Artaxerxes in Constantinople: Basil I's Genealogy and Byzantine Historical Memory of the Achaemenid Persians

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THE EMPIRE FOUNDED by Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE proved to be exceptionally long-lasting in its impact on subsequent polities throughout much of the ancient and medieval world. The memory of ancient Persia and its meaning were constantly made and re-made for centuries from Western Europe to India and beyond. Its impact was so great that modern scholars have even coined a term to describe it: 'Persianism'. Rolf Strootman and Miguel John Versluys have recently collected a number of essays dedicated to the concept, which is designed to encapsulate "the ideas and associations revolving around [Achaemenid] Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or political) reasons."[1] The empire encouraged and accommodated a wide range of ideological purposes across several linguistic, religious, and political communities from antiquity to the present. Indeed, Garth Fowden once described large portions of antiquity as "living in the shadow of Cyrus."[2] Yet the medieval Roman Empire, Byzantium, has been largely absent from these discussions.

The Byzantines maintained a knowledge of and interest in

[1] R. Strootman and M. John Versluys, "From Culture to Concept: The Reception and Appropriation of Persia in Antiquity," in *Persianism in Antiquity* (Stuttgart 2017) 9.

[2] G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 3–4.

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the Persian past throughout the empire's history, employing and drawing from this past in ways that went beyond simple antiquarianism. This was particularly true during the reigns of Basil I and his successor, Leo VI. The legendary genealogy ascribed to Basil I, which claimed descent from the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia, is well known. Yet the earliest known text in which some version of this genealogy appears, the funeral oration (*epitaphios logos*) by Leo VI, includes not just the emperor's famed Arsacid lineage, but also descent from Artaxerxes I Makrocheir. While much ink has been spilled investigating and contextualizing the Arsacid claim, this Achaemenid branch of the emperor's supposed lineage has been largely ignored.

This paper explores Leo VI's assertion of his father's Achaemenid ancestry and, in so doing, attempts to bring medieval Byzantium into recent discussions of the multiple afterlives of the ancient Persian past. Two questions in particular lie at the heart of this exploration: where Leo VI got his information, and what sort of image Artaxerxes I would have evoked among his Byzantine contemporaries. Part of this second question will also lead toward a hypothesis for why Leo may have selected Artaxerxes I specifically as his father's Persian forebear.

Basil I's genealogy has been well covered by modern historians, and many will be familiar with the general outline. Basil's obscure origins among Macedonian peasants was gradually supplemented with a royal lineage reaching back to antiquity. This lineage famously included the Arsacids, who had ruled both Persia (the Parthian dynasty) and Armenia. Alexander the Great and Constantine I were eventually added to the list as well.

Evidence suggests that, early in his reign at least, Basil encouraged the elaboration of his rags-to-riches story, especially through comparisons with the biblical King David.[3]

[3] A. Markopoulos, "An Anonymous Laudatory Poem in Honor of Basil I," *DOP* 46 (1992) 225–232, and "Οι μεταμορφώσεις της 'μυθολογίας' του Βασιλείου Α΄," in V. A. Leontaritou et al. (eds.), *Antecessor: Festschrift Spyros N. Troianos zum 80. Geburtstag* (Athens 2013) 945–970; G. Moravcsik, "Sagen

Eventually, however, Basil I and his immediate successors initiated a thorough rebranding of the dynasty's origins, including a reworking of both Basil's genealogical background and the reputation of his immediate predecessor on the throne, Michael III.[4] This version of Basil's origins, which might be thought of as the ruling dynasty's 'official' position by the mid-tenth century, was significantly expanded and solidified in the history of Joseph Genesios and, most notably, in the lengthy biography of Basil I contained in the *Continuation of Theophanes* (*Theophanes Continuatus*).[5] This portion of the chronicle, typically known as the *Vita Basilii*, has received considerable scholarly attention.[6] The lengthy biography utilizes elements of both

und Legenden über Kaiser Basileios I," *DOP* 15 (1961) 59–126; N. Tobias, *Basil I, Founder of the Macedonian Dynasty* (Lewiston 2007), esp. 1–41. Leo VI likewise portrayed himself as a new Solomon, both stressing his own wisdom and developing the image of his father as a new King David; see S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912)* (Leiden 1997, and "The Wisdom of Leo VI," in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal* (Aldershot 1994) 171–179.

[4] While not every source from this era repeats the dynasty's 'official' line, the majority of written sources from this period and later largely reflect this rewriting of history, particularly as it concerned the enduring reputation of Michael III. Recent work has begun to recover some aspects of the emperor's image prior to Basil I's ascension, but it is telling that Michael continues to be widely known as "the Drunkard" (ὁ Μέθυσος), even among professional historians. For more on this see A. Markopoulos, "Voices from the Center: Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos and the Macedonian Dynasty in Contemporary Historiography," in N. Gaul et al. (eds.), *Center, Province and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos* (Wiesbaden 2018) 22–38.

[5] If the current scholarly consensus holds true, Genesios' text predates the *Continuation of Theophanes*. According to this view, Constantine VII first commissioned Genesios' history, but, perhaps dissatisfied with the final result, then commissioned the *Continuation*. For a useful summary of this scholarship see L. Neville, *Guide to Byzantine History Writing* (Cambridge 2018) 95–98; for the text itself, A. Lesmüller-Werner and J. Thurn, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor* (Berlin 1978).

[6] For an entry into some of these discussions see esp. N. Adontz, "L'âge et origine de l'empereur Basile I (867–886)," *Byzantion* 8 (1933) 475–500; P. J.

hagiography and encomium to paint a picture of a man who was destined to rule the Byzantine Empire.

The *Vita Basilii* offers the fullest version of Basil's genealogy. In addition to claiming that Basil could trace his ancestry back to the Arsacid royal line and Alexander the Great, the text also states that his maternal line could be traced back to Constantine I.[7] The *Vita Basilii* does not explicitly tie the Arsacid dynasty to the Achaemenids, and the account stresses Basil's Armenian descent, though it does mention that "not only the Parthians and Armenians, but also the Medes had been ruled by none other than the lineage (γένους) of Arsakes and his descendants."[8] The focus remains very much on the Armenian branch of the Arsacids.[9] The *Vita* offers a detailed narrative of how the supposed ancestors of Basil I were forced to flee Ar-

Alexander, "Secular Biography at Byzantium," *Speculum* 15 (1940) 194–209; Moravcsik, *DOP* 15 (1961) 59–126; Markopoulos, in *Antecessor* 945–970; A. Schminck, "The Beginnings and Origins of the 'Macedonian' Dynasty," in J. Burke et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Macedonia: Identity, Image and History* (Leiden 2000) 61–68; L. van Hoof, "Among Christian Emperors: The *Vita Basilii* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus," *JECS* 54 (2002) 163–183; T. Greenwood, "Basil I, Constantine VII and Armenian Literary Tradition in Byzantium," in T. Shawcross et al. (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 447–466.

[7] The *Vita Basilii* appears as Book 5 in *Theophanes Continuatus*, in I. Bekker, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus* (Bonn 1838). It has been edited separately and translated by I. Ševčenko, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nominee fertur liber quo Vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur* (Berlin 2011).

[8] *V.Bas.* 212.20–213.2, τὸ δὲ γένος εἶλκεν ἐξ Ἀρμενίων ἔθνους Ἀρσακίων. τοῦ γὰρ παλαιοῦ Ἀρσάκου, ὃς Πάρθων ἡγήσατο, ἐπὶ μέγα δόξης προελθόντος καὶ ἀρετῆς, νόμος τοῖς ὕστερον ἐχρημάτισε μὴ ἄλλοθεν βασιλεύεσθαι μήτε Πάρθους μήτε Ἀρμενίους, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ Μήδους, ἢ παρὰ τοῦ γένους Ἀρσάκου καὶ τῶν ἀπογόνων αὐτοῦ. It is perhaps relevant that, in the detailed story that follows this statement, a recounting of the supposed journey of Basil's forefathers into Byzantine territory, the Persians appear as the main antagonist.

[9] Basil's descent from Aršak/Arsakes and the Arsacid dynasty is mentioned not once but twice, and this connection is repeatedly stressed in the coverage of Basil's intermediate ancestors as well.

menia and eventually settle in Byzantine territory in the mid-fifth century. The text is careful to note that, over the centuries, this group of Arsacid nobles took care to maintain its identity and, through careful marriage policies, "to preserve their lineage unmixed."[10] When the narrative reaches the generation of Basil's own parents, the reader is told of several divine portents and other signs of the future emperor's greatness, drawing from a multitude of traditions and more ancient examples. These include stories associated specifically with Cyrus the Great of Persia.[11]

The genealogical tradition represented most fully by the *Vita Basilii* seems to have succeeded in cementing the dynasty's royal Arsacid origins, at least in the minds of many. It continued to be repeated by Byzantine authors well into the eleventh and even twelfth century, albeit with occasional skepticism.[12] The story may even have traveled beyond the borders of Byzantium, albeit in slightly altered form. Al-Tabari, for example, records that Basil I had come from a royal background, although he says nothing about an Arsacid heritage. For him, Basil's parents came from Slavic royalty, undoubtedly due to the family's geographic origins around Adrianople.[13]

Not everyone was convinced by the regime's efforts. Part of what makes Basil's story so unusual is the surviving evidence of opposition to the imperial court's messaging. Some sources, like the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothetes, simply ignore the

[10] *V.Bas.* 212.2–215.2, καὶ ἀσύγχυτον τὸ γένος διαφυλάττοντες.

[11] For more on this see A. Markopoulos, "Κύρου Παιδεία και Βίος Βασιλείου. Ένας πιθανός συσχετισμός," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 15 (2002) 91–108.

[12] John Skylitzes, for example, who wrote his *Synopsis of Histories* during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), borrows more or less directly from the *Vita Basilii* when describing Basil I's reign, including his supposed link to the Arsacids: I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historion* (Berlin 1973) 115 ff.; transl. J. Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057* (Cambridge 2010) 116 ff.

[13] N. Adontz, "L'âge et origine de l'empereur Basile I (867–886) (suite)," *Byzantion* 9 (1934) 255.

elevated claims of royal ancestry asserted by supporters of Basil's dynasty.[14] Others attack them much more overtly. The strongest criticism undoubtedly comes in the pages of the *Life of Patriarch Ignatios* by Niketas David. Ignatios had been a political rival of Photios, and the *Life* is replete with attacks directed against him. One of the charges laid against him is that Photios, in order to ingratiate himself with Basil, had invented a prestigious lineage for him. According to Niketas, Photios forged an "ancient text" which he then brought to the emperor as proof that he was descended from "Tiridates, the great Armenian king at the time of the holy martyr Gregorios."[15] The *Life of Ignatios* represents a rare example of a surviving source openly questioning and criticizing exaggerated genealogical claims.[16] It also reiterates both the importance of the Armenian branch of the Arsacids in the Macedonian dynasty's claims and Photios' somewhat shadowy role at their center.

It comes as no surprise that a Byzantine emperor should wish to embellish or invent an illustrious genealogy for himself. This phenomenon is well known both in Byzantium and elsewhere.[17] By the eleventh century, several prominent families claimed to be direct descendants of Constantine I or other ancient Roman lineages.[18] In the words of Tim Greenwood, "The puzzling feature is why Leo VI should wish to establish descent from either the Arsacids or Artaxerxes in the first

[14] S. Wahlgren, *Symeonis magistri et logothetae chronicon* (Berlin 2006) 689–690.

[15] A. Smithies, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2013) 89; Greenwood, in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire* 454–455. The translation is Greenwood's.

[16] For more on this see N. Leidholm, "Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-century Byzantium," *BMGS* 42 (2018) 185–201.

[17] *BMGS* 42 (2018) 185–201.

[18] The Doukai were among the best-known Byzantine families who claimed descent from Constantine I; see D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London 1968).

place."[19] This question has dogged researchers for decades, and despite a great deal of work, it remains open to debate.

Some have argued that an Arsacid lineage was simply more believable than other potential candidates, since nearly all Byzantine sources seem to agree that Basil's family were Armenian in origin.[20] This includes sources hostile to Basil like the *Life of Ignatios*, which has served to support many such arguments.[21] Others, like Kaldellis, place the claim within the politics between Byzantium and its eastern neighbors, as Basil had to contend with a newly-crowned Armenian king in Ašot I Bagratuni beginning in 884.[22] Greenwood has argued that Basil's Armenian Arsacid lineage was designed specifically to appeal to the sizeable group of elites in contemporary Byzantium who boasted of Armenian ancestry, many of whom only recently found themselves in the service of the emperor.[23] While these explanations for the origins of Basil's Arsacid claims may or may not suffice for the time being, the Achaemenid aspect of this most famous embellished genealogy remains almost completely unexplored. Aside from Basil I, no Byzantine emperor or imperial family made any claim of descent from the Achaemenid dynasty, which renders the assertion all the more intriguing.

Although most scholarship has focused on the *Vita Basilii* in discussions of the genealogical claims of Basil I and his descendants, the funeral oration of Leo VI is not only chronologically

[19] Greenwood, in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire* 454.

[20] For example, Adontz, *Byzantion* 9 (1934) 223–260.

[21] These claims might also have been influenced by a generally low opinion of Armenians among some segments of Byzantine society in this period, as well as the fact that Photios was himself from an Armenian family. See M. E. Shirinean, "Armenian Elites in Constantinople: Emperor Basil and Patriarch Photius," in R. G. Hovannisian et al. (eds.), *Armenian Constantinople* (Costa Mesa 2010) 53–72.

[22] A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2019) 192–194.

[23] Greenwood, in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire* 465–466.

first, it also has a very different focus.[24] The oration probably was delivered by Leo, Basil's son, shortly after Basil's death in 886.[25] In it, Leo briefly highlights the fact that his father could trace his origins to the Arsacids, though he does not elaborate further. For, he says, they are well known to those who have read their history.[26] He does, however, include a curious note that the Arsacids could count none other than Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes I and Achaemenid king of Persia, among their own ancestors.[27]

Leo chooses not to expand upon his father's supposed relation to the Arsacids, nor does he take the time to enumerate that dynasty's history or achievements. The Armenian branch of the Arsacids is given no special mention, nor is Basil's supposed Armenian ancestry more generally. Instead, Leo devotes several lines to a description of the Achaemenid Great King Artaxerxes I *Makrocheir* ("Long-hand" or "Long-arm").[28]

[24] It is likely that claims of Arsacid descent predated Leo's oration, but it is the earliest securely dated text that directly attests this link. For a recent synopsis of scholarly opinion see Kaldellis, *Romanland* 191–194.

[25] The text has recently been edited by Th. Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae* (Turnhout 2008), *Homily* 14. For a thorough analysis of the text's importance see N. Adontz, "La portée historique de l'oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Leon VI le sage," *Byzantion* 8 (1933) 501–513; A. Vogt and I. Hausherr, *Oraison funèbre de Basile Ier par son fils Léon VI le Sage* (Rome 1932).

[26] *Homily* 14.126–129: Πλὴν ἡ κάτω δὴ ταύτη τῆς φθορᾶς γένεσις εἰς Ἀρσακίδας αὐτὸν ἀνῆγεν· οὗτοι δὲ τίνες ποτέ εἰσιν, οὐ τοῦ παρόντος διηγεῖσθαι λόγου – οὐ γὰρ ἱστορίαν, ἀλλ' εὐφημίαν ἐργάζεται –, γνοῖεν δ' ἂν οἱ τὰς ἱστορίας ἀναλεγόμενοι.

[27] It must be admitted that Leo's well-documented animosity toward Basil leaves open the possibility that his funeral oration could contain veiled criticism; at the very least, it should be read with an eye toward potential double entendre or less than sincere praise. This could affect one's reading of the genealogy presented in the text. It is worth remembering, however, that at least the Arsacid portion of this genealogy was picked up by Constantine VII and his court, at which time it was certainly presented with sincerity. For more on their relationship see Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*.

[28] The term χείρ could designate the hand or the full length of one's arm

> [The Arsacids] come from royal stock. For they draw the source of their blood from the springs of Artaxerxes, who for the longest time was exalted for royal power and especially his defeats of other nations. As a result of this they gave him the extraordinary epithet *Makrocheir*, even if some think that he received the name because one hand hung longer than the other. But those who investigate the matter more carefully say that it is not because of the size of his hand, but because he extended the dynasty to its greatest extent that he was called *Makrocheir*, which seems to me to be closer to the truth.[29]

Leo's oration seems to be in response to a pre-existing claim of Arsacid ancestry, which generally fits with current opinions on the chronology. If there is any truth to the criticism of Photios in the *Life of Ignatios* by Niketas David, the claim had been around since the period of the patriarch's deposition (867–877) or shortly thereafter.[30] Leo clearly wants to move the conversation away from the Arsacids, and there could be several reasons for that. One might speculate that it was related to criticism like that in the *Life of Ignatios*, or perhaps that it stemmed from tensions between Leo and his father. But this is a separate question and a project for another day. For now, I would like to focus on the appearance of Artaxerxes I in the oration, to which Leo turns his attention.

Leo not only notes this genealogical connection to the Achaemenid dynasty, he also works to praise and even reha-

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from the shoulder to the tip of the fingers.

[29] *Homily* 14.135–139: Πλήν γε ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ βασιλείου προῆλθον σπορᾶς. Ἕλκουσι γὰρ τοῦ αἵματος τὰς πηγὰς ἐκ τῶν Ἀρταξέρξου ναμάτων, ὃς ἐπὶ μήκιστον χρόνου βασιλείῳ κράτει ἐμεγαλύνθη καὶ πλεῖστα ὅσα τῶν ἐθνῶν πεποίητο ὑποχείρια, ᾧ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐξαίρετον ἐπώνυμον ἔδοσαν τὸν Μακρόχειρα ὀνομάσαντες, εἰ καὶ δοκεῖ τισι ταύτην λαβεῖν τὴν κλῆσιν, ὅτι δὴ θατέρα τῶν χειρῶν συνέβαινεν πλέον τετάσθαι· ἀλλ' οἵ γε ἀκριβέστερον περὶ τούτου σκοπήσαντες, οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ τῆς χειρὸς μεγέθους, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τῆς δυναστείας ἔκτασιν τὸ Μακρόχειρ καλεῖσθαι φασὶ προσλαβεῖν, ὃ καὶ δοκεῖ μᾶλλον ἀληθείας ἐγγύτερον.

[30] Kaldellis, *Romanland* 191. See also A. Smithies, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius* (Washington 2013) 2–132.

bilitate the reputation of his reputed ancestor. Artaxerxes is lauded for his extension of his empire's borders and his victories over his enemies, which were obviously praiseworthy traits for any ruler, especially for the early Macedonian emperors. These assertions, however, raise several questions.

Artaxerxes I is indeed praised in much of the classical tradition, but almost always for his mercy and kindness as a ruler. Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes*, which is otherwise dedicated to Artaxerxes II, begins with a brief notice celebrating the first Artaxerxes' "gentleness and magnanimity" (*Artax.* 1.1). A similar claim is made by Ammianus Marcellinus, and several anecdotes shared across multiple authors express a similar sentiment.[31] The biblical tradition, which was repeated and reworked in many Byzantine works of Leo VI's age, was likewise largely favorable toward Artaxerxes I, although his image there is rather more complicated by confusion over the identities of Persian monarchs and by other issues (see further below). Still, this tradition adds little that would directly support Leo's claims. The assertion that Artaxerxes Makrocheir was noted for the expansion of the empire's borders and for his victories over foreign enemies is unusual enough to require further explanation.

If Leo's purpose was simply to add an Achaemenid branch to his dynasty's growing list of famous ancestors, he had several choices at his disposal. Cyrus the Great, Xerxes, or Darius readily evoked images of conquest and would have served Leo's purpose well. Cyrus in particular would have fit nicely alongside Alexander the Great and Constantine I in later versions of the genealogy. After all, Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* has been shown to have served as a model for aspects of Basil's

[31] Amm. Marc. 30.8.4. According to Ammianus, Artaxerxes Makrocheir was beloved by his subjects because of his mildness, commuting death sentences or other cruel punishments to other, less severe ones. With such support, he accomplished great deeds commemorated by Greek writers. For an example of anecdotes of magnanimity sometimes associated with Artaxerxes see K. Alpers, "Xerxes und Artaxerxes," *Byzantion* 39 (1969) 5–12.

biography in the *Vita Basilii*.[32] That being said, the inclusion of Artaxerxes in Basil's genealogy is partially explicable by looking to earlier sources, including Leo's probable source for the core of his assertion in the funeral oration.

It seems likely that Leo VI drew his information for the connection between the Arsacids and Artaxerxes from the *Chronicle* of George Synkellos or a common source. The chronicler, who completed his project sometime between 810 and 820, probably used Arrian's *Parthika* for this portion of his narrative, although his version of events differs from the summary of that work in Photios' *Bibliotheke*.[33] According to Synkellos, Arsakes and his brother, Tiridates, were serving as the satraps of Baktria under the rule of Agathokles just prior to Arsakes' rise to power as the founder of the Arsacid dynasty of the Parthians. The brothers reportedly "drew their family line from Artaxerxes, [king] of the Persians."[34] The fact that Photios' version of the story omits any mention of Artaxerxes makes Synkellos the most likely candidate for Leo's source.

There was some precedent in the ancient world for simultaneous claims of both Arsacid and Achaemenid descent, some of which were certainly known in the courts of Basil I and Leo VI. Photios, for example, records that the second-century Syrian novelist Iamblichus "flourished during the reign of Soaimos, the Achaemenid [and] Arsacid, who was a king descended from kings, and who became both a senator in Rome and a consul, and then again king of greater Armenia."[35]

[32] Markopoulos, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 15 (2002) 91–108.

[33] *Bibl.* 17a, cod. 58. Neither Artaxerxes nor any other Achaemenid is listed in Photios' version, which leaves open the possibility that the connection originates somewhere other than Arrian, perhaps even in a Byzantine milieu.

[34] Synkellos p.539 Bonn = *FGrHist* 156 F 31: Ἀρσάκης τις καὶ Τηριδάτης ἀδελφοί, τὸ γένος ἕλκοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ Περσῶν Ἀρταξέρξου, ἐσατράπευον Βακτρίων ἐπὶ Ἀγαθοκλέους Μακεδόνος ἐπάρχου τῆς Περσικῆς, ὃς Ἀγαθοκλῆς ἐρασθεὶς Τηριδάτου, ὡς Ἀρριανός φησιν.

[35] *Bibl.* 75b, cod. 94: καὶ ἀκμάζειν ἐπὶ Σοαίμου τοῦ Ἀχαιμενίδου τοῦ Ἀρσα-

Claiming descent from both Alexander the Great (or at least Macedonian royalty) and the Persian royal families in fact places the early Macedonian emperors in a long line of Hellenistic rulers, especially in Anatolia and other formerly Seleucid regions. The Orontid dynasty of Commagene famously claimed descent from the Achaemenids (in addition to their Seleucid/Hellenistic credentials), as did the Ariarathids of Cappadocia, the Mithradatids of Pontus, and the Armenian Orontids.[36] The Pontic program proved exceptionally influential. Not only did the Hellenistic kingdoms and Commagene and Cappadocia seemingly follow suit in their claims, but according to Shayegan, Mithridates VI may have been more or less directly responsible for the appearance of Achaemenid claims among the Arsacids of Parthia as well.[37] It remains possible that Leo VI or members of his court were aware of such claims as well, although this remains speculative at best.

Most scholars have identified the Artaxerxes mentioned in Synkellos' account with Artaxerxes II Mnemon (r. 404–359), who Ctesias claims was known as Arsakes/Arsikas before

κίδου, ὃς βασιλεὺς ἦν ἐκ πατέρων βασιλέων, γέγονε δὲ ὅμως καὶ τῆς συγλήτου βουλῆς τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ, καὶ ὕπατος δέ, εἶτα καὶ βασιλεὺς πάλιν τῆς μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας. Soaimos ruled the kingdom of Armenia as a client of Rome from 144 to 161 CE and again from 164 to 186.

[36] C. Lerouge-Cohen, "Persianism in the Kingdom of Pontic Kappadokia: The Genealogical Claims of the Mithridatids," in *Persianism in Antiquity* 223–224. According to Polybius (5.43.1–2), the Mithradatids of Pontus claimed descent from one of the seven conspirators who assassinated the usurper Smerdis in 522 BCE, allowing Darius to ascend to the throne. The Ariarathids of Cappadocia and Orontids of Armenia did the same.

[37] Lerouge-Cohen, in *Persianism* 227–228. Pontic claims underwent a major change under Mithradates Eupator (111–63 BCE). He claimed no link to the Seven, but instead claimed descent from Cyrus and Darius on one side, Alexander and Seleukos on the other. He was the first Hellenistic king to make such a claim of dual descent, but Antiochos I Theos of Commagene would claim something similar (Achaemenid on his father's side, Macedonian on his mother's). His reign (69–40 BCE) began while Mithradates Eupator was still in power.

coming to the throne.[38] The similarity between his pre-regnal name and that of Aršak/Arsakes, founder of the Parthian dynasty, as the argument goes, helps to explain the otherwise apocryphal connection between the two in later Greek and Roman historiography.[39] Most Hellenistic claimants of Achaemenid lineage tended to link themselves explicitly with Artaxerxes II as well. Thus, in a group of inscriptions found at Nemrut Dağı, King Antiochos of Commagene claimed that the founder of his dynasty, Aroandas (Orontes) had married a daughter of "the Great Artaxerxes, who is also Arsakes."[40]

Though it has largely escaped notice in modern studies, Leo VI identifies the Artaxerxes in Synkellos' chronicle not with Artaxerxes II, but with Artaxerxes I. It is possible that Leo simply took the Artaxerxes from Synkellos' account and expanded it by drawing on the Artaxerxes more familiar to him, in this case Makrocheir; Synkellos' brief notice names the Achaemenid forebear of Arsakes only as Artaxerxes without specifying further. This is a very real possibility, especially considering the significant amount of confusion surrounding the identification of specific Persian kings in both the classical and the biblical traditions.

At the same time, assertions like the one found in his funeral oration would have been made very carefully, and Leo was well known for his knowledge of and interest in the classical past.[41] The choice was likely deliberate, which naturally leads

[38] See J. Wieshöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD* (London 1996) 132–133. Photius *Bibl.* 43a.11–12, cod. 72 = *FGrHist* 688 F 15.55: Ἀρσάκης, ὁ τοῦ βασιλέως παῖς, ὁ καὶ ὕστερον μετονομασθεὶς Ἀρτοξέρξης. The claim is repeated in Plut. *Artax.* 1.2.

[39] See for example M. Rahim Shayegan, "Persianism: Or Achaemenid Reminiscences in the Iranian and Iranicate World(s) of Antiquity," in *Persianism in Antiquity* 427–428.

[40] *IGLSyr* I 3, discussed by Shayegan, in *Persianism* 428–429; see also W. Messerschmidt, "Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: Die Ahnengalerie des Antiochos I. von Kommagene," in J. Wägner (ed.), *Gottkönige am Euphrat. Neue Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in Kommagene* (Mainz 2012) 87–98.

[41] See esp. Th. Antonopoulou, "Emperor Leo VI the Wise and the 'First

to the question of his motivation. More specifically, the question of why Leo would choose Artaxerxes I specifically and what sort of resonance this assertion would have had among his contemporaries remains to be answered. If the choice was deliberate, might there be a reason beyond what is made explicit in the text of the funeral oration? Even if this was a case of mistaken identity, what was the image of Artaxerxes Makrocheir that was more familiar to either Leo or his audience?

In sum, if Leo had simply wanted to add an Achaemenid ancestor to the growing number of claims associated with his dynasty, one might have expected Cyrus or even Darius or Xerxes, especially if the goal was to emphasize the expansion of empire and victories over foreign enemies. If one instead looks to earlier claims of an Arsacid-Achaemenid or Hellenistic-Achaemenid connection, one would expect to see Artaxerxes II Mnemon in that role. The fact that Leo chose Artaxerxes I needs explanation.

In his defense of Artaxerxes' eponym, Leo closely follows the ancient thesaurus/dictionary of Julius Pollux, which describes the range of meanings of various epithets, supported by examples from literature;[42] the argument is directed against a common assertion from the classical tradition regarding Artaxerxes' "long arm/hand," which is repeated by Plutarch (*Artax.* 1.1), among others. Leo's assertion about Artaxerxes' expansion of the empire, a rather curious one, may also have been influenced by Josephus and/or the Old Testament, in which the empire of Artaxerxes is described as comprising "one hun-

Byzantine Humanism': On the Quest for Renovation and Cultural Synthesis," *TravMém* 21.2 (2017) 187–233; Tougher, in *New Constantines* 171–179.

[42] Pollux offers the example of Artaxerxes III Ochos(!) in his description of the epithet Makrocheir (2.151): μακρόχειρ, εἴτε κατὰ Πολύκλειτον ὁ Ὑστάσπου Δαρεῖος, εἴτε κατὰ Ἀντιλέοντα Ξέρξης, εἴτε κατὰ τοὺς πλείστους Ὦχος ὁ ἐπικληθεὶς Ἀρταξέρξης, ἤτοι τὴν δεξιὰν ἔχων προμηκεστέραν ἢ τὴν ἀριστερὰν ἢ ἀμφοτέρας· οἱ δὲ ὅτι τὴν δύναμιν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐξέτεινεν. ἀπὸ δὲ χειρῶν καὶ χειρῖδες παρὰ Ξενοφῶντι [*Cyr.* 8.3.13], καὶ χειριδωτοὶ χιτῶνες.

dred and twenty-seven satrapies from India to Ethiopia."[43] Such a description certainly evokes an image of a great empire. Leo's words (see n.29 above), however, follow those of Pollux's *Onomastikon* quite closely, making it perhaps more likely that the emperor was simply following a similar source.

Interestingly, Al-Tabari, a contemporary of Leo VI, records an almost identical description of the Persian king in his *History*. His account of Ardashir Bahman, a semi-legendary Persian king who combines aspects of Cyrus the Great and Artaxerxes I, begins by claiming that "he was called Ardashir the Mighty (*al-tawīl al-bā'*), and was nicknamed thus, so it is said, because he took whatever was within reach in the surrounding kingdoms, and thus ruled all the climes."[44] The title, translated by Perlmann as "the Mighty," was taken from the Persian *darāzdast*, literally "the long hand."[45] While there is almost certainly no direct link between Tabari and Leo's funeral oration, the similarities are striking.

None of this adequately solves the mysteries behind this item in Leo's funeral oration. In stark contrast to the Arsacids, the Achaemenid side of Basil I's legendary lineage has been largely ignored by modern scholarship. Most treatments offer little more than a simple statement acknowledging that it existed.[46] Yet, as Greenwood has argued, the fact that Leo did not feel the need to expand his discussion to include the identity of the

[43] *AJ* 11.186.2–3: παραλαβὼν γὰρ τὴν βασιλείαν ὁ Ἀρταξέρξης καὶ καταστήσας ἀπὸ Ἰνδίας ἄχρι Αἰθιοπίας τῶν σατραπειῶν ἑκατὸν καὶ εἰκοσιεπτὰ οὐσῶν ἄρχοντας.

[44] M. Perlmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* IV *The Ancient Kingdoms* (Albany 1987) 81 (§687). Ardashir Bahman, or Kay Bahman, was thought to be the grandson and successor of Bishtasb in Tabari's version of events, while his mother was named as Asturya, identified by Tabari as the biblical Esther. Multiple traditions named Bahman as the reputed ancestor of the Sasanian dynasty of Iran.

[45] Perlmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* IV 81 n.232.

[46] E.g. Moravcsik, *DOP* 15 (1961) 69; Greenwood, in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire* 454.

Arsacids or of the precise relation between them and the Achaemenids "suggests that those claims held meaning for contemporaries without further explanation, supporting the contention that they were current during the lifetime of Basil I."[47] But what, exactly, was this meaning?

Reconstructing the ninth-century Byzantine image of Artaxerxes I is a much more complicated task than identifying Leo's source, but, as is argued below, doing so may also help to answer the question of Leo's motivations for emphasizing the Achaemenid ruler's place in Basil's genealogy.

The Byzantines accessed the ancient Persian past through two parallel traditions: the classical tradition represented by Roman and especially ancient Greek authors, and the biblical tradition represented primarily by the Old Testament and related literature. The classical tradition to which ninth- and tenth-century Byzantines had access generally gave much more attention to Artaxerxes II than Artaxerxes I.[48] Artaxerxes II was (and still is) best known for the civil war he fought against his brother, Cyrus the Younger. Xenophon was an eyewitness to the conflict and tells the story in his *Anabasis*. Ctesias, who served as a physician at the court of Artaxerxes II, likewise offered extensive coverage of the king's reign. Although Ctesias' account no longer survives today, both texts were read and copied extensively in medieval Byzantium.[49] Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes* was likewise well known in Leo VI's day. While his coverage of Artaxerxes II's reign was based largely on earlier sources like Xenophon, his biographies remained quite popular among Byzantine readers. Plutarch's biography gives a decidedly mixed impression of Artaxerxes II, who appears as a

[47] Greenwood, in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire* 453–454.

[48] For the Byzantines' role in the formation of this classical tradition see A. Kaldellis, "The Byzantine Role in the Making of the Corpus of Classical Greek Historiography: A Preliminary Investigation," *JHS* 132 (2012) 71–85.

[49] I. Pérez Martín, "The Reception of Xenophon in Byzantium: The Macedonian Period," *GRBS* 53 (2013) 812–855.

microcosm of the grand narrative of the Persian empire as told by Greek historians, in which it begins strong, hopeful, wise, and merciful, but gradually deteriorates into tyranny, cruelty, and decadence.[50]

Artaxerxes I would have been most recognizable to medieval Byzantines thanks to his inclusion in the biblical tradition.[51] Though identifications vary, both among Byzantine authors and modern scholars, Artaxerxes I was typically associated with two books of the Old Testament in particular: Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther.[52] In addition, according to most commentators of the ninth and tenth century, Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, understood as a countdown to the birth of Christ, was also closely associated with the Persian king.

The ancient and medieval traditions associated with Artaxerxes are plagued by a degree of confusion, due largely to the several kings known by that name (including, for example, the Sasanian Ardashir, which usually appears as Artaxerxes in Greek sources) and, at the same time, alternate forms of the name ascribed to the same rulers. For example, the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah in the Septuagint uses an alternate form, Arthasastha (Ἀρθασασθά), which more closely resembles Old

[50] E. Almagor, "Plutarch and the Persians," *Electrum* 24 (2017) 138–139. As Almagor points out, the complexity in Plutarch's narrative has led even modern scholars to interpret the *Life of Artaxerxes* in widely different ways, with some arguing that it is an overwhelmingly negative portrait while others describe it as a largely sympathetic piece.

[51] L. Llewellyn-Jones, "The Achaemenid Empire," in T. Daryaee (ed.), *King of the Seven Climes: A History of the Ancient Iranian World* (Irvine 2017) 75–76.

[52] Ezra-Nehemiah, which is split into separate books by most modern editions of the Septuagint but was usually read as a single book in Byzantium, tells of a series of Jewish leaders dispatched from Persia to ensure the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. Nehemiah, the last of these leaders, was often associated with the reign of Artaxerxes I. The Book of Esther tells the story of a young Jewish girl who is taken as a wife by a Persian king and, with the help of her uncle Mordecai, thwarts both a plot against the king and the genocide of her people.

Persian and/or Aramaic versions of the name (OP Artaxšaça). The Persian king in the Book of Esther is clearly given the Hellenic form Artaxerxes in some versions of the Septuagint, while other manuscript traditions give the name Assouēros.[53] While scholars continue to argue over the precise identity of this Artaxerxes/Assouēros, the text itself is vague. Josephus specifically names Artaxerxes I in his version of the story, although he complicates matters further by calling him "Cyrus, whom the Greeks call Artaxerxes" (*AJ* 11.184 ff.). Assouēros, however, is commonly recognized by scholars to have been Xerxes, as is clear in the Book of Ezra itself.[54]

Adding to this confusion were attempts to synchronize the chronologies of the two major traditions. In his zeal to reconcile the chronologies of multiple sources and traditions, Synkellos exemplifies just this kind of confusion.[55] He claims that the Arthasastha named by Ezra, whom he also identifies as Artaxerxes, is different from the Artaxerxes who dispatched Ezra to Jerusalem.[56] The latter he identifies as Artaxerxes Makrocheir. The former, he says, was called Cyrus by the Greeks, apparently following a similar statement by Josephus.[57]

[53] K. H. Jobes, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford 2007) 424–425.

[54] In the Septuagint version of Ezra (4:6–7), Assouēros (Ἀσσούηρος) is named as the father and predecessor of Arthasastha/Artaxerxes.

[55] E. Jeffreys, "Old Testament 'History' and the Byzantine Chronicle," in P. Magdalino et al. (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington 2010) 159–160. According to Jeffreys, Synkellos was more concerned than many Byzantine chroniclers to show "that every major event of Christ's life was paralleled by events in the week of creation," and he did not mince words when it came to criticizing his predecessors for mistakes in their calculations.

[56] A. A. Mosshammer, *Georgius Syncellus, Ecloga chronographica* (Leipzig 1984) 282.11–18.

[57] *AJ* 11.184–185: Τελευτήσαντος δὲ Ξέρξου τὴν βασιλείαν εἰς τὸν υἱὸν Κῦρον, ὃν Ἀρταξέρξην Ἕλληνες καλοῦσιν, συνέβη μεταβῆναι. τούτου τὴν Περσῶν ἔχοντος ἡγεμονίαν ἐκινδύνευσεν τὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος ἅπαν σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσθαι. τὴν δ' αἰτίαν μετ' οὐ πολὺ δηλώσομεν.

Such blending of Cyrus the Great with Artaxerxes I was fairly common in Byzantine and other, contemporary sources.[58]

Despite such confusion, however, surviving sources allow us to reconstruct, at least partially, the image of Artaxerxes I around the time of Leo's funeral oration. Near-contemporary world chronicles, a genre that proliferated in the ninth and tenth centuries, are a good place to start.

Synkellos, who may have served as Leo VI's source for his funeral oration, provides reasonably lengthy coverage of Artaxerxes I in his *Chronicle*, devoting more lines to the king than to many other ancient sovereigns and including commentary on his reign in two different sections of his work. Predictably, much of this is drawn from the biblical tradition. The chronicler repeats the contention of Julius Africanus that Artaxerxes I's reign was associated by some with the beginning of the Seventy Weeks leading to the birth of Christ as foretold by Daniel in the Old Testament.[59] Synkellos himself seems to agree with this view, as he later notes that it was under Artaxerxes I that the plain and the area around the walls of Jerusalem were settled (299.13–18).[60] As mentioned above, Synkellos also argues that the Arthasastha named by Ezra was

[58] For the Byzantine chroniclers generally see R. Fishman-Duker, "The Second Temple Period in Byzantine Chronicles," *Byzantion* 47 (1977) 126–156. The confusion and/or conflation of Cyrus and Artaxerxes in George the Monk, George Synkellos, and Symeon the Logothetes is addressed below. For the Iranian tradition see Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bahman," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1989) 489–490, and T. Daryaee, "On Forgetting Cyrus and Remembering the Achaemenids in Late Antique Iran," in M. R. Shayegan (ed.), *Cyrus the Great: Life and Lore* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2019) 221–231.

[59] Synkellos 277.14–19: Τινὲς μὲν οὖν τὰς ο′ ἑβδομάδας ἀπὸ τοῦδε τοῦ χρόνου βούλονται ἀριθμεῖσθαι, ἕτεροι δέ, ὡς καὶ Ἀφρικανός, ἀπὸ Νεεμίου καὶ τελείας ἀνοικοδομῆς τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τῆς πόλεως, ἥτις γέγονε κατὰ τὸ κ′ ἔτος Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ καὶ Μακρόχειρος, ὅπερ ἦν κόσμου ˏεξη′. ἕτεροι ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς διὰ Ζοροβάβελ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰωσεδέκ, τῷ β′ ἔτει Δαρείου, ἀριθμοῦσι τὰς αὐτὰς ο′ ἑβδομάδας.

[60] This version of events is repeated and elaborated at 303.17 ff.

not Artaxerxes Makrocheir but rather the one responsible for dispatching Ezra to Jerusalem to complete the city's settlement and fortifications in the seventh year of his reign (282.8–17). Synkellos later offers a more detailed account of this Artaxerxes' reign, which is heavily focused on the events narrated in the Septuagint, especially the Book of Ezra (302–304). The chronicler notably repeats the language of the Old Testament in writing that Artaxerxes had been "moved by God" in his decision to send Ezra with a number of Jewish settlers to Jerusalem.[61] The final portions of Synkellos' account are taken up by brief notices related to the Peloponnesian War, which the author notes occurred during Artaxerxes I's reign.[62] This section also contains a list of notable figures, mostly philosophers, poets, and rhetors, who were born and/or flourished at the same time as the Persian king. In general, Synkellos' account of Artaxerxes I is heavily reliant upon the biblical tradition. Aside from the Old Testament itself, he draws most heavily and explicitly from Africanus, Eusebius, and, secondarily, Josephus.

In his own entry on Artaxerxes I, George the Monk, who wrote during the reign of Michael III (r. 842–867), also dwells for some time on the resettlement of Jerusalem and the prophecy of Daniel. He argues forcefully against the opinion that the city's rebuilding had occurred under Cyrus the Great: Jerusalem "was not settled during the reign of Cyrus, but that of Artaxerxes Makrocheir." After enumerating the list of Persian kings from Cyrus to Artaxerxes, he asserts that Nehemiah raised up the city in Artaxerxes' twentieth year, "which Ezra describes for us in detail."[63] It is from this point, he argues, that

[61] E.g. 302.22: ὁ κύριος ὁ δοὺς ταῦτα εἰς τὴν καρδίαν μου τοῦ βασιλέως; 303.17–19: τὸν ἀρχιερέα Ἔσδραν τῷ ζ′ ἔτει αὐτοῦ θεόθεν κινηθεὶς ἐξέπεμψε πρὸς διδασκαλίαν τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ Ἰουδαίων.

[62] He cites Thucydides as his authority (304.2–23).

[63] C. de Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon* (Leipzig 1904) 414.15–21: οὐκ ἐπὶ Κύρου δὲ ᾠκοδομήθη, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ Μακρόχειρος. μετὰ γὰρ τὴν κάθοδον ἐπανῆλθε Καμβύσης, εἶτα οἱ μάγοι, καὶ μετ' ἐκείνους Δαρεῖος Ὑστά-

the "weeks" in Daniel's prophecy foretelling the coming of Christ should be counted. Aside from this detailed discussion, George the Monk simply includes a list of figures from the classical Greek world who flourished during Artaxerxes I's reign, much like Synkellos. These include, among others, Sophocles, Thucydides, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, and the last days of Socrates (284.8–15).

Symeon the Logothetes, writing in the later tenth century, states plainly that Artaxerxes I Makrocheir "is the same one called Arthasastha in Ezra" (46.9), though like George Synkellos, he argues that there are two different kings called "Arthasastha" in the book. In his entry for Cambyses, he notes that this king was also called Artaxerxes, "the same one who is also called Arthasastha in Ezra."[64] Symeon's coverage of Artaxerxes I begins with the assertion that he was the Persian king in the biblical story of Esther and that it was during his reign that Ezra was active as a prophet. This is followed by a brief description of the story of Nehemiah and the final stages of the resettlement of Jerusalem, including the plain and the area around the walls.[65] The final portion of Symeon's account asserts plainly that it is from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign that one should begin counting the Seventy Weeks to the

σπου, μεθ' ὃν Ξέρξης ὁ Δαρείου καὶ Ἀρταβάνης. εἶτα Ἀρταξέρξης ὁ Μακρόχειρ ἐβασίλευσε τῆς Περσίδος. ἐν δὲ τῷ εἰκοστῷ ἔτει τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ Νεεμίας ἀνελθὼν τὴν πόλιν ἀνέστησεν, ἅπερ ὁ Ἔσδρας ἀκριβῶς ἡμῖν διηγήσατο.

[64] *Symeonis magistri et logothetae chronicon* 46.4: Καμβύσης ὁ καὶ Ἀρταξέρξης (ὁ αὐτὸς δέ ἐστιν ὁ καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἔσδρᾳ λεγόμενος Ἀρθασασθά).

[65] *Symeonis* 46.9: Ἀρταξέρξης ὁ Ξέρξου, ὁ Μακρόχειρ (καὶ οὗτος ἐν τῷ Ἔσδρᾳ Ἀρθασασθὰ κέκληται), ἐβασίλευσεν ἔτη μα′. ἐπὶ τούτου τὰ κατὰ Ἐσθὴρ καὶ Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ Ἀμμὰν ἐπράχθη. καθ' ὃν καιρὸν καὶ Ἔσδρας προεφήτευεν. συγχωρήσαντος Ἀρταξέρξου Ἔσδρας ὁ ἱερεὺς τοὺς ὑπολοίπους ἀναγαγὼν εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ τὸν νόμον ἐξεπαίδευεν. Νεεμίας τε, ὁ ἀρχιοινοχόος Ἀρταξέρξου, ἀνὴρ ἐκ γένους ὢν ἀρχιερατικοῦ, παρακαλέσας τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἐπιτραπεὶς ἄνεισιν εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν καὶ τὴν Ἰερουσαλήμ. τειχίζει δὲ αὐτὴν τῶν ἐπιτιθεμένων ἕνεκα ὅπλοις τοὺς ἐνεργοῦντας περιστοιχίσας. καὶ τὸν λαὸν σὺν τῷ Ἔσδρᾳ τῷ Μωυσέως ἐξεπαίδευσε νόμῳ, πᾶσαν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἑλληνικὴν ἀποκινήσας ἀγωγήν. καὶ ᾠκοδομήθη πλατεῖα καὶ περίτειχος ἡ πόλις.

coming of Christ.[66]

Artaxerxes II receives far less attention in middle Byzantine chronicles, largely because he does not figure prominently in the biblical tradition. Most such world chronicles prioritized the biblical tradition more generally, especially for periods or events included in the Old Testament.[67] Middle Byzantine historians were primarily interested in the Persian Empire as the setting of much of the Old Testament.[68]

The tenth-century *Suda* does not contain a separate entry for Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes II. Still, other entries make clear that the author/compiler thought that the biblical Ezra flourished under Xerxes, while the Persian king who married Esther was Artaxerxes I Makrocheir.[69] Representing the classical tradition, the text notes that Themistocles, hero of the Battle of Salamis, met with Artaxerxes I when he fled to his court and briefly names him in an account of the so-called Peace of Kallias.[70] There is also a reproduction of a letter sent from one "Artaxerxes, king of the Persians," which purports to show how the king had inquired after the wisdom of Hippocrates.[71] The *Suda* incorporates information drawn from both classical and biblical/religious sources, yet the image of Artaxerxes I is still overwhelmingly weighted toward the biblical tradition.[72]

[66] *Symeonis* 46.10: Ὅθεν ἄρχονται ἀριθμεῖσθαι αἱ ο′ ἑβδομάδες ἐν τῷ Δανιὴλ Εἰκοστῷ ἔτει τῆς βασιλείας Ἀρταξέρξου, ἐντεῦθεν φασὶ δεῖν τὰς ἑβδομάδας ἀριθμεῖσθαι τὰς ο′ τὰς ἐν τῇ τοῦ Δανιὴλ ὀπτασίᾳ μέχρι τῆς τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσίας καὶ τῶν ἐξῆς ἐπισυμβεβηκότων. φανερὸν δέ ἐστιν, ὅτι ἑβδομήκοντα ἑβδομάδες ποιοῦσιν ἔτη υϙ′.

[67] For a good overview see Jeffreys, in *Old Testament in Byzantium* 153–174.

[68] Kaldellis, *JHS* 132 (2012) 73.

[69] E 3121 (Ezra), 3139 (Esther).

[70] Θ 124 and 125 (Themistocles), K 214 (Kallias).

[71] I 564.

[72] Only the entry for Ezra and the related entry for Esther specifies that Artaxerxes Makrocheir is meant. In most other cases, Artaxerxes is named without further clarification.

While there are some disagreements and inconsistencies among them, the sources surveyed here generally agree on several points. Accounts of Artaxerxes I and his reign are heavily weighted toward the biblical accounts. Classical Greek sources make occasional appearances but are almost always secondary. More specifically, Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks features prominently in all of them, which includes the final stages of the rebuilding and populating of the city of Jerusalem and its temple. The identity of the Persian king in the Book of Esther seems to have been subject to less of a consensus in ninth- and tenth-century Byzantium, although Artaxerxes I was a strong candidate. Perhaps significantly, none of the Byzantine sources examined here attempt to identify him as Artaxerxes II Mnemon. If anything, they tend to push the relative date of the story further back in time, citing Josephus or other authorities to explain how Cyrus, Darius, or even Cambyses were alternately known as Artaxerxes/Arthasastha.

If this was the image of Artaxerxes I familiar to Leo VI, the question remains: why select Artaxerxes I as Basil's ancestor rather than the more conventional Artaxerxes II or the more famous Cyrus? A look at the Byzantine chroniclers' own sources may offer an additional clue.

Aside from the biblical texts themselves, Julius Africanus and Eusebius are cited most frequently in middle Byzantine chronicles in their coverage of Achaemenid Persia. The assertion that Daniel's Seventy Weeks should be counted from the reign of Artaxerxes I in particular relies upon the authority of Africanus.[73] Aside from this, Josephus seems to have been the source from which middle Byzantine chroniclers drew most often, especially for material related specifically to Artaxerxes I and Old Testament accounts.[74] Josephus' own treatment of the king, however, differs significantly from these Byzantine

[73] For example, Synkellos 277.14–19 (quoted n.59 above).

[74] For example, George Monachos 414.22–415.2: ἂν τοίνυν ἐντεῦθεν τετρακόσια καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα ἔτη θῶμεν, ἥξομεν πάντως ἐπὶ τὴν κατασκαφὴν ταύτην, ὡς καὶ Ἰώσηπος αὖθις μαρτυρεῖ λέγων.

authors, at least in its emphasis. His account in *Jewish Antiquities* focuses particularly on the story of Esther, repeating much of what a Byzantine reader would encounter in the Septuagint, but it is decidedly negative in its depiction of the Persian king, highlighting how Artaxerxes nearly destroyed the Jewish people "including women and children" (n.57 above). Credit for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple is largely shifted to Cyrus the Great or Darius I.

As stated above, Byzantine sources largely agree on their association of Artaxerxes I with the final stages of the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, but they tend to downplay or simply do not mention his apparent plans to wipe out the Jewish people. In this case at least, there is a clear shift in emphasis between one of their main sources, Josephus, and the chroniclers themselves. This could be significant when placed in a late-ninth-century context.

Between them, Basil I and Leo VI sought to create an image of their rule as a time of imperial renewal.[75] One of the key ways in which this message was conveyed was through an extensive building and restoration program in the capital city, which was designed to remake the city's spiritual and ceremonial landscape in particular. As Ousterhout has argued, Basil I's "cultural revival was made manifest by the restoration of a few select buildings, augmented by the construction of a few, lavish new ones."[76] The *Vita Basilii* lists numerous structures that were supposed to have been renovated or restored during Basil's reign.[77] This includes, for example, the restoration of the Church of the Holy Apostles, an important spiritual

[75] Th. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden 1997); M. L. D. Riedel, *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity* (Cambridge 2019); Tougher, in *New Constantines* 171–179.

[76] R. Ousterhout, "Reconstructing Ninth-Century Constantinople," in L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* (Hampshire 1998) 129.

[77] *V.Bas.* 321–325; Ousterhout, in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century* 125–126.

center that served as the burial place for most emperors. In particular, Basil's construction of the so-called *Nea Ekklesia* in the southeast of the imperial palace complex altered the religious and ceremonial landscape of Constantinople. The church quickly became one of the most important repositories of holy relics associated with the imperial throne and was almost as quickly incorporated into several public ceremonies that formed the imperial calendar.[78] A large number of these relics were associated with Old Testament figures, including the prophet Elijah, Abraham, and King David, as well as some with the emperor Constantine I.

Among the many aspects of Basil I and Leo VI's legitimation campaign and symbolic repertoire were comparisons of Basil and Leo with the biblical kings David and Solomon.[79] Basil, like David, rose from obscurity to become ruler, and yet had a 'secret' royal lineage. Leo, like Solomon, became renowned for his wisdom (he would eventually become known as "the Wise").[80] This obviously opened the door to other Old Testament types and allusions. Byzantine thinkers and theologians gradually put forward the view that Byzantium was in some sense a New Israel, which simultaneously made Constantinople not only a New Rome, but also a New Jerusalem.[81] Although this vision was not fully articulated in Leo VI's day, some aspects of this rhetorical and theological movement were almost

[78] P. Magdalino, "Observations on the Nea Ecclesia," *JÖB* 37 (1987) 51–64; Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Ninth Century* 118.

[79] See, for example, P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, in *Old Testament in Byzantium* 1–38; Antonopoulou, *TravMém* 21.2 (2017) 187–233, and "Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography: Models and Approaches," in *New Constantines* 159–170; Markopoulos, in *Antecessor* 945–970; and n.3 above.

[80] Tougher, in *New Constantines* 171–179.

[81] Jeffreys, in *Old Testament in Byzantium* 172–173; S. Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Leiden 2018). This appears regularly by the twelfth century, but the extent to which it was already accepted at the turn of the tenth century remains open to debate.

certainly present.[82] The Achaemenid Empire was likewise a continuous interest for Byzantine thinkers since it was commonly held to be one of the four kingdoms of the world foretold in the Book of Daniel.[83] Rome, including Byzantium, was understood to be the fourth and final of these kingdoms.[84] This, then, placed Byzantine emperors in a continuous line that included the Achaemenid kings. Old Testament typology built into imperial propaganda was, without a doubt, both common and meaningful at the turn of the tenth century.

Artaxerxes I's association with the biblical tradition more broadly and, potentially, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks more specifically could have led Leo VI to select him as Basil I's ancestor rather than the more conventional Artaxerxes II. Thus, the Byzantine emperor created a pedigree for his father's dynasty that imbued their rule with both prophetic significance and an association with the reconstruction of Christendom's holiest city. Just as Artaxerxes I had overseen Jerusalem's rebirth or renewal, so too were Basil and Leo ensuring a similar renewal in the capital of the Roman Empire.

By way of conclusion, this review of the image of Artaxerxes I in late-ninth-century Byzantium may offer some clues about the unexpressed motivations of Leo VI, but it should be interpreted with caution. Leo does not mention anything about the re-construction of Jerusalem in the portion of his funeral oration dedicated to Artaxerxes, which likely precludes this as the main reason for the Persian king's inclusion in the genealogy. Certainly he was not trying to make this a cornerstone of his dynasty's propaganda. It may, however, have played a role in Leo's decision to select Artaxerxes Makrocheir in his

[82] Some hints of the development can be seen in some of the works of both Leo VI and his son, Constantine VII: see H. Ahrweiler, "Un discours inédit de Constantine VII Porphyrogénète," *TravMém* 2 (1967) 393–404.

[83] Magdalino and Nelson, in *Old Testament in Byzantium* 14 and 28.

[84] Fishman-Duker, *Byzantion* 47 (1977) 129–131.

construction of Basil's Persian genealogy, assuming this was a deliberate choice.

Leo's claims of Achaemenid Persian ancestry for Basil may not have had the lasting impact that the dynasty's Arsacid lineage did, but the very fact that such a claim remains unique in Byzantine history makes it worthy of investigation. This is especially true in light of recent interest in the many iterations of the historical memory of ancient Persia across time and space. Basil I's genealogy might be placed in the long tradition of Persian and Hellenistic claims to both Achaemenid and Macedonian/Alexandrian descent. Of course, I do not wish to argue for any kind of direct continuity from these claims, and they existed in very different contexts, but the fact that Basil's case is so anomalous in a Byzantine context appears far less so in this long view. Sources available to Byzantines to construct and imagine the ancient past meant they were well placed to be at least tangentially aware of this tradition.

This same fact makes Byzantium an ideal candidate for current discussions of 'Persianism'. This is especially true of the time of the Macedonian dynasty. Not only was the period marked by an increased interest in the more distant past, including such developments as encyclopedism and what has been termed the First Byzantine Humanism,[85] it was also a time in which the Byzantine Empire was not faced with the immediate threat of a contemporary Persian Empire on its borders. This would change with the coming of the Seljuqs in the mid-eleventh century. Once again, Byzantium was faced with a serious challenger in the east whom they regarded, as least in rhetorical contexts, as 'Persians'. The absence of a rival or enemy who was conceptualized as Persian between the eighth and eleventh centuries may have encouraged Byzantine readers and authors to more fully explore the Persian past in ways that differed from both earlier and later periods, when the

[85] The assertion was famously made by P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanism byzantin* (Paris 1971), esp. 7–9. See also Antonopoulou, *TravMém* 21.2 (2017) 187–233.

centuries-old Roman tradition of framing conflicts with 'Persian' enemies as a timeless conflict reaching back to Alexander the Great or the Persian Wars made repeated appearances. Future research will hopefully reveal more. One thing, at least, is certain. The medieval Byzantine Empire has much to offer scholars interested in the rich and varied afterlives of the Achaemenid Persian past.

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