive during his father's reign because he was only a child, and he chose an iconophile bride because he was influenced by his iconophile stepmother.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Late 812 / early 813	Theophilus born
July 813	Theophilus christened
821	Theophilus (age 8) crowned
822	Theophilus (age 9) carries fragment of Cross
2 October 829	Theophilus (age 16) and Euphrosyne succeed Michael II; coins: Class I
Late 829 / early 830	Triclinium of the Pearl built
5 June 830	Theophilus (age 17) marries Theodora
Later 830	Euphrosyne founds the Gastria and retires to it; Theophilus sole ruler
ca 831	Thecla born
ca 832	Anna born
ca 833	Anastasia born; coins: Class IV (really II)
ca 834	Constantine born; coins: Class II (III)
ca 835	Maria born; Constantine drowns in Blachernae cistern; coins: Class III (IV)

<i>ca</i> 836	Maria betrothed (married?) to Alexius Musele; Pulcheria born
837	Alexius made Caesar, appears at triumph and goes to Macedonia
838	Alexius campaigns in Sicily
<i>ca</i> 839	incident of 'dolls'; Maria dies and is buried in Constantinople
839	Alexius recalled and imprisoned in Constantinople
9 January 840	Michael III born; coins: Class V
20 January 842	Theophilus (age 28 or 29) dies
Early 866	Thecla (age 35) becomes Basil's mistress

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