

Constantine Monomachos' Role in the Eleventh
Century Crisis of the Byzantine Empire

by
Cihan Ozanalp

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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Department of History
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Abstract

This thesis examines the Byzantine Empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries focusing primarily on the rule of the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042 – 1055). It argues that the traditional historiography concerning the causes of the “eleventh-century crisis” must be reevaluated. It also argues that Constantine Monomachos should not be vilified for the Empire’s social, economic and political problems in the eleventh century. By examining the eleventh century works of Michael Psellos and Johannes Skylitzes, supplemented by modern historians such as Michael Angold, Alexander Kazhdan, Alan Harvey and Paul Stephenson, I demonstrate that it was the policies of Constantine IX’s predecessor Basil II and social and economic changes occurring within and outside the Empire in the eleventh century that were the real reasons for the Empire’s difficulties.

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Introduction

There are various interpretations regarding the extent of Constantine Monomachos' role in the so-called "eleventh-century crisis" of the Byzantine Empire. Modern historiography of the subject paints a very bleak picture of the period from 1025 to 1081 AD. The general consensus is that the social, political and economic situation of this era was destabilized after the death of the Emperor Basil II. For a time prior to Basil's death in 1025, the Empire enjoyed a period of relative peace and economic prosperity. The Byzantine army was the strongest and most efficient fighting force in Europe. The imperial treasury boasted 200 000 talents of gold as well as a very large quantity of precious jewels and other valuables. Also during Basil's reign, the Russians were brought into the Byzantine sphere of influence and the Bulgarians were duly subjugated. The frontiers of the Empire ran from the Euphrates to the Danube, the largest extent held by the Empire since the death of Justinian I in 567.

After Basil's death the fortunes of the Empire crumbled. The frontier regions began to buckle and succumb to the intrusions of the Patzinaks and the Seljuk Turks while the unchecked aspirations of the Kievan Russians prompted an attack on Constantinople. The imperial fisc became depleted due to imperial over expenditure and poor economic policies. The great military magnates of the East, whose power and thirst for land were carefully kept in check by Basil and the civil administration, slowly gained the upper hand in their struggle with the Constantinopolitan bureaucracy. These developments are believed to have been the results of a variety of internal and external factors greatly exacerbated by the ineptness of Basil's successors and the self-serving interests of the imperial administration. This decline culminated in the defeat of the Byzantine forces at

the hands of the Seljuk Turks at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 and the eventual victory of the military aristocracy over the civil faction with the accession of Alexios I Comnenos in 1081.

While historians accept that the problems of the period were caused by a combination of both internal and external factors, almost all point to the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042 – 1055) as the period which held the most seminal consequences for the Empire. The conventional view is that Constantine and his civil ministers grossly undermined the military and economic well-being of the state by erroneous, selfish and useless policy-making. This commonly accepted thesis of twentieth century scholarship is not without merit nor does it lack evidence. Others contend that the Empire's troubles were a result of foreign pressure on its boundaries or an outcome of its changing internal social and economic structure, to which the Empire was ill-prepared to adapt after 1025. For instance, some argue it was the policies of Basil II that fermented the eleventh-century crisis. Although Basil was successful in expanding the Empire's territories and increasing its financial reserves, he did not make any effort to prepare and select a successor. Succeeding emperors were therefore ill prepared to run the Empire and the actual reins of government were passed on to the civil bureaucracy whose policies were dictated by self-interest. Some historians argue that the Byzantine Empire was not immune to certain economic forces such as feudalization, which undermined the best efforts of the State to maintain the *status quo*. While it is generally accepted by many scholars that the reign of Constantine IX contributed greatly to the inexorable decline of the Byzantine Empire's glory, some acknowledge that Constantine should not bear all the blame for the eleventh-century crisis and that the work of his imperial predecessors,

along with perhaps inescapable external and internal factors concerning the Empire, were the culprits as well.

A reconsideration of the period in question will be necessary to illustrate that the eleventh-century crisis was not only a result of Constantine IX's faults but a product of social, economic and political factors that influenced domestic and foreign policies of the Byzantine Empire. Furthermore, the deeds of emperors who occupied the imperial throne prior to Constantine will also be scrutinized. A reading of the primary sources is basic to this study especially with regard to the study of Constantine IX's reign. The most important primary sources of the period are *The Chronographia* of Michael Psellos¹ and John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum*.² Both these historians were contemporaries of Constantine IX and were witnesses to the changing realities of the Byzantine Empire in the mid-eleventh century.

Psellos' work is an account of the lives of fourteen Byzantine rulers from 976 to 1078. It purports to provide us with the most intimate details of the lives of the emperors who reigned during this period. Psellos' history is also the best picture we have of the inner workings of the imperial court and the civil administration since he himself was a bureaucrat of high distinction in Constantinople. Given that Psellos worked closely with the Emperor Constantine IX, a large section of his history is devoted to the Emperor. The *Chronographia* is based largely on Psellos' personal observations with Psellos himself as the central character of the story.

The chronological history of Skylitzes provides less detail concerning the workings of the court than Psellos' history but the *Synopsis Historiarum* does provide us with much

¹ *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*. trans. E.R.A. Sewter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

² *A Synopsis of Histories*. trans. J. Wortley (Winnipeg: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2000).

information concerning the Byzantine Empire's (mostly combative) relations with its neighbors between the years 811 to 1057. Little is known about Skylitzes' life. In the preface of the *Synopsis* he states that he held the dignity of *Kouropalates* and was a former *Droungarios tes viglas* (Droungarios of the Watch).³ Also in the preface, Skylitzes praises Theophanes the Confessor whom he considers to be the best historian of the period concerning early Byzantium to the death of Nikephoros I (d. 811). Thus, Skylitzes sees his history as a continuation of the work of Theophanes. He laments what he sees as the inaccuracy of other histories by his contemporaries including Michael Psellos. By providing an overview or synopsis of previous histories, Skylitzes attempts to sift out facts that are deemed too incredible to be true. Nevertheless, these sources are sometimes heavily abridged or condensed which leads to a number of inaccuracies in the *Synopsis Historiarum*.

Both Psellos' and Skylitzes' histories provide us with detailed information on the reign of Constantine IX. An attempt will be made to synthesize the histories of both Skylitzes and Psellos to provide insights of both Constantine's reign and the Byzantine world at large. While examining Constantine's reign, key questions and issues will be explored. Such issues include, among others, the extent of the influence of the bureaucracy on the reforms instituted by Constantine, the consequences of the Empire's fiscal policies in the eleventh century and the methods by which the Empire dealt with the outside world.

Secondary sources concerning the history of the Byzantine Empire are broad and varied. General histories of Byzantium such as George Ostrogorsky's *History of the*

³ Skylitzes, *Prooemium*.

Byzantine State (1968) or Warren Treadgold's *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (1997) will undoubtedly be invaluable for this particular study by providing an overall narrative of the Byzantine Empire in the medieval period. However, it is the works dealing more or less exclusively on the history of Byzantium in the eleventh century that are to be more useful for this undertaking. Political events of the period are covered extensively by Michael Angold's *The Byzantine Empire, 1025 – 1204: A Political History* (1997), which emphasizes the problems inherited by the Empire after Basil II's death and Constantine IX's attempts to solve them by his programs of reform. Angold's work on Basil II is supplemented by Romilly Jenkins' *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610 – 1071* (1966) and Mark Whittow's *The Making of Byzantium, 600 – 1025* (1996). Both works deal with the theme of Byzantine 'crises' and 'recovery' from the triumph of the emperor Heraklios over the Persians to the zenith of Byzantine greatness under Basil II. Another work of interest concerning Basil II is *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (2003) by Paul Stephenson that challenges previous scholarship which sees the reign of Basil as the 'golden age' of the Byzantine Empire.

With regard to Byzantine relations with its neighbors in the eleventh century, several works are of interest. The most enduring is Dimitri Obolensky's *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500 – 1453* (1971). Although a bit dated, it is the standard work in understanding Byzantine foreign relations. Furthermore, it illustrates the spread of Byzantine culture throughout Eastern Europe and is very useful in explaining cultural and political events in Bulgaria and Russia. Works that are more specific to the Empires' neighbors are varied but several should be mentioned. Concerning the Russians and the Byzantine Empire, George Vernadsky's *A History of Russia: Kievan Russia*

(1948) is the classic English work on the Russians between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Although Vernadsky is still useful it has largely been supplanted by the work of Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard's *The Emergence of the Kievan Rus* (1996). English works dealing specifically with the Patzinaks are few. Omeljan Pritsak's *The Pecenegs: A Case of Social and Economic Transformation* (1976) is a small study that provides a brief overview of Patzinak culture and history but fails to provide a picture of the Patzinaks in the wider sense of Byzantine history. A clearer view of the Patzinaks is provided in John Fine's *The Early Medieval Balkans* (1983) and Paul Stephenson's *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier* (2000). Both are good in explaining the social and economic motivations of the Patzinaks in their migrations into Byzantine Bulgaria.

Several scholars study the fall of Armenia and Byzantine Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks. Peter Charanis' *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire* (1963) largely examines the role of the Armenian people in the political and social life in the Empire but is useful in providing the basic narrative of Byzantine annexation of Armenian principalities in the eleventh century and its consequences with regard to the Seljuk Turks. *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor* (1971) by Speros Vryonis gives good insight into the decline of the Empire in the eleventh century and the Seljuk conquest of Asia Minor. However, the book's main focus is the decline of Hellenism in Asia Minor and its Islamization from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. A fresher treatment is given by Michael Brett in his essay "Abbasids, Fatimids and Seljuqs" in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (2004), which discusses how the Byzantines were swept up in the power struggle between the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate, as represented by the Seljuk Turks and the Fatimid Shiites.

The economy of the Empire in the eleventh century is perhaps the most extensively covered subject of the period. Two works are worth mentioning. Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein's *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1985) challenge the view that the Empire was in a state of decline in the eleventh century. Rather, the economy of the Empire grew during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries despite military defeats and erratic government. This view is also taken by Alan Harvey in *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900 – 1200* (1989). These two works are supplemented by the numismatic research of Michael Hendy in *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300 – 1450* (1985). A detailed study on the debasement of the *nomisma* by Constantine is found in Ph. Grierson's essay "The Debasement of the Bezant in the Eleventh Century" (1954).

Angold's work provides the best overview of Constantine Monomachos' attempt at provincial administrative reorganization and the reestablishment of the University of Constantinople in 1045. Kazhdan and Epstein provide a good analysis of sociopolitical and economic consequences of Constantine's reform programs in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Joan Hussey provides a decent yet somewhat dated reading concerning the state of education during the reign of Constantine. In *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire 867 – 1185* (1937) and "The Byzantine Empire in the Eleventh Century: Some Different Interpretations" (1950), Hussey extols Constantine's patronage of the arts and learning which rectified imperial disinterest of higher education by Constantine's eleventh century predecessors.

Using the secondary sources an attempt will be made to show the social, political and economic changes of the Empire in the eleventh century and how Constantine Monomachos and his administration adapted to external and internal changes.

The main purpose of this study is to reassess the reign of Constantine IX within the broader context of the 'crisis' of the eleventh century. It would not be enough to provide information solely concerning the reign of Constantine because the history regarding this period demands that one must look at the changes of factors within and outside the Empire. Such factors include the changing nature of the Empire's neighbours, the shifts in the conflict between the military aristocracy and the civil bureaucracy and the realities of the so-called 'feudalization' of the Empire. A study of such themes is necessary to understand Constantine's fiscal, administrative and military policies. Furthermore, an evaluation of the period from 1025 to 1081 must be made as a whole to identify general trends in the social, economic and political developments that led to the demoralizing Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Manzikert and the eventual victory of the military aristocracy in their struggle with the civil bureaucracy as personified by the accession of Alexios I Comnenos.

Chapter 1: Basil II, His Successors and A Brief History of the Reign of Constantine IX

When Constantine Monomachos became Emperor in 1042, he inherited a realm that had largely been mismanaged by his predecessors since the death of Basil II in 1025. It was also an Empire, the existence of which was being challenged by enemies abroad and by revolts within its borders. It can be said however that in 1042 the boundaries of the Empire were roughly of the same extent as they had been after the death of Basil. Indeed, the borders were actually expanded by the achievements of the Empire's most capable general of the age, George Maniakes, who captured Edessa in 1031 and Messina in 1038. The army in 1042 was still quite large. When Basil II died, the effective number of soldiers in the Empire remained virtually the same until the disbanding of the border themes of Iberia by Constantine IX in 1053.¹ The Empire was still governed by a well-oiled bureaucratic machine that ensured that taxes were collected and that the aspirations of the provincial military magnates were kept in check. This is the legacy Basil II left his successors. Nevertheless, the glue that held the Empire together had already started to weaken after 1025. As shall be explained below, Basil's policies were reversed due either to the ineptness of successive emperors or to provide short-term solutions that arose after Basil's death. Constantine Monomachos certainly had a part in reversing Basil's policies but he ruled an Empire that was undergoing broad changes in its social and economic fabric.

Perhaps the most important policies of the reign of Basil II were his stringent efforts to reduce the power of the aristocratic landed magnates over the free village communities,

¹ W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284 – 1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 79 – 80.

to maintain the small military and free peasant holdings, and to conduct his rule moderately and sensibly over the weaker subjects of the Empire. Basil needed to maximize the tax collected on surplus production produced by a free peasantry from the land, which they used. Basil's policies were also intended to maintain small military holdings to provide recruits and resources for the Byzantine army.

The accession to power of Basil II in 976 marked the end of the great Anatolian military families' grip over effective imperial power that had briefly been represented by Basil II's predecessors. Nikephoros Phokas (963-969), who had seized the imperial throne when Basil and his brother Constantine were quite young, and John Tzimiskes (969-976) were both from this aristocratic background. Although crowned emperor after seizing power, Nikephoros ruled with the understanding that the rights of the imperial princes would be respected. This arrangement² continued after his death when his nephew John succeeded him. While John ruled, the real reins of government were controlled by the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lakapenos (c. 949 – 985), the illegitimate son of Romanos I Lakapenos (920 - 944) and uncle of Basil and Constantine.³ Although always resentful and envious of the central government, the eastern aristocracy always acted with respect and restraint concerning the legitimate heirs to the Emperor Romanos II (959-63) while their kinsmen were co-emperors. This arrangement would not last long as Basil II gained control of the Empire some years after John's death. According to Skylitzes, Basil

² M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, (London: Longman, 1997) p. 26 defines this arrangement as a "constitutional compromise" in which Nikephoros or his successor[s] would cede power to the young princes when they came of age.

³ The *parakoimomenos* (one who slept near the imperial bedchamber) was the highest office reserved for eunuchs of the imperial court. Basil attained this distinction during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (913 – 959). After a semi-retirement during the reign of Romanos II (959 – 963), Basil regained the title of *parakoimomenos* during Nikephoros Phokas' co-emperorship.

Lakapenos slowly poisoned John after John had learnt that the *parakoimomenos* had acquired rich farmlands at the expense of the public purse.⁴ Basil Lakapenos became the effective regent of Basil and Constantine until the young emperor Basil II sent his uncle into exile where he died. A series of revolts against Basil led by two military families, the Phokai and Skleroi, attempted to regain the position enjoyed by the Anatolian magnates when Nikephoros and Tzimiskes were in power. Eventually, the final revolt was put down in 989 and Basil II's position, as the *de facto* Emperor, was secure.

Nevertheless, the revolts of the Phokai and Skleroi taught Basil a valuable lesson: the power of the great military families must always be held in check lest a continuation of events preceding 989 happen again.⁵ This was done by a number of legislative measures that would curtail, and even sometimes make impotent, the power and wealth of the great magnates, while preventing them from forming a united front of dissent. Furthermore, such legislation was introduced with the intent of increasing crown land and the wealth of the state. One such way was the introduction of a novel in 996, that changes the provision of a legislation that had previously allowed a forty years grace period on property that was illegally confiscated, after which no restitution was allowed and therefore extinguished. This novel stresses the fact that the magnates, thanks to their position of power, could circumvent the period of grace with impunity and secure the property to which they were not entitled. The Emperor decreed that all property acquired by the

⁴ Skylitzes, John Tzimiskes: 22. Katherine Ringold, *The Perfect Servant* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003) p. 130 cautions us that that Skylitzes' tale of Basil Lakapenos' treachery might be a literary convention. Like women, eunuchs were regarded as greedy and underhanded by many contemporaries.

⁵ Psellos, p. 43 says Basil II asked the captured leader of the Skleroi, Bardas, how best to prevent dissent in the empire, to which Bardas replied, "Cut down the governors who become over-proud. Let no generals on campaign have too many resources. Exhaust them with unjust taxations, to keep them busy with their own affairs. Admit no woman to the imperial councils. Be accessible to no one. Share with few your most intimate plans."

“powerful” (*dynatoi*) from the “poor” since the time of the first relevant edict, by Romanos Lakapenos in 922, should be restored to their previous owners without any regard for a period of grace and without any compensation. According to Basil II, the state was exempt from an observance of grace: the state’s right of eviction reached back to the time of Augustus.⁶ Peasant property now received imperial protection from the encroachments of the magnates.

A few years after the abolition of the grace period for illegally acquired property, Basil II legislated that any arrears owed by a tax district, which previously was the responsibility of the village community as a whole, was now the responsibility of the magnates who would shoulder the burden of the tax arrears of the free peasantry⁷. The purpose of this obligation, the *allelengyon*, was two-fold. First, the burden of taxation fell heavily on the peasantry and was one of the major causes that forced them to either abandon their holdings or to sell up, which meant the likely buyer would be the wealthy landed magnate whose income and power increased with the acquisition of more land. Meanwhile, the state received less tax revenue. It was in the best interest of the state to have a productive, stable and independent peasant class that the state could extract taxes from and press for military service. Second, by making the magnates responsible for the tax arrears of the peasantry, much of their surplus wealth would be absorbed by the state and they would have less money to purchase peasant property. Also, it meant that fewer

⁶ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, rev. edition (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969) p. 306. On Romanos Lakapenos see R. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610-1071*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) pp. 241-255. See also, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, trans. Eric McGeer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies 2000) pp. 115 – 132.

⁷ Skylitzes, Basil II: 21.

peasants would be forced to give up their independent status; becoming dependant to landowners of great estates.

Before continuing the narrative of the Macedonians, a few more details must be explained about Basil II's tax policies concerning the less prosperous peoples of the Empire. Although there could be no question that Basil II's fiscal policies were aimed at increasing the tax revenue at the expense of the *dynatoi*, he must have depended on a free peasantry to supply the largest portion of taxable revenue. Nevertheless, sources indicate that Basil did not insist the peasantry pay taxes on time if they were not in a position to do so. Indeed, Skylitzes comments that poorer peasants owed two years of back taxes at the time of Basil's death.⁸ It can be surmised that this was an act of prudence on the part of the Emperor who feared this would drive the free peasantry to ruin and into the servitude of the magnates. Furthermore, the Bulgarians, who were subjugated by the Empire in 1018, were not required to pay taxes in cash, since their economy was not monetized at this point, but were allowed to pay in kind.

After the death of Basil II in 1025, his successors reversed some of his policies that safeguarded the central government and the state from the interests of the aristocratic magnates. The legacy left by Basil II was a strong one but later changes in imperial policy and civil and provincial administration drastically changed the character of the Byzantine state during the course of the eleventh century. However, Basil's policies themselves did have detrimental effects on the future of the Empire. The imperialist policies of Basil stretched the resources of the Empire and the growth of the central administration in Constantinople was expensive to maintain. Although the state treasury

⁸ Skylitzes, Constantine VIII: 2.

held a very large amount of gold, the fiscal policies of Basil called for the hoarding of gold coin, which meant a significant amount of *nomismata* was withdrawn from circulation, thus creating a deflationary effect in the economy.⁹ Basil tried to minimize these strains by imposing rigid imperial control over economy and society in order to support his war policies. By limiting the power of the magnates in favor of a free peasant society, Basil sought to strengthen imperial control over the *dynatoi* with whom he competed for taxable land. This seemed to work during the reign of Basil, but the state could only maintain control of the economy for so long. Since the tenth century the economy was slowly shifting to the provincial markets near the estates of the *dynatoi*. The great military families, whose power was based on the thematic system, brought their disposable wealth to the local markets based in small towns and around fortresses in the provinces.¹⁰ Eventually, these families invested in peasant property and their power bases in the provinces grew. The protection of peasant property by the enactment of land legislations by the emperors of the tenth century was designed to curtail the growing strength of the *dynatoi*.¹¹ Although the land legislations of the tenth century established the authority of the emperors over the powerful military families, they ultimately could not stop the decentralizing economic forces of the markets.¹²

As soon as Constantine VIII Porphyrogenitos (1025 – 1028) succeeded his brother Basil, the rot of the Empire began. During his rule, Basil delegated little, if any, authority to anyone. Thus, no one had the necessary experience to govern the Empire. Furthermore,

⁹ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp.29-30.

¹⁰ Angold, p. 30.

¹¹ McGeer, pp. 6-7.

¹² Angold, *ibid.*

Basil did not produce an heir nor did he carefully pick a successor to become Emperor after his death.¹³ Therefore his brother Constantine, who had co-ruled as Emperor (in name only) for many years, was the only available candidate to succeed Basil, but unfortunately he did not possess the experience necessary to rule the Empire alone. According to Psellos Constantine VIII was more inclined to enjoy life's pleasures than concerning himself with the welfare of the state.¹⁴ Constantine spent his days entertaining guests, attending lavish entertainments, gambling or bestowing titles and gifts on flatterers and hangers on rather than men of ability. During his reign he did nothing of note save that he attempted to collect the two years' taxes from the peasantry that Basil left uncollected by demanding five years taxes in three years.¹⁵ This caused the deterioration of the peasantry and many farmers abandoned their holdings in Anatolia. Previously, the magnates were expected to shoulder the peasantry's mounting tax arrears.¹⁶

Constantine VIII's successor, Romanos III Argyros (1028-34) was an equally unremarkable man who had the luck to be married to the middle daughter of Constantine, Zoë. Romanos was the scion of an old aristocratic house. The most important feature of his reign was the abandonment of the policy of limiting the power of the provincial magnates, which attempted to sooth the ill will of those who had suffered under the rule of Basil II. He repealed the *allelengyon*, which although strengthened and secured

¹³ Psellos writes, "As a matter of fact, the dying Basil summoned him [Constantine VIII] to the palace just before the end, and here handed over to him the reins of government." p. 53. Also see Skylitzes p. 197.

¹⁴ Psellos, p. 56.

¹⁵ Skylitzes, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Angold, p. 31.

imperial rule, had perhaps undermined the economy at the expense of the magnates and the peasantry.¹⁷ He also gave great sums of money to starving peasants in Anatolia in order that they could return to their villages so that peasant society there might be restored.¹⁸ As a gesture of good will, he amnestied the generals imprisoned by Basil and Constantine and forgave debts to the treasury. However, he also tolerated, or was completely oblivious to the embezzlement of funds by his tax collectors, which according to Psellos was done at the expense of state revenues.¹⁹ Romanos' biggest blunder was to continue the imperialist policies of Basil II. In 1030, he conducted an ill-conceived²⁰ campaign against the emirate of Aleppo and suffered a humiliating defeat. In 1033, he tried to conquer Egypt but was again repulsed at the expense of thousands of Byzantine lives. The Empire's fortunes in the east were not entirely lost however as the *strategos*²¹ of the Euphrates Cities, George Maniakes, was able to reconquer Edessa from the Marwanid emir.²² Maniakes was also able to retake some fortresses north of Tripoli and make an alliance with Tripoli's emir against the Fatimids of Egypt.²³

¹⁷ Skylitzes, Romanos III: 1 states that the abolition of the *allelengyon* was originally the intention of Constantine VIII but was something he never did.

¹⁸ Angold, p. 31.

¹⁹ Psellos, 71.

²⁰ W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 585 taking a page from Skylitzes states, "Romanos personally led an army to Aleppo in the summer of 1030. His lack of military experience showed in his insistence of campaigning when the heat was worse and the water scarcest. The troops...finally fled along with the emperor.

²¹ The *strategos* was a military governor of a theme district.

²² Treadgold, p. 585.

²³ Ibid.

The end of the reign of Romanos III marked the beginning of a period in which the reign of Michael IV (1034-41) the Paphlagonian and the *rule* of his brother and chief minister of the government, John the Orphanotrophos began. John had served as a *protonotarios*²⁴ under Basil II and as the *Praepositos*²⁵ under Romanos III.²⁶ Ambitious and shrewd, it was John who had introduced the young, good-looking Michael to the Empress Zoë in 1033 in order to advance his own career, and she fell in love with Michael immediately.

A striking feature of Byzantine history after the death of Basil II is that the central administration and the civil nobility dictated government policy. Power was concentrated in the hands of men like John the Orphanotrophos who used their position to frustrate the imperial ambitions of the great military families and to strengthen the power of the central bureaucracy. For example, the most suitable candidate for succession after Constantine VIII was the Eparch²⁷ and former Duke of Antioch, Constantine, of the military family known as the Dalassenoi who were held in great esteem for their unswerving loyalty to Basil II in the past. On his deathbed, Constantine VIII was persuaded by the imperial courtiers to choose the less capable Romanos Argyros, who thought that they would have more influence over a weak emperor.²⁸ This was a pattern that would persist up until the accession of the emperor Isaac Comnenos (1057-1059). Since John the Orphanotrophos was a eunuch, he had no chance of ever attaining the

²⁴ The title of *protonotarios* designated a civil official of a theme district that was a judge.

²⁵ The *Praepositos* was a court title reserved for eunuchs. It is roughly equivalent to Master of Ceremonies.

²⁶ Skylitzes, Romanos III: 9.

²⁷ The *Eparch* is the mayor of the city of Constantinople.

²⁸ Treadgold, p. 585. Jenkins, p. 339.

Byzantine throne but realized that he could wield effective power over the Empire by engineering the succession of Michael over Romanos III.²⁹ The Orphanotrophos also tried to advance the interests of his other relatives. Michael, inexperienced in government and suffering from epilepsy, was under the influence of his more experienced brother John.

The regime of John was most notable for its drastic fiscal measures. A four-year famine in Anatolia, a failed bid to reconquer Sicily and Michael's church building/rebuilding program drained imperial resources. In order to offset expenses and curtail debt John sold offices and added surcharges to taxes. In 1040 John also reversed the policy of Basil II that allowed the Bulgarians to pay their taxes in kind. The Empire now demanded that its Bulgarian subjects pay in cash.³⁰ This provoked a rebellion that spread over all the Bulgarian lands. Fortunately for the Empire, the Byzantine military was still a considerable force. Showing energy and conviction, the Emperor, who was epileptic and dying of illness personally led the campaign to put down the rebellion.

After the death Michael IV in 1041 Zoë, with the cooperation of the imperial eunuchs, tried to rule the Empire herself. Realizing her limitations as a ruler, John the Orphanotrophos induced Zoë to adopt his nephew Michael and he was soon made emperor.³¹ Michael V, who had held the rank of Caesar under the previous ruler, was made to promise John to rule in subordination to Zoë (who was, at this time, under the power of the Orphanotrophos). Michael was closer to John's brother, Constantine, whose

²⁹ Psellos, pp. 81-2 refers to rumors of the time that Zoë, Michael and John slowly poisoned Romanos III. Skylitzes, Romanos III: 17, says that Romanos was poisoned then drowned in his bath by Michael's henchmen.

³⁰ Skylitzes, Michael IV: 220.

³¹ Skylitzes, Michael V: 1.

jealousy of John's power affected the young Michael. Under the influence of his uncle Constantine, Michael exiled John in 1042 and reinstated many of those who were exiled during the administration of the Orphanotrophos. He also gave Constantine the rank of *nobilissimus*.³² John died that same year.

Michael was also envious of the Empress whose imperial lineage earned her far more respect than was afforded him.³³ Trying to get rid of Zoë once and for all, Michael packed her away to a monastery on charges that she tried to poison him. Riots broke out in the streets of Constantinople with the people demanding the release of Zoë.³⁴ Trying to appease the crowd, the Emperor and his uncle Constantine recalled Zoë to the palace. Meanwhile, the crowd had forced palace officials to fetch Zoë's sister Theodora from her convent and proclaim her Empress. Nevertheless, the mob seized Michael and Constantine and had them blinded.

The problem of succession that plagued the successors of Basil did not go away upon the release of Zoë and Theodora from their captors. The uprising that overthrew Michael V left the sisters as the sole rulers of the Empire with Zoë as the senior Empress. According to Psellos, the sisters 'preferred to govern alone' for a brief period³⁵ carefully avoiding innovations in court procedure and the appointment of any new officials to government posts. However, it was clear to the administration and the Empresses that a suitable husband had to be found for the childless Zoë.³⁶ After considering several

³² Psellos, p. 127.

³³ Ibid, p. 132.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 138.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 155.

³⁶ Psellos writes, "to put it quite candidly....neither of them was fitted by temperament to govern." p. 157.

candidates Zoë settled on Constantine, a nobleman from the ancient family of the Monomachoi. Zoë recalled Constantine to Constantinople. Constantine was exiled by John the Orphanotrophos to the island of Mytilene for supposedly plotting against Michael IV. By his second marriage to a member of the Skleroi family, Constantine was related to Romanos II Argyros, and like him he was a member of the civil aristocracy.³⁷ He was also chosen as a candidate for the emperorship by the civil administration for his weaknesses rather than his abilities.³⁸ Soon after at the capital, Zoë and Constantine wed and Constantine was proclaimed Emperor in 1042.

There is much disagreement amongst historians concerning the merits of Constantine IX Monomachos' reign and whether his policies caused the various crises the Byzantine Empire faced in the eleventh century. Concerning the historiography of the period, there are generally two main branches of thought regarding Constantine's performance as emperor. First, there are those historians who regard Constantine as an indolent, pleasure seeking character who did not take matters seriously and whose policies were either gross errors of judgment or were suited to benefit himself at the expense of the state. Such conclusions can be found in Ostrogorsky, Jenkins or Treadgold's works. Secondly, there are those who perceive Constantine as a reforming emperor, who, for good or bad, tried to overhaul the administrative, military and fiscal systems of the Empire to suit the changing social and economic realities of the eleventh century. This group includes Angold, Kazhdan, Epstein and Hussey. The narrative of Constantine's reign, which is to

³⁷ Ostrogorsky, p. 326.

³⁸ Treadgold, p. 590.

be presented in this chapter, will simply highlight the more important events of his rule; their deeper meanings are to be explored in the subsequent chapters of this work.

Psellos claims in the *Chronographia* that Constantine was neither prudent in the distribution of honors nor careful when spending money from the state treasury.³⁹ Constantine bestowed honors and titles on men of all ranks of society, including those of the commercial classes, much to the chagrin of Psellos. Skylitzes also mentions this but he believed Constantine gave titles and honors to men on the basis of merit.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, honorary offices were previously bestowed on men without the payment of salaries, or empty titles were bought for a price with a salary (*roga*) that was too low to recoup the initial investment. Now Constantine “opened up the senate” that is, he permitted a new social group to acquire honorary posts and the *roga* they carried by their initial investment.⁴¹ Furthermore, previously such offices were life-tenured and could not be transferred. Under Constantine, these offices became hereditary which burdened the imperial fisc. Constantine also spent enormous sums of money on luxurious living and building programs such as the great Church of the Mangana. The creation of new offices, the building programs and Constantine’s extravagant lifestyle were a great financial drain on the treasury.

Constantine faced several challenges to his rule. Previously, the emperor Michael V had sent the *magister* George Maniakes to Sicily to stabilize the areas that he had conquered in 1040 before being arrested on charges of conspiracy by John the

³⁹ Psellos, p. 171.

⁴⁰ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 2.

⁴¹ N. Oikonomides, “The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy,” *The Economic History of Byzantium*, (Washington D.C.: DOP, 2002) Vol. III, p. 1021.

Orphanotrophos. Constantine, whose mistress was the sister of Maniakes' rival, recalled the general from Sicily in 1043 to please her brother. Angered at being relieved of his command just at the point of victory over the Arabs, Maniakes had himself proclaimed emperor and advanced on Constantinople. It is entirely conceivable that Maniakes would have succeeded in overthrowing Constantine had he not suddenly fallen from his horse and died during a skirmish in Ostrovo.⁴²

Shortly after the Emperor narrowly escaped the threat of Maniakes, the Kievan Russians sent 400 ships and attacked the Empire that year. The exact reasons for the Russian expedition are unknown. Some historians contend that the Russians had responded to appeals from George Maniakes for aid in his rebellion against Constantine. Others believe that the Russians were hoping to assert their independence from the Byzantine Empire.⁴³ The Byzantines were able to defeat the Russians soundly when they were subjected to Greek fire in the narrow waters of the Bosphorus strait. Any animosity between the two nations was quickly patched up when a marriage was arranged between Maria, the daughter of Constantine and Vsevolod, the younger son of Iaroslav the Wise.

Besides the Russian threat and the rebellion of Maniakes, another external menace threatened the Empire. The Patzinaks, who had been allies with the Byzantines throughout most of the tenth century, had begun to cross the Danube into the Empire more frequently in the beginning of the eleventh. These Turkic-speaking peoples crossed

⁴² Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 3.

⁴³ Treadgold, *History*, p. 594 believes that the Russians were in fact responding to possible appeals for aid by George Maniakes. Angold, p. 36 takes quite the opposite view arguing that Maniakes was in no position to appeal for aid until the autumn of 1042, while Russian preparations for the attack started well before this.

the Danube to escape the pressure of another Turkic tribe known as the Oguz.⁴⁴ Between 1032 and 1036, a series of Patzinak raids penetrated the Empire, causing havoc in the regions of Thessalonika, Thrace and Macedonia. The arrangement of a truce and economic incentives of trade were offered to induce the nomads to quit their raids. Nevertheless, it did not stop large migrations of Patzinaks into imperial territories between the years 1043 and 1046. Constantine Monomachos allowed the pillaging nomads to settle in the area of the western Balkans hoping they would become productive agriculturally and be used as mercenaries if need be.⁴⁵

The attack of the Seljuk Turks on the eastern frontier in 1047 compelled the Emperor to raise a force of 15000 Patzinak soldiers from amongst the newly settled colonists. The Patzinaks were sent east under the leadership of their own chiefs but they soon rebelled, making their way back to the Balkans and finally settling in the vicinity of Preslav. Attempts to crush the rebellion failed. In 1053 Constantine Monomachos was forced to recognize the settlement of the Patzinaks in northern Bulgaria.

The rebellion of Leo Tornikios was the next challenge to the rule of Constantine Monomachos. Tornikios had previously been the governor of Iberia until a family quarrel brought him at odds with Constantine, who had Leo tonsured.⁴⁶ Eventually, Tornikios' stand against the Emperor caught the attention of those who were opposed to the Emperor's policies. The main center of dissatisfaction was Adrianopolis where the western armies were opposed to the Emperor's settlement of the Patzinaks into imperial

⁴⁴ Omeljan Pritsak, *The Pecenegs: A Case of Social and Economic Transformation* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Institute, 1976) p. 20.

⁴⁵ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 17.

⁴⁶ Psellos, p. 201 writes that Constantine and his sister, Euprepia, did not get along well and Leo was caught in the middle of a siblings' dispute.

territory.⁴⁷ Their leaders got in touch with Tornikios, who was cloistered in Constantinople, and persuaded him to lead a rebellion. He accepted and escaped to Adrianopolis.

In 1047, Leo Tornikios was proclaimed emperor and he and his troops marched to the capital. Although the Emperor's troops were fighting in Iberia and citizens and prisoners had to defend the city,⁴⁸ Tornikios did not have any funds so his troops were forced to pillage and loot Thrace. This did not look well to inhabitants of Constantinople who feared similar behavior if they admitted them into the city. Eventually, with little hope of breaching the huge walls Constantinople, Tornikios' followers began to defect over to the side of the Emperor. Tornikios' rebellion lost steam as his army just melted away. The belated arrival of the eastern troops effectively ended the rebellion. Tornikios was captured and blinded.

The eastern forces had been in Armenia to claim the principality of Ani from the usurper Gagik in 1044. As far back as 1022, the uncle of Gagik, John-Smbat III designated the Byzantine Emperor as his heir but the nephew was put on the throne. After a show of force by the Byzantines and promises of rich rewards, Gagik capitulated.⁴⁹ The annexation of Ani was achieved with the help the neighboring emirate of the Shaddadids of Dvin.⁵⁰ Ani surrendered in 1045 and the kingdom of Armenia would be added to the theme of Iberia.⁵¹ However, in an attempt to keep all Armenia for himself, Constantine

⁴⁷ Angold, p. 60.

⁴⁸ Psellos, p. 215.

⁴⁹ Angold, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Treadgold, p. 592.

⁵¹ Treadgold, p. 592.

ordered his forces to attack Dvin but they failed to conquer it. The annexation of Armenia was a policy designed to keep the strongholds that oversaw the major invasion routes from Anatolia to Iran in the protective hands of the Byzantines.⁵² This worked well at first, as the Byzantines were able to drive out the forces of the Seljuk sultan Tughrul - Beg from Armenia after he overran Vaasprakan in 1048. By 1055, the two sides had established a truce that lasted until 1064. In the long term however, the annexation of the Armenian principalities by Constantine, which had begun during the rule of Basil II, would leave the Byzantines face to face with the Seljuk Turks. This would ultimately lead to the defeat of the Byzantine military at the battle of Manzikert in 1071.

Traditionally, the most disastrous measures of Constantine IX were seen to be the debasement of the *nomismata* and disbanding of thematic troops in the frontier regions. These topics will be discussed more in depth in succeeding chapters but a few comments should be made at this time.

Constantine IX's debasement of the *nomismata* and the disbanding of the thematic armies are measures that are related to each other. Increasingly during the eleventh century, the government relied less on thematic troops and more on mercenaries, the military forces of Byzantine client states and the *tagmata*. The thematic troops were those soldiers who were given land tenures by the imperial government in return for service in the military. However, these troops had been inactive and out of training due to the relative peace the Empire enjoyed after 1025. Nevertheless a permanent military presence in eastern Anatolia and Armenia was needed to defend the border against the Seljuk Turks or any other eastern threat to the Empire. In order to cut military expenditure,

⁵² Angold, p. 40.

Constantine, under his chief minister John the Eunuch, debased the twenty-four carat *nomisma* to eighteen carats. This was probably done to decrease the pay of inactive thematic soldiers, since the pay of active soldiers always varied. The weight of the new coin was the same as that of the old *nomisma* (24 carats) and this made it hard for the purposes of accounting, causing an inflationary effect.⁵³ The debasement did cut payrolls but it also reduced the total revenues collected by the state when taxpayers started using the new debased coins. Furthermore, Constantine disbanded the eastern units by allowing its soldiers to commute their military service for taxation. On the surface, it seemed like a cynical cash grab, which left Anatolia open to invasion. However, the payment of inactive soldiers cost a lot of money. As mentioned above, the Empire became more reliant on the *tagmata* during Constantine IX's reign. The *tagmata* were professional soldiers who could either be garrisoned in the themes, near Constantinople or deployed as cavalry units throughout the Empire. As shall be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this work, the Empire did not need both the thematic and *tagmatic* armies in the east.

Constantine Monomachos sought to strengthen his position by initiating a series of reforms between the years 1043 to 1047. The first was the creation of new ministry called the *epi ton kriseon* which gave the central government a greater measure of control over the provincial administration. The second was the creation of a university in Constantinople that trained individuals for service in law and the administration.⁵⁴

The series of revolts originating in the provinces, that had threatened the government in Constantinople, pointed to problems of provincial administrative organization. Since

⁵³ Treadgold, p. 595.

⁵⁴ The most extensive research on both the ministry of the *epi ton kriseon* and the University of Constantinople can be found in Angold (1997), pp. 63-68.

the death of Basil II, the judge of the theme, who was originally subordinate to the military governor, gained more influence as the business of provincial government became more and more concentrated into his hands.⁵⁵ The military governor controlled matters of a military nature while the judge controlled the administration. However, their respective jurisdictions were not clearly defined, which caused problems in the district they operated in. Before Constantine's reforms, it was not known whether the judge answered to the military governor or vice versa. After the establishment of the *epi ton kriseon*, the judge answered directly to the central government. Therefore, the civilian administration had authority over the military governorship in the provinces.

Constantine's creation, or rather the reorganization of the law school in Constantinople, was the first time the state had an interest in the teaching of law since the time of Basil I (867-86). From that period on until 1045, the training of lawyers was in the hand of the guilds, most notably of the *tabularii*. Although the law system before Constantine was adequate for the needs of the time, the new importance of the judges of the themes meant that able administrators were needed in the provinces to carry out the orders of the central government more efficiently. Constantine created the position of the *nomophylax* or 'guardian of the law' to head the new institution. The first of the *nomophylakes* was John Xiphilinos, a theologian and legal expert who would later become the Constantinopolitan patriarch. His duties included the instruction of law, the training and supervision of notaries and running the library.⁵⁶ He received a salary and sustenance from the Emperor. Theoretically, he was to teach his students free of charge,

⁵⁵ Angold, p. 62.

⁵⁶ H.J. Sheltema, "Byzantine Law," *CMH*, vol. v. pt. ii (Cambridge: CUP, 1967) pp. 70.

but could accept gifts. Paralleling the school of law, Constantine Monomachos created a school of philosophy and rhetoric that was headed by Michael Psellos whom he named 'Consul of philosophers.' Psellos taught rhetoric and philosophy and supervised the various private schools operating in the capital. He might be described as a sort of 'minister of education.'⁵⁷

It can be argued that the eleventh century up to accession of the military aristocrat Alexios I as emperor saw the central government try to increase its control over the economy, military and the provincial administration. The reign of Constantine IX was a continuation of this trend of centralizing government by emperors and their ministers that existed since Basil II. Although the administration of the Empire became more and more centralized, we shall discover that there were social and economic forces at work that would eventually unravel the framework of Byzantium and lead to the 'eleventh-century crisis.'

⁵⁷ Angold, p. 66.

Chapter 2: The Debasement of the Nomisma and Social Changes in the Byzantine State.

Part I: The Debasement of the Nomisma and Economic Expansion

On the surface, it seems that the difficulties the Byzantine Empire faced in the eleventh century were the result of various political problems facing the imperial government after the death of Basil II. In the previous chapter, discussion was centered on the deeds of Basil's successors, which, by and large, had worsened the fortunes of the Empire and destabilized the central government in Constantinople. Certainly, the most serious problem was the imperial succession itself. Basil's death in 1025 left the Empire rudderless as he had not produced an heir nor foreseen the necessity to groom a capable successor with the skill to reign. The Macedonian house lived on for a while in the personages of his brother Constantine VIII and his daughters Zoë and Theodora but Constantine proved inept during his short reign as Emperor and all three had died without issue.

The Constantinopolitan bureaucracy, which remained an effective apparatus of the state well after Basil II's death, eventually took over the role of determining who would sit on the imperial throne. The central administration performed this function in their own best interests as they nominated emperors who would strengthen their position against the great military and landed magnates of the imperial provinces. Certain high-ranking officials such as John the Orphanotrophos exploited the uncertain political atmosphere to advance their careers by seeing that both his brother and his nephew became emperors respectively. Under Constantine IX, who was considered a patron of the arts and

education, men such as Michael Psellos and John Xiphilinos did quite well for themselves until they were accused of deviating from orthodox Christian theology.¹

Mismanagement of political affairs in the Byzantine Empire during the eleventh century became manifest in the attacks made on the Empire by its neighbours, its failed military expeditions and the occurrence of several rebellions and revolts within the Empire. These episodes were quite prominent in the mid-eleventh century during the reign of Constantine IX.

On a deeper level, the problems facing the Byzantine Empire were financial and social in origin. Historians generally agree that the period from the mid-ninth through the early eleventh century saw the Empire in a period of cultural and political apogee due to the Macedonian Emperors' wise protection of the interests of the peasantry and soldiers of the Empire, thus ensuring the state's best interest in its need to collect revenue in the form of taxes. Historians are less in agreement as to the reasons for the Empire's decline in the period after Basil II's death. Some will describe the growth of feudalizing tendencies in the Empire and decentralization of the state as the prime reason for the Empire's military decline. Others see internal political decay as a consequence of economic collapse and a demographic crisis. There are some scholars however, who do not see the period in question as one of 'decline' in the traditional sense and reinterpret the various economic and social indicators that would otherwise lead others to believe

¹ Treadgold, p. 687. Psellos, pp. 254-6, claims that he and two of his close friends whom are thought to be Xiphilinos and John Mauropous made the conscious decision to become monks as the political situation under Constantine IX made their position in court somewhat perilous.

that the Empire was worse off than it really was. To them, the mid eleventh to twelfth century was an era of economic growth.²

Most scholars generally accept the debasement of the gold coinage during the reign of Constantine IX as the leading indicator of the Empire's long-term economic decline. To them, the debasement of the *nomisma* was symptomatic of the Empire's increasing inability to regulate its economy and manage its finances in the eleventh century.

Michael Angold best sums up the general attitude held by most of his contemporaries:

It may not at first have been apparent where the debasement of the gold coinage was leading, but today it looks like the first step down the slippery slope of permanent economic decline. It was a sign that the Byzantine government was finding it increasingly difficult to finance an international currency and that its economic ascendancy was coming to an end.³

² See A. P. Kazhdan and W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. Also see Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900-1200*. Cambridge: CUP 1989.

³M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, p. 81.

It was the first serious debasement of the gold standard since its inception from the reign of Constantine I in the fourth century.⁴ For six hundred years the *nomisma* stood at a fineness of 24 carats of gold and was recognized as an international form of currency by almost all peoples of the known world.⁵

Constantine Monomachos' debasement of the *nomisma* was irreversible, as his successors could never revive its traditional purity of 24 carats.⁶ During the course of his reign, the fineness of the coin was reduced five different times. He also debased a version of a coin with lesser fineness known as the *tetartera*, which had first been introduced during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas.⁷ It was obvious to the Emperor's subjects that each successive coin was of a different fineness which would lead one to conclude that Constantine did not intend to deceive the public by passing off the coins at full value.⁸ Eventually the *nomisma* stood at a fineness of 18 carats at the end of Constantine's reign. The fineness of 18 carats for the *nomisma* stood until the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes (1067-71). After the battle of Manzikert the fineness of the *nomisma* plummeted rapidly until it stood at eight carats at the end of the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078-81).

⁴ P. Grierson "The Debasement of the Bezant in the Eleventh Century." *Byzantinisch Zeitschrift*, 47 (1954), pp. 379-394, is perhaps the first scholar to equate the debasement of the *nomisma* as occurring during the reign of Constantine IX and not under the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078-81) as was previously supposed by most.

⁵ R.S. Lopez, "The Dollar of the Middle Ages," *Journal of Economic History*, 11 (1951), pp. 209-34.

⁶ Grierson points out that while the *nomisma* stood at a theoretical 24 carats (4.53 gr.) at the beginning of Constantine IX's reign the real fineness probably stood around 23 carats, p. 382.

⁷ Ibid, p. 384. See also Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300 – 1450* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) pp. 509 – 510.

⁸ Angold, p. 82.

The reasons behind Constantine's policy of debasement are difficult to understand. As mentioned, the fineness of the *nomisma* stood at 24 carats since the fourth century. Perhaps preserving this gold standard was important in maintaining imperial prestige more than anything else. There was one previous exception, which occurred during the reign of Nikephoros II. Nikephoros had to pay for various campaigns and the organization of new themes created to protect Cilicia from the Arabs. In order to do this Nikephoros issued a coin at a fineness of 22 carats called the *tetartera*. This provoked much resentment amongst his critics and contributed to his eventual overthrow. John Skylitzes writes:

He reduced the gold coin and devised the so-called *tetarteros*. From then on there were two sizes of gold coins; for the collecting of taxes he demanded the heavier one but paid out the small one in expenditure. And he made a law that every [coin bearing] the emperor's effigy, even if it were of short weight, should be preferred, thus debasing the value of others. For this reason his subjects suffered greatly from the taxes called *allagioi* and the worst of it was that although the government oppressed them to make them pay, they received no benefit for their payment.⁹

The lesson learned by his successors was that debasing the gold coinage for short term financial gain wasn't worth the political instability such an act would encourage and the practice was discontinued, although the *tetartera* still continued to be minted. One would expect that Constantine Monomachos would also learn the lessons of his predecessor and not embark on a program of debasement. Nevertheless he did so at the risk of raising the ire of his subjects who had openly criticized him for his other faults. Oddly enough, the debasement led to no protest amongst Constantine's subjects; what we know of Nikephoros' debasement we have learned from the chroniclers of the time, it is only

⁹ Skylitzes, Nicephorus Phocas: 18.

though modern numismatics that we have learned of the debasement under Monomachos.¹⁰ Why then did Constantine resort to the debasement of the *nomisma*?

The most common and simplest explanation was that Constantine and the Empress Zoë spent far too much money. After the deposition of Michael V, there was a short-lived joint reign of Zoë and her sister Theodora. The empress Zoë seemed to lack any financial prudence and spent lavishly on her self and on others to ensure her popularity. Psellos writes that Zoë was so carefree with money and was “the sort of woman who could exhaust a sea teeming with gold-dust in one day.”¹¹ On the other hand, Theodora was more level-headed and “counted her *staters* when she gave away money, partly no doubt because her limited resources forbade any reckless spending, and partly because inherently she was more self-controlled in this matter.”¹² Zoë also spent large sums of money on her many hangers-on and her personal bodyguard; funds that were supposed to be used as prize-money for soldiers and revenues for the army, “as if the Emperor Basil had filled the treasuries with riches for this very purpose.”¹³

After Constantine married Zoë in 1042, the liberal spending of the Empress continued during his reign. Psellos explains that during this period, the vast treasure that had accumulated under Basil II was rapidly being depleted by Constantine’s expenditure on gardens, churches and palaces that he built, altered, replanned and rebuilt without regard to cost.¹⁴ Like Zoë, Constantine was generous in his grants of offices and dignities, which

¹⁰ Angold, p.82.

¹¹ Psellos, p. 157.

¹² Ibid, p.157.

¹³ Ibid, p. 159.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 250-2. See also Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 29.

commanded various pensions and salaries in cash. Most of these offices were merely honorific and were attained by men who were willing to pay for them, as was the custom of previous emperors who sold such offices that came with little or no salaries. Not only did Constantine increase the number of offices available, he was the first emperor to not only give away such offices with a salary but also make them transferable from father to son.¹⁵ With the increase in honorific offices and making such offices hereditary, the cost of paying these salaries must have been immense. Debasement might have seemed like an obvious way to meet costs. As to why Constantine's debasement of the *nomisma* did not garner any criticism (so far as we know) of the kind Nikephoros Phokas faced when he undertook a milder debasement one can only speculate. Michael Angold is of the opinion that "those who counted did not suffer as a result."¹⁶ Nikephoros' debasement meant a real reduction in salaries and pensions for office holders of the time but under Constantine the inflation of honours meant the possibility of promotion to higher dignities and a corresponding increase in pensions and salaries.¹⁷

Debasement was also the result of the various wars and rebellions Constantine Monomachos faced during his reign. The rebellions of George Maniakes (1043) and Leo Tornikios (1047) and the long struggle against the Patzinaks must have cost a great deal of money to put down. Constantine's wars against the Armenians of Ani and the Seljuk Turks must have also added a considerable financial burden on the Empire. Raising the

¹⁵ Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, p. 591. Treadgold basis this assumption on Psellos who says, "It is well known of course, that there is in the political world a proper scale of honours, with an invariable rule governing promotion to a higher office, but Constantine reduced this *cursus honorum* to mere confusion and abolished all rules of advancement." p. 170.

¹⁶ Angold, p. 83.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 83.

revenues to meet such challenges must have been quite difficult. The tenth century land legislations of the Macedonian emperors, which protected the village communes from the encroachments of the powerful provincial magnates, had previously allowed the state to collect its taxes from the peasant landowners who provided the Empire's principal source of revenue and services. It also established the system of "soldiers' properties" whose *stratiotai*, held land in exchange for military service in the Byzantine army.¹⁸ The *allelengyon* of Basil II, which put the onus of taxation on the rich for the arrears of the peasantry, kept the magnates occupied with covering the small landowners' financial shortfalls instead of conspiring to acquire more land, thus depriving them of their source of power and influence. By the reign of Constantine Monomachos, revenues obtained from the taxation of the free peasantry had decreased immeasurably. Romanos Argyros had already repealed the *allelengyon* much earlier; its reimposition would have been quite impossible for Constantine as the ruling elite at the time was much more powerful than it was in the tenth century and he could ill afford their resentment. Previous emperors who found themselves in difficult financial situations would simply add a surcharge on the basic land tax of the peasantry, which, after the repeal of the *allelengyon*, must have further alienated many of the free peasantry from their holdings. Furthermore, just obtaining the basic land tax was difficult in itself.¹⁹ From the reign of Romanos Argyros, tax farmers were used to obtain back taxes, even in those newly conquered areas such as Bulgaria where the monetary system was hardly as developed as in the older provinces of

¹⁸ Eric McGeer, p. 7.

¹⁹ Angold, p. 83.

the Empire.²⁰ The Empire's attempt to levy taxes from the Bulgarians in cash rather than in kind led to that province's rebellion during the reign of Michael IV in the year 1040.²¹ Debasement was perhaps the only option of meeting the financial obligations of the Empire.

Many historians of this period see the debasement of the *nomisma* by Constantine IX as a symptom of economic decline. However, there are those who see the debasement as one of the prime reasons for increased economic activity in the Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or that economic expansion favored the debasement of the gold standard. According to Alexander Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein, the *nomisma* was primarily a symbol of imperial power from the mid-seventh through the mid-ninth centuries but became an important vehicle for economic exchange in the eleventh century after its debasement.²² In other words, a chief function of the *nomisma* was its importance as a tool of imperial propaganda. Its debasement to eight carats in the second and third quarters of the eleventh century was a reaction to the "increased demand" of a coin that would be more flexible with regard to economic transactions.²³ Kazhdan and Epstein also argue that archaeological excavations conducted inside and outside the former borders of the Byzantine Empire have led to the discovery of various buried coin hoards, which to them, supports the supposition that there was a great increase in coin use in the eleventh

²⁰ Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy," *The Economic History of Byzantium*, vol. 3. (Washington D.C.: DOP 2002) p. 991.

²¹ Skylitzes, Michael IV: 220.

²² Kazhdan and Epstein, p. 25.

²³ Ibid.

century.²⁴ The problems that became manifest after Constantine's debasement program wasn't as serious as one would think as the value of the *nomisma* rebounded somewhat in the latter eleventh century. The minting of the *hyperpyron* by Alexios I at a denomination of 20.5 carats, and its continued use into the middle of the thirteenth century implies that suppositions concerning the economic 'decline' of the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century must be reevaluated.²⁵ Kazhdan and Epstein illustrate that the debasement under Constantine Monomachos was symptomatic of a period of economic expansion. However, even though economic activity increased, the growing prosperity of the provinces would have a destabilizing effect on the central government of the Empire.

Alan Harvey takes a similar view as Kazhdan and Epstein. He equates debasement with increased monetary flexibility in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁶ Commercial activity was impeded by the rather rigid system represented previously by the *nomisma*, *milliaresion* and *folles*.²⁷ At full value, the *nomisma* was an inconveniently high denomination for transactions except where a limited range of high value products were concerned. Harvey states that Constantine's debasement of the *nomisma* went unnoticed

²⁴ Ibid. Curiously Kazhdan, along with Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington D.C.: DOP 1982) writing about the "ambivalence" of history with regard to Byzantine economics, mentions that the Byzantine economy was a mixture of a barter and monetary exchange system. Currency in the Empire was either hoarded as treasure or issued for economic transactions, albeit for purposes such as the taxation, the payment of soldiers and the administration. Contradictory to Kazhdan and Epstein's assertion that the archaeological discovery of coin hoards suggests an increase in coin use in the Empire, Kazhdan and Constable write, "[t]he fact that that hoards of coins were gathered and that coins were used as items of personal adornment shows that their monetary function had disappeared or had at least declined," p. 142.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 26.

²⁶ Harvey, pp. 89-90.

²⁷ The *milliaresion* was a silver coin introduced by the Emperor Leo III (717-41), which corresponded roughly in value to the Arab *dirham* at twelve to the gold *nomisma*. The copper *folles* was valued at 288 *folles* to the *nomisma*.

by his contemporaries even though the most heavily debased *nomisma* stood at eighteen carats at the end of his reign.²⁸ He assumes that this debasement and the increase in money in circulation led to an equal number of economic transactions. As the *nomismata* of the 1070s and 1080s became even more debased, regular economic activity increased, as the coinage could be used in a greater number of transactions. He also sees the reformed coinage of Alexios I as more convenient for commerce than the old pre-debasement coinage.²⁹ The citation of archeological evidence supports his theory that the use of coinage for economic transactions increased in the eleventh century after the debasement of Constantine Monomachos.

Harvey makes the supposition that due to the debasement of the *nomisma* a rudimentary monetary economy emerged in the Empire's rural districts in tempo with the more urbanized areas of the Empire. The archaeological record finds numerous coins in the provincial countryside. This, with the written record that explains the close interaction between urban and rural communities, suggests that more money made its way out of the towns and into the agricultural regions. The growth of the economy in the urban districts was certainly mirrored, although on a smaller scale, by the rural areas.³⁰ Harvey also points to the tax reforms of Alexios I in the first decade of the twelfth century that introduced the *hyperpyron*, which allowed more money to be extracted from the rural economy.³¹

²⁸ Harvey, p. 89.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 90.

³¹ Ibid.

Michael Angold warns us against readily assuming that the debasement of the *nomisma* was a conscious decision made by Constantine Monomachos or the Constantinopolitan bureaucracy in order to put more money in circulation. He certainly agrees with those historians who see the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the Byzantine Empire as a period of economic expansion. However, he believes that a planned debasement carried out in order to foster economic growth would be a line of reasoning more suited to modern economic theory. In the 1980s it was the inclination of historians such as Kazhdan, Epstein and Harvey to conjecture that since supplies of precious metals were finite in the eleventh century and the existing coinage in circulation did not meet the demand of exchanges, debasement was the only way of increasing the money in circulation. Angold feels that it is unlikely that civil bureaucracy thought of the debasement in these terms at the time it was implemented, since the civil service always stressed the importance of maintaining the value of the coinage.³² Some of the problems of rapid economic expansion were fixed by debasement but it was probably implemented to solve the budgetary problems of Constantine Monomachos' reign. In consequence however, the debasement gave rise to debate in court circles and may have provided contemporaries a deeper understanding of the laws of economics after the resultant effect of the debasement. The debasement produced unlooked for consequences that were both good and bad which may not have been anticipated but which became more clear as time progressed.³³ If the debasement happened to soften the rigidity of the coinage supply and put more money in the economy it was a fortuitous development.

³² Angold p. 84.

³³ Ibid, p. 84.

Angold points out the argument that monetary debasement occurred to meet the demands of a growth economy is circular:

[T]here was not enough money in circulation, therefore it was necessary to debase; the need to debase proves that there was not enough money in circulation. How can we be sure that the money supply was insufficient? Again the argument advanced to support such a contention is a dangerous one: since the money supply was inelastic, it could not meet the demands placed on it by economic growth, whence the need to debase; since there was debasement, this must have meant that there was economic growth. Therefore the money supply was insufficient, or there would have been no need for debasement. The safest conclusion is that the decision to debase was taken on strictly budgetary grounds. This would, however, produce a coinage that was more flexible and better adapted to commercial activity.³⁴

Part II: Changes in Byzantine Society in the Eleventh Century

It is generally agreed by most historians that the Byzantine economy in the eleventh century was growing. Evidence suggests that the economy flourished in Constantinople and its environs. The small ports that lined the shores of the Marmara profited from providing goods to the capital. The petty tradesmen of Constantinople and small merchants did well during this time. According to Psellos, many of these guildsmen and businessmen of Constantinople were given high court dignities by Constantine Monomachos, which was most likely due to their newly acquired wealth.³⁵ Even the father of the previous Emperor Michael V was a ship caulker, which was apparently a lucrative skill in the eleventh century.³⁶ Michael's greatest supporters were those members of those who "belonged to the working class or were manual workers."³⁷ His

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Psellos, p. 170.

³⁶ Angold, p. 85.

³⁷ Psellos, p. 131.

deposition of the empress Zoë after his elevation incited the populace, under the direction of the guilds of Constantinople, to overthrow him.³⁸ The elevation of merchants and businessmen to high court dignities and the reversal of fortunes of Michael V, implies that powerful citizens that represented business and industry could not be ignored in the capital.

Archeological evidence also points to urban growth, the manufacture of goods and increased economic activity in the provinces of the Empire. Most cities of the Byzantine Empire in the early middle ages were largely abandoned and were replaced in function as imperial citadels.³⁹ However, in such places as the lower Balkans for example, a sustained growth in urban life occurred, most notably in Athens and Corinth.⁴⁰ In the eleventh century, houses and workshops began to be built, usually around churches and monasteries. Other cities that seemed to have prospered in the region during this time were Sparta and Thebes. It appears that after the second half of the eleventh century, urban life was more or less stable in the Grecian peninsula until the mid-thirteenth century.⁴¹

The prosperity of the cities in the lower Balkans was largely agricultural in origin. By the eleventh century, there seems to have been a considerable interest by rich families to invest in agriculture. Most of these landowners had their estates concentrated in certain

³⁸ Ibid, p. 138. For a good study on the how the eleventh century guilds of Constantinople exercised the political functions of the old demes and circus factions see Speros Vryonis, "Demokratia and Eleventh-Century Guilds," *DOP*, no. 17 (1963) pp. 289 – 314.

³⁹ Harvey, p. 225. Angold, p. 86.

⁴⁰ Charalambos Bouras, "Aspects of the Byzantine City, Eighth-Fifteenth Centuries," *The Economic History of Byzantium*, vol. 2, (Washington: DOP 2002) pp. 501-502.

⁴¹ Kazhdan and Epstein, p. 26.

regions where they had urban properties. This enabled them to meet the growing urban demand for agricultural produce by supplying goods to the cities quickly.⁴² Their presence in the city also attracted merchants and artisans who hoped to benefit from their wealth and patronage. Industries such as glassmaking, purple-fishing and soap-making, which were geared toward the manufacture of cloths and silk, were largely in the hands of refugee Jews who escaped persecution under Fatimid Egypt. Since it was impossible for them to settle in Constantinople and ply their trades, with the city's guild restrictions and regulations, they set up shop in cities such as Corinth, Athens and Thebes, which provided fewer prohibitions on business.⁴³

In Asia Minor, the archeological record shows little evidence of manufacturing activity in its cities. In some urban centers such as Sardis there seems to have been some building activity dating around the tenth and eleventh centuries but in others such as Ephesus there is little or no evidence of activity of urban renewal at all during this period. Anatolia seems to have been a region of wide-open spaces interspersed with few market towns such as Ikonion or Euchaita. Although archeological evidence does not support the growth of cities or the expansion of trade and commerce in Anatolia the written record suggests that the region's real source of wealth was based on maritime trade and the export of agricultural goods.⁴⁴

The Evidence shows that overall, the Byzantine Empire was doing quite well economically and that old notions of an economic decline of the Empire in the eleventh

⁴² Harvey, p. 86.

⁴³ Angold, p. 87.

⁴⁴ E.g. Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) chap. 1 "Byzantine Asia Minor on the Eve of the Turkish Conquest," pp. 1-68.

century should be questioned. Although the imperial government found it increasingly difficult to pay for its finances in the eleventh century, thus resorting to the debasement of the coinage, commerce and agriculture prospered around Constantinople and in regions such as the lower Balkans and Asia Minor. The debasement of the *nomisma* might have even helped to facilitate trade and commerce and spread the distribution of cash to areas where it had previously been hard to find. If the economy was expanding, why was it so difficult for the government to meet expenditure?

The most probable reason for the Empire's financial difficulties is that it had lost its ability to collect taxes. Since the death of Basil II, the state became increasingly incapable of asserting its imperial prerogative of taxation on its subjects; both the free peasantry and aristocratic landed magnate alike. This could be blamed on the ineptitude of Basil's successors who either lacked the skill to govern or who simply lost themselves in the pleasures that accompanied their newly acquired power. On the surface, it looks as if the "eleventh-century crisis" was a result of poor government.

However, the answer to the government's financial woes could be attributed to broad changes that occurred in Byzantine society in the eleventh century. Some may refer to these changes in terms of either "feudalization" or "decentralization" of the Byzantine state: two theories which, when carefully compared to each other, differ from each other on a very subtle level. It is not my intention to delve deeply into the arguments concerning whether the social transformations of the Empire could be construed as feudal or not for reasons of expediency. Nevertheless, both arguments base their assumptions on the same historical precedents, which I will explain.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the tenth century land legislation of the Macedonian emperors was promulgated when it became apparent that their authority was threatened by the rising power of the provincial aristocracy. Imperial power depended on the state's ability to raise taxes from those productive agricultural lands and labor that was necessary to keep those lands productive. Legislation restricting the activities of the provincial magnates, who coveted crown land, was necessary to avoid the disruption of the imperial fiscal system and the state's authority over its subjects. The fiscal system in the tenth century was organized in a system of rural tax districts. These tax districts were composed of two institutions that were essential for its success. The first was the village communes, which were inhabited by peasant landowners, whose taxes and labor represented the state's primary source of revenue and services.⁴⁵ Secondly the small landholdings of the soldier, or *stratiotai*, provided the Byzantine army its main source of manpower.

Fourteen novels were issued throughout the course of the tenth century by the Macedonian emperors. They protected the village communes and the property of the *stratiotai* from the outside interests of the "*dynatoi*", who were represented by civil, military or ecclesiastical dignitaries or provincial magnates that wished to obtain productive land in order to expand their wealth. It was also necessary to protect the village commune from monastic foundations, which had begun to accumulate large estates in the tenth century through bequests or donations of peasant land.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ McGeer, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

The culmination of the tenth century land legislation was Basil II's novel that instituted the *allelengyon* in 996. While it generated revenue for the state at the expense of the *dynatoi* it also protected the peasant from the burden of taxation that might force them to give up their holdings. The *allelengyon* also prevented the *dynatoi* from raising enough revenue to undertake rebellions as the Phokai and Skleroi had done previously. Until Basil II's death in 1025, the state was able to raise a very large amount of money from taxation while preventing contending powers of Byzantine society from absorbing land, labor and wealth, which was its main source of imperial fiscal revenue and military power.⁴⁷

In the eleventh century, the land legislation of the Macedonian emperors were either abandoned or ignored by Basil II's successors. Many farmers in Anatolia had to abandon their land holdings after Constantine VIII disregarded legislation by demanding the peasantry pay two years of uncollected back taxes, which at the time, was the responsibility of the magnates. During the reign of Romanos Argyros, the *allelengyon* was abandoned altogether and the amount of taxes the government was able to collect decreased since there was less free, tax paying peasantry available as the landed magnates bought up their holdings, thus creating a class of dependent peasantry. As revenues fell, Constantine Monomachos resorted to debasement to meet government expenditure. During the tumultuous period of the 1070s and 1080s the government's need for revenue became more acute. To operate effectively, the government had to deal in gold and as the nomisma became more debased, those landowners who did pay taxes were able to exploit

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

the situation by paying in the most heavily debased currency.⁴⁸ This forced the Empire to rely increasingly on a system of tax farming to collect revenue throughout the rest of the eleventh century.⁴⁹ Collecting taxes under this system was grossly inefficient and open to abuse. Thus, during the course of the eleventh century, imperial authority declined while the power of the landed magnates and civil nobility grew. The checks on the machinations of the *dynatoi* in the tenth century were lifted and the system of free peasant and military landholdings existed only on a very rudimentary level. As the *dynatoi* obtained more land and power, they were able to use imperial authority as a tool for their own use.

Another factor in the growth of large landholdings were the demographical changes occurring in the Empire. While it is the opinion of most historians that the population of the Empire steadily increased from the ninth to the twelfth century, there is some debate as to how this affected the economy and the growth of large provincial estates.⁵⁰ The simplified version is that demographic growth led to the rapid increase in the number of large landownings at the expense of the free peasantry. As the population increased, there was less land available to acquire. Naturally, the rich had the greater means over the poor to pay for the increasingly limited amount of land. The growing families of the peasantry meant that the land inherited by their children became smaller and the amount of surplus extracted from it corresponded accordingly, thus, peasants became poorer and eventually

⁴⁸ Harvey, p. 90.

⁴⁹ Lenora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) p. 49.

⁵⁰ Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, pp. 26 – 27, note several scholars who see the period after the middle of the eleventh century as a time of demographic decline. Most notably these are N.G. Sovronos, H. Ahrweiler and H. Antoniadis-Bibicou.

had to sell off their land.⁵¹ As more people were available to work the fields, the value of labor declined.⁵² Most of the formally free peasantry would be obliged to work as dependents (*paroikoi*) on the large estates. Furthermore, the loss of the eastern provinces to the Seljuk Turks meant that there was less land available for anyone, even if they could afford it.⁵³ The influx of refugees from the eastern provinces exacerbated this problem.

On the surface, the factor of demographic growth seems like a very reasonable argument as a contributor to the increase in large estates. However, its relation to the growth of the economy is harder to understand. The most compelling explanation is that the land that was under the control of the *dynatoi* was better managed and had more resources, which in turn, produced a bigger harvest. Since agricultural technology was limited in the Empire, production increased by extending the area under cultivation. The increase in the number of *paroikoi* meant that large estates could be worked by more of those who were dependent on the great landowners. This led to the further growth in large properties and it can also be assumed that the Empire's revenues from imperial properties increased as well as many *paroikoi* were dependents of the state.⁵⁴ The state as well as the landowners benefited from the increased availability of manpower as the

⁵¹Treadgold, p. 700.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ P. Charanis, "Observations on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire," *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972) p. 17.

⁵⁴ Harvey, p. 47.

paroikoi outnumbered the free peasantry.⁵⁵ The state actively encouraged the installation of the *paroikoi* if only to bring land under cultivation quickly.⁵⁶

However, this does not mean that free peasants or free villages disappeared altogether, although the sources concerning this topic are scarce. For instance, the Crusaders came across independent peasants who paid taxes to the state but had no private lords.⁵⁷ In the Peloponnesian region, they also encountered independent village populations that were obligated only to serve in the army. These villages were not expected to pay state taxes or private rents.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, large estates did increase in number, which made it difficult for the state to tax its subjects. Appropriated land, which might be made into a large farm or ranch might employ slaves or hired labor but in the majority of cases the peasant would have stayed on his holding, but paying rent and taxation to a lord rather than to the state. As a unit, the peasant community under the lord continued to exist in the same manner as a free community. It was essentially a self-regulating body, with its own courts that continued to deliberate community affairs; the only difference with a free village commune was that a lord or a patron represented the village before the state.⁵⁹ In some cases this was preferable, as there are examples of peasants submitting to a lord voluntarily. In exchange for his influence and prestige in the eyes of state officials, the village might offer to provide services of labor or produce. It has been mentioned that the extraction of taxes from the peasantry was difficult and it

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Neville, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Kazhdan and Epstein, p. 58.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Angold, p. 88.

became harder still when a village acquired a patron lord. The yield of the basic land tax would likely fall since the tax system of the Empire was regressive, i.e. the more rich you were the less taxes you were likely to pay.⁶⁰ A village under the patronage of a lord would pay fewer taxes than a free village would, even if it had the same number of peasants working the same number of holdings.

It can be argued that the agrarian legislation was not in the peasants' best interests since the lord might offer better protection than the state. Under Basil II the state looked for ways to increase revenue by exploiting public lands. When deserted land came into the hands of the state, it tried to sell it off quickly and cheaply in order to accelerate the land's cultivation and maximize the taxes extracted from it.⁶¹ This was under the direction of the ministry that was run under the presidency of the *epi ton oikeiakon*. Since the 1030s, lands sold through the *epi ton oikeiakon* came with the condition that only the *paroikoi* were to be settled on them. It also was able to keep the claim to the land tax even in cases where the landowner received a complete exemption from other charges.⁶²

In the eleventh century, the growth of landed estates and the dependent peasantry seriously affected the state's ability to generate revenue from taxation. The creation of the office of the *epi ton oikeiakon*, which tried to profit from peasants who were already servile on public lands sold to buyers, was one way of protecting its interests. However, it was the various grants of immunities and exemptions from taxation bestowed by emperors on patrons that further limited the state's access to revenue. Rural society in the

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 89.

⁶¹ Neville, p. 51.

⁶² Harvey, p. 68.

Byzantine Empire during the eleventh century saw great landowners exercising rights of patronage and paying little, if nothing, in taxes.⁶³ Due to the decline of the theme system in the tenth century and the loss of authority of the military governor to the civil, the rural communities and garrisons, on which the theme system rested on, was quickly overtaken by the authority of the landowning nobility. As the prominence of the rural districts as administrative centers declined, the town grew in importance but was largely overlooked by the imperial government, which seemed rather content to let the town regulate itself.⁶⁴ The landed magnates, who often preferred to live in the towns rather than on their estates, usually provided the leadership in the local governments.

The Empire in the eleventh century can be characterized by its loss of control over political affairs and its inability to manage its finances. The debasement of the *nomisma* under Constantine Monomachos meant that the Empire did not have an organized plan to meet its financial obligations except by cutting its expenditures. The fact that it was incapable of raising taxes was due to its inability to stop the loss of its free peasantry, and hence its rural tax districts, to the landed interests of the *dynatoi*. Thus, the central government's imperial prerogatives in the provinces were usurped by the local elites. This process of decentralization was a consequence of the Empire's economic expansion. The rural and urban economies throughout the Empire experienced rapid growth during this time. As the population grew, urbanization increased, along with the number of manufactured goods from urban centers. In the rural districts, the increase in the number of available workers meant the rise in agricultural produce from the well-managed estates

⁶³ Angold, p. 90.

⁶⁴ Angold, p. 90.

of the provincial magnates. As the districts outside the immediate sphere of influence of the capital became more affluent and its towns grew in size and importance, it became increasingly difficult for the government in Constantinople to assert its authority in the provinces.

Chapter 3: Structural Changes and Reform

During his reign, Constantine IX enacted a series of administrative and military reforms that would attempt to centralize power in the capital, reduce government expenditure and provide the education necessary to train future members of the imperial bureaucracy and judiciary. This program of reform may also have been a way to assert Constantine Monomachos' own power over the various factions of the Constantinopolitan court. It would also establish the civilian government's dominance over the provinces of the Empire from which the competing political interests of the great landed magnates and their families originated. Whether these reforms in themselves contributed to the decline of the Empire's fortunes in the eleventh century is debatable. They might just have been a cynical attempt by Constantine Monomachos to consolidate his own power or to reduce imperial expenditure in order to pay for his building programs and maintain his extravagant lifestyle. However, one could contend that Constantine's reforms were a genuine attempt to meet the changing nature of Byzantine society and economy.

As explained in the previous chapter, most historians view Constantine Monomachos' debasement of the *nomisma* as an attempt to meet imperial expenses. It has also been argued that the debasement, albeit unintentionally, may also have contributed to the increase in economic activity within the Empire during the eleventh and twelfth centuries by allowing smaller coins into circulation, thus making financial transactions easier and facilitating trade. Although the effects of a growing economy could be felt in the capital, especially with the rise and influence of guildsmen, merchants and other businessmen in

high court positions, it can be argued that it was the provinces, under the patronage of the landed military magnates, that benefited the most from economic expansion.

It has been pointed out that the tenth century land legislation that protected free peasant and military properties was either repealed or ignored during the course of the eleventh century. The abrogation of the *allelengyon* meant the free peasant commune (*chorion*) was obliged to provide the payment of any tax arrears. The use of the dysfunctional and abusive system of tax farming in the provinces, which was symptomatic of the state's inability to collect its own taxes at this time, further burdened the peasantry. These and other factors contributed to the free peasantry abandoning their properties. As more and more agriculturally productive land was abandoned and bought up by the *dynatoi*, taxes were harder to obtain by the imperial government. Certainly, Constantinople was able to profit from the increased trade of manufactured items within its environs and from the produce and livestock farmed on its crown lands, yet the Empire consisted predominantly of rural and agricultural land, of which a large portion of taxable and productive was controlled by the landed aristocracy.

It was in this way that the power of the provincial magnates grew and threatened the authority of the central government. The debasement of the *nomisma* helped save the government money in the short term but this measure alone was largely ineffectual against the broad social changes that were happening in the provincial countryside, which was largely under the control of the great magnates. Constantine Monomachos' only recourse was to reform the provincial administration so as not to lose control over the rural districts where the thematic armies were based and from which productive land provided revenue from taxation.

Before discussing Constantine Monomachos' reforms it is necessary to clarify the distinctions and competing interests between the civil aristocracy, as represented by the imperial administration, and the military, which was represented by the provincial aristocracy, for they are not as clear-cut as they appear. It is the customary view of most historians of the eleventh century that after the death of Basil II, Byzantine politics was dominated by a power struggle between the civilian government centered in Constantinople and the military *dynatoi* of the provinces. This is illustrated by the rebellions of George Maniakes and Leo Tornikios, which signified the growing dissatisfaction of the provinces with the capital as well as the machinations of the military magnates to wrest power from the bureaucracy in Constantinople. It is also the inclination of most scholars to view imperial policy as the means of a homogenous group of administrators in the capital and the civil nobility to undermine the great military aristocrats of the provinces. This is certainly the viewpoint of Ostrogorsky who portrays the civil bureaucracy as an institution bent on destroying the very foundation of the Empire's military strength, based on the *stratiotai* system, out of sheer hatred for the military aristocracy.¹ Furthermore, the abolition, or rather the diminution of the powers of the thematic *strategos* and the increasing reliance of the Empire on the use of mercenary troops contributed to the army's resentment of "the anti-militarist bureaucracy," and the "opposition of the provinces to the centralization of the government in Constantinople."² Treadgold is of the opinion that the imperial government's policy was to avoid appointing magnates to the central administration, while relying more on members of less

¹ Ostrogorsky, pp. 331-4. See also Ostrogorsky's "The Aristocracy in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 25 (1971) pp. 3-31.

² Ibid, p. 333.

prominent families from the Balkans, at the same time systematically reducing the size of the military forces whose officers were mostly from the aristocracy.³ Jenkins writes that the citizens of Constantinople themselves were solidly anti-military and, although this opinion of the Constantinopolitans might be seen as a paradox due to the Empire's perpetual need to engage in warfare for its survival, conflict between the capital and the provincial military certainly existed.⁴

In broad terms, animosity and discord did exist between the civilian and provincial factions of the Empire during the reign of Constantine Monomachos. After all, Constantine was a descendant of a high-ranking aristocratic family, which had produced several members who had served in the imperial court previous to his reign.⁵ The leaders of the two rebellions, Maniakes and Tornikios, are seen as the representatives of the military aristocracy. Nevertheless, the revolts were neither a case of the provincial aristocracy's interests pitted against their civil counterparts nor were Maniakes and Tornikios the archetype of the aristocratic elite of the military class. Maniakes himself was not a descendant of an aristocratic background but had earned his rank of *Strategos* gradually through his abilities and triumphs in the field.⁶ Furthermore, his revolt was the result of court intrigues against him by the aristocrat Romanos Scleros who was his neighbor in the Anatolic theme and whose sister was the mistress of the Emperor.⁷ Leo

³ Treadgold, p. 678.

⁴ Jenkins, pp. 335-6.

⁵ Psellos, p. 162. See also Attaleiates, *Historia*. Partial Fr. trans. by H. Gregoire, *Byzantion*, vol. 28 (1958), chapter VIII.

⁶ Psellos, pp. 192-3,

⁷ For the full story see Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 3.

Tornikios could claim descent from Armenian kings but he too rebelled for personal, rather than political reasons as his long-standing love affair with Constantine Monomachos' sister was exposed and the Emperor sent him away to a monastery.

There is further indication that the distinction between the civil and provincial aristocratic families was not as distinct as one might suppose. Most families, which had some claim to political power, were often united through marriage. Property was often held in the provinces but the provincial aristocracy would certainly possess estates or residences in or around the capital in order to be near the Byzantine court. Some of these families, whose wealth and power had been diminished due to the Macedonian land legislations of the tenth century, were slowly regaining influence after the repeal of the *allelengyon*, the grants of *exkousseia*⁸ and other laxities of the emperors of the eleventh century. Their positions in the imperial court were further cemented by marrying into the civil nobility of the capital.

Michael Angold sees the accession of Constantine Monomachos as the reassertion of the power of the families in the capital, which he describes as representative of "old wealth buttressed by position at court and in the administration."⁹ Leadership in the Empire was dominated by a handful of families who relied on their immense wealth, a measure of control over military affairs, a network of clients and, most crucially, a

⁸ The *exkousseia* or 'exemption' was the granting of tax and judicial immunities to monasteries and other private landowners. The first known documented instance of *exkousseia* (although the term itself is not used) is a chrysobul of Constantine Monomachos issued to a monastery on the island of Chios in 1045, which granted it immunity from the judicial authority of government officials. After the second half of the eleventh century the term found itself in more and more documents. See P. Charanis, 'The Monastic Properties and the State in the Byzantine Empire' *DOP*, 4 (1948) pp. 65 – 66.

⁹ Angold, p. 61.

position at court in order to influence political affairs in the capital.¹⁰ The existence of a familial network between the capital and the provinces was a reality at this time.¹¹

The eastern and western armies were the most useful tools the nobility had at their disposal to assert their influence in the provinces. The western army was the more influential due to its closer proximity to the capital as its base was situated at Adrianopolis. However, the two armies were seldom one cohesive unit. After Basil II's death, animosity between the eastern and western armies became more apparent due to the court's practice of playing one unit against another to weaken opposition to the capital. It was in this way, for example, that Constantine Monomachos brought in the eastern troops to crush the rebellion of Leo Tornikios whose military support came from the Macedonian and Thracian themes. In response, the western troops refused to aid the eastern forces in Bulgaria against the invasion of the Patzinaks a year later.¹²

In the capital, various institutions tried to assert their influence politically but none was able to gain the upper hand decisively. One would expect the central administration to be the dominant force in imperial government. Nonetheless, the bureaucracy was split into a number of cliques, who tried to dominate government policy independently of each other but were for the most part unsuccessful.¹³ By allowing the Senate to be open to a larger segment of Roman society, merchants, guildsmen and other people of industry who

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ On the subject of retinues, suites and servants of the Byzantine nobleman, see Ostrogorsky, "The Aristocracy in Byzantium," pp. 12-16.

¹² Attaleiates, chapter XVII. On the animosity between the eastern and western armies see W. Kaegi, "Patterns of Political Activity of the Armies of the Byzantine Empire," *Army Society and Religion in Byzantium*, VII: 19-20.

¹³ Angold, p. 61.

contributed to the economy (and to the treasury by purchasing imperial dignities) had a greater voice in political affairs. Furthermore, the church, under the leadership of the Patriarch, would also have some influence over imperial policy. It is to Constantine Monomachos' credit that he was able to balance all these competing interests with fair success.

Whether the revolts of George Maniakes and Leo Tornikios were symptomatic of provincial dissatisfaction with the governance of the Empire from the capital or were attempts at usurpation by two generals who were either overly ambitious or keen on avenging some slight is open to debate. The struggle for supremacy between the Emperor and the provincial aristocrats is a major theme of Byzantine history from the tenth century until the accession of Alexios I in 1081 who was representative of the latter group.¹⁴ The creation of the ministry under the *epi ton kriseon* and the reorganization of higher education between the years 1043 and 1047 point toward the capital's desire for an effective civilian government over the provinces that did not have to rely on the endorsement of military power.¹⁵ Certainly, the rebellions of the provincial nobility Basil II faced during his reign were a struggle not only for the imperial diadem but also for control over crown and village lands and the revenue that could be extracted from them. Although Basil had won over his enemies in battle, his novel of 996, which protected poor and village communes, consolidated his victory.¹⁶ By the time of Constantine Monomachos' reign, the fight for territory was largely won by the *dynatoi* with the repeal

¹⁴ See Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp. 316 – 350; Treadgold, pp. 534 – 611, etc.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ McGeer, pp. 109-132.

of the land legislations of the tenth century. However, the possession of the crown was still in the hands (albeit precariously) of the civil aristocracy whose representative was Constantine IX. The Emperor and the civil nobility's primacy over their provincial counterparts could not be achieved militarily. It was also too late to reintroduce the *allelengyon* as the absorption of village commune lands by the *dynatoi* was too advanced at that stage to be reversed. The only reasonable course of action for Constantine's survival was to define his authority over the provinces by reforming the theme system.

The administration of thematic units originally fell into two separate jurisdictions when Heraklios established the theme system in the seventh century.¹⁷ In this arrangement civilian governors, or the judges of the themes would look after matters of civilian government while the military generals, the *strategoi*, controlled the army units stationed there. The general had little to do with the administration of the theme until the nature of his duties changed around the second half of the eighth century when he took over civilian administration while the themes became militarized provinces.¹⁸ The judge had become subordinate to the military governor. By the time of Constantine Monomachos' reign, it was difficult to determine whether the judge or *strategos* had the greater authority in the theme. Theoretically, the *strategos*' duties were restricted to

¹⁷ Although it is the general consensus of most historians that the theme armies came into being during Heraklios' reign, there are some who argue that their creation predates the seventh century. For instance Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium 600 – 1025* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) argues that the establishment of a free peasantry, which is usually dated by other scholars to have occurred in the seventh century, was crucial in the formation of the theme armies as the state gave land to those who then had a hereditary obligation to serve in the army. Upon examining the earliest source concerning this phenomena, the Farmer's Law, Whittow maintains that it is not possible to know when exactly the creation of a free peasantry existed and thus the establishment of the theme system dependent on this social occurrence. He also argues that the Farmer's Law could be dated anywhere between 550 and 750, pp. 113 – 116. Walter Ashburner's translation of the Farmer's Law can be found in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 32 (1912), pp. 68 – 95.

¹⁸ Whittow, pp. 120-121.

military matters while the judge, or *krites*, looked after finances and other aspects of civilian administration. The judge was perhaps seen as the more influential figure but it was difficult to determine at the time whose jurisdictions certain obligations fell under, which must have caused some confusion amongst the inhabitants within the themes.¹⁹ Theoretically, the Emperor and the central government had, as their prerogative, the right to supervise the *strategoi* in order to restrict their activities.²⁰ This was impractical since geographical realities and local allegiances made supervision of the provinces by the capital difficult.

The ministry of the *epi ton kriseon* was designed to coordinate the activities of the civilian administration in the provinces and the capital. It allowed Constantinople a greater degree of supervision over provincial affairs and the activities of the judges of the themes.²¹ The *krites* was directly responsible to the central government, which meant his station was elevated; the ministry was the recognition of the independence he enjoyed in the theme and the higher authority he held over the *strategos*.²²

The creation of the *epi ton kriseon* was not only a means to ensure that the central government wielded greater control over provincial administration but was also a way of curtailing the power of the *strategos* whose command of the army made him a dangerous threat to the capital in a period when provincial dissatisfaction with Constantinople was

¹⁹ Angold, p. 62.

²⁰ W. Ensslin, "The Government and Administration of the Byzantine Empire," *CMH*. vol. IV, pt. II (Cambridge, CUP, 1967) p. 29.

²¹ Michael Attaleiates, chap. XI, describes the *epi ton kriseon* as the president of a department of state, created by Constantine IX that is concerned with ferreting out cases of fraud in the provincial administration.

²² Angold, p. 62.

high. This was certainly felt by the central administrators, as it seems they did what they could to hinder the growing power of the provincial aristocracy from which many of the *strategoi* were undoubtedly descended.²³ Nevertheless, hatred and suspicion of the military was not the central bureaucracy's main motivation for the creation of the *epi ton kriseon*. It was part of a larger effort of the Emperor and his administrative staff to provide a more efficient legal and administrative system in the Empire. As we shall see, it was also part of a larger effort to reform the organization of the military in the provinces, especially in the border regions.

Constantine Monomachos was concerned with the quality of education provided for the members of the civil service. Michael Angold points out that improvement of the legal system is one of the usual choices for reforming emperors, but such reforms are complemented by legislation. In contrast, Constantine issued almost no legislation.²⁴ To the Emperor, laws were the foundation of government, yet he did not view the reform of government in strictly administrative terms. The legislation of new laws was unnecessary to Constantine because he did not see anything wrong with the laws the Empire already possessed.²⁵ The problem was the inadequacy of the legal education provided for administrators and lawyers. Before Constantine Monomachos' reforms the law was neither clearly nor easily understood as the study of law and learning in general had been neglected since the mid-tenth century.²⁶ Until the re-establishment of the University of

²³ Competing interests of the civil bureaucracy and the military are illustrated in T.F. Carney's *Bureaucracy in Traditional Society* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1971) pp. 159-167.

²⁴ Angold, p. 63.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ M. J. Kyriakis, "The University: Origin and Early Phases in Constantinople," *Byzantion*, 41 (1971) p. 170.

Constantinople by Constantine, law was taught on a kind of apprenticeship system, which was often unregulated and unexamined, with no guarantee of competence on the part of the teachers.²⁷ It was run by a guild of notaries whose chief job was to teach their students how to draft legal documents.

It is presumed that judges, tax officers and lawyers learned their profession “on the job” on a trial and error basis.²⁸ Attempts were made prior to Constantine Monomachos’ accession to provide some form of guidance for individuals who held these positions by means of a handbook authorized by the central law court of the Hippodrome. This book, known as the *Peira* or Practice was a collection of legal cases based on the decisions (275 of them) of the long practicing judge Eustathios Rhomaïos (d. 1034) who served in the Hippodrome in the early eleventh century.²⁹ Nevertheless, the book only gave instructions on how to make decisions on purely practical grounds and provided arguments that were often at odds with the fundamentals of law provided in the *Basilika* (Imperial Books) of Leo VI (886-912).³⁰

Constantine Monomachos founded two institutions of higher education in 1045, the school of law and the school of philosophy. The date of the school of philosophy’s foundation is unclear and it is debatable whether it was founded during the reign of Constantine but it was traditionally thought to have been so.³¹ The school of law was

²⁷Robert Browning, “Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium,” *Past and Present*, 69 (Nov. 1975) p. 8.

²⁸ Angold, p. 63.

²⁹ Kazhdan and Epstein, pp. 146-147.

³⁰ The *Basilika* was a compilation of Justinian’s *Digests*, *Code*, *Institutions* and *Novels*, and was arranged according to subject matter.

³¹ Kazhdan and Epstein, p. 122.

founded in 1045 and was attached to the foundation of the monastery of St. George of the Mangana. Its goal was to provide capable men who would conform to Constantine's ideals of good government.³² John Xiphilinos, who was given the title *nomophylax* or 'Guardian of the Law', directed the school. The main duty of the *nomophylax* was to instruct students in law in return for a salary and subsistence from the Emperor.³³ All notaries and lawyers were required to receive a certificate from the *nomophylax* before they could practice their profession. Particular attention was given to filling vacancies in the imperial administration, which were lucrative and highly esteemed posts. The school admitted anyone who had the aptitude for the training, regardless of social or economic standing.³⁴ Theoretically, education was to be provided by the *nomophylax* for free but he could receive supplementary fees from members of rich and influential families.³⁵ Until 1054, the school of philosophy was under the tutelage of Michael Psellos whom the Emperor appointed 'the consul of philosophers.' Psellos taught rhetoric and philosophy and supervised the various private schools in the capital.

There were those in the capital who were opposed to the methods of teaching employed by Xiphilinos at the law school. His opponents were probably those who had control of legal education before the reforms of Constantine Monomachos and those judges and lawyers of the Hippodrome who were slowly being pushed aside by those taught by the *nomophylax*. It is unclear however, who exactly these men were. Although

³² Angold, p. 65.

³³ Ibid, p. 66.

³⁴ J. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1937) p. 58.

³⁵ Angold, p. 65.

he had the continued support of Constantine, Xiphilinos retired to a monastery in 1050. Michael Psellos and his old teacher John Mauropous joined him shortly thereafter.³⁶ It is not known whether the school continued to exist after the departure of Xiphilinos but the office of the *nomophylax* became an administrative post and the school was again taught by the guild of notaries.³⁷

It is unknown what, if any, effect the school of law as envisioned by Constantine Monomachos had on the course of Empire's history. Xiphilinos' tenure as *nomophylax* was only three years long and the details of the school's existence after 1050 are unknown. One could assume that it did produce a class of loyal servants devoted to the Emperor whose patronage assured them the education to serve in the court. However, training in law seemed the best way to enter the civil service and the number of men seeking an education in law continued to grow.³⁸ In theory, admission to the offices of the imperial court was open to anybody. Michael Psellos and John Xiphilinos are two examples of men who were from families whose background could be described as modest at best. It was generally the rule of emperors of the eleventh century to install members of less prosperous families into the civil service rather than members of the high aristocracy.³⁹ But it is evident that over time members of the aristocracy predominantly held the more important and profitable positions in the civil service.⁴⁰ They were the ones whose families could afford the extra donations or 'gifts' that the

³⁶ Psellos, pp. 254 – 259.

³⁷ Angold, p. 67.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Treadgold, p. 678.

⁴⁰ Ensslin, p. 33.

nomophylax was allowed to receive in lieu of payment from his pupils. As their ranks tightened, promotion in the service became increasingly difficult for outsiders. Although various cliques and factions may have existed within the service, the administration often allied itself with the Emperor, on whom its members' livelihood depended, in opposition to the growing power of the landed magnates of the provinces.

Constantine Monomachos reorganized the structure of the military in the provinces. This was done by disbanding military units on the frontiers and commuting military service by having the thematic soldiers pay taxes on their small military holdings. This is alleged by many scholars, with perhaps the exception of the debasement of the *nomisma*, to be perhaps the most disastrous policy Constantine implemented as it is seen as the chief cause for the military victory of the Seljuk Turks over the Empire's forces at the battle of Manzikert. The eleventh century historian John Skylitzes opines that it was the substitution of payment in lieu of military service that caused the fortunes of the Empire to waste away.⁴¹ This left the borders of the Empire virtually defenseless.⁴² Nevertheless, some would argue, such as Michael Angold, that Constantine's military reorganization was an expedient measure in his attempts to reform the administration of the provinces and the thematic units stationed in them.

The dismantling of the army units was part of the larger program of asserting the central government's control over the provinces and partly a means of cutting imperial expenditure. Most of the thematic armies in the Empire, especially in the Anatolian themes, sat idle as the Empire enjoyed a relative period of peace after Basil II's death. The only truly active component of the army during this time was certain professional

⁴¹ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 29.

⁴² Ibid.

regiments recruited from the themes called *tagmata*, which served abroad. While the thematic armies did exist, the general tendency until the time of the accession of Constantine Monomachos was to commute the burden of military service, the *strateia*, into a regular cash tax.⁴³ Although this was standard practice since Basil's death it did not apply to the *themata*, which were the valuable border thematic armies that protected the Empire from invasion. Around 1053, Constantine Monomachos disbanded the border army of the Iberian Theme composed of 50000 men, signaling that the Emperor had embarked on a program of a general demoralization of all armies of the eastern border.⁴⁴ Although 50000 men was too high a number for the men serving in the Iberian army alone, Skylitzes must have referred to most or almost all of the eastern themes in general.⁴⁵ In lieu of service, the soldiers of the border themes also made regular cash payments.⁴⁶

The dismantling of the thematic armies seems prudent on the surface. In the Anatolian themes, the army was very large and very expensive to maintain. In peacetime, it must have been quite burdensome to pay such a large army. Although military service was obligatory for the troops when the Empire needed them, it was seen as more advantageous that the soldiers pay a tax to the imperial fisc for the luxury of doing nothing.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Empire had professional troops stationed at the border

⁴³ John Haldon, "Military Service, Lands, and the Status of Soldiers," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 47 (1993), p. 60.

⁴⁴ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 29. See also Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284 – 1081*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Treadgold, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Haldon, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Treadgold, p. 214.

regions under their own commanders, which were probably more capable than the thematic army of Iberia. The thematic soldiers performed poorly anyway against the Seljuk Turks in the campaigns of 1048 to 1049 whose *strategos* was captured by the enemy.⁴⁸ To the Emperor and the central administration, an ineffectual army was seen as a financial burden, which, if disbanded, saved significant sums of money and, in turn, became a source of revenue from the troops who commuted their service for tax payments.

Did the reform program of Constantine Monomachos achieve its intended results or did it contribute to the so-called eleventh-century decline? The establishment of the *epi ton kriseon* and the disbanding of the thematic units were part of the broader program of reducing the power of the military in the themes. While the government in Constantinople held the upper hand in the struggle against the military after the death of Constantine 1055 the struggle was short lived as Alexios I, who represented the military aristocracy, gained the imperial throne in 1081. It is unknown whether the office of the *epi ton kriseon* ceased to exist at this time or was so drastically altered as to render it unrecognizable. The disbanding of the border themes did reduce expenditure but it left the Anatolian plateau defenseless against the marauding Seljuk Turks who overran it after the battle of Manzikert in 1071. As stated, the law school established by Constantine IX continued to exist after the departure of John Xiphilinos but largely as a platform for the ambitious who joined the imperial service for the status it would bestow upon them and the lucrative income that came with it. It would be fair to say that if Constantine

⁴⁸ Angold, p. 63.

Monomachos had the luxury of hindsight he would be quite disappointed by the outcome of his intentions.

Chapter 4: The Empire and its Neighbors in the Eleventh Century

The main theme of the history of the Byzantine Empire between the years 1043 to 1071 is the series of crises it experienced from peoples that existed beyond the Empire. It was also a time in which new confederations of nomadic groups of peoples such as the Seljuk Turks would emerge that would challenge the Empire's military reputation and the integrity of its borders. Constantine Monomachos could be blamed in part for the problems of this period. In previous chapters, discussion concerning the policies of Constantine IX centered on his debasement of the *nomisma*, which caused the Empire various economic problems. His inability to check the interests of the *dynatoi* and strengthen the power of the capital via a series of administrative and educational reforms did not stop the decentralization of power from the capital to the provinces. It can also be argued that Constantine's frontier policies and his program of military reform was the reason various nomadic peoples were able to breach the Empire's borders. Some scholars argue that the Emperor's dismantling of the troops in the eastern frontier region of Iberia, for example, was a grave mistake. Allowing the 50000 troops in the region to pay taxes rather than do military service was motivated by the Emperor's greed and the Empire's need to cut expenditure. In consequence, the Seljuk Turks would defeat the Byzantine forces at Manzikert and overrun Anatolia a few years later.

Nevertheless, Constantine Monomachos should not be held chiefly accountable for the "eleventh-century crisis" the Empire is alleged to have experienced. Moreover, as mentioned in the first chapter, it is debatable as to what extent the Empire was in crisis. The classic interpretation of this period is of Ostrogorsky's who saw the Empire experience a period of decline both militarily and economically after the death of Basil II.

The 'civilian' emperors after 1025 were ineffectual and greedy; the chief characterization of their reign was the decay of the Byzantine army¹ and the decline of central authority.² The harshest words are reserved for Constantine Monomachos who, more than any other emperor of the period, contributed to the reduction of the Empire's military forces.³ This was done by converting the peasant soldiers into taxpayers and reorganizing the theme system in which the military governor was made subordinate to the civil governor. Also, the Empire's resources were tied up in the process of feudalization, which meant that the state had no ability to extract the necessary taxes from the peasantry who were coming increasingly under the control of the great landed magnates.⁴

Later historians have challenged Ostrogorsky's notion that the Empire was in a period of decay. Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein see the eleventh century as a time of economic growth. Resistance by the central government to the processes of feudalization, or decentralization as Epstein and Kazhdan prefer to call it, led to the political problems of the eleventh century.⁵ This is in contrast to Ostrogorsky's belief that it was the lack of the central government's resistance to the forces of feudalization that led to political and military instability. Kazhdan and Epstein see the growth of the large estates as a boon to the Byzantine economy overall due to the fact that large tracts of land were more efficiently managed and more prosperous than the free peasant holdings.⁶ This

¹ Ostrogorsky, p. 331.

² Ibid, p. 330.

³ Ibid, 333.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 329 – 330.

⁵ Kazhdan and Epstein, pp. 56 – 73.

⁶ Ibid.

is also the view held by Alan Harvey who also agrees that the Empire was expanding economically, maintaining that the growth of large estates was essential to economic prosperity.⁷ Nevertheless, Kazhdan and Epstein do agree with Ostrogorsky's assertion that the centralization of military administration to the capital worsened the Empire's military situation. The subordination of the *strategos* to the civilian theme judge by Constantine IX did not allow the military commanders on-site initiative in conducting the large numbers of provincial troops.⁸

Paul Lemerle's views on the period in question takes a middle ground between Ostrogorsky and Kazhdan and Epstein. Lemerle believes that the Byzantine state was not in a period of crisis between the years 1025 to 1081.⁹ Economically the Empire was growing and the patronage of educated men such as Michael Psellos by the Emperors marked a period of cultural apogee. The invasions of the Seljuks and the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert should not be taken that seriously. Events such as these have happened in the past and the Empire was able to rebound. The real downfall of the Empire was the dissolution of the civilian government in Constantinople. The accession of Alexios I and the rise of the military aristocracy reversed the progressive programs of the civilian emperors. Furthermore, Alexios I's neglect of Anatolia lost the region to invaders.

Michael Angold contends that the Empire's misfortunes in the eleventh century stem from the 'poisoned legacy' left by Basil II to his successors.¹⁰ Also, problems occurred

⁷ Harvey, pp. 35 – 79.

⁸ Kazhdan and Epstein, pp. 71 – 72.

⁹ Paul Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le IXe siècle Byzantin*, (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique 77) pp. 249 – 312.

¹⁰ Angold, p. 34.

due to new developments beyond the Empire's borders. He abandons the views of his predecessors that the Empire's political misfortunes are the result of the conflicts between the civil and military aristocracy.¹¹ He saw Basil's achievements, both military and political, as impressive. However, as has been pointed out previously, Basil II's unwillingness to delegate authority and his disinterest in providing a suitable heir to his rule led to a succession of inept emperors. Furthermore, the Empire's relations with its neighbors in the eleventh century were much different from what they were in the tenth. The Empire in the tenth century was on a military footing and was gaining territory due in part to the political instability of its neighboring territories.¹² The fiscal policies of Basil II also provided great sums of revenue for the imperial government while keeping the power of the provincial magnates in check. In the eleventh century, the Empire continued its expansionist policies although it had either reversed or overlooked tenth century land legislation that protected free peasant commune land from its absorption by the great estates of the *dynatoi*. Thus, the state lost valuable revenue in the form of taxation, which financed its wars and bought off potential enemies or converted them into allies. While the Empire lost taxable lands to the *dynatoi*, the *stratiotai* were also alienated from their lands from which surplus revenue was generated in order to provide for their families and equip themselves. This led to problems for the Empire as it faced new challenges from various peoples at home and abroad, which perhaps signaled the waning prestige and power of the Empire. Angold believes that Constantine Monomachos recognized this and embarked on a policy of territorial reorganization and

¹¹Ibid, p. 17.

¹²Ibid, p. 35.

foreign diplomacy. He sees Constantine as a reforming emperor who attempted to fix the problems that Basil II left behind.¹³ The large military force Basil II left behind cost money. Cutting military expenditure eased the financial problems of the state but may have ultimately left the borders open to the incursions of the Patzinaks and the Seljuk Turks.

The Byzantine Empire and the Russians

It is not altogether clear as to why the Russians attacked the city of Constantinople in 1043. The historiography concerning this incident presents possible explanations that range from broad socio-economic changes within both the Kievan kingdom and the Empire to specific events that occurred within Constantinople that angered the Russians enough to declare a state of war.

Although known to the Byzantines prior, the first real contact between this group of Scandinavian Kievans and the Empire occurred around 860 when the Russians began to raid the areas around Constantinople. According to contemporary and modern sources the raids were devastating and the Russians were only stopped from attacking Constantinople when a storm forced them to turn back.¹⁴ Eventually, trade relations were established between the Russians and the Byzantines who coveted the wax, hides, furs, timber and the reserves of Varangian guards the Russians could supply. During the reign of Leo VI

¹³ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁴ Skylitzes, Michael III: 18; *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, trans. S.H. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzer, p. 60. See also Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of the Rus 750 – 1200* (London: Longman, 1996) pp. 28-29.

(886 – 912) treaties were established that laid down the conditions for the Russians to trade within Constantinople.¹⁵

The importance of Kiev to the Empire grew during the course of the tenth century. Previously, the Empire had relied on the Khazars to protect its interests in the north but eventually the Byzantines would look more and more towards the Russians who were becoming a considerable power in their own right. In 941, the Kievan prince Igor felt powerful enough to lead a large expedition against the Empire.¹⁶ Although the invading fleet was almost completely destroyed by Greek fire¹⁷ a treaty was concluded in 944 between the Russians and the Byzantines.¹⁸ In exchange for favorable trade concessions with the Greeks, the Russians in turn would respect the Byzantine integrity of the Black Sea port of Cherson.¹⁹ A military alliance was also concluded between the two parties in which the Russians would provide soldiers to serve in the imperial forces in exchange for the Empire's military assistance should the Russians need it.²⁰

It was after this time that the Russians truly began to move into the Byzantine sphere of influence and by the end of the tenth century the Russians had more or less embraced Orthodox Christianity. However, some of the Russians may have embraced Christianity, albeit a very small number, before this time. According to Skylitzes, soon after the attack

¹⁵ Franklin and Shepard, p. 105.

¹⁶ According to Skylitzes the Rus sent out ten thousand ships to attack Constantinople; Romanos I: 31. However, the tenth century diplomat Luidprand of Cremona puts the number at just over one thousand ships sent out against the Romans; "Antapodosis," trans. F.A. Wright in *The Embassy to Constantinople and Other Writings* (London: 1993), p. 136.

¹⁷ Skylitzes, *ibid*; *Russian Primary Chronicle*, p. 72.

¹⁸ Franklin and Shepard, pp. 115-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 118.

²⁰ Whittow, p. 257.

on Constantinople in 860, the Russians had sent a delegation to Constantinople whose members were baptized.²¹ Nevertheless it was the period between 957 and 989 that Byzantine Christianity became the prominent religion of the ruling Kievan family while its ties to the Byzantine court were greatly solidified. Shortly after the treaty of 944, prince Igor was killed by some of his Slavic retainers and the regency passed to his wife Olga who was the mother of Igor's heir Sviatoslav. In 957, she and her retinue arrived in Constantinople as guests of the Emperor Constantine VII. Most Byzantine sources from the period are vague on this event but Skylitzes claims that Olga was baptized, showing "fervent devotion" and was afterwards honored by the imperial court.²² Whether she truly embraced Christianity is uncertain but contemporary sources generally agree that her chief motive in visiting Constantinople was to extract more trade concessions from the Byzantines as well as to shore up legitimacy against her deceased husband's enemies.²³

Byzantine Christianity did not truly take hold amongst the Russians until the aforementioned bargain between Basil II and the Kievan prince Vladimir. Both Vladimir and Basil's positions as rulers of their respective lands were in peril. Circumstances at the time demanded that both rulers needed each other to secure their authority over their peoples. After the death of prince Sviatoslav, much of the period during the 970s was a time of struggles for succession between his sons, which ended when Vladimir seized

²¹ Skylitzes, Michael III: 18. Mark Whittow in *The Making Of Byzantium*, p. 256n explains that according to the *Epistulae* of the Patriarch Photios, the baptized Rus also accepted a bishop.

²² Skylitzes, Constantine VII: 5; *Russian Primary Chronicle*, pp. 82 – 83.

²³ Franklin and Shepard, pp. 135 – 138. See also Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971) pp. 189 – 190. Ostrogorsky suggests that since Constantine Porphyrogenitos' book of ceremonies *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* does not mention that matter at all and that other Russian sources of the period mentions that her retinue in Constantinople included a priest, it was quite possible she was baptized before her arrival in the Byzantine capital, p. 283f.

control of Kiev in 980. At this time, the region Vladimir ruled was a highly heterogeneous state, which had pockets of Christianity amongst differing types of paganism. Although Vladimir was initially a devout pagan, embarrassing incidents such as idolatry and ritual sacrifices emerged that possibly embarrassed the prince.²⁴ Most of the elite at the time were either Orthodox Christians or were aware of Christian ritual from their relations with the Byzantine Empire.²⁵ Furthermore, the trade of Russian goods such as furs for the Samanid silver *dirham* had steadily decreased by the 980s and Kiev was in financial difficulties.²⁶ The Ghaznevid and Qarakhanid designs on Samanid lands disrupted long distance trade between Russia and Central Asia, which also led to the devaluation of the *dirham* and the reluctance of Russian fur suppliers to work in that particular market.²⁷

It is possible that Vladimir could have embraced the Latin church as represented by the Germans since dialogue concerning Christianity had existed between these two peoples since the early 960s.²⁸ Around this time German missionaries had converted other states in Northern and Eastern Europe such as Poland, Hungary and the Scandinavian regions into Christian kingdoms.²⁹ Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard argue that Vladimir was compelled to convert to Christianity partly out of prestige and

²⁴ Franklin and Shepard, pp. 158.

²⁵ T. Noonan, "European Russia, c. 500 – c. 1000," *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. iii (Cambridge: 1999), p. 510.

²⁶ Franklin and Shepard, pp. 157 – 158.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 156.

²⁸ Obolensky, pp. 189 – 190.

²⁹ Janet L. Nelson, "Rulers and Government," *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. iii (Cambridge: 1999), pp. 118 – 199.

also to avoid the “social isolation” of his peers, meaning the members of the Scandinavian royal courts.³⁰ Nevertheless, the Kievan Russians under Vladimir chose Orthodox Christianity. Vladimir’s more prominent kinsmen, if not Christian already, were quite aware of the Byzantine Church and were already exposed to Byzantine culture.³¹ The Russian conversion to Orthodox Christianity made sense under these circumstances as it might help stimulate trade between them and the Byzantines. It also might help to unify a highly multicultural and multi-faith society. Siding with the Byzantines rather than the Germans was probably more sensible to Vladimir. Vladimir needed Basil II’s support to achieve these ends.

However, Basil needed Vladimir more than Vladimir needed him. The conflict between Basil and the rebel Bardas Phokas strained imperial manpower and Basil needed fresh troops if he was to wrest control of Asia Minor from the Phokian forces. Vladimir captured Cherson, which was an anti-imperial stronghold, as part of an agreement with Basil.³² Vladimir also contributed a force of 6000 men and ships to aid Basil in Anatolia. The combined Kievan and imperial forces defeated Bardas Phokas at Chrysopolis and Phokas was killed after a fall from his horse.³³ Most contemporaries of the period believe he was poisoned.³⁴ After Bardas Phokas’ defeat the Emperor could concentrate on stopping the rebellion of his other rival, Bardas Skleros, which was put down later that

³⁰ Franklin and Shepard, p. 159.

³¹ Noonan, p. 511.

³² This is the general consensus of most historians. See Franklin and Shepard, p. 162; Noonan, p. 510; Andrzej Poppe, “The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus’: Byzantine – Russian Relations between 986 – 89, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 30 (Washington D.C.: 1976), pp. 238 – 239.

³³ Psellos, pp. 36 – 37.

³⁴ Psellos, *ibid.* Skylitzes, Basil II: 18.

year. In exchange for Vladimir's alliance, Basil gave him his sister's hand in marriage in 989³⁵ on the condition that Vladimir adopted the Orthodox faith. Thus, the Kievan royal house, through religion and marriage, was bound to the Byzantine imperial family.

The story of the Russian's conversion to Orthodox Christianity prior to the attack of Constantinople in 1043 in and of itself is not important except to illustrate that friendly relations between the two states ultimately became mutually beneficial. The conversion of the Russians to Orthodox Christianity and the familial ties established between the Imperial family and the rulers of Kiev led to a relatively long period of peace. Kiev adopted a decidedly pro-Byzantine outlook and grew more prosperous from trading with the Empire. The Empire itself had greater access to raw materials from the north. Meanwhile, the Empire was relatively stable after the death of Basil II and had a strong ally on the Steppes. However, the short period of peace and prosperity in the early part of the eleventh century led to Byzantine carelessness with regard to observing developments in the emerging Russian state. Other than the fact that they had a valuable trading partner to the north, the Byzantines were not actively attentive to Russian aspirations and growth.³⁶ It could also be said that the unifying forces of Christianization and the Russian leaders' Byzantine influenced views on kingship strengthened the Kievan state, which would lead it to seek parity, or at least greater recognition, from Constantinople. Furthermore, hundreds of miles separated Kiev from Constantinople and any real attempt at overlordship made by the Empire over the Russians was impossible.³⁷ Thus, unified,

³⁵ Skylitzes, *ibid*; *Russian Primary Chronicle*, p. 113.

³⁶ Treadgold, p. 557.

³⁷ Obolensky, p. 223.

unhindered and unobserved by the Empire, the Kievan state grew in power and aspirations.

Why then did Russia attack Constantinople in 1043? As mentioned, trade relations between the Kiev and Constantinople were on a reasonably good footing. Even after Vladimir's death in 1015, Kievan princes still recognized the Empire claim to political sovereignty over Kiev.³⁸ Christianity had also expanded considerably in Kievan Russia from the death of Vladimir to 1043. Relations between the Empire and the Russians had been relatively peaceful during this time. According to Psellos, Russian aggressions were kept in check by the fact that the Russians feared the Byzantines who invoked in them the memory of Basil II.³⁹

It is not necessary to offer a detailed account of the Russian attack on Constantinople but to provide the causes that might have led to the war and the possible reasons behind them. It is enough to know that the Russian forces were utterly defeated by the Byzantines and that after the attack relations between Kiev and Constantinople were congenial for some time. Both Skylitzes and Psellos offer differing views as to the actual cause of the war. According to Psellos, the Russians' barbaric temperament garnered "an insane hatred for the Roman Empire."⁴⁰ Constantine Monomachos, who lacked the vigilance to check on his neighbors to the north, overlooked the Russians' machinations.⁴¹ Psellos claims that the Russians' preparations for the attack actually began during the reign of Michael IV. However, this has been discredited by George

³⁸Ibid, pp. 224 – 225.

³⁹ Psellos, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Vernadsky, explaining that during the period of 1034 to 1041, the Russians were in no position to mount such an attack as the position of their ruler Iaroslav was insecure until 1036. Soon thereafter he concluded talks with the Patriarch that allowed a metropolitan to oversee the church in Kiev, thus making it a diocese of the patriarchate of Constantinople in 1039.⁴² Other than Psellos, there is no indication by Byzantine or Russian sources that Iaroslav planned an attack during the reign of Michael V or during the first months of Constantine Monomachos' reign.⁴³

Skylitzes offers a more straightforward reason for the events of 1043. He points out that the Russians and the Byzantines had been allies and that trade relations between them were on a good footing. Unfortunately, a brawl had broken out between some Greeks and Russian merchants (whom he refers to as Scythians). Several Russian merchants and a prominent Russian nobleman were killed in the melee.⁴⁴ Skylitzes describes Iaroslav's son Vladimir as an impulsive man who immediately prepared a large number of ships to attack Constantinople. He also rejected an embassy sent by Constantine to resolve the situation.⁴⁵ Vernadsky agrees that this is the most likely catalyst of the war explaining that since Russian merchants were not allowed to carry weapons in Constantinople, the Emperor was personally responsible for their safety. Iaroslav could not ignore the murders since it might destabilize commercial relations and

⁴² George Vernadsky, "The Byzantine – Russian War of 1043," *Sudost Forschungen*, XII (1953), pp. 61 – 62.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

jeopardize the personal safety of Russians in Constantinople in the future.⁴⁶ Franklin and Shepard provide a similar, although somewhat more complicated, argument. Iaroslav's religious and cultural outlook was decidedly pro-Byzantine. For example, his rebuilding program of Kiev was modeled after Constantinople and its centerpiece was the magnificent new church built between 1037 and 1047, which was fittingly named St. Sophia. Possibly, the liturgy there might have been celebrated in Greek.⁴⁷ However, Iaroslav's Byzantine outlook may not have been an acknowledgment of the Empire's pre-eminence but a way of asserting Kievan parity with Constantinople.⁴⁸ Franklin and Shepard also point out that the Byzantines viewed the Russians with some snobbery. Perhaps Iaroslav desired to be taken seriously by the Byzantines who did not pay too much attention to the Russians. Nevertheless they admit the real causes for the attack are unclear. With regards to the killing of the Russian merchants they state, "[w]e do not know what deeper resentments prompted Iaroslav to launch such a major response to such a relatively minor incident, but the response is compatible with Iaroslav's desire to be taken seriously, a reaction to Byzantine *inattentiveness* more than to Byzantine *overattentiveness*."⁴⁹

A popular, yet dubious explanation for the Russian attack on Constantinople has the general George Maniakes colluding with the Russians in 1043. Maniakes had highly successful campaigns in Syria and Sicily. During his time in Sicily, Maniakes had under his command the kinsman of Iaroslav, the Varangian Harold Hardraada with whom he

⁴⁶ Vernadsky, p. 52.

⁴⁷ Franklin and Shepard, p. 213.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 216.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

had become friends. A rival soldier of high rank accused Maniakes of conspiring to depose the Emperor Michael IV in order to seize the Byzantine throne. Maniakes was briefly imprisoned but the newly installed emperor Michael V released him and sent him to Italy to drive the Normans out of Apulia. Due to Constantinopolitan court intrigues, Maniakes was to be relieved of his command by messengers sent by Constantine Monomachos. In response, the general revolted against the Emperor in September of 1042. Because George Maniakes was a friend of Harold Hardraada and because he was well liked by the many Russian auxiliary troops who composed his army, it has often been suggested that Maniakes was in complicity with the Russian forces that were advancing against Constantinople. This is the view held by Warren Treadgold and Vernadsky.⁵⁰ According to Michael Angold this was impossible since Maniakes' revolt could no have taken place until 1042, while preparations for the Russian expedition began well before this.⁵¹ Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard do not even deign to address the subject in their study.⁵² However, it has been suggested by Vernadsky that many of the Greeks could have viewed the Russians in Constantinople as a potential "fifth column" as many of the Russian Varangians who served the Emperor still kept ties to Scandinavia. Perhaps the brawl between the Greek and Russian merchants was an expression of the tensions that existed between these two peoples.⁵³

⁵⁰ Treadgold, *History*, p. 592 and Vernadsky, p. 63.

⁵¹ Angold, p. 36.

⁵² The section dealing with the attack of 1043 in *The Emergence of the Rus* is based partly on J. Shepard, "Why did the Russians Attack Constantinople in 1043?", *Byzantinischneugriechischen Jahrbucher*, 22 (1979), pp. 147 – 212 in which Shepard refutes Maniakes' complicity in the attack.

⁵³ Vernadsky, pp. 61 – 62.

Both Skylitzes and Psellos remark that Constantine Monomachos had behaved quite admirably during this crisis. Skylitzes states that Constantine prepared for war only after he had sent two failed delegations to mollify the Russians.⁵⁴ Psellos maintains that the Russians had attacked without any provocation and the Emperor had acted coolly to the challenge.⁵⁵ Besides organizing the successful defense of Constantinople, the Emperor rounded up the many Russian merchants who dwelled in the city and had them sequestered under armed guard in the outlying themes in case they caused any trouble.⁵⁶ It was only after a third failed attempt by the Emperor to make peace that the actual battle took place.⁵⁷ The Russian forces were annihilated and Constantine Monomachos had overcome the first serious challenge to his rule.

Differences between Kiev and Constantinople were soon resolved in the later years of Iaroslav's reign. The Byzantines, who had provided the bulk of the artisans and workers for Iaroslav's building program, finished the Church of St. Sophia a few years after 1043 while they had also begun preparations for a new church in Novgorod, which was the city ruled by Iaroslav's son Vladimir.⁵⁸ In 1046, A marriage was arranged between Vsevolod, the younger son of Iaroslav and the Emperor's daughter Maria.⁵⁹ In the same year, and possibly as a condition of the marriage alliance, the surviving Russians of the war who

⁵⁴ Skylitzes, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Psellos, p. 200.

⁵⁶ Skylitzes, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Franklin and Shepard, p. 217.

⁵⁹ Obolensky, p. 225.

were imprisoned in Constantinople were released.⁶⁰ There was some friction between the two powers shortly after 1043 but it did very little to alter the course of Byzantine/Russian history. Iaroslav had appointed a Russian monk Hilarion as metropolitan of Kiev in 1051, which previously had always been held by a Greek appointed from Constantinople.⁶¹ This might have been an attempt of Iaroslav to stress his independence as ruler of Kiev but after peace was finally concluded with the Empire, Hilarion was replaced shortly thereafter.⁶² After the death of Iaroslav in 1054, his kingdom was divided amongst his sons and Constantinople soon reasserted its authority over the church in Kiev.⁶³ After 1054, there is very little information concerning relations between Russia and the Byzantines in the eleventh century.

The Patzinaks

The troubles the nomadic Patzinaks posed on Constantine Monomachos had its roots in the period shortly after the death of Basil II. Indeed, the political situation of the Empire had changed dramatically after 1025. Basil's successors failed to recognize the changing realities in the Empire, especially in the Balkans and vis-à-vis the emerging tribes of nomadic Oguz Turks, who destabilized the *status quo* in the region. Besides the shifting geopolitical realities of the time, the consequences of the changes in Byzantine foreign policy in the northern Steppes also strained the Empire's relationship with the Patzinaks. Since the mid-tenth century, it was clear to the Byzantines that the Patzinaks were indispensable to the protection of the Empire's borders and the important port city

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Noonan, p. 512.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

of Cherson. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitos' *De Administrando Imperio*, the Patzinaks could be used by the Romans to attack the Bulgarians, Turks or the Russians in exchange for money or gifts.⁶⁴ The Patzinaks worked for whomever they wished as when they supported prince Sviatoslav in his war with the Empire in 971.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Patzinaks' allegiance with the Russians was somewhat short-lived.⁶⁶

In the eleventh century, the changing political situation in the Steppes left the Patzinaks increasingly isolated. The victory of Constantine IX over the Russians and the peace that followed lessened the importance of the Patzinaks to the Byzantines. The role of the Patzinaks as the allies of the Byzantines in the north was then taken up by the Russians who protected imperial interests there. As the services of the Patzinaks became obsolete, the influx of gold and luxury items paid to them by the Byzantines ceased. Also, the building program of Iaroslav in the 1030s strengthened fortifications around Kiev, which did not allow the Patzinaks to pursue their traditional means of livelihood by raiding the city and the outlying countryside. Finally, the arrival of the Oguz Turks into the Steppes and their use by the Russians as military garrisons against the Patzinaks to control trade routes between the Danube and central Asia forced the Patzinaks to look toward the lower Danube for booty and new pastoral lands.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *De Administrando Imperio*, trans. R. Jenkins, vol I. (Washington DC: 1967). There are several chapters devoted by Constantine VII in *De Administrando Imperio* concerning relations between the Empire and the Patzinaks; most notably chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6.

⁶⁵ Skylitzes, John Tzimiskes: 7.

⁶⁶ Skylitzes recounts how the Patzinaks turned on the Russian forces and killed Sviatoslav after the latter made terms for peace with the Byzantines; John Tzimiskes: 18. This event is also mentioned in the *History* of Leo the Deacon, trans. A.-M. Talbot and D.F. Sullivan (Washington DC: 2005), IX: 12, and the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, p. 90.

⁶⁷ Omeljan Pritsak, *The Pechenegs: A Case of Social and Economic Transformation* (Cambridge Mass.: 1976), p. 27.

The conquest of Bulgaria and the way it was administered further exacerbated the problem of Patzinak incursions into imperial territories. Basil II did little to alter the Bulgarian organizational structure after 1018. There is no evidence that Basil established a civilian or financial administrative system in the region of the lower Danube.⁶⁸ Instead, order was maintained by a patchwork of local elites and the presence of military commanders in a sparse collection of citadels.⁶⁹ Most importantly, Basil's annexation of Bulgaria might have brought the danger of Slavic raids into Byzantine territory under control but it also eliminated a buffer state against the Patzinaks.⁷⁰ After 1018, administration of the area comprising the lands of the lower Danube was the responsibility of the district known as Paristrion. Although established by John Tzimiskes in the tenth century, it did not officially become a theme until its designation as such by Constantine IX when it was renamed Paradounavon.⁷¹ In the interim, the importance of Paristrion grew as the chief center of trade and administration in northern Bulgaria.⁷² Even the Patzinaks, who had previously traded in the markets of Cherson when unhampered in the north by the Russians, now sought Byzantine goods in Paristrion.⁷³ Although commerce in Bulgaria was initially based on a barter economy, trade with the

⁶⁸ Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) p. 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ John Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983) p. 208.

⁷¹ Stephenson, p. 94.

⁷² Ibid, p. 86.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 86.

Byzantines made Paristrion a center of monetary exchange.⁷⁴ Evidence for this is supported by archaeological findings, which have unearthed large quantities of Byzantine coins from the eleventh century, which also seems to support Kazhdan and Epstein's theory of Byzantine economic expansion in the eleventh century due to the increased circulation of coinage.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Paristrion would become the region that caused the Empire the most trouble in Bulgaria since it was so attractive and accessible to the Patzinaks.

Basil II allowed the Bulgarians to pay taxes in kind rather than in cash. Initially the system worked. As long as contingents of Byzantine troops made their presence felt and members of the local power structure remained cooperative with the Empire, Bulgaria did not pose a threat. Nevertheless, the situation in the Empire had changed and successive Emperors tampered with Basil II's Bulgarian policy. Money was the chief issue. The repeal of the *allelengyon* meant that the process of the absorption of taxable land by the large estates of the *dynatoi* had begun. Also, the costly war launched by Romanos III against the Emir of Aleppo strained the imperial treasury further. The decline in imperial revenues made the operation of large border armies very costly. During Basil II's reign, the standing army was a necessity to fight the Empire's wars of conquest and expansion. However, the relative era of peace that followed saw such a large standing army drain imperial coffers. Furthermore, the nature of warfare the Empire's armies faced in northern Bulgaria changed as well. The cumbersome military units of the Byzantines

⁷⁴ Evidence in a shift from a barter economy to a monetary economy in Paristrion is found in archaeological excavations around the then prosperous town of Preslav. See Ivan Jordanov, "Preslav," *The Economic History of Byzantium*, vol. ii (Washington D.C., 2002), pp. 669 – 670.

⁷⁵ *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1985) chap. II, pp. 24 – 73.

were increasingly unable to repel the raids of the highly mobile units of Patzinaks. The isolated imperial fortresses guarding the region of the lower Danube were ineffective against the marauders. The fortresses themselves were an attractive target to the Patzinaks for the goods contained within them.⁷⁶ Again Angold points out, the ineffectual and expensive army in Bulgaria was one aspect of Basil II's "poisoned legacy" to his successors.⁷⁷ Problems such as this were largely ignored by Basil's immediate successors until Constantine IX attempted to ease the Empire's financial burdens by reducing military expenditure.⁷⁸ However, attempts at military reform often met the resistance of the officer corps who were mostly members of the powerful military families.⁷⁹ This forced the Empire to find new ways of generating revenue, which contributed to the unstable political and military situation in Bulgaria.

Patzinak raids into Paristrion that began after Basil II's death exacerbated the Empire's need for revenue and the restructuring of the Empires' frontier policy in Paristrion. In 1027, during the reign of Constantine VIII, the Patzinaks invaded Bulgaria, destroying the countryside and killing many troops before being repulsed by the Byzantine forces.⁸⁰ Between the years 1032 and 1036, the Patzinaks raided Byzantine territory several times.⁸¹ They had penetrated the Empire as far as Thessalonica and had

⁷⁶ Stephenson, pp. 81 – 82.

⁷⁷ Angold, p. 34.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Stephenson, p. 81.

⁸⁰ Skylitzes, Constantine VIII: 2.

⁸¹ Ibid, Romanos III: 10 and Michael IV: 10.

caused much destruction in Macedonia and Thrace.⁸² According to Stephenson, the Empire's frontier policy in Paristrion was reevaluated by Michael IV's chief minister John the Orphanotrophos. Stephenson suggests that John had two choices: the commitment of greater military resources to the frontier or the withdrawal of troops to the more easily defensible Balkans to protect the rich lands of Thrace.⁸³ These were not very attractive options for the Orphanotrophos. Increasing the military presence on the border would be very costly. The withdrawal of troops from the border would leave Paristrion and its inhabitants vulnerable to the Patzinak threat. Moreover, there was the danger that the Patzinaks would settle permanently in Paristrion and create an independent realm of their own if the Empire withdrew from the region.⁸⁴

Michael IV and John the Orphanotrophos chose to pursue a policy that mixed frontier reinforcement and diplomacy. A treaty was concluded with the Patzinaks, which was made in order to buy time while the Byzantines rebuilt a number of fortresses and the defenses of various towns.⁸⁵ Although fewer in number, these towns and fortresses were strengthened and local populations were relocated around them in the event these peoples would need to be protected in them.⁸⁶ The Emperor and his chief minister also facilitated controlled access to the goods that the Patzinaks desired.⁸⁷ At the time this seemed to work.

⁸² Stephenson, p. 81.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 82.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 83.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Unfortunately, the peace between the Byzantines and the Patzinaks did not last for long. In the 1040s a group of Patzinaks had reached the Empire's Danube frontier after migrating to avoid the hostility of the Oguz Turks.⁸⁸ Constantine Monomachos allowed some of these Patzinaks, under their leader Kegenes, permission to settle into the Empire in 1046. Kegenes was fleeing the forces of the Patzinaks' overall leader Tyrach who had set about to kill him. Kegenes was, according to Skylitzes, a "nobody by birth," but had distinguished himself in battle against the Oguz Turks, much to the envy of the ineffectual leader Tyrach whose authority had become weakened by the Patzinaks growing admiration for Kegenes.⁸⁹ In return for sanctuary, Kegenes was given responsibility to defend the river border. He and his men were also compelled to accept baptism. Kegenes himself was raised to the rank of Patrician with command of three fortresses along the bank of the Danube.⁹⁰

Constantine Monomachos' treatment of the Patzinak rebel Kegenes illustrates the long-standing policy of the Byzantine practice of exploiting divisions of the various tribes dwelling along the banks of the Danube. The Empire's promotion of dissention among rival peoples often led to the inability of forces to come together and gave the Empire time to maneuver if need be. Furthermore, providing Kegenes with the title of patrician and deploying his men to act as border patrols was in line with the Byzantine tradition of promoting one tribal chieftain and his followers against another to obtain loyalty to the

⁸⁸ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 16.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Empire and create a sense of purpose within an imperial system that was quite alien to such peoples.⁹¹

Imperial patronage emboldened Kegenes to launch periodical attacks against other Patzinak tribes across the Danube. In protest, Tyrach sent a delegation to the Emperor complaining that such hostilities contravened pacts made previously between the Patzinaks and the Byzantines. Nevertheless Constantine ignored their grievances.⁹² In the winter of 1047, the Danube had frozen over and Tyrach, with a large host of Patzinaks behind him, crossed over into imperial territory and laid waste to the countryside. Nevertheless, a joint force of Kegenes' Patzinaks and the Byzantine army defeated them.⁹³ Kegenes wished to slaughter the defeated Patzinaks but the Emperor, wishing to colonize the uninhabited area between Nish and Sofia, settled them there instead.⁹⁴ Tyrach and his closest followers were sent to Constantinople where they received honors and were baptized.⁹⁵

Constantine's program of settlement of foreign confederations of peoples within the Empire's borders is not without precedent. According to Stephenson, the flat lands south of the Danube allowed the settlers of Kegenes to pursue their traditional, nomadic way of life.⁹⁶ Their settlement in the region of Sardika was an attempt by the Emperor to make the Patzinaks more sedentary, perhaps hoping that they would become loyal subjects who

⁹¹ Stephenson, pp. 90 – 91.

⁹² Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 17.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Angold, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Skylitzes, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Stephenson, p. 91.

could become productive agriculturally.⁹⁷ However, Skylitzes is of the opinion that it would have been preferable to settle the Patzinaks over the “desert plains” of Bulgaria and to extract tribute from them, which would have been quite a large sum.⁹⁸ He also recognized that if the Empire needed to raise an army to fight its enemies, the Patzinaks would be available to do so.⁹⁹ According to Treadgold and Angold, the settlement of the Patzinaks in this region raised the ire of the western tagmata stationed in Adrianopolis and sparked the rebellion headed by Leo Tornikios.¹⁰⁰

In the spring of 1048, Constantine dispatched 15000 Patzinaks to shore up eastern defenses against an attack by the Seljuk Turks. Uneasy about the fate that awaited them, the Patzinak forces mutinied and marched back across the Bosphorus. Meanwhile, Tyrach and his men who were in Constantinople at this time were kept “detained in the city with gifts and favors.”¹⁰¹ In reality, they were captives. Eventually the mutiny turned into a full-scale rebellion and all the Patzinaks abandoned their new settlements.¹⁰² They then established themselves in the vicinity of the old Bulgarian capital Preslav.¹⁰³ Constantine sent Kegenes to help quell the uprising but eventually this group also joined the rebellion.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Skylitzes, *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Treadgold, p. 592; Angold, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 22.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Angold, p. 38.

¹⁰⁴ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 21.

Skylitzes' relates the reasons as to why the Patzinak leadership, which had been generously patronized by the Emperor, decided to join the rebellion. After the mutiny of the Patzinaks and their subsequent settlement in Preslav, Kegenes was summoned to Constantinople for consultation on the matter. Just before Kegenes' audience with Constantine there was a failed assassination attempt on the Patzinak leader's life in which he was wounded. When confronted by the Emperor, the captured conspirators claimed that Kegenes was disloyal and planned to overtake the city with his men.¹⁰⁵ Kegenes also had his suspicions about Constantine and may have believed that the assassins were agents of the Emperor.¹⁰⁶ According to the narrative of Skylitzes, Kegenes and his sons were kept at the capital as prisoners while the Emperor entertained the rest of his men under the pretext that they were honored guests during which time Kegenes should be allowed to rest and have his wounds taken care of. The Emperor's benevolent disposition towards them was just a ruse to disarm them, to deprive them of their horses and to keep them as prisoners at the capital.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the would-be assassins were let go. Kegenes' men were angry that they were being deprived of their leader and his sons. They slipped out of the city at night and joined the main body of the Patzinak rebels in Preslav.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Tyrach, who had also been indisposed in Constantinople, was given amnesty in exchange for his aid in pacifying the rebels. However, upon meeting the rebels Tyrach also joined the insurrection.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 22.

The Byzantine forces sent out to dislodge the Patzinaks from Preslav failed. The following summer the Patzinaks crossed the Balkan mountains and fell upon Thrace.¹¹⁰ The Byzantines checked their advances in 1050 and were able to hold them off in Adrianopolis. Two years later, the Byzantines again tried to disperse them from their stronghold in Preslav but were defeated. Kegenes was sent out from prison to mollify the Patzinaks but was slaughtered by Tyrach's men.¹¹¹ Constantine Monomachos had no choice but to conclude a thirty-year truce with the Patzinaks. They remained as independent allies settled within the borders of the Empire and were allowed to keep their own chiefs and their tribal structure.¹¹²

The way Constantine Monomachos handled the Patzinak situation was fairly consistent with the methods used by his predecessors under similar circumstances. The old Byzantine practice of playing off one barbarian tribe on another helped to weaken any unified effort against the Empire. In conjunction with their baptism, Kegenes and Tyrach were given high rank and certain duties, which should have ensured their personal loyalty to the Emperor. However, Constantine did not treat the leadership of the Patzinaks as well as he could have. The ill treatment and detainment suffered by Kegenes and Tyrach under Constantine did not endear the Emperor to the Patzinak peoples. What Constantine hoped to achieve was the settlement of agrarian colonists in Bulgaria in regions that were sparsely settled. Instead Constantine was forced to recognize the settlement of a group of

¹¹⁰ Angold, p. 39.

¹¹¹ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 25.

¹¹² Angold, *ibid.*

independent peoples within the borders of Paristrion with more or less autonomy from the central government.

The Byzantines failed to keep the Patzinaks from settling in the Empire for several reasons. The buffer zone of Bulgaria, which had previously kept barbarian tribes out of the Empire, did not exist during the reign of Constantine IX. Furthermore, the patrols guarding the frontier along the Danube were ineffectual in keeping out the Patzinaks. As mentioned above, financial difficulties in the Empire prompted Constantine to embark on a program of cutting military expenditure by reducing the size of borderland troops. In turn, the Empire relied more heavily on mercenary troops and the *tagmata* as the use of the thematic armies declined. The rebellion of the western *tagmata* in 1046 was sparked by what they perceived as Constantine's attempt to replace them with the Patzinaks that were settled in Sardika. Whether Constantine attempted to replace the western forces completely with the Patzinaks is unknown. However, sources of the period mention the disdain and mistrust Constantine felt for the western units¹¹³ and that some of these soldiers felt overlooked while others were unemployed.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the *tagmata* were paid with the heavily debased *nomisma*, which could hardly have escaped their notice.¹¹⁵ As the Patzinaks pushed into the borderlands of the Danube, the reduced military resources of the Empire were stretched to the limit and were unable to stop them.

The Seljuk Turks

For many historians, the incursions of the Seljuk Turks in the east and their subsequent victory over the Byzantine forces at Manzikert in 1071 were the definitive

¹¹³ Psellos, pp. 208 – 209.

¹¹⁴ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 8.

¹¹⁵ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Army*, p. 216.

moments of the “eleventh-century crisis.” Blame by scholars of the period is largely directed at Constantine Monomachos whose policies regarding the reduction of the Empire’s military forces left the eastern borders of the Empire defenseless against Seljuk attacks. There is some merit for this but, as we have seen before, the legacy left by Basil II set the stage for future problems. As we shall see, the absorption of the Armenian principalities begun by Basil removed an important front line of defense against invaders from the east. Furthermore, the Seljuk invasions of Anatolia were not wholly initiated by the Seljuks themselves but by their inability to check the marauding instincts of the Turkoman tribesmen who were under the nominal leadership of the Seljuk clan.

As with the conquest of Bulgaria, which left no buffer zone between the Empire and the Patzinaks, the absorption of the Armenian principalities left the Anatolian plains vulnerable to the Seljuk Turks. Since the late tenth century, the Armenian principalities have been slowly annexed by the Byzantine Empire. In their dealings with Armenian chieftains, the Byzantines developed the practice of acquiring their territories in exchange for the offer of estates elsewhere in the Empire. The Armenian chieftains were also provided various titles and offices. This was done with the intent of extending the frontier regions eastward while absorbing the more resistant elements in the region into the military and political system of the Empire.¹¹⁶ During the reign of Basil II this process was accelerated. It was accomplished by a mixture of Byzantine aggression and unstable circumstances in the region, which compelled some of the Armenian rulers to leave their lands. Basil’s first major acquisition was the region of Taik, which was ruled under the

¹¹⁶ Peter Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire* (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1963) p. 48.

Kouropalates David.¹¹⁷ Taik was the core of the larger regions of Manzikert, north to Lake Van, Erzurum and the northwest region of Kars. David was an ally of Basil II against the rebel Bardas Skleros but at some point had sided with the rebel Bardas Phokas. To escape the victorious emperor's wrath, David had promised that Basil would take over Taik upon his death. When he died in 1000, Taik became the theme of Iberia.¹¹⁸ In 1022, King Senacherim willingly seeded his territories of Vaasprakan to the Emperor since he could not deal with internal problems in his realm and the external threat from the marauding Seljuk Turks. Vaasprakan became a *katapanate* of the Empire.¹¹⁹

Basil II's most contentious acquisition was the absorption of the Kingdom of Ani and the Kingdom of greater Armenia. John – Smbat III of Ani, the king of Greater Armenia, who had sided with a certain George of the Georgian feudal monarchy against Basil II, bequeathed his lands to the Empire in 1022. After Basil II engaged and defeated George in Iberia, John – Smbat recognized that further resistance against the Empire would be a mistake and decided that the best way to keep himself alive was to hand over Ani to the Emperor.¹²⁰ In return, Basil made John – Smbat the ruler of Ani and the Kingdom of Greater Armenia, making him promise that upon his death his lands would revert back to the dominion of the Empire.¹²¹ In 1041, when John – Smbat died, he was succeeded by

¹¹⁷ The *kouropalates* was a high-ranking dignity of the court which translates into the 'supervisor of the palace.'

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. A *katapanate* was a frontier province.

¹²⁰ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 8.

¹²¹ Ibid.

his nephew Gagik who, while recognizing the suzerainty of the Emperor, refused to hand over his kingdom to him.¹²²

Constantine IX, while not to blame for asserting his rightful claim over Ani, went about the situation poorly. In 1044, the Emperor sent a force to Ani to force Gagik to capitulate. With the help of the neighboring Shaddadids of Tivion, Ani surrendered in the spring of 1045. In return for Shaddadid aid, Constantine promised them the control of certain villages and several key fortresses. When the ruler of Tivion, Aplesphares, tried to lay claim to the spoils promised him by the Emperor, Constantine had the army attack Tivion.¹²³ Tivion survived by the sudden withdrawal of Byzantine troops that were needed to stop the rebellion of Leo Tornikios.¹²⁴ It was a little later after this time that the Seljuk Turks would begin raiding the regions of Vaasprakan, eventually capturing its duke Liparites.¹²⁵ Instead of fighting the Seljuks however, Constantine Monomachos fought his Shaddadid allies in 1046.¹²⁶ As Treadgold pithily put it, “the emperor ignored his enemies and fought his friends.”¹²⁷

Constantine Monomachos’ eastern policy of Armenian annexation was merely a continuation of Basil II’s previous conduct in the region. It would dissolve an important buffer zone against eastern invaders. This might be a question of the Empire’s short sightedness regarding the growing threat of the emerging Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks were

¹²² Ibid. and Charanis, p. 49.

¹²³ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 8.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Skylitzes, Constantine IX: 15.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹²⁷ Treadgold, *History* p. 592.

certainly not a concern for Basil II as they were only a very distant threat during his reign. By the reign of Constantine IX, the reality of the Seljuk menace should have been more apparent. Although causing some problems in the Armenian districts the Seljuks, from Constantine's point of view, were not as great a threat as the Patzinaks who were originally deployed to deal with the Seljuks in Iberia. After forcing the Shaddadids to accept clientage and concluding a truce with the Seljuks, it seems that Constantine was content with the situation on the Empire's eastern border.

Contentment may have led to over-confidence regarding the situation in Armenia. It is generally regarded that a grave mistake of Constantine, which would have far reaching implications for the future, was the demobilization of the Armenian themes. In the year 1053, Constantine relieved 50000 troops or about one fifth of the army, from Armenia in return for regular cash payments.¹²⁸ This would add some money into the imperial treasury but it was also in line with the growing practice of relying less on thematic troops and more on the *tagmata* (cavalry), mercenaries, client states and independent allies.¹²⁹

Whether one believes that Constantine Monomachos' demobilization of the Armenian thematic armies was a mistake or not depends on two competing lines of debate, which are best illustrated by the works of Treadgold and Angold. According to Treadgold, the demobilization, in theory, meant that the Armenian soldiers could return to active service if needed, yet they soon became ordinary citizens as no one realized the potential threat

¹²⁸ Skylitzes, *ibid*: 29.

¹²⁹ Treadgold, p. 595.

of the Seljuks.¹³⁰ Angold points out that the Empire was on a peacetime footing and apart from the *tagmata* the thematic armies existed on paper only, with its soldiers commuting the military service they owed.¹³¹ Both agree that the thematic armies in Armenia at the time were ineffectual but they differ on the reasons why the Empire disbanded the border guards in the *katepanates*. Treadgold believes that the thematic troops of the Armenian themes were among the most experienced soldiers and were vital to protect the eastern provinces against the Seljuk Turks.¹³² The decision to take payment in lieu of military service from the soldiers of the Armenian themes was a mistake because the men there were still accustomed to serving.¹³³ In themes where there was little or no conflict, men would have refused to pay or even rebel. The decision to demobilize the Armenian themes was made for purely financial reasons.¹³⁴ Angold on the other hand, believes that the disbanding of the eastern border themes was symptomatic of a larger scheme for the general demobilization of the armies on the borders.¹³⁵ Angold does not dispute the value of the border guards in the defense of the Empire but he does point out that on the surface Constantine Monomachos might have thought that the demobilization of the border themes was a logical way to cut expenditure. On the borders, professional troops under their own commanders existed which served the same function as the thematic army. Constantine must have viewed this as a double expense for the same service and the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Angold, p. 63.

¹³² Treadgold, *ibid.*

¹³³ Treadgold, p. 596.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Angold, pp. 62-3.

disbanding of the thematic army of Iberia saved the Empire a large sum of money.¹³⁶ The disbanding of the eastern thematic armies also coincided with Constantine's program of restructuring the provincial administration and local military organization under the *epi ton kriseon*, which gave the capital greater control over the provinces.¹³⁷

It would soon become apparent that the eastern border would not be able to hold against the invasions of the Seljuks and Turkomans. Raids into Byzantine territories prior to the demobilization of the eastern themes by the Seljuks were repulsed. In 1048, the half brother of the Seljuk leader Tughrul-Beg, Ibrahim Yinal, attacked Theodosiopolis and sacked the city of Artze but the commander Kekaumenos Katakalon and his forces were able to beat back the Seljuks and force them out of Armenia.¹³⁸ In 1052, the Seljuks sacked Kars and in 1054, Tughrul-Beg captured Arjish and besieged Manzikert.¹³⁹ However, these incursions were always beaten back. Soon after, Tughrul-Beg conquered Baghdad and liberated the Abbasid caliph al-Qu'am from the Buyid Turks. The Caliph proclaimed him Sultan in 1055. In the same year, terms were concluded between the Byzantines and the Seljuks, which recognized the claims of the Sultan over the Caliphate in Baghdad. The Byzantines had also abandoned their relations with the Fatimids of Egypt who were their chief allies in the region of the Iranian plateau, expecting that the Seljuks would be on good terms with the Empire militarily.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Angold, p. 63.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Skylitzes, Constantine: 21.

¹³⁹ Skylitzes, Constantine: 19.

¹⁴⁰ Angold, p. 41.

Any hopes the Byzantines had that the situation would remain the way it was were soon to be quashed. Seljuk raids into Byzantine territory were to increase over the years; each time penetrating a little further into Armenia and Anatolia. These were raids for plunder and not for conquest. This is not to say that the Sultan had acted in bad faith. Seljuk policy dictated that settlements of Turkomans remain southward along the Seljuk – Byzantine border on the Euphrates descending into Syria.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Tughrul-Beg tried to solidify his rule by protecting the western border of his territories of the Iranian plateau. The various Turkoman tribes he held suzerainty over, which were not of the Seljuk tribe itself, needed pasture lands and were naturally inclined to satisfy their war-like, nomadic nature. Soon after conquering Baghdad he suppressed a revolt by several of his kinsmen and thwarted an attempt by a Buyid governor to seize control of Baghdad. He was master of most of the Middle East by 1059. However, control of his vast domains could be destabilized by the vast westward migrations of various Turkic tribes. Thus, Tughrul-Beg protected his own territories, which meant the nomadic Turkomans had no option but to press on into Byzantine territory.

Therefore, the Turkomans did not limit their activities to the Euphrates in Syria. In 1057, tribesmen penetrated the Byzantine defenses and sacked the city of Melitene and in the next year they rode all the way to Sebasteia and sacked it as well.¹⁴² It was clear that the Sultan was losing control over the Turkomans. In later years, various factions would carve out their own territories within the Empire. In the years 1067 – 1068 they were to be found in Amorium, Ikonium, and in Cilicia. In 1070 they would be in Chonae. As they

¹⁴¹ Claude Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion: The Selchukids," *A History of the Crusades*, ed. K.M. Setton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955) p. 147.

¹⁴² Angold, p. 41.

made their military prowess known, the various factions that existed in the Middle East often employed them. Some served the Mirdasid Arabs of Aleppo against the Byzantines while others were employed by the Fatimids to pacify Bedouin tribes.¹⁴³ The Byzantines themselves employed them to fight the Seljuk forces at Manzikert.

The exploits of the Turkoman tribes in Anatolia threatened to destabilize the peace between the Empire and the Seljuk Sultanate. The Seljuk leadership feared the Byzantines might renew old alliances with the Fatimids of Egypt in order to stop the Turkoman raids and to overthrow the Sultanate. The successor of Tughrul-Beg, Alp-Arslan (1063 – 1072) realized that he would have to assert his authority over other rogue Seljuk princes who tried to carve out their own territories in Armenia. This would mean Alp-Arslan establishing his authority within the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Previously under Tughrul-Beg, the stability of the Sultanate in Baghdad and the conquest of Fatimids in Syria meant the curtailment of the ambitions of the various Turkoman tribes. The Sultan tried to assert his authority by curtailing unlimited Turkic expansion into Armenia and Anatolia.¹⁴⁴ Under Alp-Arslan, the Turkomans were used to expand into Armenia.¹⁴⁵ In 1064, Alp-Arslan captured the old Armenian capital of Ani. In 1068, he annexed some Georgian territory. This was done to assert control over his vassals in Azerbaijan and provide a base for operations to be used for control of Turkoman soldiers in the area.

¹⁴³ Cahen, p. 148.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Brett, “ ‘Abbasids, Fatimids and Seljuks,” *The New Cambridge Medieval History*,” vol. IV, part II (Cambridge: 2004) p. 703.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

In response, The Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes enacted a series of measures from 1068 to 1069 to organize and strengthen the frontier defenses of the Empire. In the Opsikion and Anatolian themes he recruited mercenaries and organized the thematic soldiers. In the summer of 1068, he led a force against Turkish raiders in Syria but achieved little success. Whenever Romanos' troops would advance the Turks would evade them, passing the Byzantines' rear and continue raiding all the way to Amorium.¹⁴⁶ Although Romanos managed to secure some fortifications in Syria, on the whole his efforts were fruitless. By 1070, it seemed that the Turks could raid the Anatolian plateau with impunity.

By 1071, opposition in the capital to the Emperor Romanos had become quite bitter. His detractors, led by the Caesar John Doukas, pointed to his dismal military record against the Seljuks while questioning his legitimacy as Emperor. If Romanos wished to retain power, he would have to obtain a swift and resounding victory over the Seljuks. In the spring of 1071, at the head of a very large army (which was said to be in the neighborhood of 40000 soldiers of Byzantine, Patzinak, Norman, Oguz and Armenian extraction) Romanos set off to recover the strategic outpost of Khliat and some fortresses around Manzikert.¹⁴⁷ Manzikert surrendered in the summer of that year and Romanos sent a contingent to take Khliat. Alp-Arslan, who had been besieging Edessa, turned back with his forces and chased away the mercenaries. Eventually, the Sultan met with the main body of the Emperor's forces at Manzikert. Alp-Arslan offered Romanos a peace treaty but the Emperor refused, concerned that possibly the longer he waited the more

¹⁴⁶ Cahen, p. 148.

¹⁴⁷ Angold, p. 44.

likely that the Oguz contingent of his army would defect to the Seljuk forces.¹⁴⁸ The battle took place on 26 August 1071. As the battle dragged on into the night the Emperor thought it prudent to order a retreat back to camp. The main body obeyed but the flanks did not receive the order in time and breaks began to appear in the line of defense. During the retreat, the Turks harassed the Byzantine forces relentlessly, so much that the Emperor ordered the retreating body to turn around in an attempt to drive the Seljuk forces away. Andronikos Doukas, eldest son of Caesar John Doukas, started a rumor that the Emperor had fled.¹⁴⁹ The ranks broke and the Turks encircled the center of the army as the left flank was chased off the battlefield. The battle was lost for the Byzantines and the Emperor was captured.

On the surface, the Battle of Manzikert epitomized the “eleventh-century crisis.” A large Byzantine army (albeit made up mostly of foreign mercenaries) was crushed in battle by a barbarian horde, which also managed to capture the Byzantine Emperor; a feat not matched since the capture of Valerian by the king of Persia, Shapur I in 260. If one was to inquire further however, the Byzantine army did not appear to have suffered very heavy casualties and a peace treaty between the Emperor and the Sultan was drawn up in which the Byzantines lost very little territory except for some vital fortresses Alp-Arslan had coveted.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the conquest of Anatolia was not part of Alp-Arslan’s plans. A successful war with the Fatimids of Syria and Egypt would require peace with the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 45.

¹⁴⁹ As the eldest son of John Doukas and nephew of the late Constantine X Doukas, whose widow Eudokia later married Romanos Diogenes, Andronikos’ future and that of the Doukas family rested on the outcome of this battle. If Romanos was successful there was a good chance that the succession would pass on to one of the sons born to him and Eudokia and not to Andronikos.

¹⁵⁰ Angold, p. 46.

Byzantines.¹⁵¹ Since victory over the Fatimids was the Sultan's primary objective, he did not make any further incursions into Anatolia.¹⁵² Nevertheless the battle of Manzikert would ultimately leave Anatolia open to the displacement of the Byzantines by tribes of Turkomans in the future.

The central character of this chapter, Constantine Monomachos, has been vilified by many for his lack of judgment concerning the management of the eastern border themes that ultimately led to Anatolia to be overcome by the Turks. In all fairness, Constantine inherited an Empire that was overly bloated and expensive to maintain. Territorial expansion was negligible after the death of Basil II and the cost of maintaining an army of immense size during peacetime was very expensive. The annexation of Armenia under Basil II and Constantine IX brought more territories under Byzantine control but it had also brought the borders of the Empire right up against the nomadic Turkomans. As costs soared, budgetary cuts would have to be made. The commutation of military service in exchange for taxes eased this burden somewhat and also cut costs, as the state did not have to pay the rather large and obsolete thematic armies of the eastern border. Mercenaries and the *tagmata* replaced the border armies. Yet as in the west, the eastern *tagmata* were paid with the heavily debased *nomisma*. Future emperors tried unsuccessfully to implement policies that would protect the borders of the east but due to financial restraints the Empire did not have the finances to implement them. Furthermore, Constantine Monomachos could not see events after his death that would lead the Seljuks to settle in Anatolia permanently. During his reign, the Seljuks would from time to time

¹⁵¹ Brett, p. 703.

¹⁵² Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. I, (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) pp. 6-7.

raid Byzantine territory but they would always be beaten back. Constantine was also not above taking diplomatic measures with the Seljuks to keep the eastern borders stable.

During the Patzinak rebellion of 1049, the eastern *tagmata* were sent west and Constantine made a truce with the Seljuks. In 1055, the Empire recognized the claims of Tughrul-Beg over the Caliphate in Baghdad in an alliance with him that would effectively end the Empire's relationship with the Fatimids of Egypt.¹⁵³

Historians generally agree that the defining characteristic of the "eleventh century-crisis" was the collapse of the Empire's military might which led to its inability to keep its enemies at bay. This was due to domestic and foreign mismanagement of the Empire's interests by the successors of Basil II. The most villainous was Constantine Monomachos whose inability to check the nomadic Patzinaks led them to raid and ultimately settle in the prosperous region of Paristrion. It was also the period in which Constantine's eastern policy concerning Armenia and military deployment opened up Anatolia to Seljuk invasions, which in turn led to the symbol of the crisis; Manzikert. Is this an entirely fair assessment however? Should Constantine be considered as the archetype of imperial incompetence during the eleventh century? Not so. The nature of the Empire's relations with its neighbors did not change much from the time of Basil II (and even before then) to Constantine IX. The Russian attack of Constantinople in 1043 was one of many instances of Russian invasions against the Empire, which had occurred since the ninth century. In simple terms, time and again the Russians would attack the Empire and fail, which would lead to a number of trade concessions and alliances between them and the Empire. This is what happened in 1043. The victor Constantine married his daughter to a

¹⁵³ Angold, p. 41.

Kievan prince and Iaroslav was compelled to abandon his idea of an independent Russian church. This is presumed to be the result of trade agreements between Kiev and the Byzantines that were favorable to the Russians.¹⁵⁴ The troubles the Patzinaks presented to the Empire were hardly the fault of any foreign policy oversight by Constantine Monomachos. Basil II's conquest of Bulgaria left the imperial regions along the Danube open to attack by nomadic peoples. It is true that the Patzinaks always presented a danger to the Empire in this region but matters really came to a head when the Oguz Turks in the region gradually displaced the Patzinaks. Constantine's initial diplomatic overtures to the Patzinak leadership might be seen as soft but was in line with the traditional Byzantine practice of winning over enemies by trade concessions and the grants of titles.

Constantine's annexation of Ani in the east is also seen as detrimental to the integrity of the Empire's border. However, the Empire's absorption of the Armenian principalities had begun during the time of Basil II. Constantine's seizure of Ani was the continuation of that process.

What really did change in the Empire between the death of Basil II and the accession of Constantine IX was the internal social, political and economic structure. The decline in the number of free peasant properties left the Empire with less taxable land. The repeal of Basil's land legislation, which began shortly after his death, contributed to this. In turn, the landed magnates grew more powerful and the process of decentralization from the capital to the provinces, which had begun during Basil's reign, was accelerated. By the time Constantine became emperor, the resources at the Empire's disposal were limited. This led Constantine to implement reforms of that would generate revenue and reduce expenditure. Although the effectiveness of these reforms are debatable, one could argue

¹⁵⁴ Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, vol. ii (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) p. 82.

that Constantine was a progressive emperor who recognized the need to tackle the problems the Empire faced while his predecessors did not. These reforms went hand in hand with Constantine's military reorganization. The debasement of the *nomisma*, which may have helped to stimulate the markets in the provinces, did save the Empire money but led to economic deflation. The decentralization of power from the capital to the provinces was countered by administrative reorganization in the themes with the creation of the *epi ton kriseon* which led to the subordination of the military governor, who most often represented the interests of the military magnates, to his civilian counterpart. It may also have led to the ineffectualness of the military governor's command of his troops. The demobilization of the eastern border armies saved the Empire a substantial amount of money and decommissioned many inactive soldiers who were more valuable to the Empire as taxpayers. The active *tagmatic* and mercenary troops of both the east and the west were paid with the heavily debased *nomisma*. The administrative and economic programs of Constantine, which ultimately affected the military structure of the Empire, may have led to its inability to counter the growing Seljuk menace.

Conclusions

Two questions arise when reviewing the historiography concerning the role of Constantine Monomachos in the “eleventh-century crisis.” First of all, did the Byzantine Empire face a crisis in the eleventh century? The answer is that it did, yet not in the way described by the traditional historiography championed by George Ostrogorsky.

Ostrogorsky believes that the period of military might and political stability the Empire experienced under Basil II rapidly turned for the worse after his death. The unstable political condition in the Empire is attributed to a stagnant economy. From the 1970s to the present day, historians have disavowed this theory.¹ The modern consensus is that there is no doubt that the Byzantine Empire’s economy grew rapidly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Ostrogorsky blames the woes of the state’s economy on the recklessness of Basil II’s “civilian” successors and cites Constantine IX’s debasement of the *nomisma* as the greatest indication of imperial ineptness in the management of the economy. This analysis is not without some merit. While it is true that the Empire on the whole was facing a period of economic growth, the central administration in Constantinople had trouble managing the resources available at the time. The Empire could not generate sufficient revenue. The traditional method of raising revenue was the collection of taxes, but this became increasingly difficult after the repeal of the *allelengyon* by Romanos Argyros. To supplement imperial revenue in order to meet the increasing costs of running the state, emperors after 1025 relied on inefficient measures. This was characterized by their reliance on tax-farmers and the increase of the sale of offices. Both generated some

¹ Michael Hendy, “Byzantium, 1081-1204: An Economic Reappraisal,” *The Economy, Fiscal Administration and Coinage in Byzantium*. (London: 1970: Variorum Reprints) II, pp. 31-52.

revenue for the state but not in the same numbers as the method of taxing the free peasant communities that had been protected from the powerful landed magnates, which was the case during the time of the Macedonian emperors of the tenth century. Thus, the political instability of the eleventh-century crisis was not a result of a stagnant economy as Ostrogorsky surmises but on the states inability to tap into its own wealth.

The second question is more vexing. Was Constantine IX the great bogeyman of the “eleventh-century crisis”? Was his reign pivotal in the downward spiral of the Empire’s fortunes? The answer is no. While it is true that Constantine’s policies may have inadvertently contributed to the great troubles of the eleventh century, the real culprit was the legacy left behind by Basil II and the changing social and economic realities of the Empire. Basil held power close to his vest. Power was not delegated to anyone and he died without a suitable heir. Thus, no one had the requisite experience to run an empire on the model left by him. Furthermore, a lack of a direct heir of Basil II meant that the Constantinopolitan administrators, whose interests were often at odds with the powerful provincial aristocracy, chose their own candidates for the imperial diadem.

Basil II’s tenth century land legislations slowed the rate of absorption of free peasant properties by the provincial magnates but did not stop it entirely. True, Basil II’s successors reversed or ignored his land legislations, letting the absorption of free peasant properties by the *dynatoi* accelerate. However, it is fair to say that in the long run, state control over the economy would have failed anyway. A process of decentralization of market forces away from Constantinople to the provinces had already begun in the tenth century. In the provinces, urban life grew around towns and citadels, which provided seats of power for the provincial aristocracy. It would have been impossible for

Constantine Monomachos to reestablish protective land legislation without raising the ire of the increasingly prosperous provincial aristocracy and starting a major civil war. As mentioned, tax farming and the sale of offices raised some revenue but not enough to meet state expenditure. Constantine had little choice but to devalue the *nomisma* to meet costs.

Constantine Monomachos' program of monetary debasement went hand in hand with the reorganization of the military. Most of the state's revenue was gobbled up by the cost of maintaining the large army left standing after Basil II's death. Indeed, Basil's army was the biggest White Elephant Constantine Monomachos had to contend with during his reign. If Constantine had reigned during a period of war and conquest, then it would have been reasonable to maintain such an immense fighting force. However, Constantine came to power during a period of relative peace and the military forces had to be disbanded to cut costs. Furthermore, the thematic armies of the east and west were rendered obsolete as the Empire relied more and more on the highly mobile *tagmatic* units and disposable mercenary troops. Keeping the thematic troops, which had hardly seen much fighting after Basil II's death, would be a double expense for the state. Thus, having those troops pay cash in lieu of having them perform military service saved the state money.

Critics argue that Constantine Monomachos' program of disbanding the border armies of Iberia left the Anatolian plateau open to Seljuk invasion, ultimately leading to the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert. Disbanding the border armies was part of the larger program of military reorganization, which was necessary for the state to cut expenditure. Since the Empire could rally its *tagmatic* forces to the front quickly, there was hardly any need for the expensive border armies. The gradual annexation of the Armenian

principalities, which had begun under Basil II, was the main reason the Anatolian plateau was so vulnerable by the time of Constantine Monomachos. This eliminated a valuable buffer zone between the Empire and any eastern invader. Basil could not have realized the threat of the Seljuks during his reign because they barely registered on the radar. However, he must have realized the historical importance of the Armenian principalities as a buffer between the Empire and past enemies such as the Persians and later the Arabs. When Constantine Monomachos obtained Ani and the Kingdom of Greater Armenia in 1045, he was merely continuing the program of Armenian annexation begun by Basil II.

Constantine IX's problems with the Patzinaks could also be blamed on Basil II. Basil's conquest of Bulgaria might have brought Slavic raids into Byzantine territory under control but removed an important buffer zone between the Empire and the Patzinaks. As with the acquisition of Armenia, Basil II's conquest of Bulgaria left the Empire vulnerable to attack by the Patzinaks.

The later invasions of the Seljuks and the Patzinaks were exacerbated by Basil II's failure to recognize the importance of the buffer zones of Armenia and Paristrion during his reign. However, it was developments outside the Empire's borders and beyond the control of Constantine IX that would ultimately lead to these invasions. The establishment of a strong Russian presence in the Steppes and the western movements of the Oguz Turks into the regions of the Danube compelled the Patzinaks to look toward imperial lands for survival. Internal dissent among Patzinak chieftains also destabilized tribal unity. This is somewhat true for the Seljuks as well. The Turkoman tribesmen under Tughrul-Beg were kept in check and were not a real threat to the Empire during the

reign of Constantine Monomachos. The real threat came later when other Turkic groups pushed the Turkomans into imperial territory during the 1060s and 1070s.

It is difficult to conclude whether the administrative reform programs of Constantine Monomachos were a detriment to the fortunes of the Empire. When put into the larger context of Constantine's attempt at military reorganization the *epi ton kriseon* met the needs of the central government to assert its control over the provinces in the short term. However, since this ministry is not mentioned in the records after the year 1055, it is plausible that it did not survive after the death of Constantine IX. The creation of the University of Constantinople did train a new group of civil servants to administer the Empire effectively but again, it is assumed that after Constantine's death the University existed merely as a school to train notaries. It did not function long enough to educate enough bureaucrats to administer the Empire in any meaningful sense. Nevertheless, what should be laudable about Constantine IX is that he actually tried to meet the changing needs of imperial administration although it is apparent that in the long run these changes did not truly take hold.

The "eleventh-century crisis" was not caused by the inability of Constantine Monomachos to adjust to the changes the Empire experienced during his reign. Constantine recognized that changes in foreign and domestic policy were necessary. The real cause of the crisis was, as Michael Angold calls it, the "poisoned legacy" of Basil II. Basil's achievements certainly were impressive and his reign represented the high water mark of the middle Byzantine period. Nevertheless, Basil's policies were short-term solutions for problems that would plague future emperors of the eleventh century. It

cannot be disputed that Constantine Monomachos at least had the wherewithal to try and solve the problems he inherited from Basil II.

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