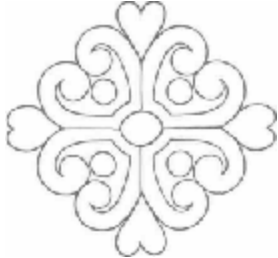


ROMILLYJENKINS

**Byzantium
The Imperial
Centuries
AD 610-1071**



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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE¹

BASIL II
(continued)

We left the great Emperor Basil n at what seemed to be the nadir of his fortunes, yet, owing to his courage and determination inspired no less by bad than by good qualities, poised to begin the ascent which should lead *him* to the summit of human grandeur never ascended by any Roman emperor since Trajan, or ever to be ascended again. We left him encompassed by a sea of misfortunes and menaces. And it is impossible to withhold our admiration for the presence of mind, the coolness, the statesmanship and the sheer dogged obstinacy with which he made his way to shore.²

Nothing could better illustrate the unquenchable spirit and vigour of the young emperor than his conduct in the autumn of 989. As soon as **Bardas Phocas** was dead, and while **Sclerus** was still in arms, he dispatched a powerful force under John of **Chaldia** to punish the Georgian princes who had aided the chief rebel. David, the prince of **Tao** in South Georgia, who in 978, while he was aiding the then loyal Bardas, had been granted temporary possession of the Roman territories north of Lake Van, had continued to support Bardas when the latter had himself revolted in 987. He was now to make atonement. Basil's terms, accepted by David in 990, were characteristically **farsighted**. David might retain the lands ceded to him in 978, and be invested with the high imperial title of **'curopalate'**; but at his death, all his lands, including his native Tao, were to fall to the Byzantine crown. By this politic settlement Byzantium was assured of her

BASIL II (CONTINUED)

title to all, and much more than all, her former domains on her north-eastern frontier.

At the end of the same year, 990, Basil embarked on his second Bulgarian campaign, which occupied him almost without intermission until 995. In 991 he restored the position at **Thessalonica** by the recapture of **Berea**; and then began a systematic pacification of the enemy's territory. Details are wholly lacking; yet there is reason to think that he devoted special attention to establishing a firm hold on the area about **Serdica**, the importance of which was to be demonstrated during the years 998-1003: that is to say, he embarked with better success on the strategy that had failed through indiscipline in 986. A vivid impression of his general plan is conveyed by a brief passage of **Yahya of Antioch**:

During four years [i.e. 991-5] Basil made war on the Bulgarians and invaded their country. In winter time he marched upon the most remote provinces in the Bulgarian territory, assailed their inhabitants and took them prisoner. During this time he stormed a number of fortresses, retaining some and destroying others which he thought he had not means to hold.

It was in these years that Basil himself developed from the inexperienced youth who had fled from Trajan's Gate into the wary and ruthless slayer of the **Bulgars**; and perfected that scheme of warfare which made him invincible whenever he took the field. This scheme was the annihilating progress through a specific area

by an overwhelming force, perfectly equipped and perfectly disciplined, which could be neither openly encountered nor surprised. Such a method of warfare called not so much for brilliant generalship as for meticulous organisation: and here Basil was in his element. His exactitude and attention to detail were phenomenal. Nothing more was needed. His soldiers grumbled to his face at his minute punctilio; but he blandly assured them that by such means, and by such alone, could they hope to return safe to their families and homesteads. One more lesson of cardinal importance he had **learned**: that for a legitimate emperor supreme command in the field was essential. Here **Nicephorus II** and John **Zimiskes** were the models. It was all very well for a **Leo VI** or a **Constantine VII** to sit at home, writing encyclopedias, composing prayers and declaiming sermons. The intervening thirty years had shown that only the commander-in-chief was master. And this Basil

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determined to be. He may probably not have known that the word 'emperor' means '**commander-in-chief**'. But he had discovered it by painful experience.

At the same time Basil was busily engaged in strengthening his position in Bulgaria's rear by diplomatic means. In March 992 a treaty, long in preparation, was concluded with Venice, whereby the tolls payable on Venetian cargoes trading with the empire, and the method of their exaction, were regulated on terms highly favourable to the republic. Venice, for her part, undertook police and carrying duties for Byzantium in the Adriatic. In the same year, while still encamped in Bulgaria, Basil negotiated an agreement with the Serbs, which probably had the effect of drawing to his side John Vladimir, the powerful ruler of the Serbian principality of **Dioclea**.

The progress of these necessarily protracted operations was interrupted during the winter of 994-5, when they were still far short of completion. A disaster on the Syrian frontier compelled the emperor to proceed thither in person. Since 992 the **Hamdanid** emir of **Aleppo**, a Byzantine protectorate, had been under pressure from the encroaching power of the Egyptian **Fatimid** Caliph **Aziz**. The emir appealed to Basil, who in 994 sent reinforcements to **Antioch**, with instructions to its governor to intervene. The

governor, Michael **Vourtzes**, was old and incompetent. He advanced languidly to the **Orontes**. The Fatimid commander, a Turk called **Manjutekin**, hurried westwards from **Aleppo** to meet him. On 15 September he forced the ford of the Orontes, turned the Byzantine position and routed the Roman army with great slaughter. Vourtzes fled back to Antioch. The emir of Aleppo dispatched a second appeal to Basil, who was wintering in Bulgaria. The emperor was quick to see the danger, which now menaced Antioch itself. He gathered some levies, which included newly recruited Bulgarians, and, travelling by forced marches, crossed his empire from west to east, a distance of some six hundred miles, in twenty-six days. At the end of April 995 he appeared unannounced beneath the walls of Aleppo, at the head of seventeen thousand men. At the mere report of his presence Manjutekin threw up the siege of Aleppo and retreated in haste to Damascus. Basil received the homage and thanks of Aleppo; then, turning south, sacked **Rafaniya** and **Emesa**, and penetrated as far as Tripoli, burning and pillaging as he went. On his return he garrisoned **Tortosa**, and, after appointing **Damian Dalassenus** to govern **Antioch**,

with instructions to continue the policy of annual demonstrations in force, made his way back to Constantinople. In less than six months the eastern situation was restored.

His homeward journey could be taken more leisurely; and he was able for the first time to see for himself the vast encroachments which during the past century the **Anatolian** aristocracy had made on the lands of the village communes and on the estates of the crown. **Eustathius Maleinus**, the old rebel, on whose estate **Bardas Phocas** had set up his standard in 986, and whose properties spread mile after mile over the provinces of **Charsianon** and **Cappadocia**, received his sovereign much in the style of a powerful independent prince. Basil saw, as his predecessors had seen, that while this immense and growing influence was wielded by military magnates jealous of, and hostile to, the crown, the legitimate emperor could never be master of his own soldiers and his own revenues. But where Basil differed from his predecessors was in his ability to apply a practical remedy. He was now the head of the strongest military force in Christendom; and his remedy was soon forthcoming. On 1 January 996 was promul-

gated a comprehensive law for the repression of landed estates. This celebrated edict combines a searching demand for titles to landed properties which is reminiscent of *Quo Wananto* with a ban on the alienation of estates to the church which is reminiscent of *Mortmain*. As the law then stood (the law of *Romanus i*), forty years of undisputed tenure were required to establish rights of ownership and disposal. But it was easy enough for a powerful proprietor, whether by bribery or brute force, to suppress any claims for restitution during the period of suspense. The provision was openly derided; and estates held by no legal title whatever were handed on from father to son as though they had been the real properties of the testators. This provision was now repealed. Estates which had been held, and could by properly authenticated documents be shown to have been held, during seventy-five years or more, were confirmed on the possessors. The rest were to be handed back, without compensation, to the original proprietors. But for crown lands seized and held through bribery of government inspectors, no time limit less than one thousand years was to be valid, and the proprietor was required, with grim humour, to cite a title dating from the reign of Caesar Augustus.

Documents emanating from the treasury and purporting to make grants of such land in the imperial name were revoked. In particular, a demand was made for the revision of all deeds of grant issued between the years 976 and 985 in the name of the chamberlain Basil the Eunuch. These were submitted to the personal scrutiny of the sovereign: and all which were not accorded his 'endorsement', written in his own hand, were declared invalid.

The effects of this radical enactment were felt even before its formal promulgation. *Maleinus* was summarily expropriated and imprisoned for life. The estates of the *Phocas* family were drastically curtailed. The grasping *protovestiary Philocales* was evicted and humbled to the status of a peasant. The *Mousele* family was reduced to beggary. These were examples *in terrorem*: 'so that', as the emperor bluntly expressed it, 'the powerful may take note of it, and not leave this sort of inheritance to their children'. The law was thereafter enforced for thirty years with unceasing rigour; and all the great properties, whether military, civil or ecclesiastical, suffered substantial diminution if not wholesale extinction. Yet even this was insufficient. Eight years later (1003-4) the terrible

emperor imposed a yet more crushing burden on the estates of the 'powerful'. The groups or communes of villages were assessed at an annual sum which all the proprietors were jointly held liable for subscribing. This system had borne harshly on the 'poor', and Basil determined to relieve them. The *allelengyon* (as it was called) now became the sole responsibility of the 'powerful' land-owner: that is to say, that, when the sum of taxes on a provincial commune was found to be deficient, owing to the failure or desertion of a peasant-landowner, this deficit was no longer chargeable on his peasant fellow-proprietors, but on any great land-owner who had bought up property in the district. This *fmal* blow fell most heavily on the church properties, which had fewer resources to meet it. The 'ministers of God', who, says the chronicler, 'were reduced to the extreme of penury', urged the Patriarch *Sergius* to repeated protests (1004, 1019); but these were dismissed with *contempt*.³

Basil remained at home during the unusually long period of two years and a half (January 996 -midsummer 998). The wide application of his land law demanded his presence: for his *draconian* measures provoked serious disaffection. Ecclesiastical and diplomatic affairs of grave import also claimed his attention. In 996, after the ecumenical patriarchate had been four years vacant, he appointed to the see a layman, the well-known physician *Sisinius*, and set him to work towards a rupture with the papacy. At almost the same time a yet bolder design occurred to him: of placing a Greek prelate on the throne of *St Peter*. Bishop John *Philagathus*, a Greek-speaking native of Calabria and a *protege* of the

late empress of the west, *Theophano*, was sent to Constantinople in the summer of 996 to negotiate the betrothal of Basil's niece *Zoe* to the young Emperor *Otto m*. The tenor of these negotiations is unknown; but the consequence is notorious. On his return to Italy early in 997, *Philagathus*, trusting to the anti-German reaction in Rome fostered by the patrician *Crescentius*, allowed himself to be chosen anti-pope in opposition to the German *Gregory v*, the cousin and nominee of *Otto* himself. The manoeuvre miscarried disastrously. After a short term of ineffectual presidency, the upstart was seized by the Ottomans, horribly mutilated and thrown into prison (998). Thereafter, negotiations between Basil and *Otto*, though not entirely suspended, were in-

decisive during three years.

Meanwhile, Basil's withdrawal from the west in 995 had led to a dangerous revival of the power of the Bulgarian Samuel. In 996 he ambushed and killed the governor of **Thessalonica**, Gregory **Taronites**, and took prisoner successively Gregory's son **Ashot** and his *remplacant* **John of Chaldia**. Samuel then swept south into the defenceless province of Hellas, and ravaged it down to the Isthmus of Corinth. Basil, **pre-occupied** at home, could not intervene. But he sent to Thessalonica, which still held out, the ablest and most fortunate of his marshals, **Nicephorus Uranus**, who in 997 encountered the returning **Bulgars** on the river **Spercheius**, and inflicted on them a bloody defeat. Samuel himself was wounded, and barely escaped. Uranus seized the opportunity to advance into the centre of Bulgaria; and such was the completeness of his victory that during a progress of three months he met no opposition. From 997 until 1001 Samuel's arms were not seen in eastern Bulgaria or Macedonia. Indeed, he seems for a moment to have thought of submission. But events of the same year caused him to think again. 4

In 997 died the Croat princeling **Stephen Drzhislav**, to whom the Byzantine government had granted the title of king and entrusted the protection of their province of **Dalmatia**. His death inspired Samuel with the grand design of carving out a fresh and unassailable empire in the west. From this time may be dated the truly imperial policy of Samuel. He proclaimed himself tsar. He seized and garrisoned **Dyrrhachium**. He invaded **Dioclea** and took prisoner its prince, John Vladimir, whom he married to his daughter. He advanced up **Dalmatia**, where, though its maritime cities repulsed him, he was soon master of the hinterland, hitherto under Croat protection. He then turned north-eastwards into Bosnia; and in or about the year 1000 he set the seal on his triumph by concluding a marriage alliance between his son and heir **Gabriel Radomir** and a daughter of King Stephen of Hungary.

His power in the west of the peninsula was now enormous. But Basil was more than a match for him. The emperor's first counter-stroke was the transfer of the protectorate over Dalmatia from the feeble successors of **Drzhislav** to Venice. The doge's eldest son, **John Urseolo**, hastened to Constantinople (997-8), and the bargain was soon struck. John returned to Venice with the promise of a wife from the imperial house; and in 1000 the doge him-

self, in a splendid progress down the Adriatic, received the grateful homage of his new protectorate. Meanwhile Samuel had virtually abandoned his territories east of a line from Vidin through Serdica to Vodena, and Basil was not slow to take advantage of the respite. When Samuel returned eastwards in 1001, it was too late.

Basil's strategy in the Bulgarian war from 998 to 1003 is clear enough. It was a steady progress outwards from the centre, each advance being secured by the garrisoning of strong points along the route. Philippopolis was first made into a strong base camp, with a permanent governor. Next, the forts about Serdica must be occupied, for they commanded the routes north-westward to Vidin and the Danube, and south-westward to Skoplje and Ochrida. If the centre were firmly held, each of these routes could be pursued in turn. A chain of Byzantine garrisons on the Danube would prevent the crossing of any reinforcements from Hungary or Patzinacia, a danger always present to imperial governments of that time. An advance on Skoplje would menace any Bulgarian thrust south-eastwards, and would concentrate Bulgarian defences on the threatened capital at Ochrida. Basil took the field in the summer of 998, and had carried out the first part of his programme, the reduction of fortresses about Serdica, by the following spring. In 999 he was urgently recalled to the Syrian frontier, in circumstances precisely similar to those of 995. But this time he could safely leave western operations in the hands of his marshals. In 1000 Xiphias and Theodorocanus overran the Dobrudja, and established the Byzantine arms firmly on the lower Danube. They returned without loss.

In July 998 the energetic governor of Antioch, Dalassenus, was accidentally slain during a campaign against Apamea. His troops at once broke, and were massacred. Basil saw that it would be necessary to repeat the lesson administered four years before. He arrived in Syria in September 999, with the invincible Russian troops of his household, and during three months spread devastation far and wide, though once again he had to fall back before the impregnable defences of Tripoli. He appointed Nicephorus Uranus to succeed Dalassenus at Antioch, and in January 1000 went into winter quarters at Tarsus.

But he had other work to do in the east and this was the time to do it. In April, as he lay at Tarsus, came news, not unexpected by

him, of the murder on Easter Day of the **curopalate** David, prince of **Tao**, whose rich legacy must now be occupied in force. Without delay Basil, at the head of his army, pushed north-eastwards through **Melitene** and **Hanzit** and **Erez**, settling local affairs by the way. At **Hafjij**, a fortress on the south bank of the **Phasis** river, the Georgian and Armenian potentates were gathered to receive him. A bloody encounter between the emperor's Russians and the Iberian levies, which may have been accidental but was certainly impressive, preceded the assize. The chief of the despots to be reckoned with was **Bagrat**, King of **Abasgia** and Prince of **Karthli**, whose southern frontier marched with that of **Tao**, now annexed to the empire. He was given the title of 'curopalate' in succession to his deceased cousin, and his borders were carefully defined and agreed upon. The assize, which included a tentative towards the annexation of **Vaspurakan**, was followed by a progress through the recovered territories north of Lake Van, and thence into the heart of the new province of **Tao** itself. Late in the year Basil returned by way of **Theodosiupolis** to Constantinople. In the

5

following year, 1001, the **Fatimid** caliphate signed a ten years' truce with the empire. Matters being thus satisfactorily settled in the east, the emperor

at once resumed his interrupted campaign in Bulgaria. In the spring and autumn of 1001 he made two short but fruitful forays into the southern area, capturing **Berea** and **Serbia** in the first, and rooting out Bulgarian garrisons from **Thessaly** in the second. Samuel, now **effectually** roused by the Byzantine menace, advanced eastwards and made an attempt to recapture **Serbia**, but was repulsed. Late in the year Basil returned to Constantinople, to renew and this time to complete the negotiations for the marriage of his niece with the western emperor. But here, once again, his western diplomacy miscarried. The princess, magnificently escorted, set out for Italy in January 1002, only to learn on her arrival at **Bari** that her betrothed, in the flower of his 'sweet years', had passed away.⁶

We have more than once referred to this interesting dynastic plan of Basil **n**: and it calls for more than a passing mention. We have to look on it in connexion with the whole series of similar **tentatives** which were made in the period under review, with the object of re-uniting east and west, and doing away with the

anomalous - nay, blasphemous - condition entailed by two separate empires. Constantine vi and Charlemagne's daughter; Charlemagne himself and Irene; Basil I's son and Lewis n's daughter; Lewis m and Anna; Romanus n and Bertha; Romanus n and Hedwig of Bavaria; Otto n and Theophano: these were the most important of the matches projected or consummated, always with the same end in view. But none of them could compare in promise or importance with the match projected by Basil n. Let us consider the circumstances. Of the two legitimate emperors at Constantinople, Basil was unmarried, and his brother Constantine had three daughters, of whom one, the Princess Zoe, now offered, was eminently nubile. She was twenty-three years old. She was the undoubted heiress of the line of Basil the Macedonian; and she was *porphyrogenita*. Her bridegroom himself, aged twenty-one, was no less undoubted emperor of the west, being third in the direct line from Otto the Great. But he was more than this. His mother Theophano was also a Byzantine princess, in - as I believe - the direct line of Basil the Macedonian: and, if so, the betrothed couple were first cousins. Young Otto m had been brought up by his mother in the traditions of Byzantine rather than western imperialism. He was a Roman rather than a German emperor: crowned by the pope of Rome and ruling in the Eternal City. If he and his cousin had had male issue (as seemed highly probable), what pretender in east or west could have stood for a moment against such unquestionable and enormous authority? Meanwhile the bride's uncle, Basil, was rapidly reducing to Roman authority the territory that lay between the Euxine and the Adriatic; while Otto himself was master of Germany and, in all but name, of the whole of Italy besides. A son born to the young couple would have been in his early twenties when his great-uncle and grandfather died (1025, 1028): and would have inherited a dominion extending unbroken from Armenia to the Gulf of Lyons, from the confines of Persia to the confines of France. Many believe that the cleavage between the Greek and Roman worlds was already far too wide to be bridged by any mere dynastic fusion: and I do not say that they are wrong. What I do wish to bring out is the implications of such a match as they presented themselves to Basil n. It was a grand conception: and it seemed a stroke of Providence itself that it was not given a chance to be fulfilled. Basil had now tried to put a Greek pope in the

chair of **St Peter**, and a Greek princess, his own heir, on the throne of the west. Both **tentatives** had failed. Only the third alternative, that of conquest, remained: and if he had lived till 78 instead of 68, he would have tried this too, and very probably succeeded.

The year **1000** Basil devoted to extending the work of his marshals on the Danube. He hastened to the north-west, and, probably in March or April, laid siege to **Vidin**. The town, defended strongly by art and nature, resisted for eight months. Samuel tried to relieve it by a destructive raid on **Adrianople**, far in the emperor's rear. Basil was not to be deflected; and at last the fortress surrendered. Samuel was now forced to make a serious attempt to stem the tide of Byzantine invasion. In the spring of 1003 Basil advanced to the **Vardar** and menaced Skoplje. The Bulgarians lay in strength on the opposite bank of the swollen river. Samuel repeated the blunder which had cost him the battle at the **Spercheius** six years before. He trusted too much to the natural barrier, and kept slack guard. Basil forded the river by night, and massacred his army. ⁷ This was the turning-point in the war, and even Samuel's allies saw that it was so. Nothing could now prevent the final and total victory of the Byzantine arms, however long it might be in coming; and the navy of Venice presented an insuperable barrier to Samuel's establishing an Adriatic power. In the summer of 1004 the grand **Veneto-Byzantine** alliance was confirmed by the marriage in Constantinople of John **Urseolo** with Basil's second cousin, Maria **Argyrou**, at which the imperial brothers acted as groomsmen. In the spring of 1005 the bridal pair returned in triumph to Venice; and in the same year **Dyrrhachium**, Samuel's all important outlet on the western sea, was surrendered by his own father-in-law to a Byzantine fleet.

The last sparks of Bulgarian resistance were not finally trampled out until 1019. This was partly due to the tenacious spirit of the Bulgarian people and to the natural strength of many of their fortresses, impervious to any siege which even Basil could mount against them; and partly to the fact that, now Samuel was incapable of serious resistance in the field, the occupation could be slower and more methodical, and more time be given to consolidating the revolutionary progress made both at home and abroad in the years 996-1004. For these reasons, we have almost no details, apart from scattered and unreliable hints, about the annual incursions into Bulgaria during the next decade. It is cer-

tain only that many or most of them were undertaken in winter time, when the flocks were down from the hills and the peasant at his fireside, and that they were accompanied by systematic destruction, pillage, and mass deportation. When the curtain rises again in 1014, the aspect of the war has changed, very much to Samuel's disadvantage. Northern and central Bulgaria were now firmly held; and Basil, in his gradual progress towards the heart of Samuel's dominion at **Ochrida**, had during successive campaigns entered Bulgaria from the south, by way of **Serres**, the pass of **Rupel** and the Long Plain, the '**Campulungu**', of the **Strumnitsa** valley, between the mountain barriers of **Ograzhden** and **Belashitsa**. The tsar, in this year, made a final and desperate effort to halt the ruinous advance. With fifteen thousand men he blocked the pass near **Kleidion**; and sent another force across the mountain to **Doiran**, in order to menace **Thessalonica**. Both manoeuvres failed. The diversionary force was cut to pieces by **Theophylact Botaneiates**, the governor of Thessalonica; while from the Long Plain Basil sent a detachment over the **Belashitsa**, which, on 29 July, fell suddenly on Samuel's rear. The tsar himself got clear to **Prilep**. His army fell, almost to a man, into Basil's hands. Then was committed the savage crime which has left a lasting stain on the memory of that great emperor. The number of the prisoners was fourteen thousand. Basil put out the eyes of ninety-nine in every hundred, leaving the hundredth wretch one eye to guide his fellows back to their prince. This fearful instance of severity has been received with scepticism by some writers in our own age; but nothing we know of Basil's character or of his conduct on similar occasions gives us any reason to doubt it. Basil was no lover of cruelty for cruelty's sake; but he was not a man to do things by halves, or to strike two blows where one would suffice. The punishment was inflicted, as always, with a politic end in view, and this end was achieved. The sight of his mutilated host as it stumbled towards him broke Samuel's heart. He fell down in a seizure, and died two days afterwards, on 6 October 1014.⁸

Thereafter the very name of Basil, the very report of his presence, were dreadful to his victims. On one occasion, a Byzantine detachment was cut off and surrounded. Basil called for volunteers and rode off to the rescue. At sight of the imperial standard the **Bulgars** raised a lamentable cry, 'Run, run, it is the Tsar!': and

they ran.

The end of the whole gigantic undertaking was now in sight. Sporadic and unorganised opposition was encountered from Samuel's son Gabriel **Radomir** (died 1016), and from his murderer John Vladislav (died 1018). Basil never relaxed. He was everywhere, mopping up resistance, storming and garrisoning fortresses, disposing of the royal and noble personages who fell into his hands, riveting the chains of Byzantine control and administration on one area after another. By 1019 nearly the whole of the vast domain was an integral part of the Byzantine empire. It was parcelled out into the three provinces of Bulgaria in the centre and **Sirmium** and **Paristrion** on the upper and lower Danube. These, as imperial provinces, were now entitled to the imperial philanthropy; and they were administered, especially in the collection of revenue, with a leniency demanded by their ravaged and ruinous condition. Serbia (**Dioclea**, **Rascia**, Bosnia) and Croatia were allowed to remain self-governing dependencies; but their proximity to the Byzantine provinces of **Dyrrhachium**, **Dalmatia** and Sirmium, as well as to the Adriatic power of Venice, rendered them powerless to harm. 9

Basil's ambitions were directed toward the west, which was the goal of that stupendous career; but during the past five years the unquiet state of affairs far to the north-east, on his Georgian borders, had disturbed the settlement of 1000, and led him in 1021 to undertake his third and last progress in the east. In 1014 died the **curopalate Bagrat** of **Abasgia**, and his son George at once broke through the agreement. With Armenian aid, he invaded and occupied **Tao** and **Phasiane**. Basil had no time to deal with him personally, though in 1016, as a preliminary step, he sent a naval force to occupy the **Chazar** ports in the rear, that is, to the north-west, of George's dominions. In 1021 the emperor's hands were free. He recovered Phasiane, and pushed on beyond the frontiers of Tao into inner Iberia. A drawn battle was fought near Lake **Palakatzio**; but after it George abandoned his gains in Tao and fled northwards into Abasgia. In the following year, though he was able to incite Basil's trusted marshal **Xiphias** to an abortive revolt in the emperor's rear, he was finally defeated in September near the **Phasis** river. Menaced both by land and sea, he left his infant son a hostage in Basil's hands, and retired, this time for good, beyond his frontier. Basil, as was his wont, improved the

occasion by making a wider settlement of the east. He compelled John **Sembat**, king of Armenia, as he had once compelled David of Tao, to bequeath his lands about **Ani** to the Byzantines, a legacy which fell to them in 1045. He then turned south and occupied the territory of **Vaspurakan**, to the east of Lake Van, whose ruler Sennacherib, alarmed by the first ripple of the swelling **Seljuk** inundation, had in the winter of 1021-2 ceded his lands to the empire.¹⁰

When Basil returned to his capital early in 1023, the Byzantine empire had, through the energy and resolution of one man, achieved a territorial extent combined with internal economic security which it had never known before and was never to know again. From Azerbaijan to the Adriatic the emperor was absolute master. In southern Italy a dangerous Lombard revolt, which broke out in 1017 and was rendered yet more dangerous by the adhesion of the earliest Norman invaders, had been crushed in a second *clades Cannensis* (1018) by the governor Basil **Boiannes**.¹¹ Four years later the same Normans, now prudently enrolled in the imperial service, repulsed from Byzantine territory the last of the Saxon emperors, Henry **n**. At home the land-holding aristocracy, though seething with resentment, was held powerless in an iron grip; and the old system of 'free' peasant communes and soldiers' estates, relieved of the crushing burdens of taxation which had ruined them in the past, were enjoying a halcyon interlude of

prosperity and devotion to the central government. Moreover, the **sohd** strength of the empire had, as was natural, enormously enhanced its political influence beyond its borders, of which the most spectacular symptom was the firm establishment of the imperial religion and culture in Christian Russia. The achievement was so splendid and astonishing that it demands a brief review of the circumstances which made it possible.

Of all the emperors of Byzantium Basil **n**, in his own person, came nearest to the imperial ideal of boundless power and boundless providence. He seemed to have been sent by Heaven to show that, in a set of highly exceptional circumstances, it was humanly possible to put the age-old theory into practice. He was supreme, exclusive **pantocrat**; over the army, over the civil administration, over the church. His fiat seemed to be invested with a

godlike omnipotence and inexorability. At his nod, Russians and Slavs threw back his enemies in South Italy: Armenians fought on the Danube: Bulgarians were settled in **Vaspurakan**. His treatment of the church is especially worthy of notice, in view of a modern tendency to misconceive the nature and extent of its authority at Byzantium-

It is sometimes said - very erroneously - that emperor and patriarch governed the bodies and souls of men in an amicable **dyarchy**: and scholars have pointed to the **definition** on these lines put out in 879 by **Photius**, and reaffirmed to John **Zimiskes** by **Polyeuctus**. But they fail to observe the exceptional circumstances in which these declarations were made by the spiritual, and acquiesced in by the secular, authority. In 879 the Emperor Basil I was nearly out of his mind and fit for nothing; and in 969 John Zimiskes had usurped through murder an empire in which his own position was most insecure. The Patriarch **Cerularius**, as we shall see, vindicated his independence in face of the feeble Emperors **Constantine ix** and Michael **vi**: but no sooner had the strong Emperor Isaac I mounted the throne than he was dismissed without ceremony. The emperor chose his patriarch. The emperor could and often did dismiss him. The emperor defined dogma either directly or else by the simple expedient of refusing to allow the promulgation of any dogma he disliked. 'Amicable dyarchy' seems in the circumstances a misnomer: and, as we have repeatedly emphasised, in the political theory of the Byzantine imperial constitution the patriarch was no more than the head of a **department** of state.

Now to apply this principle to the strongest of emperors, Basil **n**. Basil appointed three patriarchs of Constantinople, of whom one was a layman and the other two were ciphers. They were wholly subservient to his policies, especially where these concerned his relations with the west. Before the first and second of these appointments he allowed the see to remain vacant during a total of more than seven years, for no better reason than that he was absent from the capital and could not, or would not, make time to nominate. He rusticated the patriarch of **Antioch** (989) and seven years later deposed him, nominating as his successor a creature of his own. He detained the patriarch of Jerusalem at Constantinople from the year 1000 until his **death** in 1004. His ambition, we have seen, may not have stopped short of appointing

a Greek pope of Rome. His ecclesiastical settlement of conquered Bulgaria made of it an archbishopric, the appointment to which was in the emperor's own personal gift, without reference to the patriarch of Constantinople. His legislation bore as hardly on church as on lay property, and he was deaf to all remonstrance against it. There was, plainly, no room for a **Polyeuctus** or **Cerularius** in the economy of this sovereign autocrat.¹² In his diplomacy he was not less independent and despotic. His dynastic marriage of a **porphyrogenita** to Vladimir of Russia in 989 has often been cited as a breach with tradition, committed under duress; but the marriage of Maria **Argyrou** to John **Urseolo** and the betrothal of the **porphyrogenita Zoe** to Otto **m** were no different in principle. Of the Byzantine tradition of learning and education, which his own ancestors had done so much to foster, he was openly contemptuous. To the end of his life he spoke and wrote, plainly and forcibly indeed, but without the smallest regard to grace or propriety. Extravagant ceremonies and pageants he disliked in themselves and because they cost money. His financial administration was not the least brilliant of his achievements : though he spent half a century in continual and costly warfare, and though he reduced the taxes on all the poorer estates in his realm, he left at his death no less than fifteen millions **t>fgold** pieces, with other treasures worth many times more than this. Some money he did spend on architecture. When the dome of **St Sophia** fell down, he put it up again; but this was from political rather than from aesthetic or pious motives. In these departments, as in all others, his word was absolute. The unity of the world under the elect of Christ, which the sovereigns of the ninth and tenth centuries had postulated, and for which they had striven, was finally consummated in the person of their prodigious offspring.

Yet the very qualities required to achieve this consummation - the unswerving resolution of a dedicated ruler, the strategic grasp of a commander-in-chief united to the meticulous precision of a drill-sergeant, the practical talent and farsightedness of a statesman, the laborious fidelity of an administrator, above all, perhaps, the physical toughness and endurance of a body insensible to fatigue and privation - were so various that they could never again be united in a single frame. The flaw in the noble structure

built by Basil, as in many of the structures of Byzantine architecture, was that it was built for the day without regard to the morrow. The internal forces which threatened disruption were held in check by his arm alone. The military aristocrats he could humble by economic oppression; and he could and did submit their rash and hot-headed methods of warfare to the iron discipline of his imperial military machine. But even he could not do without them. If he had found it as easy to recruit capable general officers from the ranks as to recruit capable clerks for administration, he would have dispensed with the services of the military even more readily than he did with those of the bureaucratic grandees. But this was impossible; and throughout his reign **Dalasseni, Melissenii, Argyri, Comneni**, even **Phocae**, are found in high command. Abroad, Normans and **Seljuks** were at his death already on the western and eastern borders of his empire. The inevitable result of his being succeeded by his brother and his nieces must have been clear to eyes far less sharp than his. Yet he 'put out no roots for the throne'. He probably never married, and certainly left no heirs of his body. He was and remained an unique phenomenon.

Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia had not sated that thirst for conquest. In 1025 he sent his marshal **Boiannes** into Sicily, to prepare his way. He was about to follow in person; but, on 15 December, in his sixty-ninth year, he died.

BYZANTIUM: THE IMPERIAL CENTURIES

NOTES

¹ The contents of chapter 23 are, with a few slight alterations, reproduced from *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4 (new edition), by kind permission of the Cambridge University Press.

² The Byzantine sources for the second part of Basil's reign are meagre.

Scylitzes* version is confused, and **Psellus** scarcely mentions external

affairs. The facts are mostly to be found in **Gustav Schlumberger, L'epopee**

byzantine a la fin du dixieme siecle, Part II, ***Basile II le tueur de Bulgares***

(Paris, 1900).

3 Ostrogorsky, 253-4; Brehier, 217-8; **Vasiliev**, 347-9.

4 Cedrenus, 449-50; Ostrogorsky, 256.

5 Cedrenus, 447; Brehier, 228-9.

6 Brehier, 229.

7 Cedrenus, 454-5.

^ Cedrenus, 457-9.

9 Ostrogorsky, 257.

10 Brehier, 233-4-

" Brehier, 236-7.

12 Brehier, 218-20; Ostrogorsky, 258.