2011

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Byzantine Emperors and Old Testament Kings:
Contextualizing the Paris Psalter as a Product of Ninth and Tenth Century Byzantine Imperial Ideology

Kelsey M. Eldridge
**Introduction**

The Paris Psalter is an outlier amongst Byzantine manuscripts due to its exceptional style and size. At 36 centimeters in height, it is larger than all but one known illuminated Psalter.¹ The Psalter’s fourteen full-page illuminations contain scenes from a cycle of the life of David and the Odes. Stylistically, the Psalter’s illuminations depict biblical themes in a classicized manner, using Graeco-Roman mythical motifs and compositions. Because of its classical style and unique attributes, the Paris Psalter eludes easy classification. Consequently, although it has been widely studied, no exact date of origin has yet been established to the Psalter. Even efforts at determining a general point of origin have long been complicated by the Psalter’s atypical style. Until Hugo Buchthal’s 1938 study of the manuscript, it had long been proposed that the Psalter’s miniatures might have been made more than two hundred years prior to its original binding.² The stylistic differences between the Paris Psalter and the works that pre and post-date it, are now attributed to its tenth century origin, during the period called the “Macedonian Renaissance.”

The Macedonian Renaissance corresponds to the period of the Macedonian Dynasty’s rule of the Byzantine Empire. Although scholars are not in agreement over the exact scope or even existence of the Macedonian Renaissance, it is evident that the period saw a revival of classical motifs and learning and an emphasis on the imitation of earlier models. This renewed interest in Byzantium’s classical heritage was centered within the court and can arguably be seen as a result of prevailing court culture and ideology. At the same time however, the Byzantine state also witnessed an upsurge in the presence of Old Testament influences at the religious and political levels.

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This paper will examine how various factors within the imperial court led to a renewed interest in classical and Old Testament models, and how this new interest manifested during the tenth century. Specifically, the goal of this study lies in how a consideration of historical circumstances surrounding the Paris Psalter can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the manuscript. The intent of this paper is not to carry out an iconographical study of the Psalter’s miniatures or to prove the existence of the Macedonian Renaissance; it is instead meant to be a thorough examination of how contemporary religious and ideological factors influenced its production. Thus, a study of the Paris Psalter informed by contemporary Byzantine views on the Old Testament and classicism will provide a new perspective on the manuscript’s context, origin and nature.

An Introduction to the Paris Psalter

In addition to its large size, the Paris Psalter is also notable in respect to its style and miniatures. The Psalter is no longer in its original binding; a sixteenth-century Western binding now holds it together. It is not clear if it contains all of its original folios, but it is apparent that some of its miniatures have been trimmed at a date significantly later than that of its creation. The Psalter has fourteen full-page miniatures. Seven miniatures at the beginning of the manuscript depict the life of David, and the remaining seven are related to the text of the psalms. The Paris Psalter is an aristocratic Psalter. There are two types of illuminated Psalters, aristocratic and marginal. A marginal Psalter is defined as having small “marginal” illustrations around its text. An aristocratic Psalter is more difficult to define. It can almost be best described

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as anything that is not a marginal Psalter. As in the case of the Paris Psalter, the aristocratic type is mainly characterized by the presence of large, full-page illuminations.

The Paris Psalter contains a catena explaining its text. Not all aristocratic Psalters feature a catena, but it can be seen as linked to their function as luxury objects. In the Paris Psalter the catena accompanies the text, but it does not appear that the Psalter’s text, catena and miniatures were made in unison. The miniatures are irregular in size, which leads scholars to deduce that they were made prior to the text. Their size is irregular because portions of the images were changed so that they could fit with the Psalter’s text. Scholars disagree as to whether the miniatures were made shortly before the text of the Psalter or centuries before. In recent years it has become the accepted view that the miniatures are products of the same era as the text. It is not apparent how closely the miniatures preceded the text but it is unlikely that they were created more than a few years earlier than the text.

Previous Scholarship

Although a few relatively recent studies have been done on the topic of the Old Testament’s influence on imperial ideology in Byzantium, there is still a need for further research. The 2003 English translation of Gilbert Dagron’s 1998 text *Emperor and Priest: the Imperial Office in Byzantium* contains several chapters on how the Old Testament influenced Byzantine imperial ideology. Dagron’s analysis on Old Testament typology and the Davidic model of Kingship are particularly relevant to a study of the Paris Psalter. Several essays from the book *New Constantines*, a collection of papers published in 1998 and edited by Paul Magdalino, are significant to this project. Magdalino’s publication includes detailed papers on...

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4 Lowden “Observations,” 245.
the Macedonian rulers and their place within the tradition of Byzantium and tenth century imperial ideology. The most recent text available to me was Paul Magdalino and Robert S. Nelson’s *Old Testament in Byzantium*, published in 2010. The papers within the book begin where Dagron took off, and pay particular attention to the ways in which Old Testament influence permeated different spheres of Byzantine culture. In the introduction to the text, Magdalino calls for further scholarship in tracing the Old Testament influence in art objects such as the Paris Psalter. On the subject of the Paris Psalter, Hugo Buchthal’s 1938 study, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter: Study in Middle Byzantine Painting* remains the only significant, detailed work on the Psalter. Buchthal’s text features outstanding analyses of each of the manuscripts miniatures and their models. Buchthal also makes an attempt to contextualize the Psalter, arguing that it may have been a gift from Constantine VII for his son Romanos II.

**Basil I and the Emergence of the Macedonian Dynasty**

Emperor Basil I’s rise to power provides a backdrop against which many of the Macedonian Dynasty’s prevailing ideologies took shape. His humble beginnings and trajectory of ascent to the throne and are arguably at the core of the emphasis on Old Testament views of kingship that came to typify Basil and his successors. Although he was technically of Armenian descent, Basil acquired the moniker “the Macedonian” because Armenia was in the theme of Macedonia at the time of Basil’s birth around the year 811.⁶ Basil’s parents were relatively well-off peasants who were forcibly brought to Bulgaria in 813 under the Bulgar Kahn Krum.⁷ Basil

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escaped from Bulgaria in 836 along with a group of other Byzantine refugees.\textsuperscript{8} After fleeing Bulgaria, Basil relocated to Constantinople. Using his geniality and formidable physical strength, Basil was able to quickly build himself a career.\textsuperscript{9} Basil was introduced to the emperor Michael III by a relative of the empress Theodora, and the two became close companions.\textsuperscript{10}

As a favorite acquaintance of the emperor, Basil’s political career took off rapidly and fortuitously. Michael III originally hired Basil to be groom of the imperial stables, but he quickly rose through the ranks.\textsuperscript{11} By 866, Basil was Michael III’s grand chamberlain and a member of the emperor’s inner circle. That year, Basil’s status rose once again when the emperor’s longstanding mistress Eudocia Ingerina became pregnant.\textsuperscript{12} So that his heir would not be born into wedlock and in order to avoid divorcing the Empress, Michael forced Basil to divorce his wife and marry Eudocia.\textsuperscript{13}\textsuperscript{14} Several months later, Michael ordered Basil to kill Bardas, the emperor’s Caesar and chief political rival.\textsuperscript{15} Michael subsequently adopted Basil, making the Macedonian, who was thirty years his senior, junior emperor. Shortly thereafter, Eudocia gave birth to Michael’s son, and adoptive grandson, who received the imperial name Leo.\textsuperscript{16} It was not long after the birth of Leo that Michael began to lose his enthusiasm for Basil. Though formerly unbounded with praise and reward for the Macedonian, the emperor’s attitude towards Basil began to sour. Michael made sure that Basil was aware of his status within the court and that he

\textsuperscript{8} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 455.
\textsuperscript{9} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 455.
\textsuperscript{10} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 455.
\textsuperscript{11} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 455.
\textsuperscript{12} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 453.
\textsuperscript{13} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 453.
\textsuperscript{14} Some historians do argue that Leo VI may have actually been Basil’s natural born son, for a discussion of this, see also: Shaun Tougher, \textit{The Reign of Leo VI (886-912): Politics and People}, (Leiden: Brill, 1997).
\textsuperscript{15} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 453.
\textsuperscript{16} Treadgold, \textit{History of the Byzantine State and Society}, 453.
not presume upon anything. Then, following a banquet on the evening of 23 September 816, Basil had Michael murdered in his bedchamber.

As the new emperor of Byzantium, Basil made quick work of reversing the unfavorable legacies of Michael III’s reign. Because of his status as junior emperor, Basil became emperor immediately upon Michael’s death. Although he was a peasant by birth and had spent much of his life outside of Constantinople, Basil had immense respect for Graeco-Roman heritage and civilization and the tradition of Roman law. Basil modeled his role as a statesman in the image of the Roman imperial ideal. In his nineteen years of rule, Basil’s greatest achievement was perhaps his revision of the Justinianic law books. Following Basil’s death, the emperor was succeeded by his son Leo who would go on to become Leo VI. Under Leo VI, power in the Byzantine state was centralized, placing total power in the hands of the emperor and the imperial bureaucracy. When Leo died in the spring of 912, his son Constantine was only six years old. Because of Constantine’s youth a series of regents were appointed to rule in his place until the young emperor came of age. However, the empire’s naval commander Romanos Lecapenus impeded Constantine’s ascent to the throne. Romanos used his considerable influence to usurp power from Constantine, and ruled the Byzantine Empire from 920 until 944. By the time he finally attained power in 944, Constantine VII was thirty-nine years old and had spent the better part of his life compiling histories and books on governing the Byzantine Empire. In a

discussion of the Paris Psalter and other works attributed to the Macedonian Renaissance, the lives and circumstances surrounding the first three members of the Macedonian Dynasty are of great significance.

**Imperial Ideology and the Influence of the Old Testament in Byzantium**

The influence of the Old Testament on imperial ideology was evident throughout the history of the Byzantine Empire. This influence is observable through a consideration of the role of the Byzantine emperor. In his book *Emperor and Priest*, Gilbert Dagron describes the unique status of the Byzantine emperor as model for his empire in both the religious and political realms. In respect to this duality of responsibility Dagron writes that,

“This emperor with a mission to convert and to fulfill the prophecies had then to be recognized as possessing the special priesthood, outside the strictly liturgical domain, which had been that of the mysterious Melchizdek of Genesis, or of Saul, David and Solomon, predecessors of the basileis at the head of a chosen people.”

In his association between the attributes of the Byzantine emperor (basileis) and the Kings of the Old Testament, Dagron argues that the emperor could be thought of within the tradition of Old Testament kingship. This association is elucidated by Dagron’s observation that in Byzantine Christianity the Old Testament was far more influential than antiquity. He states that this idea arose from the notion that because of the pagan Hellenistic kings of Antiquity, Constantine and his successors had been improperly Christianized.

The specific nature of the Byzantine Empire also played an important role in terms of the way the Old Testament and Judaic tradition influenced its political and religious spheres. It has

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been acknowledged that the location of the Empire may have had a significant impact on the ways in which Old Testament influence became manifest. Physically, Byzantium was in closer proximity to the holy land than most of the Christianized world.\textsuperscript{28} Likewise, the Byzantine Empire was nearest to the location where the most highly structured and traditional Jewish communities survived, thus lending immediacy to their existence and traditions.\textsuperscript{29} As such, the Byzantines began to view themselves as the new chosen people and saw Byzantium as the new Israel.\textsuperscript{30} Byzantium could conceivably be seen as a New Jerusalem, because its founding was religiously motivated and Constantinople was intended to be the new Christian capital of the Roman Empire.

Constantinople’s primary function as a new Christian capital further relates to the level of significance the Old Testament attained in Byzantine Imperial Ideology. Constantinople was like Jerusalem in that it was a city in which monotheism was a dominant factor in nearly all aspects of life. In ancient Israel, the Old Testament was not merely a liturgical or symbolic text; it contained God’s exact instructions as to how a monotheistic religious nation should be led and maintained. It is for this reason that the canon of the Old Testament would have had a greater significance for the nature of the Byzantine Empire than that of the New.\textsuperscript{31} In this regard, Paul Magdalino states that the Old Testament took precedence over the New in Byzantium because, “for the culture and society of an earthly kingdom, the Old Testament was richer in tangible historical precedents.”\textsuperscript{32} Whereas the New Testament told of the life of Jesus and his promise of salvation, the Old Testament outlined how believers could model God’s heavenly kingdom on

\textsuperscript{28} Dagron, \textit{Emperor and Priest}, 4.
\textsuperscript{29} Dagron, \textit{Emperor and Priest}, 4.
\textsuperscript{31} Magdalino and Nelson, “Introduction,” 3.
\textsuperscript{32} Magdalino and Nelson, “Introduction,” 3.
earth. Furthermore, while the New Testament model guaranteed election to all followers Christianity regardless of nation, the Old Testament specifically elevated the Jews above all others. This conception of divine election would have been appealing to Byzantine emperors who saw themselves as leaders of God’s new chosen people.

Although the Old Testament had considerable influence in Byzantium, its interpretation was firmly within the Christian rather than Judaic tradition. This difference in interpretation can be attributed to the concept of typology. A Christian typological reading of the Old Testament sees the contents of the book as anticipating the gospel story of the New Testament. Stories, images, people and sacred objects that are found throughout the Old Testament are seen as “types” that prefigured elements from the life of Christ and the Incarnation. In describing typology in the Byzantine Empire Claudia Rapp declares that, “Typoi are thus, in a sense, the figures of Old Testament history who cast their long shadows into the historical time of here and now, where they are fully realized.” She further explains that typology is useful in that it can instantaneously convey an entire story along with an ethical lesson that elicits a moral response. Typological readings of the Old Testament are common throughout the history of Christianity but not to the extent that is seen in Byzantium. What is unique, is the way in which typology became entrenched into Byzantine Imperial Ideology. Old Testament types were major influences not only in the methods and approaches emperors used to govern, but also influenced how the emperor conceived of himself, his legacy and his role as basileis. This ideological phenomenon is particularly noticeable within the first hundred years of the Macedonian period.

The Impact of Old Testament Typology on the early Macedonian Dynasty

As founder of the Macedonian line, Basil I set much of the ideological tone for the first one hundred years of the dynasty. For the Macedonians, this tone consisted in part of an emphasis on Old Testament types used as models for kingship and emblems of the imperial office. During his rule as emperor, Basil was particularly attached to the prophet Elijah, who was a significant Old Testament figure. According to Dagron, this attachment may have been a result of the Christian belief that when Elijah reached the end of his days he did not die, but instead ascended alive to heaven. Dagron goes on to state, “This great Old Testament figure was therefore a fit prophet of accession and perhaps a sure guarantor of imperial apotheosis.” A miniature from the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris, gr. 510) shows Elijah presenting Basil with Constantine the Great’s labarum. It is not clear as to whether Paris gr. 510 was commissioned for or by Basil, but evidence suggests that it was made between the years 879 and 883, comfortably within Basil’s reign. Basil’s admiration for Elijah also came across through the emperor’s increased emphasis on the feast of Elijah (20 July), but most notable was Basil’s construction and consecration of the Nea Ekklesia in to honor, among others, the prophet.

Basil I’s Nea Ekklesia was a tangible testament to the importance the emperor placed on the Prophet Elijah and Old Testament types in general. The Nea Ekklesia, meaning “New

37 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 198.
38 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 198.
39 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 198.
41 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 193.
Church” was commissioned by Basil and built next to the imperial palace between 876 and 880. There are no longer any physical traces on the Nea’s existence, and much of what is known about it comes from Constantine VII’s Vita Basilii. The Nea Ekklesia was dedicated to five patrons, one of whom was the Prophet Elijah. Paul Magdalino’s analysis of the Nea describes it as the most ambitious church building erected in Constantinople since the sixth century. Magdalino also argues that in the context of the Nea, the word ‘new’ “implied imitation rather than innovation. It was a way of authenticating something new by giving it a traditional identity.” The notion of ascribing the Nea Ekklesia with a traditional identity is within the scope of Basil’s high regard for the past and tradition. Basil’s regard for the tradition of the Old Testament comes through by way of the relics contained within the Nea. Magdalino describes the Nea as having an “almost complete lack of ‘normal’ Christian relics.” The relics at the Nea were not ‘normal’, primarily because they were all associated with Old Testament figures or Constantine the Great. Among these relics were Elijah’s sheepskin cloak and the Rod of Moses. What is more, as Basil liked being compared to Solomon, he had a statue of the king buried in the Nea’s foundation. The nature of the Nea’s relics and the presence of the statue of Solomon underscore Basil’s emphasis on the Old Testament in both the religious and political spectrums.

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While he invited comparisons with King Solomon, Basil’s continuing ambition throughout his reign was that he be seen as a new King David. There are overarching similarities between the lives of Basil and David. Both David and Basil had humble origins yet found their way to the throne, and both were guilty of major sins. A now lost inscription on the wall of Basil’s Kainourgion palace read, “We thank Thee, O Word of God, that Thou hast raised our father from Davidic poverty and hast anointed him with the unction of Thy Holy Ghost.”51 Some scholars even go as far as to say that Basil’s extensive use of the Davidic model led to a near identification between the emperor and David.52 If Basil was to be the new David, then his son Leo was to become the new Solomon. In order to ensure that his son would obtain the wisdom of Solomon, Basil hired the Patriarch Photius to be Leo’s private tutor.53 Photius was the greatest living Byzantine scholar, and imparted his vast knowledge onto the emperor’s son. By ensuring that a Solomon would succeed his David, Basil further guaranteed that his legacy would be in line with that of the Old Testament king.

Following the typological example set by his father, Leo VI proved to be as convincing an image of Solomon as Basil was of David. Overall, Leo’s reign as Emperor was successful because he was able to effectively handle the challenges and reverses he encountered, such as the problem of the advancing Arab army.54 Perhaps Leo’s greatest successes were his legislative achievements. He is thought to have made the greatest contribution to Byzantine law since

52 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 199.
Justinian I. Furthermore, as the typological Solomon, Leo was celebrated for his wisdom within his own lifetime. Shaun F. Tougher’s discussion of Leo’s wisdom (sophia) describes the emperor’s sophia in inner and outer terms. Because of his inner Sophia, Leo had a deep understanding of Christianity. Leo’s outer Sophia meant that the emperor had secular knowledge that served him as both a scholar and a leader. Like his father, Leo accepted the Prophet Elijah as his heavenly patron, and likewise emphasized the yearly feast of Elijah. In regards to Old Testament relics, a tenth-century source records that there was a chalice and a golden table of Solomon at the Hagia Sophia at the time of Leo’s rule.

While Leo naturally fit within the role of the typological Solomon, he has also been associated with the type of the Davidic repentant sinner. Leo struggled to produce a legitimate heir. By 901, after more than a decade in the imperial office Leo had failed to produce an heir. The situation was complicated by the fact that Leo had already had three wives, and each one of had died. It was expressly discouraged for an emperor to take more than two wives, but Tetragamy, taking a fourth wife, was against canon law and a sin worse than fornication. Thus, if Leo wished to produce a male heir he would have to commit a grave sin. During the period of controversy between Leo and the Patriarchate, Leo’s mistress Zoe Carbonospina gave birth to a

55 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State and Society, 470.
61 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State and Society, 460-466.
62 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State and Society, 466. For a discussion on Leo VI’s Tetragamay see also: Romilly J.H. Jenkins, Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries, (London: Variorum, 1970)
son, Constantine. In order to take Zoe as his fourth wife and legitimize his heir, Leo extorted the Patriarch Nicholas over his involvement in a conspiracy plot. In response, Nicholas baptized Constantine, and Leo proceeded to take Zoe as his fourth wife. Although Leo succeeded in his quest to establish a legitimate heir, he was by no means absolved of his sin. Leo was a devout Christian, and therefore formally outlawed all future Tetragamy as the Patriarch suggested. Additionally, it has been suggested that the tenth-century mosaic of an emperor above the imperial door in Hagia Sophia may portray Leo. (Fig. 1) The depicted emperor kneels in a prostrate position at the feet of Christ. This positioning signifies repentance and is used to depict the repentant David in a folio of the Paris Psalter. (Fig. 2) Through his depiction in such a way, Leo could both signify and be reminded of his Davidic repentance.

Although he was the product of Tetragamy, Constantine VII’s birth was an achievement of great significance in the legitimization of the Macedonian line. Because he was born into the established ruling dynasty, Constantine was given the title Poryphrogenitus, meaning, “purple born,” and signifying his dynastic legitimacy. In his essay on “Heredity, Legitimacy and Succession,” Gilbert Dagron explains the possible Old Testament connotations of the Byzantine Poryphrogenitus. Dagron uses the example of Constantine VII’s address to his son Romanos II in which the emperor stated, “God himself has chosen you and decided as early as the womb to give you his kingship by reason of your existence.” According to Dagron, these words are distinctly Old Testament in way their message echoes the Old Testament value of divine unction.

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68 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 42.
69 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 42.
This is illustrated through the example of the prophet Isaiah who said that the lord had chosen him from his mother’s womb. Isaiah’s belief in his divine unction parallels the Poryphrogenitus’ belief that God had modeled him to become emperor prior to his birth.

As the Macedonian Dynasty’s first true Poryphrogenitus, Constantine VII was a symbol of the line’s legitimacy. It is perhaps because of this status that Constantine worked to confer a greater deal of legitimacy onto his Macedonian predecessors. Because Constantine was only six years old at the time of Leo’s death, he was unable to immediately become emperor. Even once he had reached a sufficient ruling age, Constantine was still unable to claim the throne as a result of Romanos I’s usurpation. With few responsibilities and the empire’s scholarly resources at his disposal, Constantine spent the majority of his life compiling treatises on Byzantine ceremony and history. One of Constantine’s most significant writings was his biography of Basil I. This biography is important in that it is an account of the emperor’s life, but also in its portrayal of Basil. During the lifetime of Leo VI and under the influence of Photius, the idea that Basil was in fact descendant of a royal line became popularized and likewise accompanied by a forged genealogy. Constantine went even further with these associations, however, by formally relating the Macedonian line to Constantine the Great. These new associations between Basil and Constantine I were used to instill Basil and his descendants with a new notion of Constantinian legitimacy. In his textual appropriation of Constantinian ideology, the

70 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 42.
71 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State and Society, 470 – 471.
72 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State and Society, 487.
73 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 36.
74 Markopoulos, “Constantine the Great,” 164.
75 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 201.
Poryphrogenitus in effect placed “the two Constantines on the same, comparative, straight line.”  

Revival of the Classical Tradition during the Macedonian Period

Lending elements of Constantinian legitimacy to their dynastic authority led to increased similarities between the Macedonians and the Davidic model of kingship. In tying the origins of his line to Constantine the Great, Constantine VII garnered authenticity for his dynasty extending all the way back to Antiquity. When Constantine I ended the Tetrarchy to become Rome’s sole emperor, he asserted the legitimacy of his dynasty as Rome’s rightful rulers. The Macedonian emperors created legitimacy through the emulation of Old Testament models, associating their new royal line with King David and his formation of a new royal line. Thus Basil, like King David, was the originator of a dynasty who conferred the rights of succession onto his descendants. What is more, the descendants of each ruler were able to claim further legitimacy through their founder’s unique and extraordinary circumstances. God’s anointment of David conferred the ruler with undeniable legitimacy, whereas Constantine VII’s claims of Basil’s nobility reconnected the Byzantine Empire with the tradition of its past legitimacy.

The influence of one individual in particular contributed significantly to the renewed emphasis placed on Antiquity and classical tradition during the Macedonian period. This individual was the Patriarch, Photius. Photius was born around 810 to a well-connected and well-educated iconophile family. Photius’ family was in exile due to their iconophilic beliefs until

76 Markopoulos, “Constantine the Great,” 164.
77 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 201.
78 Dagron, Emperor and Priest, 36.
the final restoration of images in 842. Although he is considered to be the most well educated man of his day, nothing is known of Photius’ formal education or educators. What is known of Photius though, is that his private reading of books contributed most significantly to his education and scholarship. Renowned in Constantinople for his reputation as a scholar, Photius was appointed Patriarch by Bardas in 858, removed by Basil in 867, restored to the Patriarchate by Basil in 877 and removed once more by Leo in 886. Despite his waves of imperial endorsement and condemnation, Photius’ reputation as Byzantium’s foremost scholar endured.

Photius had a particularly close relationship with Basil. Recognizing the ousted Patriarch’s scholarly genius, Basil hired Photius to be Leo’s personal tutor in order that his son receive the best education attainable in Byzantium. As Patriarch, Photius lent his efforts to the exaltation of Basil during the emperor’s lifetime. Photius composed three hymns in honor of Basil, calling the Macedonians a “Divine dynasty” and making several references to Basil’s likeness to David. Photius was responsible for introducing the idea that Basil descended from Constantine I, thus creating an association between the Macedonians, David and the founder of the Byzantine Empire. This association strengthened the Byzantine emperor’s claim that he was the Davidic leader of the new chosen people. Associating the emperor with Constantine gave him imperial dynastic legitimacy dating back to the time of Antiquity, while Davidic comparisons imbued him with David’s divine unction as ruler of God’s chosen people.

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80 Treadgold, Bibliotheca of Photius, 2-3.
81 Treadgold, Bibliotheca of Photius, 2.
82 Treadgold, Bibliotheca of Photius, 2.
83 Treadgold, Bibliotheca of Photius, 2-3.
84 Markopoulos, “Constantine the Great,” 161.
86 Markopoulos, “Constantine the Great,” 162.
In the realm of culture, Photius’ scholarly endeavors represented an overall contemporary cultural trend, in Byzantium, towards the reconsideration of classical sources and modes of artistic representation. Sometime before the year 838, Photius began compiling *Bibliotheca*.\(^{87}\) *Bibliotheca* is the name given to a collection of descriptions, written by Photius, of ancient and medieval books that he had read.\(^{88}\) The collection cannot be categorized into any specific category of writing; it is at once a work of literary criticism, autobiography, library catalogue, anthology and research notebook.\(^{89}\) One of the most significant attributes of *Bibliotheca* is its role in preserving ancient texts. For eighty-one of the texts Photius describes, *Bibliotheca* is the only surviving evidence that they ever existed.\(^{90}\) Photius’ interest in classical texts was not isolated to the scholar. In the essay, “The Classical Background of the Scriptores Post Theophanem,” R.J.H. Jenkins describes the classical influences that appeared in writings of the tenth century. In particular, Jenkins gives Constantine VII’s biography of Basil as an example of how the Poryphrogenitus based the *Vita Basilii* on an antique model of biography.\(^{91}\) The model Constantine used is known as the *enkomion*, and was originally developed by Hellenistic followers of Isocrates as means of recording royal biographies.\(^{92}\) On the nature of the *Vita Basilii*, Jenkins writes that it is “none the less the perfect copy of a purely classical original by a learned and sensitive scholar; and it has that touch of local colour which gives it charm...”\(^{93}\)

**The Paris Psalter as a product Macedonian Imperial Ideology**

\(^{87}\) Treadgold, *Bibliotheca of Photius*, 1.


\(^{89}\) Treadgold, *Bibliotheca of Photius*, 1.


Jenkins’s description of the *Vita Basilii*’s “local colour” also aptly describes the nature of the Paris Psalter’s classical imagery. The Paris Psalter makes use of classical themes and motifs, but it does so in a way that is distinctly in line with Macedonian imperial ideology. As it has been demonstrated, the tenth century represented a period in the history of the Byzantine Empire in which the tradition of antiquity and Old Testament typology simultaneously had observable influences on notions of kingship and imperial legitimacy. Whether or not there was in fact a “Macedonian Renaissance,” the observable classical and Old Testament influences in the Paris Psalter point to a change in ideology. The associations proposed by Photius, between the Macedonians, Constantine the Great and David come to fruition within the Paris Psalter. These associations can hardly be better illustrated than they are in the Psalter’s miniature depicting the Exaltation David.

The Exaltation of David is the most compelling evidence within the Paris Psalter that the manuscript was created specifically by or for a tenth-century Macedonian emperor. The miniature is the final folio in a series of scenes from the David cycle that precede the Psalter’s text.\textsuperscript{94} The folio depicts three figures (Fig. 3). In the center of the composition is a mature, bearded King David who stands between personification of Sophia and Prophetia.\textsuperscript{95} David holds an open book, on which the first verses of the seventy-first Psalm can be read.\textsuperscript{96} Hugo Buchthal argues that the composition of the miniature must replicate a late antique model due to its comparatively more medieval and rigid style than the Psalter’s other folios, which are expressly Hellenistic action scenes.\textsuperscript{97} If the miniature does in fact follow a late antique model, this would

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thematically contribute an element of Constantinian symbolism to the miniature and manuscript. Classical details such as the personifications of Sophia and Prophetia are common throughout the manuscript, but the late antique character of the Exaltation miniature makes the folio stand out thematically against all others in the Psalter.

Furthermore, the Exaltation of David also stands out amongst the Psalter’s fourteen miniatures for its visibly Byzantine imperial symbolism. The Exaltation miniature’s combination of late antique, Old Testament and Byzantine imperial motifs places it thematically within the Macedonian tenth-century tradition. In the miniature, David appears in the guise of a Byzantine emperor. He is crowned, wears the emperor’s red shoes with pearl ornaments and is dressed in patterned imperial purple silk. This is in contrast to the Psalter’s other miniatures, in which David and his accompanying figures are dressed in the Hellenistic style. It is also of interest that David’s Psalm book is open to Psalm 71 as opposed to Psalm 1, which was the Psalm traditionally depicted in Psalter miniatures. Psalm 71 reads, “O God, give thy judgment to the King, and thy righteousness to the son of the king.” The tenth century reading of this Psalm has been interpreted to read as asking God for his judgment and righteousness for the Byzantine emperor and his son. This Psalm is especially relevant in the context of the Macedonian line because it makes an appeal to God for legitimacy for the new dynasty. When taken in combination, these apparent peculiarities within the Exaltation of David miniature can be made sense of within a context of Macedonian imperial ideology.

Conclusion

A consideration of the Paris Psalter within the context of Byzantine imperial ideology of the ninth and tenth centuries reveals that many of the manuscript’s seemingly random attributes can be explained through its specific historical situation. The Psalter in general, and its Exaltation miniature in particular, simultaneously combine elements of Old Testament narrative and typology, antique modes of representation and references to creating dynastic legitimacy. As it has been shown, all of these attributes were characteristic of imperial ideology during the late ninth and tenth centuries. Because the Macedonians were a new ruling dynasty, and because of the circumstances under which Basil came to power, it was in their interest to find a means of proving their legitimacy to the throne. For Basil and his successors, this meant looking towards recognized models of legitimately established power. The tendency in Byzantium for imperial ideology to imitate Old Testament types provided a starting point for this search for legitimacy. It was not outside the realm of established tradition to associate the Byzantine emperor with David or furthermore, his Byzantine subjects with God’s elect. In the context of Christianity, there was no greater legitimacy than that of God’s approval.
Images

Figure 1: Christ enthroned, blessing; mosaic in the tympanum of the narthex, Detail: Kneeling figure probably Emperor Leo VI. 9th century, Hagia Sophia.

Figure 2:

Figure 3:
Bibliography


