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978-1-107-40474-8 - John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057

John Wortley

Excerpt

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**A SYNOPSIS OF HISTORIES BEGINNING
WITH THE DEATH OF THE EMPEROR
NIKEPHOROS, THE EX-MINISTER OF FINANCE
AND EXTENDING TO THE REIGN OF ISAAC
KOMNENOS, COMPOSED BY JOHN SKYLITZES,
THE KOUROPALATES WHO SERVED AS
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE WATCH**

Foreword

After the ancient writers, the best compendium of history was written, first by George the monk,¹ synkellos to the most holy patriarch Tarasios,² then by Theophanes the confessor, hegoumenos of the monastery of Agros.³ These men carefully read through the history books, making a précis of them in simple, unaffected language, touching exclusively on the substance of the events which had taken place. George began with the creation of the world and continued to [the time of] the tyrants, Maximian and Maximinos, his son.⁴ Theophanes took the other's conclusion as his starting point and brought his work to an end with the death of the emperor Nikephoros, the ex-minister of finance. After [Theophanes] nobody continued their effort. There were those who attempted to do so, such as the Sicilian schoolmaster⁵ and, in our own time, the supremely honourable consul of the philosophers, [Michael] Psellos.⁶ There were others too but, because they took their task too lightly, they all failed to write

¹ George the monk died after 810; he composed a chronicle from creation to AD 284, English translation by W. Adler, *The chronography of George Synkellos. A Byzantine chronicle of universal history from creation* (Oxford, 2002).

² Patriarch of Constantinople, 784–806.

³ Born in 760, Theophanes was the scion of a military family. A fervent devotee of the icons, he became hegoumenos of the Bythinian monastery of Agros; he died on 12 March 817 (*PmbZ* 8107 = *PBE* Theophanes 18). He is the author of a *Chronographia* which covers the years 280–815, a continuation of the work of George Synkellos. English translation by C. Mango and R. Scott, with G. Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and near eastern history ad 284–813* (Oxford, 1997).

⁴ The son of Maximian, one of the Tetrarchs, was in fact Maxentius who was killed by Constantine at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, 28 October 312.

⁵ Theognostos: *ODB*, III, 2055.

⁶ Michael Psellos (mentioned by Skylitzes in his account of the reign of Michael VI) is the author of a *Chronographia* in which he describes the reigns of the emperors Basil II to Michael VII Doukas, who was his pupil; English translation by E. R. A. Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine emperors*

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with the requisite degree of accuracy. Many important events they omitted altogether and their works are of little value to posterity. They are little more than calculations of the duration of each reign and reports on who held the sceptre after whom – no more. Even when they appear to mention certain events, these writers do their readers a disservice and no good because they fail to write about them accurately. Theodore Daphnopates,⁷ Niketas the Paphlagonian,⁸ Joseph Genesisios⁹ and Manuel,¹⁰ these two of Constantinople, Nikephoros the deacon from Phrygia,¹¹ Leo from Asia,¹² Theodore, bishop of Side¹³ and his nephew of the same name who presided over the church of Sebasteia,¹⁴ Demetrios, bishop of Kyzikos¹⁵ and the monk John the Lydian¹⁶ – these all set themselves their own goals: maybe the glorification of an emperor, the censure of a patriarch, or to extol a friend – each attains his own ends under the guise of writing history and every one of them falls far short of the mentality of those godly men of whom we spoke. For in composing a rambling account of his own times (and a little before) as though he was writing history, one of them writes a favourable account, another a critical one, while a third writes whatever he pleases and a fourth sets down what he is ordered to write. Each composes his own ‘history’ and they differ so much from each other in describing the same events that they plunge their audience into dizziness and confusion. For my own part, I took great pleasure in reading the work of the men [first] mentioned above and I hope that [a continuation of their]

(London, 1953). But Skylitzes probably used Psellos’ *Historia syntomos*, edited and translated into English by W. J. Aerts (Berlin and New York, 1990).

⁷ Theodore Daphnopates was a senior civil servant who rose to be eparch under Romanus III. There survive letters, homilies and saints’ lives written by him and he may have been responsible for the later parts of *Theophanes Continuatus*.

⁸ Niketas David the Paphlagonian was the disciple of Arethas of Caesarea (the bitter opponent of Leo VI in the Tetragamy controversy). Niketas edited numerous works in praise of various saints, a *Commentary on the Psalms* and, most notably, a *Life of Ignatios* in which his profound antipathy to Photios is apparent.

⁹ An anonymous *History of the Reigns* has been attributed to Genesisios on the sole authority of a marginal comment in the one remaining manuscript of the work. Skylitzes alone gives the man’s Christian name. There is reason to doubt this attribution, even the very existence of a ‘Joseph Genesisios’, although a family of that name is well attested from the tenth century onward.

¹⁰ Manuel, Judge and Protospatharios, had apparently composed a work in eight volumes dealing with the exploits of John Kourkouas.

¹¹ No other mention of an author of this name is known.

¹² This is Leo the deacon, who was born c. 950 at Kaloe of Tmolos (Asia Minor). His *History* is very favourable to the family of the Phokai, especially to the emperor Nikephoros II

¹³ Author of another lost work.

¹⁴ Possibly the editor of a biography of Basil II.

¹⁵ Nothing remains of the work of this author who lived in the earlier part of the eleventh century and wrote mainly theological works.

¹⁶ An unknown writer who must not be confused with the sixth-century writer of the same name.

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summary will be of no small benefit to those who love history, especially to those who prefer that which is easily accessible to what has to be striven for; a summary, that is, which will provide them with a brief overview of what has taken place at various times and thus free them of the need to consult massive tomes of memoirs. I read the histories of the above-mentioned writers with great care. I conjured away from them all comments of a subjective or fanciful nature. I left aside the writers' differences and contradictions. I excised whatever I found there which tended toward fantasy; but I garnered whatever seemed likely and not beyond the bounds of credibility and, to this, I added whatever I learnt from the mouths of sage old men. All of this I put together in summary form and this I now bequeath to future generations as an easily digestible nourishment, 'finely ground up' as the proverb has it. Those who have already read the books of the above-mentioned historians will have in this little book a reminder of their reading which they will be able to take along with them and consult as a handbook. Reading provokes recollection; recollection nourishes and expands memory, just as, quite the contrary, negligence and laziness provoke forgetfulness which darkens and confuses the memory of what has happened in the past. Those who have not yet encountered the histories will find a guide in this compendium and, when they go in search of the more fulsome writings, they will gain a more comprehensive impression of the course of events. And now it is time to begin.

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CHAPTER I

Michael I Rangabe, the Kouropalates [811–813]

1. [5] After the emperor Nikephoros was slain in Bulgaria, his son Staurakios, having survived mortally wounded in the capital, relinquished both his life and his throne only two months later.¹ The emperor's brother-in-law (who went by the name of Rangabe)² found himself holding the Roman sceptre at the behest of the senate and people. He would have refused the office, alleging that he was not competent to sustain the burden of such great responsibilities. He was in fact prepared to relinquish the power in favour of the patrician Leo the Armenian. This Leo gave the impression of being a choleric and vigorous type of man. He was serving as commanding officer of the Anatolikon army³ at that time and he had no desire to accept it should it be offered to him. He protested his unworthiness of the imperial throne; it was in fact he who persuaded Michael that it was fitting for him to assume the power. Leo took it upon himself to be [Michael's] most faithful and vigorous servant and adjutant for as long as he lived; these promises he confirmed with most terrifying oaths.⁴

¹ According to Theophanes, Staurakios refused to abdicate even though he was seriously wounded (*PmbZ* 6890 = *PBE* Staurakios 2). It was his brother-in-law who usurped the throne with the support of the principal officers who had survived the disaster in Bulgaria. Staurakios professed himself a monk with the name of Symeon on 2 October 811, but only lived until 11 January of the next year: P. Grierson, 'The tombs and obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337–1042) with an additional note by C. Mango and I. Ševčenko', *DOP*, 16 (1962), 3–63, at 55. His widow, Theophano (*PmbZ* 8163 = *PBE* Theophano 2), a relative of the empress Eirene the Athenian, was given a palace (Ta Hebraika) which she transformed into a monastery dedicated to the Holy Trinity (location unknown: R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique*, 111, *Les églises et les monastères de L'empire byzantin*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1969), 470–1). On Staurakios' marriage see P. Speck, 'Eine Brautschau für Staurakios', *JÖB*, 49 (1999), 25–30.

² On this reign see W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine revival, 782–842* (Stanford, CA, 1988), 177–89; also *PmbZ* 4989 = *PBE* Michael 7.

³ The strategos of the Anatolikon theme commanded the largest of the thematic armies (15,000 men in theory). He was the most senior of the army officers, outranking even the domestic of the scholai. Thus D. Turner, 'The origins and accession of Leo V (813–820)', *JÖB*, 40 (1990), 171–203; also *PmbZ* 4244 = *PBE* Leo 15.

⁴ Genesios (1.2) says that Michael I preserved the text of these oaths in writing. On this practice see N. Svoronos, 'Le serment de fidélité à l'empereur byzantin et sa signification constitutionnelle', *REB*, 9 (1951), 106–42.

2. Once Michael had thus, somewhat against his own intention, come into possession of the reins of the empire,⁵ Krum, the ruler⁶ of the Bulgars, puffed up by his previous successes, together with his subjects (now become presumptuous on account of their victories) burnt and devastated the western regions.⁷ So Michael decided to mount a campaign against them, to do the best he could to restrain and throw back the Bulgar foraging parties. He therefore quickly sent out orders in all directions and troops [6] were hastily assembled. When Krum heard of the emperor's mobilisation, he recalled his own men from foraging and concentrated them in one place. He established a heavily fortified camp there and awaited the arrival of the emperor. When [Michael] arrived, he encamped over against Krum, who was sitting near to Adrianople.⁸ There were frequent skirmishes and battles within archery range and, in all these encounters, the Romans seemed to have the upper hand. This went to the soldiers' heads; they urged and yearned for hand-to-hand fighting and a general engagement. Either out of cowardice (as they said in the ranks) or because he was looking for the opportune moment, the emperor delayed and held back. The host became mutinous and shouted at the emperor, to his face, threatening that, if he did not lead them out, they would break down the palisade themselves and fall upon the enemy. Overwhelmed by this argument, the emperor opened the gates of the encampment and drew up his battle line.⁹ Krum did likewise: he got his men into line and stood them over against the emperor. Each [ruler] harangued his army at length; each spoke words of encouragement and praise, words capable of inciting men to prowess in arms. Finally, they gave the signal with the trumpets for battle to commence and each [side] charged the other. The Romans now withstood the enemy with such heroism and fought so bravely that the Bulgar forces were worn down. The enemy would even have considered a general retreat, for Krum himself was already growing weary, riding in all directions and taking in hand those [units] of the army which were being sorely pressed. And then Leo, the strategos of the Anatolikon theme (who wanted to be emperor), and, with him, the troops under his command (whom he had

⁵ Michael was proclaimed on 2 October 811: *Theophanis Chronographia*, 1 and 11, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–5), 493.

⁶ *Archon*, which means the chief of a nation when applied to foreigners.

⁷ i.e. the themes of Thrace and Macedonia.

⁸ The exact location of this place is not known, but its name is Versinikeia. See P. Soustal, *Thrakien (Thrake, Rodope und Haiminontos)* (TIB, 6, Vienna, 1991), 205.

⁹ The battle of Versinikeia was fought on 22 June 813, Soustal, *Thrakien*.

corrupted) broke ranks and took themselves off in flight, for no reason whatsoever. The remainder of the army was astounded at this sight; the men's courage began to wither away. The Bulgars, on the other hand, regained their courage and came howling at the Romans as though the thought of retreat had never crossed their minds; and theirs now became the winning side. The spirit of the Romans was broken by what had happened. They did not wait for the Bulgars' assault, but immediately turned and fled.¹⁰ Many of the soldiers were killed; not a few of the commanders also fell.¹¹ The emperor only just managed to find refuge in Adrianople, together with a portion of the army still intact. From there he proceeded to the capital, leaving the above-mentioned [7] Leo and his entourage in Thrace. They were to stand their ground against the plundering of the Bulgars and interrupt their onslaughts. Once he was alone, Leo brought out into the open the defection which he had been secretly nurturing within. He shared it with his fellow enthusiasts, telling them the time was ripe to accomplish what they intended. By the mouths of these people he spread the word throughout the whole army that it was on account of the emperor's incompetence and his lack of training in military studies that the Roman forces had been reduced [to flight] and that the former glory and renown of the Romans had departed. Thus too he corrupted the soldiers who, having been dispersed in the rout, came back on foot, devoid of arms and equipment, to join the army that was with him; and thus he persuaded them to accept the possibility of revolt. Suddenly they flocked around his tent, hurling improper and shameless words against the emperor, calling him an unmanly coward who had destroyed the Roman forces and besmirched the distinction and glory of the empire by his incompetence. On the other hand, they openly acclaimed Leo and declared him to be emperor of the Romans. When he made light of it and would have rejected the [supreme] command,

¹⁰ Skylitzes is following a lost work of the patriarch Nikephoros when he accuses Leo of treason. Turner, 'Leo V', 89–193, challenges this widely held view, basing himself on Genesios (who gives two contradictory accounts of Leo's behaviour) and on Theophanes, a contemporary of the events in question, both of whom were well disposed towards Leo. Skylitzes' narrative is inconsistent, claiming that Michael I left Leo behind to defend Thrace. This he would surely not have done had Leo been responsible for the recent disaster.

¹¹ MSS AC add: 'one of whom was the magister Michael Lachanodrakes/Lachanodrakon' but there must be some confusion here for the surly partisan of Constantine V would have been of a great age by now, and in any case that Michael is known to have fallen in a previous defeat at the hand of the Bulgars, near Marcellai, in 792: Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 468; *PmbZ* 5027 = *PBE* Michael 5. One who did fall in this action was the patrician John Aplakes, commander of Macedonia: *PmbZ* 3197 = *PBE* John 19; *Scriptor incertus*, intro. E. Pinto; text, Italian tr. and notes, F. Iadevaia (Messina, 1987), 338.

Michael of Amorion,¹² ‘the stammerer’,¹³ himself a commander of a unit of the Roman army, drew his sword. He invited others who were party to the affair to do likewise and then he threatened to execute Leo if he did not of his own free will accept the [supreme] command. It was thus that the diadem was set on the brow of this man and thus that he was proclaimed emperor of the Romans.

3. Prior to this, as the emperor Michael was returning after the army had been put to flight, he was met by John Exaboulios¹⁴ as he approached the capital. He encouraged the emperor to endure the unfortunate occurrence in a noble and magnanimous way; then he sought to know whom he had left in command of the army. The emperor replied that he had left Leo, the Commander of the Anatolikon theme, a very intelligent fellow and devoted to the empire. When Exaboulios heard this, he said: ‘Oh, emperor, it seems to me that you are very much mistaken insofar as the intentions of this person are concerned.’ That is what he said, and even before the emperor arrived at the palace, the public proclamation of Leo was reported. The sovereign was deeply disturbed by that report. He was trying to decide what action to take when some of his entourage urged him to do everything in his power to hold on to the supreme command and to resist the usurper [8] to the full extent of his capability. But he was a man of peace, with no wish to involve himself in an affair the outcome of which was unpredictable. So he ordered those who were saying such things not to incite him to engage in a murderous civil war. And he sent off to Leo one of those close to him, bearing the imperial insignia: the diadem, the purple robe and the scarlet buskins.¹⁵ He undertook to cede the throne to Leo, for he judged it better to pass from his own life than to see the shedding of a single drop of Christian blood. Leo should set aside all fear and uncertainty; let him come and take possession of the palace [said the emperor]. The empress Procopia, however, was opposed to what

¹² Amorion was the seat of the strategos of the Anatolikon theme, the most important of the eastern themes. The ruins of the fortress which housed a significant garrison are presently being excavated: C. S. Lightfoot, Y. Mergen, B. Y. Olcay, and J. Witte-Orr, ‘The Amorium project: research and excavation in 2000’, *DOP*, 57 (2003), 279–92.

¹³ This is the future emperor Michael II (820–9), founder of the ‘Amorian’ dynasty.

¹⁴ John Exaboulios (*PmbZ* 3196 = *PBE* John 81) was then count of the walls. Later he was logothete of the drome under Leo V and counsellor to Michael II, from whom he received the title of patrician. According to *Genesis* (1.3), Exaboulios was the name of a *genos* but no other person is known by this name. Other Exaboulitai are mentioned in the eleventh century but there is no indication that these were related to the above John.

¹⁵ On the imperial vestments and insignia: P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, 11–111 (Washington, DC, 1968–1973), 111, 107–45.

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was being done. She said the empire was a fine winding sheet,¹⁶ and when she failed to convince [the emperor], in order to have the last word, she said it would be strange, indeed even more than merely strange, if the upstart's wife were to deck herself out in the imperial diadem.¹⁷ She made fun of her alluding to her name, calling her 'Barka'.¹⁸ Then she began to think about her own situation. And that is what was going on around the emperor.

The usurper, on the other hand, entered [the capital] by the Golden Gate,¹⁹ acclaimed by the army, the senate and the people. He proceeded to the [monastery-] church of the Forerunner at Stoudios,²⁰ and from there, accompanied by a guard of honour, he arrived at the palace. As he was about to offer to God a prayer on his return in the Chrysotriklinos,²¹ he took off the over-garment he happened to be wearing and handed it to Michael, the head groom,²² who promptly put it on himself. To those who saw it, this seemed to be an omen that he would mount the imperial throne after Leo. The emperor then put on another garment and set out for the church in the palace. Michael was walking behind him without paying attention to where he was going. In this way he recklessly stepped

¹⁶ The famous words of the empress Theodora (quoting Isocrates) at the time of the Nika revolt. See J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman empire from the death of Theodosius I to the death of Justinian*, 2 vols. (London, 1923), II, 45 and note 4.

¹⁷ The *modiolos* was a crown used at the coronation; it has been the subject of various studies, from P. Charanis, 'The imperial crown and its constitutional significance', *B*, 12 (1937), 189–95, to A. P. Kazhdan, 'The crown Modiolus once more', *JÖB*, 38 (1988), 339–40, and C. Morriison, 'Le modiolos: couronne impériale ou couronne pour l'empereur', *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, ed. V. Déroche, D. Feissel, C. Morriison, C. Zuckerman, *TM*, 14 (2002), 499–510.

¹⁸ Clearly an insult, but the exact meaning is unclear. It has sometimes been taken to be a proper name, which led Treadgold, *Byzantine revival*, 198–9, to think that Leo had divorced his first wife (Theodosia).

¹⁹ By this gate the Egnatian Way entered the city, close to the sea of Marmara. The main gate only admitted emperors and victorious generals (R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine (AOC, 4 A, Paris, 1964)*, 115–17). *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 501, says Leo entered by the Gate of Charisios, which is far more likely for one coming from Adrianople, by which name that gate was also known. This triumphal entry took place on 11 July 813 and was followed by the coronation the day after.

²⁰ If Leo entered by the Golden Gate, a station would be expected at this, the most illustrious of the Constantinopolitan monasteries, then under the direction of Theodore of Stoudios. Following the tenth-century historians: Genesisios 1.4, *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), 18; Skylitzes here describes the traditional route of a triumphal procession.

²¹ This was one of the state rooms in the sixth-century Great Palace reserved for imperial receptions and banquets: Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 115–17. According to *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. Bekker, 19; it was in the Chalke that Leo prayed on entering the palace.

²² Michael (*PmbZ* 4990, 5047 = *PBE* Michael 10) had just been appointed *protostrator* by Leo. It was a great honour to be handed something the emperor had been wearing. Genesisios (1.4) says the vestment in question was a *kolobion*, a tunic decorated with the eagle motif.

on the hem of the imperial vestment. Leo took this to be a bad omen and he began to suspect that an insurrection would originate with that man.

That is how the usurper entered the palace and came into possession of the throne which could have been his without a struggle. Instead, he took it with considerable trouble and disturbance.

The emperor Michael, his wife Prokopia and their children²³ now took refuge in the church of the Mother of God known as the church of the Lighthouse,²⁴ where they sought sanctuary. The usurper expelled them from there and separated them from each other. Michael he exiled to the monastery on the island of Prote,²⁵ where his layman's hair was tonsured and where he spent the remaining portion of his life. Theophylact, the [9] oldest of Michael's sons, he castrated and sent him into exile, together with his mother and brothers.²⁶

4. That is what happened; and here it is worthwhile recalling the prophecy of the monk installed near Philomelion.²⁷ There was a person, one of the most distinguished of people, whose name was Bardanios Tourkos.²⁸ He was one of the principal members of the senate, a patrician in rank and, at that time, domestic of the scholai for the east.²⁹ He was always contemplating the possibility of attempted usurpation and, if it could be, of seizing control of the empire, but he was tossed by conflicting emotions. He burned with longing for the throne, but he trembled and feared at the

²³ Michael had many children. The names of three sons and two daughters (Gorgo and Theophano) are known: *PmbZ* 2290; *PBE* Georgo 1; *PmbZ* 8164 = *PBE* Theophano 1. The eldest son (Staurakios) was dead already (*PmbZ* 6890 = *PBE* Stavrakios 12). The second, Theophylact (named after his paternal grandfather), became a monk with the name of Eustratios and died in January 849, aged fifty-six (*PmbZ* 8336 = *PBE* Theophylaktos 9). His younger brother, Niketas, took the monastic name of Ignatios; this is the future patriarch: Treadgold, *Byzantine revival*, 405, n. 163.

²⁴ *Tou Pharou*, allegedly built by Constantine V; this is the church which housed the greater part of the imperial relic collection (Janin, *Églises et monastères*, 232–4), situated (as the name implies) by the lighthouse on the Marmara coast. The earliest mention of this edifice is in connection with the marriage of Leo IV with the Chazar princess in 768: Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 444.

²⁵ Now Kinali island in the sea of Marmara, a traditional place of exile. Bardanios Tourkos was sent there after the failure of his uprising in 803: R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins* (Paris, 1975), 70–2.

²⁶ The harsh treatment meted out to Michael's sons rather suggests that the transfer of power was not effected quite so smoothly as the chroniclers suggest.

²⁷ A town in the Anatolikon theme, now Akşehir, see K. Belke and N. Mersich, *Phrygien und Pisidien* (TIB, 7, Vienna, 1990), 359–60.

²⁸ The name Tourkos (the Turk) might indicate that he had Khazar blood; he was domestic of the scholai then strategos of the Anatolikon theme under Eirene and Nikephoros. His career is described in E. Kountoura-Galake, 'He epanastase tou Bardane Tourkou', *Symmeikta*, 5 (1983), 203–15. See also *PmbZ*, 759, 760, 762, 771 and *PBE*, Bardanes 3.

²⁹ An anachronism, for this title is unknown prior to the reign of Romanos II: N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Le monde byzantin, Paris, 1972), 329. Bardanios was monostrategos, 'sole commander', of all the eastern themes, meaning that he was temporarily in command of all the eastern armies, no doubt to coordinate resistance to the Moslems.

uncertainty of the outcome. Then he heard that at Philomelion there was a monk; a solitary who had attained the acme of virtue, of whom it was said that he could foretell the future. [Bardanos] knew that he simply had to share his plans with this man and obtain his judgement. Since this is what he thought, he devised a hunting party. He took Leo with him, a good-looking, fine figure of a man with sound judgement in political matters, who served him as equerry-in-chief. He also took with him the above-mentioned Michael of Amorion, ‘the stammerer’, and, in addition to these two, a fellow named Thomas,³⁰ an Armenian by race, who had his home on lake Gazouro.³¹ At a certain point, he told the large company of men that was with him to stay where they were while he and the men just mentioned went to the monk’s cave. [Bardanos] went in alone to the solitary and told him what he had on his mind. When these things reached his ears, the monk immediately discouraged him from what was proposed. He asserted that if Bardanos did not obey him and desist from his plan, he would both lose the sight of his eyes and be deprived of his fortune. The commander lost heart at these words and was very close to losing his mind. However, when the customary prayer had been said and the commander was about to leave, his horse was brought forward and he mounted it. Holding the bridle was Michael; it was Thomas who steadied the right stirrup and Leo who gave the commander a leg-up into the saddle as he mounted the horse. At that point, the monk leaned out of his window, peered down at the men and told Bardanos to come back again, [10] a recall which the latter received with gladness. In less time than it takes to tell, he leapt from the saddle and ran in to the monk, expecting to hear something to his liking. Getting him to come and stand close beside him again, the monk said: ‘Commander, yet again I advise and counsel you in no way whatsoever to have anything more to do with what you have in mind. Otherwise, make no mistake about it! It will cost you the crippling of your eyes and the confiscation of your goods. But, of the three men who brought up your horse, the one who gave you a leg-up when you were about to mount, he will be the first to gain possession of the throne, and, secondly, the one who held the bridle. As for the third man, the one who held the stirrup for your right foot, he will be proclaimed emperor but never reign. Furthermore, he will lose his life by a most pitiful death.’ When Bardanos heard this, he brushed aside what had been

³⁰ This is Thomas ‘the Slav’, who raised a serious revolt against Michael II.

³¹ Lake Karalis to the ancients, Pougouse or Scleros in the Middle Ages, this is now Beysehir Golie, one of the largest lakes in Turkey, lying between Galatia and Lykaonia: K. Belke (mit Beiträgen von M. Restle) *Galatien und Lykaonien* (TIB, 4, Vienna, 1984), 218.