

The Background to Mantzikert

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IN order to study the background to Mantzikert — or as the Caucasiologist should say: Manazkert — one must understand the nature of the relations between Caucasia and the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century. And this understanding can be achieved only in the context of over half a millennium of Byzantino-Caucasian relations. Mantzikert was the result of the last phase — and not a happy one — of these relations. But before going on, we must define our terms. While there is obviously no need, in this assembly, to define the Byzantine Empire, it may indeed be necessary to define Caucasia. Byzantine studies have so far evinced but little appreciation of the special importance of Caucasia for Byzantine history, though the present occasion augurs of a change. That Caucasia can in fact lay claim to a place of special importance in the Byzantine world, the matter of this paper will, it is hoped, make clear. One may note in passing that this neglect of Caucasia has not served to enrich Byzantine studies. Among the recent general histories of Byzantium, for instance, the inexactitudes of some concerning matters Caucasian are only matched by still more extraordinary silences or near-silences of others regarding them. Of course, in order to deal competently with things Caucasian the Byzantine scholar must face a real difficulty: he must enter a world of studies which to him is wholly new and different, linguistically to begin with. But no one will claim that this difficulty is a valid excuse for abstention. 'Rien (in the words of Ernst Stein) de l'histoire médiévale tant de l'Orient que de l'Occident ne devrait être tout à fait étranger à celui qui étudie Byzance.' An exception, however, must be made. And it is fitting that it be made here, at Oxford. Whatever we may think today of F. W. Bussell as a Byzantine scholar, his insistence on the special role of the Armenians in Byzantine history is a sign of great discernment; and his argument and conclusions have found a striking confirmation in P. Charanis's recent book, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*.

But to return to a definition of Caucasia. It can be described as the northeasternmost area of the Mediterranean world, lying south of the great chain of the Caucasus, washed in the east by the Caspian Sea and in the west by the Black Sea, and opening out in the south, semi-circularly, towards Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia. It has been perennially divided into two principal parts, Armenia and Georgia. This definition includes Armenia in Caucasia, which is not always done. But these two countries, Armenia and Georgia, have formed a historical and cultural unity, which no amount of subsequent disagreements of a confessional or nationalistic nature can efface. This unity and individuality of the area, which has been enhanced by Christianity, set it off from its neighbouring areas, as well as from the highlanders in the north; and it is this unity and individuality that we may designate by the term Caucasia. It would be more exact, of course, to say

'Cis-Caucasia', were it not cumbersome. The equally unwieldy 'Trans-Caucasia' is also inadequate, for it expresses a comparatively late point of view. This is the point of view of the Russian Empire which goes counter to the historical development of Caucasia, since, before the intensified diplomatic offensive of Russia in the eighteenth century and the Russian annexations of the nineteenth, it had practically nothing in common with the historical development of the regions lying north of the Caucasus range.

Now, Byzantino-Caucasian relations can be seen under two aspects: relations between Byzantium and the Caucasians, and those between Byzantium and Caucasia. Or, to put it differently, relations, from the Byzantine point of view, respectively internal and external: with Caucasians found on the Empire's own territory and with the Caucasian States situated outside it. The two categories of relations were to a large extent interconnected; and in both these categories, Armenia and the Armenians played a greater role than Georgia and the Georgians. This was so, in the first place, because Armenia was in closer proximity to Byzantium and, secondly, because before the eleventh century its historical importance rather outshone that of Georgia. It was only after that century, and partly as a result of the foreign policy of the Byzantine Empire, that Georgia succeeded to Armenia's earlier hegemony in Caucasia. Especially in the first category of relations, inside the Empire, was the role of the Armenians much weightier than that of the Georgians.

The principal reason for this kind of relations was military. In the Late Roman phase, the Balkans were the chief recruiting ground of the Empire, but owing to the Germanic and Hunnic devastations of the fifth century and especially to the Avar and Slavic intrusion into the peninsula after the end of the sixth, the Empire was deprived of this recruiting ground, entirely in the case of Illyricum, and very largely in the case of Thrace. As a result, the role of the Balkans passed to Caucasia. Quite obviously, this concerned chiefly those parts of it which had at different times come under the control of the Empire. The participation of volunteers from the other regions of Caucasia, though we do occasionally hear of it, as in the case of the Iberians in the armies of Heraclius I, was, in the nature of things, sporadic and, moreover, thwarted by the fact that what Caucasian lands happened to be beyond the aegis of the Empire inevitably found themselves under the control of the rival imperial State of Iran. The Roman and Byzantine rivalry with Iran over Caucasia was, as we shall have occasion to see, inescapable, and its origins went back far into the past. It flared up with a new vigour upon the advent of the Sassanid dynasty. Champions of a neo-Achaemenian *renovatio* of Iran, the Sassanid Great Kings would acquiesce in no compromise with Rome, such as had been accepted, by their Arsacid and philhellenic predecessors, in the peace of Rhandia, A.D. 63, when an Arsacid prince had been made King of Armenia under the suzerainty of Caesar and a sort of dual control over Caucasia had been admitted in principle. New Iran was committed to an uncompromising cosmocratism and energized by exclusivist neo-Zoroastrianism. At the same time the Arsacid, and in the circumstances anti-Sassanid, tradition was strong in the Caucasian kingdoms. And then, within a century after the rise of New Iran, a new bond was forged between the Roman Empire and the Caucasian kingdoms of Armenia and of Iberia (East Georgia) through their near-simultaneous acceptance of Christianity. And so the struggle of empires over Caucasia continued. And the downfall of the Sassanid Monarchy in the seventh century and its replacement by the Islamic empire of the Caliphs changed but little the situation in Caucasia. Having been the bone of contention

between Byzantium and Iran, it continued to play the same role between Byzantium and Islam. The same reasons as with Iran impelled now the world of Islam to pursue this policy.

Now, the Caucasian lands, Armenian and Georgian, which at one time or another came within the sphere of the Empire, were the following. The earliest annexation of an Armenian land occurred A.D. 72 when Lesser Armenia was made a part of the Roman province of Cappadocia. It may perhaps be thought unjustifiable to speak of this land as Caucasian, for it had early left the historical orbit of Caucasia, from which it is separated by the Euphrates, the traditional western boundary of historical Armenia. Already the Ten Thousand saw it as an Achaemenian administrative unit that was separate from the rest of Armenia. But it long remained ethnically and indeed linguistically Armenian, and subsequently became, as will be seen, the goal of one of the streams of migration from its historical counterpart, Great Armenia. A separate province under Diocletian, it became divided into First and Second Armenia under Theodosius the Great and made to contain Cappadocian territories. In the provincial reorganization of Justinian I, in 536, these provinces were renamed, respectively, Second and Third Armenia and enlarged with lands from Cappadocia and Helenopontus. And under Maurice, after the reorganization that followed the peace of 591, Third Armenia received the name of First Armenia. Later still, under the Heracliads, Lesser Armenia, together with some Cappadocian and Pontic territory, was transformed into the Armeniac theme.

Historical Armenia, that is, Great Armenia, became a vassal State of Rome in 66 B.C., and so remained, with interruptions — as when Iran several times became its overlord and also when, in the years 115–16, it was annexed by Rome — down to the years 387, when a part of it was ceded to Iran, and 532, when the part of it that had remained a vassal of Rome was annexed by Justinian I. This latter part was composed of two lands. One was originally the province of Upper Armenia, lying across the Euphrates from Lesser Armenia. This territory was all that had remained to King Arsaces III in 387, after the rest of the kingdom — the greater part — had fallen to the rival Arsacid claimant, Chosroes IV, who was backed by Iran. And then, in the accord of the rival emperors, Theodosius I and Sapor III, this division was accepted, each extending his suzerainty to the nearer fragment of Armenia. While the eastern realm, called Persarmenia by the Byzantines, continued until the abolition of the monarchy in 428, when its princely States became immediate vassals of the Iranian Great King, the western realm was, following the death of Arsaces III in 390, annexed to the Empire as the province of Inner Armenia. Nevertheless, at first, the three princely States situated on its territory — Arsacid Carenitis, Bagratid Syspirtis, and Mamikonid Acilisene — continued autonomous, as *civitates foederatae*, under the suzerainty of the Roman Emperor until annexed by Justinian in 532. In 536, this entire land was enlarged with territories from Pontus and old First Armenia and renamed First Armenia.

The other land was half-surrounded in the west by a curve of the Euphrates and included the upper valley of the Tigris, due south of both Lesser and Upper Armenia. It was composed of six princely States ruled by five dynasties. Four of these, Lesser Sophene, Ingilene and Anzitene, and Greater Sophene or Sophanene, occupied a part of the territory of the ancient Kingdom of Sophene and of the subsequent Syrian March of the Artaxiad Monarchy of Armenia. They passed under the control of Rome at the peace of Nisibis in 298. Two others, Balabitenne and Asthianene, were originally parts of Upper Armenia and became Roman vassals

sometime between 377 and 387. These trans-Euphratensian Pentarchs were misnamed 'satraps' by the Byzantines and their peoples were referred to as 'Gentiles', as befitted those who insisted on their autonomy *vis-à-vis* the 'New Jerusalem' of Byzantium. The privileges, rights, and vestments of these 'Roman Satraps' have been described for us by Procopius. These princes, too, were dethroned by Justinian in 532, and their States, annexed to the Empire, came to form in 536 the province called Fourth Armenia. Under Maurice, First Armenia regained its older Roman name of Inner Armenia, while Fourth Armenia was divided into two administrative units. One of these was still Fourth Armenia, composed of five out of the six former princely States, and the other, called Upper Mesopotamia, contained Sophanene and the adjoining Armenian province of Arzanene. The latter had once been the Arabian March of the Artaxiad Monarchy; it had then passed under the aegis of Rome in 298 and in 363 under that of Iran, reverting to Rome in 591.

The peace of 591 pushed farther east the frontier of Roman Armenia at the expense of its Iranian counterpart. And this was followed, precisely, by the reorganization of Maurice. In addition to what has already been mentioned, the territory east of Inner Armenia was now called Lower Armenia; and south of both now lay Great Armenia. The principality of 'Tayk', moreover, was renamed Deep Armenia. All these administrative changes in Free Armenia, which followed the peace of 591, must have remained changes on paper only, for in actual fact there was no interruption in the continued existence of the autonomous princely States located there. The only change, for the Armenian princes, was that of suzerain, who was now the Emperor instead of the Great King. Finally, the victorious termination of the last of the Persian wars by Heraclius I placed the whole of Free Armenia under Imperial control. Here again, it was merely a question of suzerainty, not of annexation; and in connexion with this the institution of Presiding Prince was introduced by the Emperor in 635, the nature of which will be examined presently. In 653/4, however, the Presiding Prince Theodore R̄shtuni accepted the suzerainty of the Caliph, in lieu of that of the Emperor. Free Armenia was thus lost to the Empire, save when, in the ensuing bitter struggle between Byzantium and Islam, it occasionally reverted to the control of the former. As for Roman Armenia, that is the result of Justinian's annexation, it, too, was to suffer Muslim inroads into its territory.

The Georgian lands, to which we now turn, were perennially divided into West, or Pontic, Georgia and East Georgia, the south-western projection of which lay due south of the other. The West Georgian Kingdom of Colchis became a Roman vassal in 64 B.C. and was, A.D. 64, annexed as a Roman province. In the mid-fifth century, however, West Georgia regained autonomy under the rule of its Lazic kings, from whom its new name of Lazica was derived. It remained under Roman suzerainty, but tended occasionally to move into the rival sphere of Iran, which made it an object of the struggle between Justinian and Chosroes. By the seventh century, the Kings of Lazica had been succeeded by Presiding Princes. One of them, in 697, went over to the Saracens and, until its return to Roman control *c.* 730, Lazica was a vassal of the Caliphate. It then grew somewhat more independent of the Empire when, *c.* 790, the Abkhazian dynasty unified it as the Kingdom of Abasgia, which was to merge in 1008 with East Georgia. Other West Georgian lands included the princely States of Abkhazia and of Apsilia and Missimiana, both vassals of the Empire from the first to the eighth century; that of the Machelones and the Heniochi, a Roman vassal in the first; and that of Suania, a Roman vassal from the first to the sixth century.

East Georgia or Iberia became a vassal of Rome in 65 B.C. The defeat of the Emperor Julian in 363 placed it under Iranian suzerainty. From that moment until the mid-seventh century, Iberia vacillated between the two empires; and from that time, when it accepted the Caliph's overlordship, it continued to vacillate between the Caliph and the Emperor. In 813 it succeeded in combining the two suzerainties, of which the caliphal ceased in the tenth century, and the Byzantine in the eleventh. Between 378 and *c.* 485, the south-westernmost province of Iberia, Cholarzene, belonged to the Empire, but we cannot tell whether as a province or as a vassal; and between *c.* 561 and 588, Cholarzene together with the province of Javakhet'i formed a vassal State of Byzantium.

The year 588 is of importance. Returning to Roman allegiance that year, the Iberian princes asked the Emperor Maurice for a king. The Iberian Monarchy had been abolished in 580 by the Great King, exactly like that of Armenia, on the demand of the princes. Instead of a king, however, the Emperor appointed one of the princes to preside on his behalf over the rest, combining the functions of an imperial viceroy and of the local High Constable; and he conferred on his appointee the dignity of Curopalate. Thus came into being the office of Presiding Prince, which was largely a Caucasian version of Exarch and which replaced everywhere the dormant Caucasian monarchies. The dignity of Curopalate conferred by Maurice is an eloquent testimony to the importance attached by the Imperial Court to Caucasia. The first Presiding Prince of Armenia was likewise created a Curopalate. Six out of the twenty-one Presiding Princes of Armenia and eight out of the fourteen Presiding Princes of Iberia bore that title. The preference shown to Iberia in this matter was doubtless due to the religious differences between Byzantium and Armenia, which will be dealt with later. The less important Presiding Princes of Lazica and of the easternmost Caspian land of Albania were entitled Patricians, as were also some other Armenian and Iberian Presiding Princes.

It is obvious that, in this connexion, it is important to distinguish between the two kinds of control exercised by the Empire in Caucasia, suzerainty and annexation, that is, between the integral parts of the Empire and its vassal States. The recruitment into the Imperial armed forces was of necessity carried out chiefly in the annexed lands. We know, for instance, that the trans-Euphratensian Pentarchs, who were under the obligation of rendering military aid to the Emperor their suzerain, maintained at the same time their own regular armies. Accordingly, only a fraction of the available men, and very likely not a considerable fraction, constituted the military contribution of vassal States. Of the annexed lands, the most important were the two Armenian realms absorbed by the Empire in 532, the western kingdom of Arsaces III and, precisely, the States of the Pentarchs. And it was in the name of a more efficient military defence against Iran that the annexation of Justinian was effected. This acquisition, together with Lesser Armenia, could a century or so after Justinian I compensate the Imperial government for the loss of the Balkan peninsula as a recruiting ground. And this is the reason why, while before the end of the sixth century the Armenians were merely one of the several ethnic groups of which the Imperial armed forces were composed, now, after the end of that century, they became the preponderant group. And in the ninth and tenth centuries, when the highest point of the Middle Byzantine phase was reached, the Armenian element formed at least 25 per cent of the Empire's armed forces.

There are two aspects under which one may view the role of the Caucasians, especially the Armenians, in the military history of Byzantium: manpower, the

result, precisely, of the recruitment, and leadership. Military leadership, as so often in Roman history, could in turn lead to political and social leadership, including the Imperial throne itself; and this, again, to cultural leadership. Military leadership was exercised in Byzantium not only by the inhabitants of the annexed Caucasian provinces, and in particular by members of the local aristocracy drawn to the Imperial Court, but also by the *émigrés*, likewise nobles as well as men of a less exalted social standing, coming from the Caucasian vassal kingdoms and even — as in the case, for instance, of the Kamsarakan princes or of the eunuch Narses under Justinian — from the zone of Iranian control. In fact, one of the first Caucasian generals in the Roman service was the Iberian prince Bacurius, who supplied the historian Rufinus with an account of the conversion of Iberia to Christianity. He flourished in the 390's, at a moment when his country was fully under Iranian overlordship. Already under Justinian I, Caucasian military leadership was considerable, and quite out of proportion with the then Caucasian output of manpower. We hear of nearly a score of commanders, fighting in the Emperor's wars east and west, including princes of the former Armenian royal house of the Arsacids and of the reigning Iberian royal house of the Chosroids, the Kamsarakan brothers Narses, Aratius, and Isaac, and the already mentioned great Narses himself. This prominence in leadership continued after Justinian, became most pronounced in the commandment of the eastern themes, and reached its highest manifestation in the so-called Byzantine Crusade, the *épopée byzantine* of the ninth and tenth centuries, which was captained by men of Caucasian blood, such as the several generals of the house of Curcuas and those of the house of Phocas.

Caucasians, and especially Armenians, were prominent in the military and political life of the Empire not only as individuals. They also founded a number of families. These families enjoyed the highest social position and prestige, were possessed of wealth, particularly lands in Anatolia, and supplied political leadership to the Empire and, in the first place, the commanding personnel to the armies. Such were the houses of Curcuas, whose original name was derived from the *praenomen* Gurgen; Dalassenus, who may have been the Armenian lords of Dalasha; Maniaces; Melissenus; Musele and Crinites, who must have been branches of the princely dynasty of the Mamikonids; Sclerus; and Taronites and Tornicius, the mediatized Bagratid Princes of Taraun; as well as possibly those of Ducas and of Phocas. Some of these families seem to have arisen in the integral parts of the Empire; others were *émigrés* from the outside. Then, also, without going back to Prohaeresius, Julian's master at Athens, or Hierius, who had evoked St Augustine's admiration, Armenians like Caesar Bardas and John the Grammarian and half-Armenians like Photius and Leo the Philosopher must be remembered in connexion with the re-establishment of the University of Constantinople and the intellectual activity of the Amorian renaissance of the ninth century. Here, too, mention should be made of the numerous Iberian monastic foundations throughout the Empire and in particular the Iviron on Mt Athos, whence the Romance of Barlaam and Josaphat, thanks to St Euthymius the Hagiorite's rendering of a Buddhist work, came to enliven Byzantine as well as Western hagiography. Finally, from the beginning of the Middle Byzantine phase, numerous Armenians attempted or actually reached the Imperial throne, and in this connexion the names of Mezezius Gnuni (668-9), Philippicus Bardanes (711-3), Artabasdos (742-3) who appears to have been a Mamikonid, Leo V Gnuni (813-20), John I Curcuas Tzimisces (969-976), and Bardas Sclerus (976-9) must be mentioned. They also founded three

Byzantine Imperial dynasties, two of them among the greatest; the Heracliads (610-711), who were related to the Armenian Arsacids; the Basilids (867-1056), who may have been Mamikonids; and the Lecapeni (920-45); as well as the side-dynasty, almost certainly that of the Mamikonids, to which the Empress Theodora and her brother Caesar Bardas belonged. In this connexion, it cannot be urged too strongly that the name 'Basilid', or some other, replace the wholly misleading misnomer 'Macedonian dynasty'.

Continuing, in the social domain, the distinction that has already been made in the military, between leadership and manpower, we may note that the Armenians who moved from the outside were not only leading families and individuals, but also large masses of simple folk, sometimes indeed led by their own nobles, who found their way into the Empire. This penetration was effected either through transplantation or through immigration. The transplanting of groups of Armenians from annexed, and occasionally even vassal, territories to Macedonia, Greece, Calabria, Sicily, Crete, western Anatolia, and above all Thrace, was begun by Justinian I and continued, whenever the Imperial government felt strong enough to enforce it, down to the end of the Basilid age. This practice was closely connected with recruitment; and the settling of Thrace was intended to provide protection to the capital from the barbarian pressure in the Danube area.

As for the voluntary immigration, as distinct from enforced transplanting, it was caused by the incessant warfare in Armenia between Byzantium and Iran and that between Byzantium and Islam which succeeded it; it was also prompted by the occasional Iranian and the systematic Saracen, especially Abbasid, oppression; and, finally, it received a new impetus from the Turkish pressure in the eleventh century. This immigration from both Imperial and Free Armenia had two chief directions. One ethnic wave was moving, already as early as in the fourth century and thereafter, towards Lesser Armenia and also the Cappadocian and Pontic regions; and it was this growth of the Armenian element in these territories that earned its name for the Armeniac theme. The other wave was moving, especially after the mid-tenth century, towards Cilicia and North Syria. In both cases this movement of population met with encouragement on the part of the Imperial government. As has been seen, what prompted this movement was not overpopulation at home, but the unsettled conditions there, as well as the attractions and opportunities offered by the capital and the Empire. It proved, on the whole, a heavy drain on Armenia's resources of leadership and manpower.

Finally, the prominent social, political, and military, as well as to some extent cultural, role played by Caucasians, and especially Armenians, in Byzantium and also the considerable admixture of the Armenian ethnic element in the Byzantine population were bound to leave some imprint on Byzantine civilization. It may be of interest to explore this possibility. Leaving aside the somewhat elusive domain of art, in which Professor Der Nersessian is infinitely more qualified to pass a judgement, we may turn our attention to the socio-political field. Here we may single out three factors which may be thought to manifest the presence of this Caucasian imprint: the setting up of the thematic system, the rise of the quasi-feudal *dynatoi* in Anatolia, and the appearance of quasi-legitimism in connexion with the Imperial office.

The institution of Presiding Prince, as has been noted, made its appearance in Iberia in the year 588 and in Armenia in the year 635. It was, as has been stated, the Caucasian equivalent of Exarch; and it would be interesting to know, were the

exact date of the formation of the Western Exarchates available to us, which institution came earlier. At any rate, this office, involving as it did a Caucasian prince who was vested at once with civil and military powers — those, that is, of the Emperor's viceroy and those of the commander-in-chief of the local armed forces — may be presumed, to some extent at least, to have served as the model for the first of the themes, the Armeniac, which, whatever the exact date of its institution, was formed, in the immediate vicinity of Free Armenia and, through it, of Iberia, with predominantly Armenian troops and a largely Armenian population and was at first placed under the command of an Armenian prince.

The rise of the quasi-feudal aristocracy in Anatolia went counter to the nature of Byzantine society. It is well known that nobility, as an official, hereditary, and privileged institution, was unknown to the Byzantine polity. The ruling stratum of Byzantium consisted of the Emperor and the Administration. What is often loosely referred to as the Byzantine aristocracy or, less appropriately, Byzantine nobility was actually a theoretically non-hereditary officialdom bearing non-hereditary dignities and of most diverse provenance. Whatever tendencies towards a nobiliary system can be observed in Byzantine society represented, in the words of Stein, 'une espèce de féodalisme voilé,' in which 'les grands propriétaires fonciers . . . n'exercent leurs pouvoirs quasi-féodaux qu'en tant que fonctionnaires. C'est seulement dans ce sens d'empiétements progressifs par des pouvoirs locaux tirant leur origine de conditions de droit privé, sur des prérogatives existantes de l'Etat qu'il faut comprendre les deux processus de féodalisation que l'Empire byzantin a subis successivement, le premier arrêté et défait par les réformes d'Héraclius, le second détruisant lentement les effets de celles-ci.' This was especially the case of the *partes Orientis* where we are faced in the Late Roman period with an almost total absence of family names. This was a society, as Stein noted, largely of self-made men.

The social structure of Caucasia, on the other hand, was strongly nobiliary. Its salient feature was the survival of a class of dynastic princes, evolved from the tribal dynasts of older, Urartian days. These princes were older than kingship which had had its inception among them, and which resulted from the setting up of the political ascendancy of one of them over his compeers. Their principalities were self-sufficient and self-determined units, being territorialized tribes and clans of old. They were full sovereigns, exercising executive, legislative, judiciary, and fiscal powers, commanding their own armed forces, and empowered, at least from their own point of view, to negotiate with foreign States. On the international scale, they received the treatment of minor kings, as is clear, for instance, from what Procopius has to tell about the 'Roman Satraps'. Armenia and Iberia were, in these circumstances, largely federations of princely States presided over by kings. And the kings could never claim, with regard to the princes, a position greater than that of a *primus inter pares*. This was the basic régime of Caucasia, which may be termed dynasticist. Nevertheless the Crown, from the start, had sought to increase its ascendancy over the princes. In this way, to the purely political dependence of the dynasts upon the super-dynast, or king, certain feudal features were superadded. What the Crown was powerless to reduce by force, it attempted to control by sanction; it had to admit the princely rights, but it tended to regard them as of its own delegation. Accordingly, all the Armenian and some of the Iberian princes were, from the point of view of the Crown, dukes ruling their territories and commanding their troops in the service of the king. In both the Armenian and the Iberian Monarchy, moreover, many dynasts were enfeoffed of great offices of the State and of the Court.

Below this restricted group of dynastic aristocracy, there was also the larger body of the lesser nobility, the knights and squires, vassals of the princes or directly of the king, who manned the cavalry of the realm. In contrast to Byzantine society, Caucasian society had early evolved a complex system of nobiliary family names.

The Caucasians who entered the service of the Empire were representatives of the society just described, and, more often than not, of its upper stratum. The leadership exercised in Byzantium by members of the Caucasian dynasties of the Arsacids, the Chosroids, the Mamikonids, the Bagratids, the Kamsarakans, the Gnunis has already been noted. That they should have brought with them their nobiliary attitudes is natural enough. As Bussell indicates, the epitaph on the sarcophagus of the Exarch Isaac, possibly a Kamsarakan, in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, is a good instance of 'that proud and independent spirit' of 'that princely caste who offered themselves to the emperors almost on equal terms'. And the success of the Caucasians in the Imperial service may in part have been due to precisely the encounter of two social conceptions. Here we can see the forcefulness of family solidarity, enhanced by the feeling of aristocratic superiority, as opposed to the indecision of the official negation of class and heredity that was at odds with the natural tendencies towards both. In this encounter, too, the Caucasian conception was strengthened by the natural sense of ethnic solidarity as opposed to the somewhat artificial unity of Byzantine society that was based on political allegiance and varying degrees of the presumed linguistic, cultural, and religious conformity.

With all this in view, one may presume that the Caucasian social conception was at work, as an animating principle, in the rise of the 'powerful' houses, most of them of Armenian origin, in Anatolia in the ninth and tenth centuries. For here was a quasi-feudal group of landed families, families, at the same time, of *de facto* hereditary military leaders, bearing for the first time in Byzantine history hereditary family names, which began to exercise a quasi-feudal control over the thematic troops, so largely Armenian in ethnic composition, that were settled in the shadow of their latifundias. In their attempts to thwart the rise of the 'powerful', first as a continuation of the Late Roman plutocratic bureaucracy and then as a projection of Caucasian society, the Heracliads and the Basilids demonstrated that, in their case at least, the Imperial Roman tradition had proved stronger than the dynasticist-feudal one of Caucasia.

But if these two great Imperial families escaped the influence of the Caucasian nobiliary system, they did not resist still another factor in Byzantine society which one may suppose to have been connected with the rise to prominence in it of so many Caucasians, namely the feeling of legitimism. That the unwritten constitution of the Empire admitted of no hereditary succession to the Imperial office is a fact too well known to require comment. The Emperor, as the Providential Man, was held to be the personal appointee of the gods, or of God, as the case might be. And it was through the theophanic people of Rome, or through its representative the army, that the divine choice was made manifest — *vox populi, vox dei*. But deriving his power, undiminished, from the people, the Emperor could also make an Emperor, that is, a co-Emperor with himself. This was how power could be retained by dynasties. But co-optation, though finally a mere formality, remained to the end the constitutional *raison d'être* of dynastic continuity. This was, then, the constitutional theory. Nevertheless, alongside it, there did develop, especially in the Middle Byzantine phase and thereafter, a definite feeling of dynastic legitimacy, Bréhier's 'doctrine légitimiste'. It even found its occasional official expression, as