

# The 'Moving' Reign: Byzantine emperors as moralized literary agents

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Movement as a topic is exceedingly broad: it consists of everything that has ever been done by any living being on earth (and beyond) and every single act recorded in history. It encompasses change: all progress and all decay. Stationary things, by nature, are determined by their lack of movement. Without considering ‘acts’ of movement, or ‘movement’ acts, one would be studying a lifeless landscape of wax statues – much like an outdoor museum. This museum however, would represent a morbid, vegetable-like state of being: a society, a history, in which nothing would ever come to pass. Movement is, in its essence, *life*. It is more than an act, it is the *ability* to act – whether in an individualistic manner, planned or unplanned, formal or informal, or as a collective. In a sense, it is the first hand expression of who we are. How to define motion? How to trace it, distil it, or bring it to the fore in our sources from the past? It is fairly easy to argue that to *rule*, one needs to *move*: one needs to come into action, rather than sit passively on a throne all day. From a methodological view, David Newsome gives a first impression of how the term movement might be defined: “a social network in which strategies of inclusion/exclusion, proximity/distance, commodity and hierarchy can be observed.”<sup>1</sup> It clearly is a social practice, meaning that certain performances ‘operate’ to (re)affirm one’s proper place in society. Moving in and through places rarely is a mere pragmatic practice: often it has ‘hidden’ meaning. Hendrik Dey, in a chapter on porticoed streets, in *The Afterlife of the Roman City: architecture and ceremony in late antiquity and the early middle ages*, studies how cityscapes gain shape by planning on forehand, according to specific needs of movement: a cityscape is the ‘arena’ in which rulers can present themselves to each other, the masses and to God. Dey concludes that the “topographical nexus between imperial and ecclesiastical authority was nowhere more fully realized than in Constantinople.”<sup>2</sup> Franz Alto Bauer looks closer into the relationship between urban space and ritual itself. Public space did not merely function as means of going from one place to the other as efficiently as possible, it could also be used ceremonially, or even be designed to serve ceremonial (thus symbolical) needs.<sup>3</sup> Myrto Veikou makes clear that there exists a distinctive difference between the objective ‘presence’ of a place (for instance: street or building), and the way in which it is ‘experienced’ by those who lay their eye on it.<sup>4</sup> The cityscape does not just allow the city-dweller or traveller to move (ceremonially or not); it allows him or her to *feel*, and to *identify* with something. Some buildings and places, such as palaces and fora are more packed with symbolical meanings than others. Certain ‘spots’ in the city are incorporated in ceremonial processions, while others are not, simply because they are linked, not just to a set of emotions, but to an understanding of how

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Newsome, ‘Introduction: making movement meaningful’, in: Ray Laurence and David J. Newsome (eds.), *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: Movement and Space* (Oxford, OUP 2011) 1-54, here: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hendrik Dey, ‘Ceremonial Armatures: porticated streets and their architectural appendages’, in: *The Afterlife of the Roman City: architecture and ceremony in late antiquity and the early middle ages* (New York, CUP Cambridge 2015) 65-119, here: 77.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Alto Bauer, ‘Urban Space and Ritual: Constantinople in late antiquity’, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 15 (2001) 27-61.

<sup>4</sup> Myrto Veikou, ‘Telling Spaces’ in Byzantium: Ekphraseis, place-making and ‘thick description’, in: Charis Messis, Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), *Telling stories in Byzantium: narratological approaches and Byzantine narration* (Uppsala University Press 2018) 15-31.

society functions or ought to function. A structure like a palace is often associated with imperial authority, while the hippodrome in Constantinople might suggest Constantinopolitan collective identity. In short, movement (in cities) takes place within a symbolically and emotionally charged cityscape. All movement within the city is connected to *markers* of identification: suggestive of power, hierarchy and order.

Rulership itself was often linked to ceremony, and not necessarily within boundaries of the cityscape. Sabine MacCormack studied the changes in the celebration of the Adventus ceremony in the late antique and early Byzantine periods.<sup>5</sup> Michael McCormick investigated forms of ‘Triumphal rulership’ in the Late Antique Period, and looked more closely in the Triumph ceremony as it was staged in Byzantium.<sup>6</sup> He defines the Triumph as a “*non-catalogue*” ceremony, in the sense that the event did not occur at fixed intervals. Like any large public event it was carefully staged, therefore spontaneous adaptations were hardly ever appreciated.<sup>7</sup> Another non-catalogue event was that of the welcoming of foreign embassies in Byzantium. The responsibility for the smooth sailing of such an event lay with the Master of Offices, the leading dignitary of the Constantinopolitan court (at least in the sixth century). The journeys of the Persian embassies, as described by Ioannis Dimitroukas, prove that the ‘staging’ of foreign officials could kick off well beyond the gates of the capital.<sup>8</sup> Other studies, such as one by Averil Cameron, look into the *in-catalogue* ceremony of the Byzantine Empire, which often orbits around the much cited and catch-in-all *Book of Ceremonies*, composed by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 913-959).<sup>9</sup>

To look at the Constantinopolitan cityscape, and how the Constantinopolitans moved in it, is to look at Constantinopolitan society itself. Paul Magdalino wrote an insightful article concerning the court society and aristocracy of this Christian capital, centring on the nucleus of the imperial court, which, as both a place and an institution, could facilitate movement.<sup>10</sup> Magdalino calls it the “central hub” in Byzantine society and the only one that connected with all others. He equates it to the *Book of Ceremonies*, which opens by expressing the desire that the court on earth might imitate the spheres of heaven in order and symmetry of movement.<sup>11</sup> The court – in both material and abstract sense – is presented as an institution, a *being* even, which is constantly and ideally in motion. Rene Pfeilschifter (2013) makes this concept of a court-in-motion chewable by applying the term *Akzeptanzsystem* to it: the notion that the authority of

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<sup>5</sup> Sabine MacCormack, ‘Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: the ceremony of “Adventus”’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 21:4 (1972) 721-752.

<sup>6</sup> Michael McCormick, ‘Organizing a Byzantine Triumph’, in: *Eternal Victory: Triumphal rulership in late antiquity, Byzantium and the early medieval west* (Cambridge, CUP 1986) 189-230.

<sup>7</sup> McCormick, ‘Organizing a Byzantine Triumph’, 189 and 223.

<sup>8</sup> Ioannis Dimitroukas, ‘The Trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium during the Reign of Justinian I (527-565) and its Logistics’, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 18 (2009) 171-184.

<sup>9</sup> Averil Cameron, ‘The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies’, in: David Cannadine and Simon Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, CUP 1987) 106-136.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Magdalino, ‘Court Society and Aristocracy’, in: John Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium* (Hoboken, NJ 2008) 212-232.

<sup>11</sup> Magdalino, ‘Court Society’, 213.

the emperor could always be questioned, and, at any given time, put under threat. Therefore, the emperor constantly had to make gestures of goodwill to, or compromises with, dominant socio-political groups of the realm: in Constantinople these were the people, the military, the aristocracy and the church.<sup>12</sup> The emperor could not rule by the implication that he was the representative of God alone; he had to actively re-establish good relationships with, and authority over, these groups. In an empire that frequently saw usurpers rise to power, respect and obedience were anything but a given. As a result, court ceremony might have been more a case of formulating acceptance of a *person*, rather than of institutions; meaning that in a ceremony the person who occupied a certain position was just as central as the position itself.<sup>13</sup> Constantinople had always been an imperial capital, never a Republican one, like Rome. Therefore, it seems unlikely that any other type of rule than the imperial seat would rule over it and its realm. That an emperor had to rule the Byzantine Empire was a given, the only question was: who is the *right* person for the ‘job’?

To determine who was, indeed, the right person for the job, we have to consider the relationship between gender and power. Only a male could be emperor, which meant that an empress was expected to ‘move’, ‘act’ and even ‘be’, in a different manner. Liz James studied the relationship between men, women and eunuchs (the third ‘sex’) in Byzantium. She concluded that to be ‘female’ meant – as in a many other societies – restricted opportunities of movement. To move in a morally correct manner, the woman had to conform herself to one or more of the following roles in her lifetime: virgin, wife, mother and widow. Her activities centered around the household and the raising of children.<sup>14</sup> Robert Taft concluded earlier, that, at least in the city of Constantinople, in church men and women were separated during mass.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, this segregation was visible in the imperial palace and at court, where the empress had an important role as hostess, receiving the wives of senators, while they attended the emperor. In Judith Herrin’s words, the empress leded “a feminine counterpoint to the male ceremonial”.<sup>16</sup> Men and women were also believed to be different in the aspect of emotion, meaning that women tended to *act* differently than men. Andriani Georgiou shows that men were believed to express masculinity through the control of their emotions, whereas women were easily tempted into licentious behaviour, especially on a sexual level. Yet, “by manipulating their sex, but not mutating it, empresses appropriated culturally accepted manly behavioural attributes.” Thus, while there existed friction between the position of the empress-regent (the highest authority of the state, in absence of a suitable adult male candidate for the office of

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<sup>12</sup> Rene Pfeilschifter, ‘Kommunikation und Konfliktsaustrag in einer Spätantiken Metropole’, in: *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel: Millennium-Studien* 44 (Berlin 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Pfeilschifter, ‘Kommunikation und Konfliktsaustrag’, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Liz James, ‘Men, Women, Eunuchs: gender, sex and power’, in: John Haldon (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium* (Hoboken, NJ 2008) 31-50, here: 35.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Taft, ‘Women at Church in Byzantium: where, when-and why?’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998) 27-87.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Herrin, ‘The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium’, *Past & Present* 169 (2000) 3-35.

emperor) and her gender, an empress might be able to overcome her ‘weakness’ by displaying typical male virtues.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas Georgiou specifies about what ‘good’ rulership is for empresses, other publications have been written on the appropriate behaviour of the imperial couple, such as by S.R. Joshel in 1995, ‘Female desire and the discourse of Empire: Tacitus’ Messalina’ and Martijn Icks in 2012, ‘Bad Emperors on the rise: negative assessments of imperial investitures, AD 284-395’ for the periods of the Early Empire and Late Antiquity.<sup>18</sup> Peter Bell gives insights in the political voices from the age of Justinian, including the work *Advice to the Emperor*, by Agapetus, a deacon of the church of Hagia Sophia and the reputed tutor of Justinian himself.<sup>19</sup> The publication that ties together all above-mentioned elements of (moralised) movement and good leadership is one by Monica Hellström, ‘Fast Movement through the City: Ideals, Stereotypes and City Planning’ This chapter of the 2015 book *The Moving city: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome* aims to “explore meanings associated with moving fast within the city of Rome, as described in imperial historiography and theory.”<sup>20</sup> She concludes that “In episodes that narrate transfers of power, certain locations become active, and how the would-be emperor moves between them illustrates whether he is a good or a bad ruler.”<sup>21</sup> This type of research, explicitly tying together movement in literary sources to moralized notions of rulership, seems to have hardly been done for Byzantium.

How early and middle Byzantine authors described the movements of the leading figures – military and imperial – or their age, tells modern-day historians, much about how these particular individuals, and the institutions in which they operated, were perceived. Movement seems to be symbolically charged with meaning in most or all literary sources, as it brings to surface underlying attitudes of ‘good’, ‘bad’, or plain ‘odd’ behaviour. The study of movement, therefore, is neatly related to perception of character, especially in personalised accounts by authors writing about contemporaries. In text, character traits are revealed through acts. The type of movement I am looking for focuses on how individuals relate to their society at large. Movement in text is social by nature, as text itself is meant to be communicated with an audience. My aim is to investigate how the apparent connection between “good” leadership (military and imperial) and “good” movement in the Early and Middle Byzantine periods, starting with the reign of Justinian in 527, until 1204, the sack of Constantinople during the fourth crusade, is to be explained. The main sources I will be studying are by Procopius of Caesarea (c.500-c.554), *History of the Wars*

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<sup>17</sup> Andriani Georgiou, ‘Empresses in Byzantine Society: justifiably angry or simply angry’, In: Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (eds.), *Emotions and gender in Byzantine Culture* (Cham, Switzerland 2018) 111-114, here: 123.

<sup>18</sup> S. R. Joshel, ‘Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus’s Messalina’, *Signs* 21 (1995) 50-82 and Martijn Icks, ‘Bad Emperors on the Rise: negative assessments of imperial investitures, AD 284–395.’, *Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte* 94 (2012) 462-481.

<sup>19</sup> Peter N. Bell, *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian* (Liverpool, LUP 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Monica Hellström, ‘Fast Movement through the City: ideals, stereotypes and city planning,’ in: Ida Ostenburg, Simon Malmberg and Jonas Bjørnbye (eds.), *The Moving city: processions, passages and promenades in ancient Rome* (London 2015) 47-57.

<sup>21</sup> Hellström, ‘Fast Movement through the City’, 49.

and *The Secret History*, on the reign of emperor Justinian I and his spouse Theodora, the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor (c.760-c.818) covering the time-span of 284-813, the *Book of Ceremonies*, composed by emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and the *History* of Niketas Choniates (c. 1155-1217).

### **Method and Approach**

It is my opinion that the element of ‘movement’ – concerning the dichotomy of what is ‘wrong’ and what is ‘right’; what to do and what not to do – is a central notion in all thinking, including the biblical scriptures. The Old Testament is full of stories that relate to right kind of action: Abraham, who is willing to sacrifice Isaac is a powerful example professing that mortal man should submit to the will of God, as God is inherently good. The Book of Job is another moralistic story that claims that man ought to submit to his own fate and destiny – to his Fortune, or Tyche (in ancient terms), if you will. The story of Sodom and Gomorra tells us how life without restraint will lead to eternal damnation. Likewise, the gospels of Jesus are full of stories that tell us how to act and to walk the path of salvation properly. To Christians, it would seem, there is a significant difference between moving ‘like Christ’, moving ‘like the devil’ and ‘moving like God’. The righteousness of Christ cannot be questioned, as the son is inherently good. As he still embodied mortal man, his acts can be imitated by mortals. To ‘move’ as Christ is, in essence, to walk the path of salvation. This walk is not a literal walk, but a course of *action*. The anti-Christ is the logical counterpart of mortal Jesus. It is the devil’s purpose to bring damnation upon others and he does so by trickery and lies, by sowing confusion and disorder. We picture ourselves a furious fire spirit, bright, even magnificent, but an entity that will eventually run out of steam. God, the final party, is far beyond human comprehension. As only He is omnipotent, it is impossible to walk in his footsteps. His moves, his *actions*, are beyond human judgement. God is capable (and has the authority) to bring either mass-salvation or complete pandemonium. God is infallible. His *policy* is infallible. Byzantine emperors might have been God’s representatives on earth, they were not beyond scrutiny: there were ‘good’ rulers, shining examples of stability and prosperity, and ‘bad’ rulers, who brought chaos and destruction upon the realm. Judgement, based on the emperor’s acts – his gestures and his policy – was made by those who found themselves in the position to do so. No emperor was simply excused for acting “in mysterious ways”.

As I tried to argue above, movement is, to a large extent, policy. Both concepts could be studied in equal accord with each other, in order to distil a righteous emperor from the grey blur of generic stereotypes. The traditional approach to movement is, in its crudest sense, going from point A to B. In order to come to grasp the moralized ‘motion’ of rulership, such a literal approach is not sufficient: the latter requires a method which brings together the two elements of the moving ruler and *kaiserkritik*. Kaiserkritik – the scrutinizing, often chastising of emperors for their policy and behaviour –, becomes manifest to modern historians through primary sources. These literary sources offer insights into the movement of emperors

in its crudest sense, yet so far little attention has been paid to the link between movement and its implications for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rulership. To come to the core of Byzantine understanding of what ‘makes’ or ‘breaks’ an emperor, we have to study policy. A policy then, can be made visible only by depicting it as setting things *in motion*. A policy can be seen as setting either the capital, the empire, or both, in motion. Policy thus creates a *moving* empire, at least so in literary sources – an empire dominated by a leitmotiv of either chaos or equilibrium. Action leads to reaction, and empire and city are living entities (organisms even) that respond to every single touch. I propose to use for my purpose a ‘looser’ notion of the term *movement* than applied in many of the publications discussed above. I use literary sources to look for an image of the moving emperor (as far as it is can be distilled): a literary agent that sets a narrative in motion. As will be shown, Byzantine authors often knew quite well which narrative styles to apply to create an image of flow, or, alternatively, one of stability: empire at equilibrium and standstill.

Defining ‘morally charged’ movement is complicated. It becomes, however, easier, when one accepts that policy itself *is* movement. Policy (in a less strict, less general and more personalized sense: *gesture*) is the engine that sets the machine, our literary emperor-agent, in motion. Central in this thesis, therefore, is Rene Pfeilschifter’s earlier mentioned concept of the *Akzeptanzsystem*. This system is maintained by grace of gesture: by the emperor showing his awareness and appreciation of the expectations of socio-economic groups of society and acting in accord with this. Gregory Aldrete’s use of gesture is mostly limited to body language (whereas I would focus more on the *message*: gift or promise *communicated* by gesture), yet Aldrete recognizes that gestures were not a “one-way form of communication”. On the contrary, they vocalized “a continuous process of negotiation”, which constantly defined and redefined one’s place within society.<sup>22</sup> I would say that gesture, though as formal as policy, implies a personalized relation between giver (emperor) and receiver (individual or group). Gestures, in essence, are made by one person, or party, to another. Policy generally is aimed at a faceless mass, often made in service of the realm – which itself is a highly abstract and nearly ungraspable, entity. Both policy and gesture are manifestations of movement. They have in common that they always directly affect others. When, for instance, an emperor ‘operates’ beyond the limits of convention during a ceremony, he may indeed offend others or ridicule himself, but the effect of this action on others (except perhaps the loss of faith in his persona) is relatively small. I am primarily concerned with the effects of rulers’ actions on others. What is of equal relevance to me are the reactions of ‘receivers’ to the policy and gestures of rulers: action causes reaction. *Inaction* might just as well be a policy, which itself can generate action. The emperor holds the pinnacle of power, which means that he can pull more strings than any other individual. Yet power comes with great responsibility, since the people on the other end of these strings might be the same to overthrow him: governing an empire with varying vested interests was a balancing-act.

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<sup>22</sup> Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press 1999), here: 90 and 103-104.

Historical narratives of Byzantine authors are interesting sources, since their narrators are hardly ever compelled to play *fair*. When writing about bygone ages, or flattering contemporaries, they by no means have to stick to a historical reality. The protagonists operating in these narratives are not their historical counterparts and the ‘world’ over which they preside, is limited to the imagination of the author. The Byzantine authors that wrote in the period 610-1453 (about 30 males and one woman) wrote on the basis of secular careers: they themselves had some (fragmentary) experience with governing a state and knew what they were talking about.<sup>23</sup> They belonged to the better-to-do classes, who could afford themselves the luxury of reflecting on notions of good rulership. The aristocracy and elite will have had, without doubt, quite different views on what makes a ruler just than some peasants in the provinces. There were no royal Byzantine annals; the writers wrote at their own initiative, giving room to personal preferences lingering through.<sup>24</sup> Rhetoric, which was paramount in the education of any learned man, flowed through their writings like a river or invisible red thread – one that needs to be carefully tracked and dismantled by modern-day historians. Ralph-Johannes Lilie states that the Byzantines were fond to characterize protagonists by deeds, and used sensationalism and over dramatization. He even believes that “the more exaggerated the characterization, the better the effect.”<sup>25</sup> Direct speech can hardly be realistic, as speech could not have been directly recorded as it had been delivered (if it had been delivered at all). Byzantine authors were even capable of producing “counter-propaganda”: without telling lies or adding groundbreaking new information, they reverted the message sent by original imperial propaganda from positive to negative.

### **The *Moving General and the Soldier-Emperor***

Before looking more closely into emperors as moving agents, I first take into account another type of ruler: the military man, from which a distinct course of action was to be expected, different from a *civic* ruler. Byzantium, like Rome, lacked any military academy. ‘Military families’ were present in the elite, and dominated high posts in the army.<sup>26</sup> This meant that there was no such thing as a soldier ‘by degree’. Soldiers were made in the field. So were their leaders. Palace officials were not expected to fight on the battlefield or lead the army to victory, but there were military men that did rise to the office of emperor: Justin I and Herakleios I are two examples of this phenomenon. A general is not an emperor, even though some emperors personally led armies into battle. The general is primarily concerned with the army, one of the main *Akzeptanz*-groups of Pfeilschifter as described above. The general could win the affection

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<sup>23</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, ‘The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography: an interpretive essay’, in: Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London, New York 2010) 211-222, here: 211.

<sup>24</sup> Kaldellis, ‘The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography’, 211.

<sup>25</sup> Ralph-Johannes Lilie, ‘Reality and Invention: reflections on Byzantine historiography’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014) 157-210, here: 162-163 and 205.

<sup>26</sup> Denis F. Sullivan, ‘Byzantine Military Manuals: prescriptions, practice and pedagogy’, in: Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London, New York 2010) 149-161, here: 149. Manuel I Komnenos, depicted in the *History* of Niketas Choniates appears to have been one of those observers, though his actual charging forth does not seem to have been appreciated by his father, John II.

of the people by being victorious – the admiration of the people of the capital was especially valuable to any aspirant to the throne – and people on the frontiers in particular by keeping his troops from looting subjects. In the field there was no direct need to fulfill the expectations of the senatorial class, since this was, ultimately, the responsibility of the emperor. The ‘art’ of war – dealing with a foreign enemy – was the general’s primary concern. The Byzantine Empire, in its long history, witnessed the composition of several military manuals. These helped to prepare an aspiring general for the realities of war. Manuals were written to provide moral grounding as well. To modern historians they provide insights of how a general ought to act, to *move*, not just around a foreign enemy, but around his own troops as well. In the following paragraphs I use the *Taktika* (composed around 905) of Leo VI, father of Constantine VII – among other sources – as a case study to distil a moralized image of a moving general, or an emperor as military leader.

So what does the *Taktika* tell us about idealized – thus *moralized* – movement of military leaders? First of all, Leo did not deliver a very original work. He reworked material available to him (such as emperor Maurice (r.582-602)’s *Strategikon*), instead of delivering something new.<sup>27</sup> Tactics are, in fact, referred to as “the science of movement in warfare.”<sup>28</sup> This statement presumes that generals are moving agents: they operate at the head of a body of soldiers and deputies which is in constant motion; which is deployed to face an enemy army, often at the fringes of empire. The general is, at least in the time of Leo VI, “the person who, after the emperor, has greater authority than anyone else over the entire province subject to him.”<sup>29</sup> The *strategos*, at least since the age of Nikephoros I (r.802-811), stood at the head of a so-called ‘Thema’: “a specific territory within which an army was based and recruited.”<sup>30</sup> We will see that in the sixth century, the great general Belisarius can still be seen travelling from the Persian frontier, to Africa and Italy. His authority seems to have been less bound to a specific territory than that of generals in later ages. The organization of the Byzantine army, however, is of little concern here. What matters, is that the *Taktika* interpretes war-making as a game of “tricks and deception”.<sup>31</sup> The general in motion is one who devises a different strategy for each enemy, as his enemies will not use one singular method either. It is the general’s duty – his idealized policy – to counteract and outsmart any aggressor.<sup>32</sup> Tricks and deceptions are reserved for the enemy only; when dealing with his own soldiers and deputies, a general has to be “a model to them in nobly bearing up under hard labour.”<sup>33</sup> The general ought to reward (one way or another<sup>34</sup>) those who distinguished themselves on the battlefield, to comfort wounded soldiers and provide for the burial of the death.<sup>35</sup> The good general is a father figure to the soldiery: strict, but

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<sup>27</sup> Leo VI the Wise, *Taktika*, translated by: George Dennis (Washington DC 2010), ix.

<sup>28</sup> Leo VI, *Taktika*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘Strategic Administration and the Origins of the *Themata*’, in: *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 723-771, here: 752-753.

<sup>31</sup> Leo VI, *Taktika*, 299.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 631 and 643.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Leo is not very specific about which gestures an emperor ought to make. He simply speaks of rewards.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem* 307, 383 and 631.

fair. He ought to be approachable and open about all moves he intends to make. Yet, when dealing with an enemy he ought to be a inscrutable and impenetrable – someone so ‘slippery’ that they can never set their claws in him. The *Taktika* depicts the Byzantines as inherently on the defensive (making a generic enemy the *agressor* – a warmonger whose impulses are instigated by the devil). The anti-christ inspires violence in corrupted minds, whereas God is the primary force – setting pawns in motion – determining the outcome of war.<sup>36</sup> The general, in order to harvest his fortune, has to possess a level of *energy*, be “sharp-witted, fastthinking, with his gaze turned in every direction”, because “unsuspected disorders frequently arise and force him, on the spur of the moment, to come up with a way in remedy of the situation.”<sup>37</sup> Cunningness, unpredictability and quick-mindedness are crucial abilities, as in war there is no equilibrium or standstill. Ability is partly determined by age, as young men are deemed to be reckless, whereas the old are feeble and often slow to act.<sup>38</sup> Energy is essential, but energy *thoughtfully* applied. The general is *reactive* in two ways: he counteracts the progress of the enemy and rewards the valour of his soldiers.

Leo VI’s *Taktika* is a prescriptive source, which means that it instructs military men in how to act in a way which is believed to be in accordance with common sense. Procopius *History of the Wars*, written almost four centuries earlier, is descriptive of the heroic exploits of the great Byzantine strategists of the age of Justinian I, most notably Belisarius. We see a general in the field: a great man applying theoretical concepts. As is commonplace, Procopius states how the hero possessed self-restraint “to a marvellous degree.”<sup>39</sup> He unites the army with his authority and enforces moderation by being a shining example.<sup>40</sup> He is seen protecting the interest of civilians, by rejecting cruelty and keeping his soldiers from unlawful confiscations.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he is generous for wounded soldiers, and compensates them with money.<sup>42</sup> In short, Procopius’ perfect general is he “who is able to bring about peace from war”.<sup>43</sup> Belisarius’ prowess and success is further showcased by the demise of the Italian peninsular in his absence. The remaining commanders shut themselves up inside fortresses and pursue immodest goals by taking mistresses. They literally make themselves stationary, become fatigued and lack the energy to pose their authority on the soldiers, putting the civilian population at the mercy of looters.<sup>44</sup> In the *Secret History*, Procopius makes a statement of how the lack of restraint on soldier’s movement is harmful, and Monica Hellström explains that already in the Old, republican Rome “when doing the right thing, soldiers move orderly or not at

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, 5 and 309.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, translated by H.B. Dewing (Cambridge Massachusetts 1914-1940), VII. i. 8-16.

<sup>40</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I. xiv. 9-15 and III. xviii. 5-10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, V. x. 101-105 and VI. xxix. 37-41.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, VII. i. 4-8. A fine example of gesture.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, I. xiv. 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, VII. i. 16-29 and VII. ix. 1-8.

all.”<sup>45</sup> Procopius’ Belisarius is, to a large extent, the manifestation of the generic general of Leo’s *Taktika*.

Man can only do so much to prove his valour however, as, in the eyes of the faithful, human affairs are subject to God. In the *Wars* we see another agent of destiny at work: Tyche (or Fortune). This ancient deity, until the fifth century, had a central place in Constantinople as the city’s main protector, when she gradually became replaced by the Cult of the Virgin.<sup>46</sup> In *The Wars*, Tyche represents *odds*, rather than ‘fate’ or ‘luck’; odds which either work in favour, or against the protagonists. A proper commander is well aware of his odds and does everything he can to investigate into them. Based on his odds he makes a calm, rational decision. He therefore surpasses the gambler in wisdom. Procopius indicates that it is unwise to rebel – to *move* – against Fortune, even foolish, since man is only mortal.<sup>47</sup> God and Fortune are dual entities of fate and destiny. Yet, Procopius is far from consistent in his depiction of Fortune, as he ascribes to her a “perverse nature and unaccountable will”, while at the same time he indicates that she is subjected to God: “which men are wont to call fortune.”<sup>48</sup> I believe that Tyche is not more than a literary agent to Procopius, something he borrowed from the ancients. As a Byzantine author, he was well aware of ancient Greek and Roman authors and convention. Likely he admired the ancients’ skill., Polybius, for one, portrays Tyche as *leitmotiv* in his analysis of Rome’s rise to world power.<sup>49</sup> As a literary figure, she can predetermine the outcome of a battle or war, like God could (in the minds of the Byzantines). Tyche is a powerful agent, who puts restrictions on the agency of the general. In order to win victory, the general has to move *on her terms*. This is where steadfastness, rationality and realism come into play.

In Theophanes’ *Chronicle* it is not a general who outshines others in his martial prowess, but the great soldier-emperor Herakleios (r. 610-641). Herakleios is a moving agent, as giving battle is all he does in the narrative. He manages to win over the loyalty of the troops by declaring he would struggle with them side by side and that he would be united with them as with his own children.<sup>50</sup> Herakleios is acting out the ‘role’ of ordinary soldier (his family had military backgrounds), rather than that of emperor (with its much broader scope), or even general: he charges forth ahead of his troops and kills three of his Persian enemies in a row single-handedly, while Leo VI later discourages hand-to-hand combat by generals.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the very fact that Herakleios is hardly more than an ordinary soldier, does not discredit him as an

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<sup>45</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, *The Anecdota*, translated by Richard Atwater (New York, Chicago 1927, reprinted Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press 1961), 30.28 and Hellström, ‘Fast Movement through the City’, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Herrin, ‘The Imperial Feminine’, 11 and 17.

<sup>47</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, IV. vi. 20-26. “If, however, you can bear your own thoughts and refrain from rebelling against fortune when she changes, it will be possible at this very moment for you to choose that which will be wholly to your advantage, and to escape from the evils which hang over you.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, VIII. xxxii. 24-30 and VIII. xii. 28-35.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California State University 1995) 118-160.

<sup>50</sup> Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern history, AD 284-813*, translated by Cyril A. Mango, Roger Scott and Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford, New York: OUP 1997), 436.

<sup>51</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 449 and Leo VI, *Taktika*, 291.

emperor. Justinian II is continually discredited, on one occasion as general, as he fails to impose order on his soldiers. The Bulgarians, according to Theophanes, defeated the Romans, because Roman soldiers were senselessly disposed, and “gathered together like wild beasts.”<sup>52</sup> Constantine V, the notorious iconoclast emperor – who, in reality, proved to be a capable general – entered battle “without plan or order” and was severely beaten due to his passions (instigated by the devil himself).<sup>53</sup> Theophanes is reluctant to give credit to an emperor who left a regenerated state with strong finances, a successful army and a – seemingly – united church<sup>54</sup>, out of religious motive. Yet, even in his narrative it becomes clear that a good general ought to know how to move cautiously and that caution does not result from fear, but logic.

The two emperors who are depicted in the most positive light by Niketas Choniates, John II Komnenos (r.1118-1143) and his son Manuel I (r.1143-1180), are capable generals in their own right. John is seen as “valiant” and “cunning tactician”. He provides his soldiers with an *exemplum* by being the “first to execute his instructions.”<sup>55</sup> Manuel in turn, shows himself to not be weary of the harsh realities of war.<sup>56</sup> Choniates favours an emperor who gets his hands dirty, rather than one who dispatches another for the purpose. Alexios Branas, linked to the Komnenos-dynasty by bonds of marriage, was a general who “executed his responsibilities as a general with caution, not rashly, always advancing step by step, careful to harass the enemy while taking just as much care to keep his own troops out of danger.”<sup>57</sup> Once again, moderation is praised, as well as gestures made to those who operate faithfully in the general’s service. John Skylitzes condemns the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas for failing to check the misdeeds of his soldiers, as he does nothing to prevent the soldiery from mistreating the citizens.<sup>58</sup> His military successes are thus made void. Taking the *Akzeptanzsystem* into consideration, Nikephoros II succeeds in making appropriate gestures to his soldiers (he lauds soldiers disproportionately, in fact, according to Skylitzes, who claims he endeavoured “to establish a law that soldiers who died in war were to be accorded martyrs’ honours”<sup>59</sup>), but fails to make similar gestures to the people. In recap, the excellent general moves energetically and cunningly, because he deals with an enemy who is riled up by devilish passions; who aims to conquer and destroy. He ought to move energetically because war itself is defined by the *absence* of an equilibrium. A general has no obligations towards foes, only towards his soldiers

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<sup>52</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 525.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 643.

<sup>54</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘The Triumph of Tradition? the iconophile intermission, 775-813’, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 248-365, here: 248.

<sup>55</sup> Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals*, translated by Harry J. Magoulias, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1984), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 112. “Whenever he had need of rest, the earth was his throne and hay and chaff his bedding... Actions such as these brought him more affection and admiration than when he wore his diadem, donned the purple robe, and mounted his horse with gold trappings.”

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 207.

<sup>58</sup> John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge, New York: CUP 2010), 262.

<sup>59</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 263.

and the people, who are part of the *Akzeptanzsystem*. The ‘international’ equilibrium only returns when peace is made.

### Procopius and the ‘Golden Age’ of Justinian I

I will now look into literary depictions of moralized movements of emperors – of *civic* rulers, bound by the *Akzeptanzsystem* in every single way and subject to heavy scrutiny if they disrespect the equilibrium of state. Who better to start with than one of the most unconventional, perhaps most discussed, of all? Procopius of Caesarea (c.500-554) lived in an age in which the Byzantine Empire was the predominant force of the Mediterranean. Its established order and identity was firmly rooted in that of the ‘old’ Rome. Justinian I, who reigned from 527 to 565, inherited this empire from his uncle, Justin I, and found it in a positive momentum, to be exploited for the benefit of both economical and military expansion. The death of this emperor might be regarded as marking the end of late antiquity, and his successors – as we will see – had to deal with gradual decline in various aspects, as well as with significant changes within the functioning of the empire itself. The era 395-634 was a time in which emperors almost continually resided in Constantinople.<sup>60</sup> Justinian was quite a ‘stationary’ figure in this respect: he, the high pinnacle of power, hardly moved beyond the city walls. Yet his reign was one of continuous *flow*. Procopius clearly did not develop sympathy for Justinian’s “grand strategy”. A contemporary as John the Lydian did, despite being equally critical.<sup>61</sup> Procopius’ *Secret History*, originally known simply as *Anecdota*, was likely composed in AD 550. In that same year the first seven books of the *Wars* were presented to the public. Book VIII was added in 554.<sup>62</sup> The main purpose of the *Secret History* was polemical. Dimos Spatharas even refers to it “character assassination”.<sup>63</sup> However, it has also been stated that Procopius nowhere flat out lies about any of Justinian’s acts.<sup>64</sup> Instead, he created a narrative of flow by cautiously putting what he knew, or believed, in a bad daylight. The general theme of criticism seems to be that of *innovation*: upsetting the established order of things.<sup>65</sup> This constant innovation is seen setting empire in motion.

The emperor is called “an arch-destroyer of well-established institutions.”<sup>66</sup> He is blamed for bribing barbarians (but to no avail, as they persist in their hostility), for abolishing the horses of the public post

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<sup>60</sup> Rene Pfeilschifter, ‘Kommunikation und Konfliktsaustrag in einer Spätantiken Metropole’, in: *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel*, Millennium-Studien 44 (Berlin 2013) 25.

<sup>61</sup> J.E. Atkinson, ‘Justinian and the Tribulations of Transformation’, *Acta Classica* XLIII (2000) 15-31, here: 29.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, ‘The Date and Structure of Prokopios’ *Secret History* and his Projected Work on Church History’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49 (2009) 585–616, here: 586 and 598.

<sup>63</sup> Dimos Spatharas, “Liaisons Dangereuses”: Procopius, Lysias and Apollodorus’, *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 62:2 (2012) 846-858, here: 846.

<sup>64</sup> Kaldellis, ‘The Date and Structure of Prokopios’ *Secret History*’, 593 and Potter, D.S., *Theodora: actress, empress, saint* (New York, OUP Oxford 2015), 29: “Procopius tends not to make things up from scratch, but he embellishes, sometimes grossly, what he knows; or fails to tell the whole story”.

<sup>65</sup> Roger D. Scott, ‘Malalas, The *Secret History*, and Justinian’s Propaganda’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985) 99-109, here: 106.

<sup>66</sup> Procopius, *The Anecdota*, 6.20-21.

and the ‘practice’ of spies.<sup>67</sup> Justinian creates turmoil on the fringes of empire, by heating up barbarian greed, and by abolishing state-authorized ‘swiftness’ and ‘stealth’. Justinian, in fact, most likely did no such thing as terminating the imperial post.<sup>68</sup> Procopius juxtaposes the unreasonable freedom of soldiers with reduced elbowroom and servile condition of magistrates.<sup>69</sup> This servile condition included literal restrictions on the movement of magistrates, as they were subjected to new kinds of ceremony, focusing on their subjected status to emperor and empress. While ‘initiative’ on behalf of the military needs to be prevented, magistrates need ‘space’ to operate and manoeuvre at their own judgement. Justinian, by his actions, is able to create chaos everywhere and seems to instigate a top-down process of dismantling the state: “the whole Roman Empire was agitated from top to bottom, as if an earthquake or a deluge had fallen upon it, or as if each and every city had been captured by the enemy.”<sup>70</sup> The ruler rewards those agents which are easily corrupted, while he holds the honest and upright in a permanent body lock. The government did not just resemble a tyranny, but a tyranny that “was changing every day and constantly beginning again”, due to Justinian becoming like “a cloud of dust in instability”.<sup>71</sup> Most of his actions are, by themselves, not harmful to the state, but either inspire pandemonium in others, or testify of his deranged state (characterization by deeds): he sleeps, walks and even eats inappropriately.<sup>72</sup> In the *Wars* Procopius is equally dismissive about innovations, for “where there is innovation security is by no means preserved.”<sup>73</sup> Undertaking “revolutionary enterprises” seems to go hand-in-hand with other negative assets, such as being a glutton and devouring the money of others.<sup>74</sup> In the *Wars*, both the Persian king and Justinian are accused of being fond of innovations. Procopius subtly mocks Justinian by having him write a letter to Chosroes, accusing the great king of all the things he is accused of himself (though done indirectly, via the medium of foreign envoys visiting Chosroes).<sup>75</sup> In the *Secret History*, the Persian is said to be “likewise vicious in character.”<sup>76</sup> The impression is created that the emperor is on a quest to “devourer” the entire world. This devouring entity is depicted in a dream Procopius claimed to have had about a man (anonymous, though easy to identify) standing on the shore of Constantinople opposite to Chalcedon:

“And first he drank up all the water of the sea, so that he had the impression thereafter that the man was standing on dry land... but afterwards other water appeared there that was saturated with much filth and rubbish and welled up from sewer-outlets which are on either side of the strait, and the man immediately drank even this too, and again laid the tract of the strait bare.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, 19.16, 30.2 and 30.14.

<sup>68</sup> Dimitroukas, ‘The Trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium’, 180.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, 14.13-14, “the commonwealth resembled a kingdom of children at play”, and 30.28.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, 7.6.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, 7.31 and 22.30.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 13.28-29, “he usually touched the food with the tips of his fingers and went his way. For such matters seemed to him a kind of side-issue imposed upon him by Nature”, 13.30 “after sleeping perhaps one hour he would spend the rest of the time walking about constantly” and 12.21 “he would rise suddenly from the imperial throne and walk up and down there (indeed he was never accustomed to remain seated for long), and the head of Justinian would disappear suddenly”.

<sup>73</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I. xi. 11-17.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, III. ix. 3-8.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, I. xxiii. 1-3, II. ii. 3-9 and II. iv. 21-26.

<sup>76</sup> Procopius, *The Anecdota*, 18.28.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 19.1-3.

This man – who is without doubt Justinian himself – is depicted as an ‘inward-pulling force’. A devourer who takes in everything and everyone just for the sake of being ‘master’ over it. This is a literary trope which will return in other historical accounts discussed below. A *devourer* disrupts the fabric of society, by becoming a free-standing gravitational force which knows no boundaries. Justinian is not driven by greed or malice, but by his own folly. He does not just suck up all the ‘waters’ of the sea, but that of the sewers as well, which proves he is truly a degenerate. His movement seems to be inspired by the devil, yet he lacks the devil’s cunningness. This emperor is more ‘clumsy’ and self-righteous, than desiring to do wrong. He is not denied of all empathy, and even Procopius cannot – or *will* not – deny that he loves his wife passionately. Yet he loves Theodora inappropriately, as this too leads to the hurting of the state, which “became fuel for this love.”<sup>78</sup> The relationship between husband and wife is so close that they are believed to do nothing separately whatsoever. They operate as twin demons and always “in full accord with each other.”<sup>79</sup> Calling Theodora a ‘trickster’ is one way of interpreting a woman, who I believe, is one of the most fascinating of history; seeing her as a strong, independent individual, living in a world “where the passive perished” is another.<sup>80</sup> Theodora – though loyal and devoted as a wife – was able to disagree with her husband, without letting this compromise their marriage.<sup>81</sup> Procopius ‘borrows’ much of the accusations he makes against her from the fourth century B.C. author Apollodorus of Acharnae.<sup>82</sup> His ‘roots’ in the ancients become even clearer when his depiction of Theodora is compared to that of Messalina (third wife of Claudius) by Tacitus.<sup>83</sup> In Tacitus’ *Annals*, Messalina is the stereotypical ‘bad’ wife, ruled by lust and greed. She is cunning and promiscuous; with uncontrolled sexuality she plunges Roman society into chaos. Both women lack the qualities of the ‘good’ wife: moderation and submission to male control.<sup>84</sup> The authors of these literary ‘fictions’ were both part of a senatorial elite which was highly dependent on the emperor. S. R. Joshel even claims that Tacitus “projects onto Messalina the power and action he lacks as a senator... achieving through his writing of history an agency he lacks in politics.”<sup>85</sup> One of Procopius’ criticisms directed at Justinian, as stated above, was that he restricted the freedom of the magistrates. At the same time, he fails – from Procopius’ point of view – to exercise real authority on his wife, giving her way more influence in political affairs than women were supposed to have. Like Tacitus did with Messalina, Procopius turned Theodora into a literary agent – constantly in motion and possessed by senseless rage – to make up for his own lack of power. Instead of undermining her husband, she is seen cooperating with Justinian in his foul play: her policy might differ sharply from his, in her trickery – her *motion*, demonic creations of *chaos* – she is his equal: a thing beyond Procopius’

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<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, 9.32.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, 10.13 and 10.23.

<sup>80</sup> Potter, *Theodora*, 121 and 141.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, 203.

<sup>82</sup> Dimos, ‘Liaisons Dangereuses’, 854. Apollodorus of Acharnae, *Against Neaera*, concerning a freedwoman and prostitute.

<sup>83</sup> I cannot tell if Procopius did in fact read Tacitus like he read Apollodorus, yet the comparison between Messalina and Theodora seems striking to me.

<sup>84</sup> Joshel, ‘Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire’, 60-61 and 70.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 53 and 65.

control, yet through his writings made graspable. The historical figure Theodora is tamed by Procopius' words.

If Justinian is a bad emperor for his self-righteousness, and his constant innovations, than his counterpart must be a just ruler; one who respects the equilibrium. The Goth Theodoric, for instance, is given credit for observing justice, the preservation of the law, the protection of his lands from invaders, great wisdom and manliness. Although in name he was an usurper, "yet in fact he was as truly an emperor as any who have distinguished themselves in this office from the beginning".<sup>86</sup> Theodoric clearly is a man of action, but the difference with Justinian is that he does not innovate. Procopius' depiction of the Goth is that of the *reactive* ruler. Theodoric is 'good' for his generic qualities. Justinian, on the other hand, is 'bad' for his *peculiarities*. He is inflammable, blind to reason, yet claims to be advocate of modesty and piousness. Even when he is at a standstill, his poor judgement creates turmoil; willing as he is to forgive mistakes of his commanders, he encourages them to commit offences.<sup>87</sup> Justinus I, his uncle and former emperor, on the other hand, is without any power of perception, and altogether quite impassive, which is the other extreme. Due to his lack of perception, Justinus fails to do his subjects any harm nor good.<sup>88</sup> Energy by itself is no sin, something even Procopius implies when he states that under emperor Justinian "the titles of "murderer" and "brigand" came to be regarded... as equivalent to "energetic"!".<sup>89</sup> The lack of energy, on the other hand, is always bad, since this will encourage forces of corruption to openly manifest themselves.

If the trait of being 'energetic' does not equate to being a murderer and brigand, it must apparently bear some positive connotations (in its original sense). Procopius hardly uses the term in the *Secret History*, but he applies it in abundance in the *Wars*.<sup>90</sup> In this source 'energetic' men are defined as either very *good*, or very *bad*. Such 'active' men are seen capable of tearing apart the 'status quo', or redesigning hierarchies and odds. In an emperor, such a trait truly is reason for alarm, as good emperors always need to refrain from innovations. Generals (emperors also, in their 'role' as soldier) are often dispatched with the specific objective of achieving a break-through – they have to dance with Fortune to overcome their adversaries. Energy seems to be crucial in achieving victory in the field, on the fringes of empire. It is required to overcome external foes. Internal 'friends' (i.e. subjects) need to be dealt with with patience and restraint. The ambivalent connotations of energy become clear from its application by Procopius in the *Wars*: we see a certain Godas, Goth by birth, in the service of the Vandal king Gelimer, "a passionate and energetic fellow possessed of great bodily strength", but who "could neither digest the prosperity

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<sup>86</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, V. i.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, VIII. xiii. 11-18.

<sup>88</sup> Procopius, *The Anecdota*, 6.8 and 8.2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 21.14.

<sup>90</sup> Justinian is, for one reason or another, mainly lauded in Procopius' third work, *On the Buildings*, in which energy might take on a whole new connotation. However, for my argument here, I restricted myself to what is said about Justinian in the *Secret History* and *The Wars*.

brought by fortune nor had he the spirit to endure it, and so he undertook to establish a tyranny.”<sup>91</sup> This Godas is described as a great warrior, but he is also feeble-minded – his energy did not stop him from getting corrupted. The Byzantine general John, on the other hand, was not carried away by unreasoning boldness, “since he had wisdom as well as energy.” Likewise, “energy coupled with solicitude has often relieved those who had been unfortunate.”<sup>92</sup> Wisdom and restraint are excellent qualities, but become even better qualities when coupled with energy. Feeble-mindedness is bad; feeble-mindedness coupled with energy is even worse. Energy brings excess, it spices things up – and quite clearly the coin can fall both ways. Energy quite obviously leads to action, and action involves speed. Speed by itself is neither good nor bad. The crux is whether one moves by careful decision-making or with rash and uncalculated decision. To Procopius, “rashness is different from bravery. For rashness, when it takes possession of a man, brings him into danger with discredit, but bravery bestows upon him an adequate prize in reputation for valour.”<sup>93</sup>

Procopius sketches the image of an emperor who is marked by peculiarities, whose steps are untraceable to his audience – which, as a consequence, cannot come to terms with him. Like in Monica Hellström’s study, movement in a literal sense (eating, sleeping, walking) can be applied to put the emperor in a bad daylight and to devalue his initiatives. There are cases in which an innovating ruler is depicted as truly evil, yet Justinian is more clumsy than hateful. His official policy might have been inspired by demons, yet the emperor – in Procopius’ narrative – misses the cunning to *be* a devil himself. Justinian is depicted turning the equilibrium upside down. He does so by constantly letting his actions be determined by his mood swings. He is unpredictable and so is his policy. At the same time, he *absorbs* others by trying to be lord and master of all human affairs: no one is capable of escaping from his or Theodora’s claws. By confusing his audiences – the *Akzeptanzgroups* –, he can never truly win their affection. This emperor is unfit to rule because no-one understands him and, according to Procopius, because he does not even understand *himself*. His policy therefor, is senseless. The total “grand strategy” is doomed to fail not because it is harsh or cruel, but because it is poorly coordinated and cannot be grasped. To Procopius, Justinian’s command cannot truly be followed, as it implies believing in one thing one day and in another the next.

### **Pious and the Beast in Theophanes The Confessor**

While Byzantium possessed a momentum of growth and expansion in various ways during the reign of Justinian I, the same cannot be said of the seventh century: Constantinople itself was besieged by Avars, Slavs and Arabs (though unsuccessfully). The capital lost most of its population. Albrecht Berger even claims that life within the walls dropped to a semi-rural state.<sup>94</sup> The Hippodrome, an important locus of

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<sup>91</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, III. x. 20-28.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, VI. x. 373-375 and VI. xviii. 11-19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, V. xx. 197-199.

<sup>94</sup> Albrecht Berger, ‘Streets and Public Spaces in Constantinople’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000) 161-172, here: 172.

communication between emperor and people – and potential ‘breeding’ ground of civic unrest – lost its political power in the reign of Herakleios I (610-640), and took on its final and mainly ceremonial role.<sup>95</sup> Decline in the importance of provincial towns and urban centres left the army as new potential primary ‘site’ of opposition against the central authorities.<sup>96</sup> In Theophanes’ era (c.760-818) the army appears to have played a key role as *Akzeptanz* group. The eighth century also saw the rise of empress Eirene, a rare example of a woman who ruled by her own right for a substantial period of time. Her reign was marked by feeble military successes, dubious financial measures and conflict with her own son: traits that were regarded as non-feminine and ones that would even make a male emperor highly unpopular. Despite her questionable status as ruler and mother, Eirene was praised by the iconodules for, what they believed to have been, upholding proper doctrine. This one good course of actions seemed to have excused her for many others. Eirene’s lifestory proves that women could be legitimate rulers, *if* there was an absence of alternatives. Like any man, Eirene had to face up to the challenges imposed on her. To historians of later generations, this meant reinstalling piety and the reinstalment of piety implied a ‘natural’ antipathy of *innovation*.

Theophanes was a contemporary of Eirene and, as a convinced iconodule, an advocate of her religious policy. The Confessor – a member of the Byzantine aristocracy – served at the court of Leo IV before taking up the religious life. He attended the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, which reinstated the practice of icon veneration after the First Iconoclast period (730–787), and resisted the policy of Leo V the Armenian (r. 813-820), who instigated the Second Iconoclast period (814-842). Theophanes was imprisoned for this resistance and died shortly after his release. Later, he was proclaimed a saint by both the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches. He undertook to write his *Chronicle* somewhere around 810-814, at the request of his colleague George Syncellus, as a continuation of his own *Chronicle*, which covered the period from the Biblical beginning of the earth up to the reign of Diocletian. Like Syncellus, Theophanes nowadays is regarded as “scissors and paste” historian, one who wove together narrative sources of others like a puzzle to complete his own, rather than writing a fluid history of his own.<sup>97</sup> He does this to an extent that he is believed to have used material “the original propaganda or ideological slant of which he did not fully comprehend.”<sup>98</sup> This ‘careless’ cutting and pasting largely explains why Theophanes is almost exclusively positive about Justinian I and his spouse Theodora: he used the *Chronographia* (yet another chronicle) of John Malalas (c.491-578), and not Procopius’ *Secret History* (although he does use parts of the *Wars*). Malalas seemed to have followed the line of imperial

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<sup>95</sup> Sotiris Giatsis, ‘The Organization of Chariot-Racing in the great Hippodrome of Byzantine Constantinople’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 17:1 (2000) 36-68, here: 55 and 58. No longer was the hippodrome a ‘hotspot’ of civic strife or discontent.

<sup>96</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘Belief, Ideology, and Practice in a Changing World’, in: *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 9-68, here: 26.

<sup>97</sup> Andrzej Kampa, ‘In Search of Syncellus’ and Theophanes’ own Words: the authorship of the *Chronographia* revisited’, in: Jankowiak, Marek and Montinaro, Federico (eds.), *Studies in Theophanes: proceedings of the conference "The Chronicle of Theophanes: sources, composition, transmission"* (Paris 2015) 73-92, here: 74.

<sup>98</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680-850): the sources, an annotated survey*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs: Vol. 7 (Aldershot, England and Burlington VT, USA 2001), 169-170.

propaganda, whereas Procopius seems to have turned propaganda into anti-propaganda.<sup>99</sup> This cutting and pasting makes Theophanes' *Chronicle* a difficult source to use, as it is hard to distil a cleverly crafted rhetorical outline (except perhaps when it comes to piety). The Confessor discusses a great many reigns, but he hardly discusses any of them *thoroughly* enough to distinguish between a narrative reign of flow or standstill.

Theophanes highlights two types of bad rulers: the 'secular' tyrant, and the heretical, beastly sinner. Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705-711) is the most obvious case of a traditionally cruel tyrant. Although he is merely described as incompetent and naïve during his first reign (his unpopularity being, to a large part, attributed to his cruel, self-enriching magistrates), after his mutilation – his nose had been cut off – and on his voyage back to reclaim power, he is seen as a thundering spirit consumed by desire for vengeance. When his ship is overtaken by a storm, his servant begs him to atone for his sins: "Make a promise to God for your salvation, so that, if He gives you back your empire, you will not take revenge on any of your enemies." Justinian responds in anger: "If I spare any of them, may God drown me right here!"<sup>100</sup> After he has reclaimed his throne, Justinian's actions – guided by inflamed temperament – become more and more grotesque: he sends an entire fleet to bring his Khazar wife to Constantinople, only to find it almost completely destroyed in a storm. The Khazar Chagan (his ally and a *barbarian!*) – ironically and cynically – comments on this drastic, dramatic course of action: "O fool... Do you think that you are taking her, too, by war?"<sup>101</sup> Justinian's lust for violence reaches beyond mere revenge, as he slaughters children in their mother's lap and is actually seen delighting in bloodshed.<sup>102</sup> This ruler is bad because he is merciless and rapidly spins out of control. He is a different kind of reprobate than his namesake in Procopius' *Secret History*, who is a senseless innovator. Justinian II does not innovate, yet he is highly active. Despite his activity, he fails to be *reactive* by appeasing any of the Akzeptanz groups. This ruler painstakingly refuses to act in service of the empire. His agenda is an exclusively *private* one. He too is nonsensical in his actions. He has the children of a mother butchered in her lap and then marries her off to her own cook (an 'Indian').<sup>103</sup> The only other reference to cooks in the *Chronicle* I came upon is made during Julian the Apostate's reign, who expelled all cooks "because of his frugal ways, and the barbers, since one was sufficient for many, as he used to say." Julian is said to have meddled with the public post, like Justinian I had allegedly done, by removing camels, asses, oxen and mules.<sup>104</sup> Justinian II might be described as a *centrifugal* force, pushing people away by his uncontrolled outbursts, whereas Justinian I is an enigma changing faces. The mystery which he and Theodora together form (two distinct personas flowing into one) is more of a *centripetal* nature: an inward-pulling force, and a field of gravity

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<sup>99</sup> Roger D. Scott, 'Malalas, The Secret History, and Justinian's Propaganda', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985) 99-109, here: 101-103.

<sup>100</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 507 and 521.

<sup>101</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 523.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, 528.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, 528.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, 77.

on its own. Rather than ‘scarring’ society, they reinvent it. I believe that Procopius does not truly do right to this complex and fascinating imperial couple: something I will come back to later, when I compare Procopius’ narrative style with that of Niketas Choniates, when he portrays the emperor Andronikos I Komnenos.

In Theophanes, there are three rulers who can be defined as beastly heretics: the two iconoclasts, Leo III and his son Constantine V, and the aforementioned Julian. All three are believed to have alienated themselves from orthodoxy. The Apostate is associated with animals, and is accused of having mingled the remains of a bishop with that of dead beasts.<sup>105</sup> Leo falls from “pious” to “impious” in three pages. Constantine is not just the “precursor of the Antichrist”, and a “merciless wild beast”, but also led astray “by magic, licentiousness, bloody sacrifice, by the dung and urine of horses and delighting in impurity and the invocation of demons”. Theophanes’ ‘truehearted’ spirit duly manifests itself right after he states “let’s be objective”.<sup>106</sup> But were the iconoclasts truly such monstrous rulers? For the reign of Leo III there is no real evidence of an official imperial edict prohibiting the use of icons, neither is there reliable evidence for widespread opposition against the emperor’s policy.<sup>107</sup> Again, in the reign of Constantine V, there is a lack of evidence for the destruction of images as well as serious persecutions. The only notable persecutions against iconodules resulted from a ‘secular’ plot threatening the emperor’s own authority.<sup>108</sup> Iconoclasm had never been a mass movement, nor was there ever any large scale resistance to it. The debate reached ‘apocalyptic’ heights and intensity only due to reinterpretation of the conflict by later writers, who genuinely seemed to have believed that it was a conflict that divided the Byzantine world to the core.<sup>109</sup> Important here is the notion that the debate about iconoclasm evolved around the question whether the worship of religious images was part of Christian ‘orthodoxy’. In other words: was it an *innovation* or not. The crux is that both sides claimed the force of tradition – of standstill – for their arguments.<sup>110</sup> Innovation seems inherently bad, as it betrays what people know and believe to be true or righteous.

Innovation thus is not just regarded as negative on the ‘secular’ level, but by Theophanes in ‘spiritual’ affairs as well. On the secular level, Theophanes blames Nikephoros I for “designs against the Christians by way of an ungodly control over the purchase of all kinds of animals, cattle and produce, the unjust confiscation and fines imposed upon prominent persons, and the exaction of interest on ships (he who issued laws against usury! And a thousand other inventions.”<sup>111</sup> The expelling of cooks and barbers, and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibidem, 77.

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, 551, 554, 573 and 610. Theophanes, of course, never seemed to have cared much for objectivity (or was he perhaps extremely naïve?).

<sup>107</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘Leo III: iconoclast or opportunist?’, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 69-155, here: 80 and 152.

<sup>108</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘Constantine V and the Institutionalisation of Iconoclasm’, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 156-247, here: 199, 234 and 247.

<sup>109</sup> Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, ‘The Second Iconoclasm’, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge, CUP 2011) 366-452, here: 400-401.

<sup>110</sup> Brubaker and Haldon, ‘Leo III’, 139.

<sup>111</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 671.

interfering with the public post by Julian falls in the same category of ‘unjust’ innovation. An innovating emperor is a ruler who is beyond his subjects’ comprehension – one who holds them by the throat with his stubborn-mindedness. Like Justin I is blamed for being passive in the *Secret History*, Philippikos Bardanes (r.711-713) is blamed for living “a carefree life in the palace”, spending the money all his predecessors confiscated. Philippikos is incompetent in every single way and soon pays the price for his carelessness. As with Procopius, bad emperors are either fatigue and witless, or ruthlessly innovative: Nikephoros is even called the “universal devourer”<sup>112</sup>, much in the fashion of Procopius’ nameless man on the shore.

The Confessor equates the ‘pious’ almost indiscriminately with the ‘righteous’. A recurring trope in the *Chronicle* is the insistence of religious leaders (Constantinopolitan patriarchs, incidentally a pope) that newly elected emperors do not interfere in church matters: the usurper Phokas (r.602-610) is required by the patriarch to make this assurance. A similar thing is said about Leo III and Michael I (r.811-813).<sup>113</sup> Innovations in the church made by emperors are always seen as bad. Emperors have the duty to protect the church, but they do not possess the privilege to alter things. Spiritual figures, such as Arius, are also depicted as making innovations and as steering away from proper doctrine and tradition. Arius is ‘killed off’ gushing out his bowels, like Maximianus (enemy of Constantine the Great) dies vomiting up “his God-opposing soul” and Julian excrement.<sup>114</sup> This horrifying version of the death of Arius seems first to be portrayed in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Socrates of Constantinople (c.380-440).<sup>115</sup> Although Theophanes borrows the ‘beastly’ trope of Early Christian authors, this element of vomit is not repeated again later. Beasts can be seen as different from human beings by the very fact that they operate without particular policy: they are believed to be senseless and cruel. Their ‘realm’ resembles that of the devil in chaos.

The ‘pious’ rulers in Theophanes are, among others, Constantine the Great, Justin I, Justinian I and his spouse.<sup>116</sup> Constantine is anachronistically described as a man “strong and unswerving in his faith”.<sup>117</sup> Justinian becomes suspicious only when he introduces the doctrine of Corruptibility and Incorruptibility, and the author ‘kills’ him ‘off’ “with God acting in time”.<sup>118</sup> Theophanes shows himself, at times, blind or indifferent to imperial violence, and browses over the fact that a pious ‘favourite’, Theodosius I, has his soldiers kill “fifteen thousand people” at the hippodrome in Thessalonica for no apparent reason.<sup>119</sup> The Confessor applauds Theophylaktos’ (who co-reigned with his father Michael) intents to subject the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibidem, 657.

<sup>113</sup> Ibidem, 413, 540 and 675.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem, 26, 52 and 80.

<sup>115</sup> Tomasz Labuk, ‘Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates’ History: a trickster narrative?’, in: Charis Messis, Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), *Telling Stories in Byzantium: narratological approaches and Byzantine narration* (Uppsala University Press 2018) 263-286, here: 278.

<sup>116</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 27, 260, 285 and 313.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 33.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, 354.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem, 111. Theodosius is seen silencing the crowd. Only when everything appears calm again, he has his soldiers shoot at the people with arrows.

Manichees to the death penalty, as he was “moved by an excess of divine zeal.” Unfortunately for Theophanes, “perverse” counsellors talked the emperor out of this on the wily “pretext of repentance”.<sup>120</sup> Violence against heretics (basically anyone disagreeing with orthodoxy), to the author, is not violence at all. It is motion and a good kind of motion: the cleansing of impurities, whatever the cost may be. The pious emperor is a soldier of faith: he protects the realm against intruders, but without reinventing its foundations. Humility is praised, as this gives prove of a peace-loving mind<sup>121</sup>, and of the unwillingness to innovate as well. Both Justin I and his kinsman Justinian I (on separate occasions) take off their crown for a vast period of days and proceed to church without it, after devastating natural disasters laid waste parts of the empire and killed a large number of people. Justinian turns to charity, while Justin weeps in front of the Senate, which was not regarded as unmanly, as “everybody wept and wore mourning like him.”<sup>122</sup> Another kinsman of both, Justin II, gives a moving, and heartbreaking speech when he rises one of his confidants to the rank of Caesar: he makes a plea against bloodshed, to “not return evil for evil”, to “attend all as you attend to yourself” and “remember who you were and who you are now.” To “let those who have possessions enjoy them” and to “be bountiful to those who have none.”<sup>123</sup> It is of importance to pay attention soldiery, yet, at the same time, one has to “shun soldiers.”<sup>124</sup> All these traits and qualities are linked, one way or another, to the maintenance of the equilibrium. It is strongly implied that with great power comes great responsibility, and that it is essential for any title-holder to remain as *reactive* and responsive to the needs of others as before, not applying his powers for designs that benefit only himself.

Harmony within the (imperial) family testifies of a strong – a *god-loving* – empire. Justin II, for instance, is seen coming to terms with his younger brother after initial rivalry. Together they form a united front, with Justin as the sovereign.<sup>125</sup> The great soldier-emperor Herakleios, returning from a long, succesful campaign (in what seems to be an *Adventus* ceremony), was welcomed by his son at the gates of Hierieia, in which both “shed tears on the ground”, at which the people gave thanks to God.<sup>126</sup> A virtuous emperor preserves the unity of the family – one of the cornerstones of society, and symbol of the unity of society as a whole – whereas a tyrant breaks families apart, turning familymember against familymember, thus tearing up the unity of civilisation into isolated fragments. Justinian II killed children in their mother’s lap, and of the reign of Constantine V is said that, “The Devil, instigator of evil, roused in those days such fury and mutual slaughter among Christians that sons would murder their fathers without mercy and brothers would murder their own brothers and pitilessly burn each other’s houses and homes.”<sup>127</sup> Chaos is the agency of the devil. It implies isolation, distrust and fear: a dysfunctional organism turned

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<sup>120</sup> Ibidem, 678.

<sup>121</sup> Peaceful intentions are lauded only when they are to the benefit of the orthodoxes.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem, 264 and 339.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem, 368-369.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, 369.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem, 364.

<sup>126</sup> Ibidem, 457.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, 578.

into a great many segments. Theophanes describes chaos much in the same way as Procopius does, with the notable difference that chaos, here, can originate on both the secular (most notably by vengefulness and greed) and spiritual level (impiety). Piety is the main trait that distinguishes a good emperor from a bad one. Yet, it is not as easy to link positive connotations of piety with a ‘moving’ reign of equilibrium as it is to link negative connotations of vengefulness with chaos. Theophanes’ *Chronicle* hardly produces a narrative of flow or standstill. This is partly because it is written in logbook-style: not categorizing events based on reigns, but impersonally, based on dates. The fact that he, quite carelessly, ‘recycles’ rhetorical elements does not help either. In order to grasp how Byzantine authors, writing about reigns, could create flows of moralized movement, one seems to have to look into a source that composes ‘deep’ psychological portraits: a face behind the mask of rulers being scrutinized. The deeper the ‘rabbit-hole’ goes, the better.

### **The *Book of Ceremonies*, the Macedonian Renaissance and the ‘Generic’ Ruler-Type**

In comparison to the previous two chapters, this chapter focuses on a different source entirely: the *Book of Ceremonies*. This source does not deal with specific individuals, nor with ‘grand’ politics, but with a limited aspect of rulership, implied in its title: ceremony. The composition, a translation of the Latin *De Ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae*, given to it in the mid-eighteenth century by its first editor<sup>128</sup>, is – on the first look of it – not much more than a portrait of so-called ‘generic’ types: flat, faceless characters who are not defined by their personality, but by the movement – in a literal sense – prescribed for their office, or ‘role’. The work itself is regarded as compilation, rather than “a carefully constructed unitary work.”<sup>129</sup> Much of the ceremony (which is, to some extent, depicted as *timeless*) was in fact based on innovations in years preceding its compilation.<sup>130</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (sole rule 944-959) was the fourth emperor of the Macedonian dynasty, which ruled the Byzantine Empire from 867 to 1056. Unlike the Iconoclast emperors (and largely due to Iconoclasts), the Macedonians did not seem to intend to interfere in religious affairs. Specific to the ceremonial was its reorganization to strengthen dynastical claims.<sup>131</sup> How, in fact, could the adequate application of court ceremonial give ‘prove’ of competence of a ruler such as Constantine VII? What role does (ritualized) gesture play in the *Book of Ceremonies* and how was this made graspable through *literal* forms of movement and understood by contemporary audiences?

To answer this question, it is, first of all, important to enquire deeper into the personality of Constantine. The Porphyrogenetos is presented in the *Synopsies of Histories* of the Greek Historian John Skylitzes (ca. 1140-1101), who wrote about the time from the death of Nikephoros I in 811 to the deposition of

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<sup>128</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall, Byzantina Australiensia Vol. 18 (Leiden 2012), XXIV.

<sup>129</sup> Cameron, ‘The Construction of Court Ritual’, 110-111 and 117.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*, 120.

<sup>131</sup> Gilbert Dagron, ‘Basil the Macedonian, Leo VI and Constantine VII: ceremonial and religion’, in: *Emperor and Priest: the imperial office in Byzantium*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge, New York: CUP 2003) 192-219, here: 201 and 207.

Michael VI in 1057. His work is considered a continuation of Theophanes the Confessor, who served as main inspiration for its structural basis.<sup>132</sup> Skylitzes writes concisely: he describes his protagonists in a plain and simple style, focuses on the achievements and ‘errors’ of their reigns, without delving deep into their personalities. It appears not to be his goal to make generalized conclusions based on carefully crafted ‘reviews’ of rulers. Constantine VII is depicted as a man eager for obtaining the empire, “to the exclusion of every other aspiration”, and is even referred to as “besotted like a drunken man” in this respect.<sup>133</sup> In 944, after Romanos I Lekapenos (previously the commander of the fleet, who rose to the imperial office after the death of Constantine’s father – the earlier mentioned Leo IV “the wise” – in a semi- but non-violent coup) had been deposed by his own sons and all obstacles in Constantine’s rise to power had been removed, he finally became the sole emperor. Though he was expected to be “a capable and energetic ruler, one who would devote himself to state affairs and diligence”, he proved “weaker than anticipated” and failed to live up to the expectations, always preferring “to take the easier way”.<sup>134</sup> It seems that Skylitzes regards (or used sources with this outlook) Constantine as a ruler of the ‘passive’ type, something which is inherently negative. His restoration of the ‘sciences’ (sculpture, architecture, shipbuilding etc.) and private piety are not enough to make up for his lacunas.<sup>135</sup> His lack of *energy* in particular is highlighted. Constantine is seen taking the easy way, and not capable of living up, by action, to the challenges of empire. Yet, he ruled for quite a long time. Arnold Toynbee, who put this ruler in the context of his ‘world’, admits that Constantine by temperament was not a fighter, yet this might have worked for his benefit as a “recalcitrant” emperor – one who refuses to obey convention – “was courting death.” Constantine’s private ambitions (mostly concerning his studies) did not harm or insult anyone<sup>136</sup>, yet they were of no benefit to the state. Michael III – who was murdered by Constantine VII’s own grandfather, Basil I – appeared to have been so fond of chariot racing (he is even depicted participating in them) that he neglected all state affairs because of his ‘hobby’. He too is a passive ruler unable to live up to the challenges of state, yet his private ambitions were much more explosive than Constantine’s: Skylitzes sees him as one who “even pursued moderation immoderately, so that his behaviour fell short of what is appropriate to and worthy of the imperial dignity.”<sup>137</sup> As a ruler he is passive, but as a private individual (something an emperor ought not to be) he was constantly in motion. Although he is in fact pious (he restored ‘proper’ doctrine after the Second Iconoclasm), it is not enough to save his reputation. He was murdered, whereas Constantine was not. Leo V (r.813-820), the iconoclast who instigated the Second Iconoclasm, is Michael’s polar opposite. Whereas the *Chronicle* of Theophanes breaks off early in Leo’s reign – thus leaving his reputation unshattered – Skylitzes, another convinced iconodule, discusses him in full detail. Despite Leo’s impiety, he is seen a ruler who excellently managed the affairs

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<sup>132</sup> Bernard Flusin, ‘Re-writing history: John Skylitzes’ Synopsis historion’, in: John Skylitzes, *A synopsis of Byzantine history*, trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge, New York: CUP 2010), xii-xxxiii, here: xiii.

<sup>133</sup> John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge, New York: CUP 2010), here: 191-192.

<sup>134</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 228-229.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem*, 229-230.

<sup>136</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* (London: OUP 1973), 2-3.

<sup>137</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 110.

of state and war.<sup>138</sup> In this respect, he is Michael's (and, in a sense, of Constantine as well) polar opposite. Skylitzes is in fact willing to laude Leo for some of his achievements, thus making it clear that there is no such thing as a single 'formula' of policy which all emperors could apply to win the affection of their subjects.

Liutprand of Cremona, an official at the court of Berengar in northern Italy during the middle of the tenth century, visited Constantinople in 949 and 96. He met the emperors Constantine and Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963-969) in person. The meeting with Constantine is recorded in the *Antapodosis* (a book of retribution), which he wrote after becoming estranged of his Italian benefactors. Here, Constantine is depicted as a gentle and modest ruler who takes care of the well-being of foreign envoys. He presents Liutprand with honorary gifts.<sup>139</sup> The second mission to Constantinople took place when Liutprand had become bishop of Cremona and acted in service of the German emperor.<sup>140</sup> Liutprand complains how Nikephoros did not receive the emperor's letters himself, but through the hands of his interpreter, and how he, as foreign envoy, was constantly held under guard and restricted in his movements.<sup>141</sup> The *Book of Ceremonies* states that the emperor always deals with other people through designated intermediaries of his household staff.<sup>142</sup> The Patriarch seems to be the only exception to this rule. Only on exceptional occasions were individuals directly summoned by the emperor, when given a promotion for instance. Liutprand, in his first meeting with Constantine, is asked if Berengar, his benefactor, is in good health. This too happens in accordance with protocol, which states that a palace official should enquire after the health of a foreign ruler, his wife, children and subjects, when addressing foreign ambassadors.<sup>143</sup> Liutprand's complaints had already been tackled by Procopius in the sixth century, as he warned for envoys wandering around freely through the city.<sup>144</sup> Envoys were official trustees of foreign rulers: their motives were suspicious. Liutprand seemed to have been eager to describe Nikephoros in an extremely negative manner, calling him "a monstrosity of a man", but this seems to have been done mainly to flatter his benefactors (who were emperors in their own right): "Always my lords and august emperors you seemed to me shapely, how much more shapely after this!"<sup>145</sup> Nikephoros is seen as a warmonger, who "abhors the palace as if it were the plague."<sup>146</sup> This ruler is highly active, but in a dangerous way. John Skylitzes, as stated before, described Nikephoros as a capable general, but a faulty emperor, as he failed to look after his citizen subjects. Military-minded as he was, he erected a wall around the palace, lifting it up

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<sup>138</sup> Ibidem, 25-26.

<sup>139</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, translated by F.A. Wright, in: *The Works of Liutprand of Cremona* (New York 1930), VI. 211-212.

<sup>140</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Report on his Mission to Constantinople*, translated by Ernest F. Henderson, in: *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London 1910) 440-477, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/liudprand1.asp> (visited on 20-2-2019), 441-442.

<sup>141</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Mission to Constantinople*, 442 and 443-444.

<sup>142</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, Book I:9, page 68, I:23, 134 and I:25, 140. These "other people" include both subjects and foreigners.

<sup>143</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, VI. 208 and Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, II:47, 682-683.

<sup>144</sup> Procopius, *On the Wars*, VIII. xv. 16-20.

<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, 443.

<sup>146</sup> Ibidem, 470.

“like an acropolis” or “tyrant’s dwelling”.<sup>147</sup> Thus, Nikephoros military successes were not enough to save his reputation either. Liutprand apparently thought little of him, but his use of language was clearly rhetorical. This ‘westerner’s’ distrust of the military-minded emperor can also be explained by the fact that any foreign nation would rather deal with a ‘soft’ man such as Constantine, who seemed to have hardly posed a threat if treated gallantly, than a warrior such as Nikephoros who was active and ambitious. Liutprand must have been aware that a general was prepared to deal with enemies in a game of deceit.

The *Book of Ceremonies* gives a concise overview of the complexities of court ceremonial and life at court, yet I would say that – at least in its introduction – it implies a naïve idea that proper ritual creates proper mindset. The Macedonian era did see a boost of cultural output: the revival of Hellenic education among other things.<sup>148</sup> Already since the end of antiquity, Constantinople was much of a unicum within the Empire as the central hub of all of Byzantine society – the court was the only hub that stood in direct connection with all others. The ecclesiastical sphere had no such counterpart, as the Orthodox church was composed out of the sum of all its individual bishoprics and the five main Sees.<sup>149</sup> The Senate was essentially a “service élite” and its members depended less on inheritant means than on proximity to the emperor.<sup>150</sup> The emperor had the obligation towards society to ‘protect’ religion, give justice, and maintain order. Subsequently, the political process was, to a large extent, “a matter of maintaining the equilibrium of the system in the face of all kinds of challenges, both external and internal.”<sup>151</sup> As the emperor’s power was autocratic in nature, he was the one to blame if the equilibrium got disrupted. On the spiritual level, the emperor held a self-proclaimed title of ‘apostle’, yet the explicit urge to convert entire peoples did not seem to have existed. Rather, the Byzantines let other peoples come to them for spiritual benefits.<sup>152</sup> Succession was a feeble affair, as “an emperor could be made at any time by intrigue or force”. Only the political theory, emphasizing a divine order of things, seemed to have remained stable. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, Constantinople had always been an imperial city and it seems highly unlikely that voices would ever arise that wanted to change its *constitutional* system at the core. If any of the Akzeptanz-groups did not like a particular emperor, they could riot or ‘lobby’ to get a better one. But the installment of something like an oligarchy or democracy seems never to have been an option. Constantinople ‘revolved’ around the persona and the institution of the emperor. In ceremony this is translated by the exercisement of imperial power with idealized rhythm and taxis, providing society with a ‘myth’ of stability, in which “ceremonial was both self-generating and self-enforcing”.<sup>153</sup> The Porphyrogennetos, who did not seem to have been overly ambitious, or a visionary,

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<sup>147</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 446.

<sup>148</sup> Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his world*, 577.

<sup>149</sup> Magdalino, ‘Court Society and Aristocracy’, 212.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibidem*, 217-218.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Angold, ‘The Byzantine Political Process at Crisis Point’, in: Paul Stephenson (ed.), 5-21, here: 5.

<sup>152</sup> Jonathan Shepard, ‘Spreading The Word: Byzantine missions’, in: *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe* (Farnham UK, Burlington USA 2011) 1-17, here: 6.

<sup>153</sup> Cameron, ‘The Construction of Court Ritual’, 118, 124 and 131.

needed reassurance of his own authority – more importantly: his *safety* – like no successful warmonger would.

So why is the *Book of Ceremonies* such a crucial source in this study on moralized movement? In essence it teaches us very little about what makes an emperor strong and capable of living up to external threats. These threats start beyond the gates of the Capital, yet ceremony needs to be *seen* first-hand. This source has little to say about which policy an emperor should choose, as the red thread that holds its chapters – often dry as barley – together, is its dedication to the maintenance of the courtly *status quo*, expressed in the preface: “for just as when a body is not harmoniously fashioned, but has its limbs set in a contorted and ill-coordinated way, one would describe this as a disorder, so too when the imperial administration is not led and governed by order, it will differ in no way from an ignorant and servile way of life.”<sup>154</sup> In essence, the *Book of Ceremonies* is all about gestures, perhaps more so than any other source discussed. Whereas order is illustrated in the *History of the Wars* by the submission of all officers to one supreme commander (in command of a single ‘body’),<sup>155</sup> ceremony is the ‘superglue’ that holds the hierarchical structure of the high court together. In the *Book of Ceremonies*, there is a focus on gesture which lays at the heart of the *Akzeptanzsystem*. On multiple occasions, we see the emperor in his role as ‘distributor’ of benefices. During various ceremonies, a generic type is seen distributing cash and precious objects to the officials, senators, patricians, the elders, lepers and soldiers.<sup>156</sup> At specific ceremonies, for instance at the coronation of a Caesar, the representatives of the troops can make their official request. The same thing goes for the factions – which are held to be the representatives of the people of Constantinople.<sup>157</sup> The gestures are, to a large part, symbolical, and do not truly alter the lives of their recipients a lot, yet they showcase an ideal of mutual respect between giver and receiver, imperial office and inferior ranks. The emperor is seen as constantly *in motion*. Constantly pulling the chords to maintain equilibrium. In the role of spiritual father we see the emperor as shepherd leading his people to eternal salvation. In this mode he most closely resembles (and ‘operates’ like) Christ. When visiting troops on a campaign, he ought to address the officers and the troops as “children”.<sup>158</sup> When he approaches the throne or Kathisma in the Hippodrome, the emperor makes the sign of the cross three times over the people.<sup>159</sup> On another occasion, the emperors (senior and junior) rise from their seat to imitate the “greeting of the true love of Christ”.<sup>160</sup> Despite the emperor’s privileged status on earth, he is still to be reminded of his own mortality and the subservience to the divine: he has to take off crown or tiara before entering church<sup>161</sup>, thereby showing that the earthly authority vested in his position is inferior (in a sense even *irrelevant*) compared

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<sup>154</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 4.

<sup>155</sup> Procopius, *On the Wars*, VI. xxi. 13-19. Belisarius writes in a letter to Narses: “Consider that the whole army of the emperor is one body, and that, if it does not display one single purpose, just as do the members of a man, but one part wishes to act separately from the others, what will be left to us is to perish utterly without having performed any of our duties.”

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*, I: 31, 170; I:34, 180 and I:92, 425.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibidem*, I:43, 217-218 and I:66, 299-300.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*, Appendix to Book I, 483.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*, I:63, 280 and I:70, 344.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem*, II:52, 765-766.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, for instance I:I, 32 and I:10, 84.

to God's. Although the emperor has the authority to summon the patriarch, the patriarch is the only human being the emperor makes obeisance to; often they simply "kiss" *each other*.<sup>162</sup> The object of the crown is treated with the utmost respect. Only eunuchs or the patriarch touch it, and "It should be known that the emperor is never to be crowned in front of non-eunuchs, this tradition having been observed from the very beginning."<sup>163</sup> Neither eunuch (not officially a *male*) nor patriarch (a spiritual figure) poses a threat to the emperor's authority, as neither could lay a real claim on the powers invested in this object.

The *Book of Ceremonies* admits that, for a long time, there was no single ritualized proclamation of an emperor. The chapters 84-95 of Book I are attributed to the sixth century Byzantine official Peter the Patrician and deal with varied improvised forms of acclamations from Anastasius to Justinian I. All the acclamations described came to be without any careful planning, through experimentation and chance. Chapter 91 states that there is no need for a standardized form of acclamation.<sup>164</sup> This remark must be a tenth (not an original sixth) century addition, as the list of coronations includes Nikephoros II Phokas. The most important thing concerning proclamations is "that nothing is done as a result of a hasty choice which might prove regrettable."<sup>165</sup> Those who find themselves in the position to crown someone emperor should be very hesitant to grant such sovereign power. Yet, those who are about to be granted sovereign power should be equally hesitant. The trope of *hesitation* among such 'nominees' reoccurs: Anastasius I, Justinian I, and Nikephoros II are all reluctant at first.<sup>166</sup> This is also said of the usurper Hypatius in Procopius' *Wars*, who is said to "by no will of his own came to the Forum of Constantine, where they summoned him to the throne."<sup>167</sup> Hypatius, during the Nika riot (AD 532), in fact seemed to have stage-managed events with care.<sup>168</sup> The literary trope of hesitation seems to be more than a simple gesture of modesty, it shows that the authors believed, and wanted to believe, or wanted to make *others* believe, that certain protagonists were fit for the 'job', because they did not think lightly of the task bestowed on them. It seems likely that Procopius 'used' Hypatius as a tool to downplay the authority of Justinian, as there were men among the Constantinopolitan elite who would make better emperors than the current one.

This chapter tried to show that a source like the *Book of Ceremonies* does not just deal with literal forms of movement, but with the underlying implications of gesture as well. To a more 'feeble-minded', *stuck-to-himself* ruler like Constantine VII, conventional gesture might be a safer course of action to invest time and effort in, than any large-scale policy such as (re)conquest or reorganization. Policy implies big decision making; its benefits to the state might be much larger, but the risks of losing authority or foreign

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<sup>162</sup> Ibidem, I:13, 91; I:27, 153 and I:10, 73. A ritual kiss, illustrating respect.

<sup>163</sup> Ibidem, I:48, 249; I:38, 194 and I:66, 298.

<sup>164</sup> Ibidem, I:91, 417.

<sup>165</sup> Ibidem, I:92, 420.

<sup>166</sup> Ibidem, I:92, 424; I:93, 428 and I:96, 434.

<sup>167</sup> Procopius, *On the Wars*, I. xxiv.

<sup>168</sup> Potter, *Theodora*, 151.

friends are also higher. The gestures as described in the *Book of Ceremonies* neatly fit into the model of the *Akzeptanzsystem*, yet in the case of ceremony this ‘acceptance’ cannot be communicated further than the capital itself. Policy is *felt*, but ceremony must be *seen*. It was primarily seen by the court itself and occasionally by the people. If ‘performed’ correctly, it could gain enough ‘weight’ to maintain a feeble equilibrium.

### **Niketas Choniates and the Enigmatic Demise of Empire**

The final chapter of this thesis deals with a narrative account of a highly skilled writer, who personally witnessed one of the most tragical events in Byzantine history: the fall of Constantinople in 1204. Yet, this chapter’s title is misleading, as the demise of the Byzantine Empire stretched out over a considerable amount of years and at least a handful of emperors, of which only one (Andronikos I Komnenos, r.1183-1185) posed a true mystery to the keen-eyed author of a *History* that dealt with the years 1118 to 1207. The Fall of Constantinople in 1204 appears to be imminent in Choniates’ narrative. About this author has been stated that he presented history as “a tangle of reversals and paradoxes” and that “the *History* is the testament of a man struggling to reconstitute his humanity in the face of so much senselessness.”<sup>169</sup> The momentum of Justinian I’s ‘Golden Age’ had long waned in the eleventh century, and the Empire had long ceased to be a ‘world’ power. Choniates’ manuscript was written in three phases: version *A* was composed late in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century during the reign of Alexios III Angelos (r.1195-1202), version *B* followed after 1204 and was more supportive of the Angeloi dynasty, whereas final version *C* came into being over a decade later in Nikaia.<sup>170</sup> Niketas held office under Alexios III and his brother Isaakios II (r.1185-1195) in a variety of administrative and judicial functions.<sup>171</sup> He lived in a time in which the Great Hippodrome, the largest building in all of Constantinople – capable of supporing some 30.000 to 35.000 spectators – got virtually out of use after having lost its function as third most important (after the Great Palace and the Hagia Sophia) institutional locus of communication between emperor and people.<sup>172</sup> It had, for ages, been the ‘stage’ par excellence on which *Akzeptanz* or discontent over a ruler could be expressed. Likewise, the Great Palace had seen a demise, as it had been replaced by the Blachernai palace in the northwest of the city as the favourite residence of the imperial court.<sup>173</sup> Yet, like during the Macedonian renaissance, classical education flourished: the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a revival of classical Roman behaviour ideals, which were often expressed by the historians of this time.<sup>174</sup> Niketas Choniates is considered a “wordsmith in every sense” by Stephanos

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<sup>169</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, ‘Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History’, in: Efthymiadis, Stephanos and Simpson, Alicia (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: a historian and a writer* (Geneva 2009) 75-100, here: 78 and 99.

<sup>170</sup> Alicia Simpson, ‘Introduction: Niketas Choniates – the historian’, in: Efthymiadis, Stephanos and Simpson, Alicia (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: a historian and a writer* (Geneva 2009) 13-34, here: 16.

<sup>171</sup> Alicia Simpson, ‘Introduction: Niketas Choniates – the historian’, 18.

<sup>172</sup> Giatsis, ‘The Organization of Chariot-Racing’, 36-38. A spatial site where the emperor interacted (and was *expected* to interact) with the people and the people could vocalize their support or discontent.

<sup>173</sup> Alicia Simpson, ‘Narrative Images of Medieval Constantinople’, in: Efthymiadis, Stephanos and Simpson, Alicia (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: a historian and a writer* (Geneva 2009) 185-208.

<sup>174</sup> Leonora Neville, ‘Strong Women and their Husbands in Byzantine Historiography’, in: Stephenson, Paul (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London, New York 2010) 72-82, here: 72.

Efthymiadis: a writer who possessed an unparalleled vocabulary, which sadly gets lost in translation.<sup>175</sup> Besides being eloquently written, his *History* is one of the major Byzantine sources for his historical age.<sup>176</sup>

Like Procopius, Choniates makes references to Tyche (Fortune) and energy, but much less – and much less *decisively* – so. Contrary to Procopius, he actually seems to favour an emperor who possesses enough will to face poor odds. Manuel Komnenos is praised for the fact that “when Fortune treated him unfairly, he hotly contended with her and struck back.”<sup>177</sup> Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the Empire was mainly on the defensive in the twelfth century, whereas Procopius writes in a time of unprecedented, even *hasty*, expanse. Manuel I and his father John II are the exceptions in Choniates’ history, as they play no active part in Constantinople’s inevitable demise, but this can be partly explained by the fact that these rulers lived before his time. He depended on earlier sources, which seemed to have been part of Komnenian propaganda.<sup>178</sup> Later emperors, the Angeloi in particular, did nothing to contend with Fortune and this brought them and their subjects nothing but misery. Isaakios II and Alexios III fit neatly in the ‘passive’ type of rulers: those not capable of living up to the challenges (though their mostly noble intentions partly excuse them from their failures). I found only four instances in which a man is described as “energetic” in Choniates: three of those apply to military men and all three are in a positive context.<sup>179</sup> This revalidates the notion that generals (at least) were required to be a true menace to all their enemies. The fourth reference concerns a certain medical instructor, who is mockingly described as “eloquent in speech, the darling of wisdom”, with a persona “like a magnet”. He is “energetically changing his form like Proteus of Pharos” (a shape-shifting sea deity from Greek mythology).<sup>180</sup> Here, energy becomes a dangerous asset, as it makes the protagonist cunning and untrustworthy. Worst of all: his true intentions remain *unknown* to his contemporaries and to the reader as well. The fact that he is equated to a magnet illustrates that, like a devourer, he acts as inward-pulling force: a force that dislocates the members of a body, that disfigures the fabric of society: a person with a strong will and agenda of his one – one that does not appear to be in the benefit of state. This inward-pulling force is manifested most strongly in the personality of Andronikos Komnenos, who ruled for only two years, but leaves the strongest impression of all the Choniates’ emperors. He is presented as a force that “does not merely reverse natural *taxis*” but “shreds it apart.”<sup>181</sup> Andronikos *surpasses* the mere devourer; an ‘arch-destroyer of institutions’, as described by Procopius or Theophanes. During the reign of Manuel, Andronikos is frequently accused of treason and locked into prison more than once. Yet no net seems able to contain him, as he manages

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<sup>175</sup> Stephanos Efthymiadis, ‘Niketas Choniates: the writer’, in: Efthymiadis, Stephanos and Simpson, Alicia (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer* (Geneva 2009) 35-58, here: 54-55.

<sup>176</sup> Alicia Simpson, ‘Introduction: Niketas Choniates – the historian’, 14.

<sup>177</sup> Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals*, translated by Harry J. Magoulias, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1984), 55.

<sup>178</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 158.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibidem*, 56, 108 and 278.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>181</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, ‘Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History’, 93.

to escape every cage and dodge every ambush. Andronikos is constantly *in motion* (often ‘operating’ beyond the sight of central authorities, so his acts and intentions cannot be traced). Choniates describes Andronikos, before his rise to the purple, as an animal constantly being hunted on: he “saved himself by fleeing like a gazelle from the noose, like a bird from the snare.” Yet with his cunning he outwits all his opponents. Andronikos breaks loose, disappears from the radar and makes a dramatic reappearance in some remote corner of the Empire. The moment he becomes emperor, he himself turns into the hunter. His passions dominate him throughout his life and make him “the most unstable of men, suffering from an inconstancy of character even in matters of little consequence”.<sup>182</sup> Choniates depicts him in a virtually identical way as Procopius did Justinian (a “cloud of dust in instability”). Choniates however, borrowed the likening of Andronikos with beasts from Eusthatios’s account of the capture of Thessalonike by the Normans.<sup>183</sup> The emperor transforms into a “flesh-eating” entity; one, who people fear of that his “wide-gaping jaws would one day open up and swallow” them altogether.<sup>184</sup> His enigmatic nature makes him highly dangerous, as the Byzantines consistently fail to get a grip on his mind. What makes it worse, is that he is well aware of this mind-game quality and exploits it to pull his subjects by the nose. Choniates consciously leaves the enigma intact, which makes Andronikos irresistible to his audience (as even he is not devoid of good qualities). This emperor pulls not just his contemporaries in, but the reader as well – he manifests himself as a black hole: a field of gravity, from which there is no escape. Tomasz Labuk notes that Choniates’ depiction of this emperor fits into the literary *trope* of the ‘trickster’: a manipulator, ‘situation inventor’, composed of polar opposites and “a living personification of chaos.” Like a true trickster, Andronikos has no real ‘roots’: there is nothing that connects him to the society in which he operates (all his life he had been wandering about – like an Odysseus). Despite being very cunning, the trickster will unintentionally also expose himself (being doomed to blow out of steam) as fool, a target of ridicule.<sup>185</sup> Trickster narratives develop in all cultures, by definition in times of radical transition, in which *convention* is ruptured. In this sense, it is not surprising that Choniates created a formidable inner-threat – the personification of doom – to the Byzantine Empire out of a man who was already deemed unconventional.

Family seems to be a central motive in Choniates’ narrative. At one point he explicitly blames the entire Komnenian dynasty for being “the major cause of the destruction of the empire.”<sup>186</sup> It is Andronikos who disrupts the natural order of things to a point that “brother ignore brother and father neglect son” and kinsmen become willing “in bringing about the utter ruin of their families.”<sup>187</sup> Justinian II is seen

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<sup>182</sup> Ibidem, 153.

<sup>183</sup> Tomasz Labuk, ‘Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates’ History: a trickster narrative?’, in: Messis, Charis, Mullett, Margaret and Nilsson, Ingela (eds.), *Telling Stories in Byzantium: narratological approaches and Byzantine narration* (Uppsala University Press 2018) 263-286, here: 263 and 268.

<sup>184</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 154 and 189.

<sup>185</sup> Labuk, ‘Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates’ History’, 266 and 276-277.

<sup>186</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 290.

<sup>187</sup> Ibidem, 144.

evoking the same sentiments in Theophanes' narrative. Choniates has John II, the son of Alexios I – founder of the Komnenian dynasty – exclaim “how the natural order of things have been reverted” for him, as “Kinsmen have become the enemy and strangers friends.”<sup>188</sup> Yet, the love of kin ought to be a powerful emotion: “should it even be slightly injured, it quickly heals itself.”<sup>189</sup> Andronikos has no such desire. His reign is vexed on bringing down what is most sacred and plunge everything into a state of anarchy. Anarchy is motion, and it is most vivid at the very *heart* of Byzantine life: the core nucleus of society itself.

Chaos does not just erupt when a tyrant suffocates his subjects, but also when an inadequate young ruler is left heir to a strong monarch: Empire becomes fragmented to the core. Choniates describes how some of young Alexios II's guardians, “like bees, frequently winged their way to the provinces and stored up money as though it were honey, while others, like goats craved after the young shoot of the empire and continually tried to gain possession of it.” A third type, “emulating hogs, fattened themselves on the most sordid revenues and choosing not to lift their heads and look at anything laudable or beneficial for the common fatherland, rolled about in their filthy deeds, rooting like swine after every evil gain.”<sup>190</sup> The three subtypes of degenerates are either ruled by greed, passion for power – stock trait of tyrants –, or a dysfunctional moral compass. In the absence of strong centralized power these agents of disruption become active. A soft ruler poses a ‘dead weight’ which is equally harmful. Taxis will not be torn down from the center (i.e. the emperor himself), but by those opportunists around. Isaakios Angelos arouses ambitions to open rebellion, whereas Alexios's strong-minded wife is able to prevail over him in matters of state.<sup>191</sup>

As in Procopius and Theophanes, the negative tropes of the energetic tyrant and the passive, idle ruler form a read thread in Choniates' *History*. Many of the tropes Procopius displayed in the *Secret History* and in the *Wars*, Choniates does so as well, proving that, when it comes to the evaluation of emperorship, remarkably little has changed over a period of roughly 600 years. Both authors had an administrative background (being part of the service elite of the empire), which provided close proximity to emperors themselves and the mechanics of government. They also had a seemingly similar outlook on what ‘good’ rulership is. Niketas probably wrote for a tiny circle of highly educated literary people, who likely shared his literary ambition. The same thing might have been true for Procopius, while authors like Theophanes intended (partly due to lack of ‘higher’ literary skills) to ‘inform’ their audiences at a lower level.<sup>192</sup> All writers appear cautious to applaud innovations made by emperors: Niketas Choniates explains that this is often done out of passion and not reason.<sup>193</sup> Like Procopius before him, he questions the motifs of emperors who treat their ministers “not as free men but as allotted slaves”, as well as those who let brave

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<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>190</sup> Ibidem, 129.

<sup>191</sup> Ibidem, 233 and 252.

<sup>192</sup> Lilie, ‘Reality and Invention’, 209.

<sup>193</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 223.

soldiers go to waste by mismanagement, steadily turning them into degenerates.<sup>194</sup> Making men of state motionless is a huge waste of potential, while loosing restraints on the soldiery leads to anarchy. Neither policy works to the benefit of state. John II, the noblest ruler in the *History*, on his deathbed, expresses the explicit wish that the people will be delivered “a sovereign who is not a devourer of the people.”<sup>195</sup> Andronikos sadly becomes such a devourer. He was energetic and without restraint, yet not an innovator. Gluttony and immoderate ‘application’ of sleep – among other *particularities* – are used to point out a protagonist as morally depraved.<sup>196</sup> As I stated in the previous chapter, a noble-minded and rational mind tends to refuse the throne when it is first offered to him; the more an individual craves for it, the more depraved he will turn out to be. In Choniates’, Andronikos is the most notorious example. Isaakios II Angelos is not much better. He reacted perplexed to his unexpected coronation, “not because he did not cherish the crown with a passion, but because he suspected how troublesome and difficult it would be to obtain.”<sup>197</sup>

There are three major differences between Procopius and Choniates. First of all, Choniates appears to be decisively more skilled as a literary artist, doing more right, I believe, to the complex character of Andronikos (leaving his enigma intact, rather than trying to deconstruct it), than Procopius does to Justinian and Theodora. Procopius overplays his hand in deconstructing the emperor and his spouse, which inevitably leads to contradiction and paradox. Secondly, Choniates is willing to see good qualities in all rulers, despite their errors. Procopius creates personalities which often are unrealistically blunt: either altogether good, or altogether repulsive. Lastly, Procopius blames Theodora for being virtually impossible to approach, whereas he blames Justinian for being “the most accessible person in the world.”<sup>198</sup> Choniates is also negative of those high ranking officials who were inaccessible, while he praises both Andronikos and Alexios III for being accessible for all their subjects. Andronikos was even willing to listen to the rich and downtrodden with equal attention.<sup>199</sup> Andronikos actually interacted with two of the main *Akzeptanz* groups (clergy and people) much in the way they desired. His downfall seems to be due to his outbursts of violence. Andronikos’ horrific ending testifies of wide-scale hatred of him among virtually all tiers of Constantinopolitan society. As he could not settle and did not truly belong anywhere, he seems doomed to have spun out of control. Ironically, perhaps well-intended innovations, in the guise of traditionalism, were the only policy that could have saved him from the horrific fate he suffered.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibidem*, 35 and 118.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibidem*, 25.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibidem*, 34 and 137.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibidem*, 190. Unlike the tyrant-type, Isaakios seems to be aware of the burdens of the throne to some extent, although after his coronation he strives to live a rather care-free life.

<sup>198</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, *The Anecdota*, 15.11-16.

<sup>199</sup> Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 32 and 182.

<sup>200</sup> Andronikos was tortured and beaten up by a large crowd of people in the Hippodrome before finally giving his last breath. Innovation involves action and motion to the fullest degree, yet if it bears ‘fruits’, perhaps this would have excused Andronikos of his temperament.

In the end, I conclude that, to the Byzantines, there was no singular ruling ‘style’ an emperor could adopt to win love and support. In facing the various kinds of challenges the Empire faced in its long history, different approaches were preferable. The generic ‘infallible’ stock-figure only existed on paper, as real human beings and the (historical) realities they operate in are inevitably complex. Not a single ruler was composed out of a set of stock-traits, and Byzantine authors rarely ever claimed this to be the case. Even if an emperor was righteous, he still had mortal flaws and could not possibly be loved by *all* his subjects. God was the only force who remained beyond scrutiny: he was loved by all, because he was *feared* by all. God, to the Byzantines at least, appears to have been impregnable and unknowable – precisely these qualities made him *desirable*. God’s policy is not ‘right’ because he is kind, but simply because he is *God*. Choniates’ literary agent of Andronikos Komnenos most closely resembled a God-figure in his motions, as he was impregnable, unknowable and acted ‘in mysterious ways’. Yet he was a mortal and punished severely for this unsettling fact. The enigma he posed lost its grip on the Constantinopolitan populace. Andronikos was only a man and even the emperor could not flourish – or even survive – by denying his mortal nature. In order to win the affection of mankind, a ruler had to stay in touch with its constitutions – with the very society that gave ‘birth’ to the powers vested in him. He had to partake in a balancing-act of giving and taking; distributing and redistributing. Only a ruler who stayed in motion and found ways to appease the *Akzeptanz* groups could ‘get away’ with ignoring some conventions and by implementing innovations. Innovation was excused *at best*, as an energetic man remained a possible liability. Men are wont to rebel against what is unfamiliar to them, as they fear changes will affect their position, disrupt their very sense of reality or dismantle their privileges. This, at least, appears to be true of Byzantine authors, who belonged to the upper classes of society. It often was to the benefit of these authors that the – perceived or idealized – status quo was maintained. If an individual emperor respected this equilibrium, it was showcased by gestures (acts of ‘awareness’ and appreciation): by appeasing the *Akzeptanz* groups. To safeguard his own position, a conservative ruler like Constantine VII appears to have insisted that this happened in a formalized – highly *predictable* – way. Openness was everything, and if rulers could not vocalize their good efforts in an *understandable* way, their authority was at odds. Yet, the emperor was not just lord and master of his subjects, he also was a protagonist in an international ‘arena’ of competing realms and nations. In other words: he had to protect the realm against intrusions of any kind.<sup>201</sup> If he did not live up to the challenges and his policy fell short, he was heavily scrutinized, and, once more, his authority was at odds. Bad fortune had to be countered by rationality and thoughtful conduct. Not just by emperors at the ‘core’ of the Empire, but by generals on the fringes as well. Military leaders had an arsenal of ‘tricks’ at their disposal to defeat the external aggressor. Generals ought to be an unpredictable menace when dealing with foes. Yet openness and the appreciation of convention formed the backbone of the general’s dealings with his soldiers and civilian subjects. In appeasing the particular *Akzeptanz* groups (the senatorial class mostly excluded), his duties were similar to those of the emperor.

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<sup>201</sup> These intrusions include any act of foreign potentates, whether ruler or state. They could be of mainly political nature, but also commercial ‘strategies’, spiritual benefices, or plain aggressive moves, such as waging war.

The wise emperor remained mainly *reactive*. He – the highest pinnacle of power – was above all others dependent on the *Akzeptanz* of institutions, whether these were the church, the senatorial class, the people, the army, or all at once. A righteous ruler does not act beyond his limits; does not ‘move’ beyond what is required. Those who were unpredictable, were likely to be equated with the devil, who was believed to act in the fashion of a cunning warmonger, but *worse*. Unlike the warmonger, the anti-Christ is not an external threat: his menace nestles itself in the ‘heart’ of society and operates with the sole intention to destroy it from within. The Christian dichotomy of good and bad was central in Byzantine thinking. Authors had strong opinions on what makes or breaks a secular leader. Deceased emperors were easy targets and writers were unchallenged victors in a game of uneven means, as they got to determine the ‘fate’ of a silenced ruler, defeated by something as painstakingly crude as his own mortality: *woe to the vanquished*.

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