

HERACLIUS
EMPEROR OF BYZANTIUM

WALTER E. KAEGI



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(Photographs courtesy of Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Fig. 1), and of Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, DC (Figs. 2–6))

Abbreviations

<i>AABSC</i>	<i>Abstracts, Annual Byzantine Studies Conference</i>
<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>ACO</i>	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
<i>Azdī</i>	al-Baṣrī, Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh Abū Isma‘īl al-Azdī
<i>Al-Balādhurī,</i> <i>Futūḥ</i>	al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā <i>Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān</i> , ed. de Goeje
<i>BAR</i>	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BEIC</i>	Kaegi, <i>Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests</i>
<i>Beihammer,</i> <i>Nachrichten</i>	Beihammer, <i>Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen in arabischen Quellen</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>BGA</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>Byzsl</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>ByzStratos</i>	Zia Stratos, ed., Βυζάντιον. Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Ἄνδρέα Στράτο. <i>Byzance. Hommage à Andreas Stratos. Byzantium. Tribute to Andreas Stratos</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i>
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>CMH</i>	<i>Cambridge Medieval History</i>
<i>CSCO, SS</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>DO Cat</i>	P. Grierson, <i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection</i>

<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EI</i> ¹	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> . 1st edn., 8 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1913–1936; repr. Leiden, 1987
<i>EI</i> ²	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> . 2nd edn. Leiden: Brill, 1960–
<i>EO</i>	<i>Echos d'Orient</i>
<i>FHG</i>	<i>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</i>
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i>
Jaffé, <i>Regesta</i>	Philip Jaffé, <i>Regesta Pontificum Romanorum</i> . Leipzig: Veit; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JJP</i>	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
Kūfī	Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , ed. A.P. Kazhdan, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991
<i>PBE</i>	<i>Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PLRE</i>	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
<i>PMBZ</i>	<i>Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>REArm</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Arméniennes</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Byzantines</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Revue Numismatique</i>
Stratos, Βυζάντιον	Stratos, Βυζάντιον στὸν Ζ' αἰῶνα
al-Ṭabarī	al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr, <i>Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l mulūk</i> , ed. by M.J. de Goeje et al.
al-Ṭabarī, <i>History</i>	<i>The History of al-Ṭabarī</i> (see respective translated volumes)
Ṭabarī/Nöldeke	Theodor Nöldeke, <i>Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari</i>

<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i> (Paris)
<i>TMD</i>	Ibn 'Asākir, <i>Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq</i> , ed. 'Umar ibn Gharāma 'Amrawī
<i>VV</i>	<i>Vizantiiski Vremennik</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZRVI</i>	<i>Zbornik, Radova Vizantoloshkog Institut, Srpska Akad. Nauk.</i> (Belgrade)

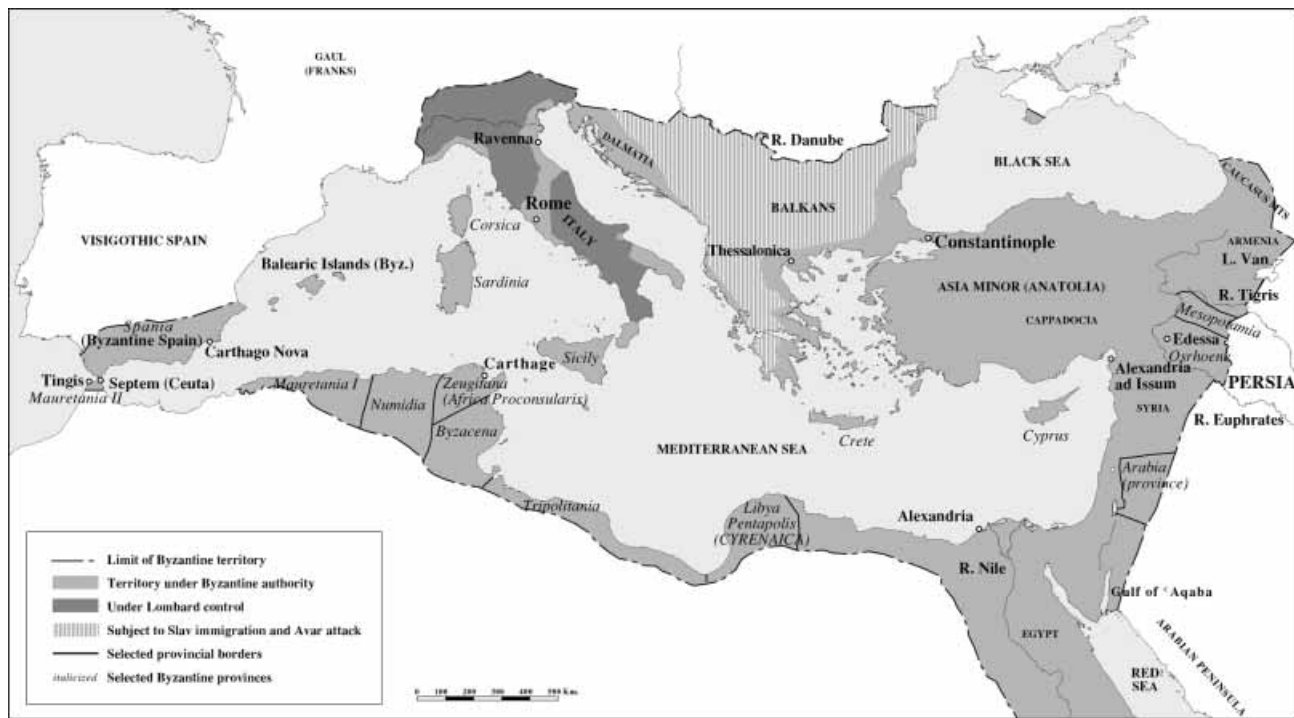
Armenia and Africa: the formative years

The seventh century did not begin auspiciously.¹ True, the Empire's borders still stretched from the Pillars of Hercules, that is, the straits of Gibraltar, in the west, to the Gulf of 'Aqaba and the edge of the Caucasus (Map 1). There was, of course, no contemporary consciousness about the start of any new century. St. Theodore of Sykeon foretold calamities that would cover Heraclius' era: speaking of the Emperor Maurice, who he predicted would soon die (as it happened, in 602), he said "after him there will be worse calamities, such that this generation has no idea of." On another occasion, he announced, "Pray, my children, great tribulations, terrible scourges threaten the world."² It was a troubled time that was about to worsen, one that would engulf virtually the total sweep of our subject's lifetime. We know very little about Flavius Heraclius' early years. Heraclius the Younger was a virtual contemporary of an illustrious man whom he presumably never met, the prophet Muḥammad, who was born about five years earlier, and who died nine years before Heraclius himself did. How much the name evoked the hero Herakles in Heraclius the Younger's mind is unknown, but it was auspicious of his future exertions.³ It may have been a stimulus to heroic efforts. For others Heraclius commemorated prominent saints, not any ancient mythological hero. But it was his unidentified grandparents who had chosen his father's and therefore implicitly his name.

¹ John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (2nd. edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); W.E. Kaegi, "Reconceptualizing Byzantium's Eastern Frontiers," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Mathisen and H. Sivan (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996) 83–92.

² *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon* c. 119, 127 (I: 96, 103, II: 99, 107 Festugière).

³ His court poets, such as George of Pisidia, certainly invoked the name of Herakles in praise of Heraclius: *Heraclius* 1.78–79, II 20–23 (243, 252 Pertusi); Mary Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius," in *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East*, ed. E. Dabrowa (Krakow: Uniwersytet Jagiellonski Instytut Historii, 1994) 206–208; Th. Nissen, "Historisches Epos und Panegyrikos in der Spätantike," *Hermes* 75 (1940) 302–303.



Map 1 The Byzantine Empire in AD 600

Heraclius the Younger was born son of Heraclius the Elder and Epiphania ca. 575, and was probably of Armenian descent⁴ (one early and one late source call him Cappadocian, but that is not irreconcilable with being Armenian).⁵ The question of the origins of Heraclius the Elder is important. If one assumes that his origin is African or Edessene Syrian or Armenian or Cappadocian non-Armenian, each of these categories creates a different group of possible assumptions about the heritage and context in which both Heraclii grew up and developed. And is the place of birth also the identifier of ethnic identity or not? The preponderance of evidence points to an Armenian origin for Heraclius the Elder, although his wife may well have had Cappadocian origins. Furthermore, the epithet “Cappadocian” leaves many questions unanswered. The term Cappadocia can refer to lands as far as the Euphrates. We have no evidence on what Armenian consciousness, if any, either Heraclius possessed. Greek panegyrists would not have wished to call attention to any Armenian origins of Heraclius. Although the achievements of his father, Heraclius the Elder, were modest, later historians magnified his military achievements as part of their program to exalt and praise his son. His father, also named Heraclius, had been a prominent general in 585, apparently second in command to Philippikos, the supreme regional commander, the Master of the Soldiers

⁴ *PLRE* III: 586–587, s.v. “Heraclius 4”; A. Pernice, *Imperatore Eraclio* (Florence, 1905). Armenian origin: Theophylact Simocatta, *Hist.* 3.1.1; other information on background: Theophylact Simocatta, *Hist.* 2.3.2, 2.5.10, 2.10.6, 3.6.2; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 109.27 (trans. R.H. Charles; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1916). Theophanes, *Chron.* A.M. 6078, 6100, 6101, 6102. Any genealogy of the family earlier than that of Heraclius the Elder is too speculative to consider here: Cyril Mango, “Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse Sassanide,” *TM* 9 (1985) 113–114, in favor of the possible identification of a late fifth-century Heraclius with this family. Other Byzantine commanders in Africa, such as John Troglitas and Solomon, had backgrounds and experience in the east, as of course, did Belisarios, so it is not in principle difficult to find a Byzantine commander in Africa who had experience and origins in the east. The author of the *History* attributed to Sebeos, although written in Armenian, does not specifically identify Heraclius as Armenian, which may be a meaningless ethnic designation for that historical context, or identify his birthplace, but for a very probable Armenian attribution, see Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1963) 192–193; Toumanoff, “Caucasia and Byzantium,” *Traditio* 27 (1971) esp. 157–158; D. Kouymjian, “Ethnic Origins and the ‘Armenian’ Policy of Emperor Heraclius,” *REArm*, n.s. 17 (1983) 635–642; Toumanoff, “The Heraclids and the Arsacids,” *REArm*, n.s. 19 (1985) 431–434, hypothesizes some genealogical tie with the ancient dynasty of Arsacids. Also: Irfan Shahid, “The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius,” *DOP* 26 (1972) 310. The relevant text is from Sebeos, *History* 144–145 (109 Thomson, n. 673); *Storia* c. 42 (111 trans. Gugerotti = 108 trans. Macler). A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952) 193, accepted this allusion by Sebeos to the Arsacid antecedents of Heraclius’ grandson, Constans II, as likewise referring to Heraclius himself.

⁵ John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 106.2, 109.27 (167, 176 Charles) mentions Cappadocia; the twelfth-century poet and historian Constantine Manasses, *Brev. Chron.* 1.3664–5 (ed. Odysseus Lampides, *CFHB* 36; Athens: Academy, 1997, 197) proclaims in verse that “his fatherland was the thrice-blessed land of the Cappadocians, his race of distinguished men, and with an abundance of hair.”

(*magister militum per Orientem*) in the East 586–588, in a capacity in 586 in which he saw action against the Persians at Solachon, and again in the same year he was at personal risk in scouting near the siege of Chlomaron.⁶ It is possible that Heraclius the Elder actually exercised authority as *magister militum* twice during the absence of Philippikos from the troops. Philippikos sent Heraclius the Elder to raid Persia late in 586 and again in late 587. Philippikos left him in command of the empire's eastern army for a time in spring 587 while Philippikos was ill and visited Constantinople. Philippikos ordered him to return to Armenia when Emperor Maurice appointed Priskos to replace Philippikos in 588, so Heraclius avoided the difficult situation of having to welcome Priskos,⁷ who replaced Philippikos and then encountered a mutiny of the troops who still wanted Philippikos.⁸ In 589 he served under the *magister militum per Orientem* Komentiolos⁹ in the east, near Nisibis, at the battle of Sisarbanon. He was the lieutenant of General Philippikos.

Precisely where the young Heraclius was during these activities of his father is uncertain – perhaps near him, perhaps in Armenia, perhaps at Constantinople. Ca. 595 Heraclius the Elder was *magister militum per Armeniam*, which reinforced his ties with Armenia. Presumably his son Heraclius would either have accompanied him or visited him while he performed those responsibilities, whether or not he had visited him during his earlier military service.¹⁰ Later Heraclius the Younger enjoyed a reputation for being very learned. There is no information on what kind of education he received as a child or during his teenage years, including when, where, and how he became literate. Armenia did not lack learned scholars, as the contemporary case of the scholar Ananias of Shirak testifies.¹¹ Presumably Heraclius was bilingual (Armenian and Greek) from an early age, but even this is uncertain, as is whether he learned to speak or read any other languages. Similarly there is no evidence concerning any acquaintances and friendships that Heraclius the Younger made at that time, or the nature or intensity of his relations with the church, or concerning any youthful religious experiences, including mentoring, that he received. His was an era in which impressive ascetics made terrifying predictions and seemed able

⁶ *PLRE* III: 1022–1026, s.v. “Philippicus 3.” ⁷ *PLRE* III: 1052–1057, s.v. “Priscus 6.”

⁸ Theophylact Sim. *Hist.* 3.1.1–2; W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest* (Amsterdam, Las Palmas: Hakkert, 1981) 68–72; M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 287–290.

⁹ *PLRE* III: 321–325, s.v. “Comentiolus 1.” ¹⁰ *PLRE* III: 584–585, s.v. “Heraclius 3.”

¹¹ Paul Lemerle, “Note sur les données historiques de l’Autobiographie d’Anania de Shirak,” *REArm*, n.s. 1 (1964) 195–201; J.-P. Mahé, “Quadrivium et cursus d’études au VII^e siècle en Arménie et dans le monde byzantin d’après le ‘K’nnikon’ d’Anania Sirakac’i,” *TM* 10 (1987) 159–206.

to make miraculous cures of various medical and mental afflictions, but we do not know whether he or his father consulted or had special contact in that stage of his life with any of them. Presumably he learned how to ride a horse and how to handle some weapons in those years.

Military service in Armenia provided Heraclius the Elder with an up-to-date acquaintance with conditions there, giving his son Heraclius the Younger some memories and ties and opportunities or future opportunities on which to build his network of friends, as well as intelligence about conditions and terrain there – including roads, weather, and communications; the people – their ways and outlooks; and the availability of provisions for man and horse. They learned of the latest developments in warfare between Persians and Byzantines. Heraclius the Elder served in those years of the 580s and 590s in precisely the regions in which his son Heraclius the Younger would be leading imperial armies in the coming decades. So paternal advice about military conditions there would have been invaluable for his son, as well as whatever personal ties and obligations the father made with local inhabitants, especially their leaders. This is a great gap in our knowledge. But the later military successes and routes of Heraclius the Younger on his subsequent campaigns, his ability to recruit troops, his readiness to undertake certain kinds of military risks in such difficult and dangerous terrain, all surely owed much to his father's previous service there, his advice to his son, and whatever goodwill and ties his father had built during his years of service there. Probably the father never wrote all or possibly any of it down, but communicated it orally to his son over a period of years. In upper Mesopotamia both necessarily would have gained at least a little familiarity with Arabs, whether those pasturing their flocks in the vicinity or those who actually were military allies, scouts, or couriers for the Byzantines, and possibly something of those who served the Persians. What opinions they developed about Arabs at that time are matters only for speculation. We cannot determine which towns and routes Heraclius the Younger visited during those years.

Heraclius the Elder had, during his military service in the east, the opportunity to develop impressions about sensitive issues of military unrest and about prominent personalities among the empire's commanders and their impact on military units. He heard a lot about commanders such as Priskos and Philippikos, reached his own conclusions, and probably passed them on to his son. Although he did not serve in the Balkans, in so far as is known, he probably shared the attitudes and possible prejudices of eastern commanders and soldiers about service and about the personalities and character of military units in the Balkans. As a commander who served

in the east, he was surely aware of the unpopularity among Armenians of transfer to and military service in the Balkans. All of this wisdom and prejudice was part of the heritage his son Heraclius received from him.

Up to this point in the lives of both Heraclii, as far as is known, Heraclius the Elder's service had been in or near landlocked areas of the interior inhabited by Armenians.¹² None of those areas had ever been heavily Hellenized or Romanized, whether in language, culture, or physical monuments, that is, public buildings, statuary, *fora*, or amphitheaters and arenas. These areas were by no means exclusively Armenian, but were inhabited by diverse ethnic groups. Except for possible visits to Constantinople, there is no evidence of familiarity with maritime regions of the empire, naval warfare or shipping. Their familiarity would have been of warfare and terrain in the Caucasus and the plains and plateaus of extreme upper Mesopotamia, regions of severe winters and summers, with harsh changes of climate, difficulties of travel and regions of limited supplies for an army, if not the need to bring one's own supplies on any substantial military expedition. It was a world of many stone fortifications, and parts of this territory required careful attention to accumulation of supplies of water, due to the parched summer conditions. Waterways, except for the upper Tigris and Euphrates, were not navigable in those regions, and even these waterways were probably of limited value to the Byzantines, because of their routes. Horses were useful in parts of this country, especially upper Mesopotamia and even some parts of the Armenian highlands.

Heraclius learned much from his father about Persian ways of war and diplomacy. His father had some actual combat and scouting experience against the Persians. That action took place in extreme upper Mesopotamia. The *Patria* of Constantinople reports that Heraclius the Younger dreamt of empire while residing in the former residence of Sophiai, built twenty-eight years earlier either for Sophia, wife of Emperor Justin II, or for Anastasia, widow of Tiberius II, and mother-in-law of Emperor Maurice, in Constantinople, presumably after his father was finished with his campaigning or while not campaigning against the Persians.¹³ By implication there he gained the ambition for imperial power, presumably having tasted of imperial splendor at that residence. That may be a later invented story,

¹² On contemporary Armenian geography: Ananias of Shirak, *The Geography of Ananias of Shirak, Asxarhacouyc, The Long and Short Recensions*, ed., trans., comment. R.H. Hewsen (Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Geisteswissenschaften, 77; Wiesbaden: Reichart, 1992).

¹³ Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) 321; *Patria Constantinopoleos*, ed. Th. Preger, K III 125. The reference in the *Patria* is problematic and may conflate Heraclius and his father.

intended to demonstrate the fated and inevitable nature of his rise to the throne, but it may contain a kernel of truth. It is entirely possible that the family of Heraclius the Elder did temporarily reside in that palace as recipients of imperial hospitality to a favored prominent commander, and to reinforce their mutual ties. Heraclius the Elder did enjoy the favor of Emperor Maurice. Probably Heraclius the Younger resided there immediately before his father's assumption of new responsibilities in Africa. Both Heraclii owed a lot to Maurice, respected him, and naturally retained a favorable memory of and loyalty to him. Subsequently Heraclius the Younger wished to associate his cause with the revenge for injustice to Maurice. There may be cold political calculations in the subsequent posthumous praise and lament at the Heraclian court for Maurice, but with it was some genuine admiration and recognition that without his sponsorship, the Heraclii would have had less lustrous careers. No record exists of actual face-to-face audiences of either Heraclius with Maurice.

By approximately the year 600, or in any event by 602, Heraclius the Elder had received appointment as exarch in Africa (a kind of governor-general, who held civilian and military powers, whose seat of power was Carthage¹⁴) on the authority of Emperor Maurice, who still reigned. Recent scholarship does not ascribe as much significance to the institution of the exarchate as was the case at the end of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century. A number of important sixth-century Byzantine military commanders in North Africa had held military commands or originated in the east and then came to serve in Africa: Belisarios himself, Solomon, and John Troglitas, Theoktistos, Sergios (nephew of Solomon), Artabanes, and Rufinos.¹⁵ Heraclius' appointment and experience fit into the larger pattern of many Byzantine military commanders in Africa, and like Solomon, he had an Armenian background. His rotation from the east and Dara and Nisibis region to Africa was not unusual.¹⁶ One does not

¹⁴ Charles Diehl, *L'Afrique byzantine* (Paris, 1896, repr. New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), also Diehl, *Études sur l'administration byzantine dans l'Exarchat de Ravenne (568–751)* (Paris, 1888).

¹⁵ *PLRE* III, s.v. "Belisarius," "Solomon," "John Troglitas," "Theoktistos 2," "Sergius 4," "Artabanes 2," "Rufinus 2." Hence it is unnecessary to seek some remote African ancestor for Heraclius the Elder: D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa* (Oxford, 1979) 1–34. On exarchate: Pringle, *Defence of Byzantine Africa* 41–42, 57. Of course there are *magistri militum*, *duces*, and exarchs for whom our biographical information is so incomplete that it is impossible to determine their previous military experience and its location.

¹⁶ Transfers between east and west in an earlier century of the Later Roman Empire: Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350–425* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 212–214. Even a fifth-century Heraclius came from the Edessa region to lead troops in Africa. He was sent by Emperor Leo I against the Vandal king Geiserich: Theophanes, *Chron.* A.M. 5963 (182–183 Mango) so the cases of sixth-century officers with eastern experience, esp. in vicinity of upper Mesopotamia, are part of a much broader pattern.

know what changes and improvements he made in Africa as a result of his earlier experiences in the east against the Persians. Because the inhabitants of North Africa had previously encountered Byzantine commanders with military experience not unlike that of Heraclius the Elder, both they and he had precedents. There may have been some difficult adjustments for both parties, but this was not the first time such a commander with this kind of background had come to Africa. The name Heraclius probably found a positive reception in Africa, because Tebessa, now in eastern Algeria near the Tunisian frontier, was a site associated with a Christian martyr named Heraclius.¹⁷ It is unknown whether Heraclius the Elder drew on reports of the experiences of some of his predecessors from the eastern front to help him adjust more easily and to avoid any previous mistakes or problems. There was an interchange and rotation of military commanders between the critical eastern commands in the vicinity of Dara and Africa. There was no simple, single pattern for it, but the career of Heraclius the Elder was no unusual case in that respect. How much improvement or change in military arrangements and tactics occurred in both regions as a result of those rotations is uncertain.

Heraclius the Younger probably spent his twenty-fifth through thirty-fifth years in North Africa with his father, a key period of his maturation. Because there is no diary, local history, chronicle, or letters that report the activities of either Heraclius during most of their stays in Africa, one must make inferences. The early Frankish historian Fredegarius (ca. 656, rather close to the reign of Heraclius) reports that Heraclius had “often” fought lions in the arena and even wild boar in unfrequented places, although he is not more specific as to locality.¹⁸ Africa possessed both lions and boar, and

¹⁷ Y. Duval, ed., *Loca Sanctorum Africae* I: 126.

¹⁸ Fredegarius 4.65 (= *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, ed. trans. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (London: Thos. Nelson, 1960) 52–53). Although previous emperors had abolished the custom of using panthers and lions and other beasts apparently as punishments, this allegedly resumed in the reign of Phokas, according to John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 107.10 (168 Charles). But John is not speaking about conditions in Africa. It had become a rarity in the east, if we can trust him. But John may refer to punishments, not to optional combat by free men. It is not likely that there were many arenas in Armenia and in upper Mesopotamia. I am unaware of the excavation of arenas in those regions. Nor would Heraclius probably have engaged in such activity while campaigning against the Persians. He could have engaged in such combat in Constantinople, and despite the opposition of the church, there were at least sporadic instances of animal combat at Constantinople, and those could have included lions. There could be Constantinian associations with such practices, and Heraclius sought to associate his name with Constantine I. The tradition of animal combat is better attested for Africa, where the supply of animals was presumably still plentiful at the beginning of the seventh century and traditions of such past combats were ubiquitous. Steven H. Wander, “The Cyprus Plates and the Chronicle of Fredegar,” *DOP* 29 (1975) 345–346, does not discuss Fredegarius’ reference to lions. See A.P. Kazhdan, “Animal Combat,” in *ODB* 100. Mary Whitby, “A New Image” (n. 3) 218–220, for images of struggle against beasts.

had a long tradition of human combat with wild beasts, as extant mosaics in Sousse and Sfax and the Bardo Museum in Tunis attest. Perhaps Heraclius as a younger man, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, had actually fought lions in controlled situations in Africa, where he had learned of traditions of such combats. Fredegarius' detail that Heraclius fought in the arena makes it conceivable that the locality of such combat was Africa, but fighting lions in the arena is an heroic activity (whether historical or unhistorical) for Armenians as well,¹⁹ so this may be a *topos* and nothing more. He would have engaged in such activity while relatively young, which accords with his stay in Africa. Such prowess probably earned him respect in Africa and among the Byzantine officials and soldiery stationed in Africa, and he was able to draw on those feats to increase his reputation and renown in the future. Renown for such combat also evoked the labors of his mythological namesake, Herakles, who had slain the Nemean lion as one of his distinguished labors.²⁰ Contemporaries could not have avoided making that association. One can always ask whether this is a mere imperial *topos* and nothing more. That is possible, but it is more likely that he had, in Africa, observed and in some fashion participated in vestigial remnants of the old arena combats of Roman North Africa. He made the most of his stay there, not ignoring local ways and local conditions. He did not isolate himself from Africans and their ways of doing things. He enjoyed his stay in Africa, which contributed to his growth and development as well as providing the resources and springboard for his rise to power. There is no way of knowing how much of Africa he visited outside Carthage.

The elder Heraclius and his son found themselves in a rich land. Byzantine Africa at the beginning of the seventh century was not in economic or demographic decline.²¹ Africa contained far more splendid Roman traces

¹⁹ Sebeos, *Hist.* ch. 20, 93 (39–40 Thomson), for Smbat Bagratuni's combat with lions in the arena.

²⁰ George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* 1.78–79, 2.19–23 (243, 252 Pertusi). J. Trilling, "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court," *Byzantion* 48 (1978) 250–251, for arguments that the "David Plates" date from early in Heraclius' reign, although certainly after his seizure of Constantinople and probably after 613, and on pp. 260–261, more discussion of the Herakles conceit.

²¹ M.G. Fulford, "Carthage: Overseas Trade and the Political Economy c. AD 400–700," *Reading Medieval Studies* 6 (1980) 68–80; S. Ellis, "Carthage in the Seventh Century: an Expanding Population?" *Cahiers des Etudes Anciennes* 17 (1985) 30–42; Ellis, "North African Villages in the Byzantine Period," *XXe Congrès des Etudes Byzantines I: Séances Plénières, Pré-Actes* (Paris 2001) 78; Stefano Tortorella, "La ceramica fine da mensa africana dal IV al VII secolo d.c.," in *Società romana e impero tardoantico III: Le merci gli insediamenti*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Rome: Laterza, 1986) 211–225. An opposing but unpersuasive view: W.H.C. Frend, "The End of Byzantine Africa: Some Evidence of Transitions," in *Histoire et Archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord, IIe Colloque International (Grenoble, 5–9 avril 1983)* = *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, n.s. 19B (1985) 387–397. Geographical limits: Pringle, *Defence of Byzantine Africa* 28–29, 59–63.

than did the Balkan towns from which many Late Roman emperors took their origins. Archaeologists and historians have modified the earlier picture of decline that Charles Diehl had sketched in his *Afrique byzantine*. Byzantine military authorities had devised ways, within their limited financial means and military capacities, to contain the Berber threat. Africa was not without problems, but life there was not on the edge of a precipice.²² Life was, in fact, far more secure than in the contemporary imperiled Byzantine Balkans or the empire's even more imperiled eastern frontier lands of Mesopotamia and the Caucasus.²³ There is evidence in the western Mediterranean for seventh-century trade between Africa and Gaul.²⁴ Yet, as in contemporary Italy, there was an understandable impetus for the assertion of local interests and for decentralization.²⁵

Churches and agriculture were thriving at and near the coasts. Grain had been important in Mesopotamia: it was also important in Africa, especially in the vicinity of Vaga or modern Beja, in the Mejerda River plain. The Arab memory of the seventh-century Byzantine Africa that they had found and conquered was of a land extremely rich in agriculture based on one principal crop, the olive, even though its grain was also important. Maritime trade was also brisk, probably involving grain, olive oil, and perhaps some wine. Fish and shellfish were plentiful. The landed elite left their principal testimonial in the form of sepulchral mosaics, the overwhelming number of which, insofar as it is possible to ascertain a date, predate the seventh century. This elite was not supine; it could be assertive, but we do not have detailed information about individual families at the beginning of the seventh century, or their familial life. We can only make inferences about their political and economic attitudes. We do not have their account

²² Averil Cameron, "Gelimer's Laughter," in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. Frank M. Clover and R.S. Humphreys (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 171–190; also Averil Cameron, "Byzantine Reconquest of North Africa," *Graeco-Arabica* 5 (1993) 153–165.

²³ Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy* 21–168. Although Hendy emphasizes (172, 620–621) the relatively smaller importance of Africa in contrast to the wealth of Egypt, one historian attributes a significant aspect of the decline of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century to the loss of Africa: Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe* (n. 16) 267: loss of control of Africa, "important as a reservoir of manpower and money, and similar to Egypt or Anatolia in the East." If Africa ever held such importance, it would have been somewhat reduced by the seventh century, and never was really equivalent to Egypt. Yet loss of control of it by Phokas was serious, especially when coupled with that of Egypt, and the imperiled situation in northern Syria and upper Mesopotamia and the restive situation in the Balkans. Africa's importance to the empire as a source of revenues rose enormously when Egypt was lost to the Persians and again to the Muslims.

²⁴ Cécile Morrisson, "Les monnaies byzantines," in Y. Solier and colleagues, "Les épaves de Gruissan," *Archaeonautica* 3 (1981) 35–52.

²⁵ André Guillou, *Régionalisme et indépendance dans l'empire byzantin au VII^e siècle: L'exemple de l'exarchat et de la Pentapole d'Italie* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1969) 231–254.

books.²⁶ Almost no one remained alive at the beginning of the seventh century who could remember the actual Byzantine reconquest of Africa from the Vandals in the early 530s. Yet some probably could explain and list some of the lessons learned in subsequent military campaigning and preventive defenses constructed against the Berbers.

Later, as emperor, Heraclius, by 630 or 632, took decisive anti-Jewish measures. Yet there is no evidence concerning his (or his father's) acquaintance, experience, or relations with Jews either in the east, until he was twenty-five, or in the following decade, during his stay in Africa, where their prominence in some trade, such as cloth, would likely have caught his attention. There is simply no evidence concerning his opinions about them or theirs about him at that phase of his life, or during his revolt against Phokas between 608 and 610.

Even less certain is what Heraclius learned or knew about Africa's historical heritage and the Roman presence in it. Scipio Africanus receives mention by at least two authors of Heraclius' court, the poet George of Pisidia, and the historian Theophylact Simocatta.²⁷ But there is no definitive proof that Heraclius took any special interest in Scipio while in Africa, let alone that he attempted to visit any sites connected with Scipio, some of which, like Zama, were distant from Carthage and probably not identified then. He was in the midst of a glorious Roman military past of conquest and victory, but what consciousness of it he had is unclear. The name of Scipio, then, was not unknown but whether it was any kind of inspiration for him, and not merely a literary *topos* for his later panegyrists, is unclear. Equally unclear is whether the general Philippikos, who explicitly is said to have studied Scipio's campaigns against Hannibal, ever later discussed such campaigns with Heraclius after he seized the throne. Heraclius' actual

²⁶ Jean Durliat speculates about the independent attitudes and actions of substantial African landowners in the seventh century: "Les grands propriétaires africains et l'état byzantin (533-709)," *Cahiers de Tunisie* 29 (1981) 517-531, esp. 525-529; also Durliat, *Dédicaces d'ouvrages de défense dans l'Afrique byzantine* (Paris: Ecole française de Rome, Collection 49, 1981) 113.

²⁷ George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* 1.97, 98 (*Poemi, Panegirici epici* 244 Pertusi). But this comparison of Heraclius with Scipio is a commonplace of Late Roman literature, especially that in Latin. Irfan Shahid has cogently argued for an interpretation that de-emphasizes Scipio Africanus in the line of George of Pisidia: "Heraclius Pistos en Christo Basileus," *DOP* 34-35 (1980-1981) 225-237. Heraclius' (and before him, Maurice's general and son-in-law) *magister militum per Orientem* Philippikos had studied Scipio's campaigns against Hannibal: Theophylact, *Hist.* 1.14.2-4 (40 Whitby, and n. 76 p. 40): "When Hannibal the Carthaginian General was ravaging the European territory of the Romans, the elder Scipio committed the war at home to deferment, attacked the Carthaginian land, and drove the enemy to serious trouble" (Theophylact 1.14.3). This may be an intentional allusion to Heraclius' "Scipionic" campaign against Persia or simply a *topos*. Scipionic associations or memories may have existed in Heraclius' Africa but we have no sure way of probing them and their effects, if any, on him.

experiences in Africa and his later memories of Africa mixed with familial ties and with interpolated conversations and nostalgia, may have created a different view of Africa while he was emperor than when he really lived in Africa with his father as exarch.

Heraclius the Elder's brother Gregory²⁸ was also in Africa, significantly, with his own son Niketas. So an entire family was ensconced, providing a stronger power base. His was a closely knit family. Yet it was not a narrow Armenian family. Heraclius the Younger himself had the reputation of being accomplished in speech.²⁹ It is possible that he did learn some Latin and that he could understand something beyond Greek and Armenian. His family members had broad experience and exposure to conditions and people outside Armenia. Their diversity of experience enriched them and helped them to understand complexities and to be flexible in handling different people and problems.

Through his uncle and cousin, the younger Heraclius probably learned more of conditions out in the countryside. The exact location of the seat of the exarch in the city of Carthage has not been identified. With his father being exarch, he surely learned of conditions in the hilly country to the west and southwest in Africa Proconsularis, of the fortifications of the mountain passes or *cleisuræ* in the interior to bar the Berbers, and of the stone forts erected at strategic points throughout Africa ever since the Byzantine reconquest in the reign of Justinian I, less than three-quarters of a century earlier. He certainly became familiar with the riches of Africa in terms of agriculture, fertility, and tax revenues, whether from agriculture or from land and maritime trade. He learned to appreciate the sea. He probably learned much about Berbers, their past and potential future threats to Byzantine authority and hegemony, and something of their leaders and the possibilities of using them as allies in warfare, in an era of serious manpower shortages. It is uncertain whether he personally visited the adjacent rich province of Byzacena, to the south of Africa Proconsularis, which also was under the jurisdiction of his father, the exarch. He cannot have avoided gaining an appreciation of the proximity of Africa to Sicily and Italy and the great commercial, fiscal, and strategic value of all of these to the empire, their synergistic significance, and their bustling activity. The dynamics of this region were very different from that of landlocked Armenia and upper Mesopotamia, with their – at least Armenia's – harsh winters and the domination of their economies by the Byzantine military, which was not the case in Africa or Sicily. We do not know whether Heraclius the Younger

²⁸ *PLRE* III: 546, s.v. "Gregoras 3."

²⁹ Hrabanus Maurus, *PL* 110: 132C.

ever personally set foot in Italy or Sicily while sailing to or from Africa, or under any other circumstances during his residence in Africa. Information about the beleaguered position of the Byzantines in Italy, under pressure from the Lombards, who were still trying to increase the regions under their control, presumably reached Carthage and his father's headquarters, and in turn him, but we do not know his reactions to or opinions about it.

Fredegarius describes Heraclius as "handsome, tall, braver than others and a fighter." He had matured with those characteristics by the time that he reached Africa. Fredegarius adds that being "well-read" Heraclius practiced astrology.³⁰ Another Latin tradition transmitted by the Carolingian scholar Hrabanus Maurus reports that Heraclius was "*vir armis strenuus, lingua eruditus, corpore decorus, et quamvis saeculari actui deditus, totus tamen erat fide catholicus; et ergo Dei cultoribus supplex, benevolus ac devotus.*"³¹ It is probable that Heraclius used his public speaking ability in Africa, but how well he had developed it before coming to Africa, or what form it took in Africa, where Latin was the dominant public tongue, is unknown. Hrabanus' list of attributes may simply be stock descriptions of what one expected in a good emperor. It is likely as well that Heraclius already was well read in Africa, but there is no evidence of any contacts by him with astrologers during his years there. For Leo Grammatikos, a tenth-century Byzantine historian, Heraclius was "robust, with a broad chest, beautiful blue eyes, golden hair, fair complexion and wide thick beard."³² Family was important to him. His relations with his uncle and first cousin were excellent. He probably gained a better appreciation of the Roman Latin heritage, however superficial, while in Africa, for its monuments, statuary, mosaics, and ruins would have surrounded him, and especially so in Carthage and its vicinity. Many Roman constructions had been dismantled in order to reuse their stones for other construction, including new fortifications and churches. But there was still a strong Roman heritage evident everywhere. There were Greek-speaking inhabitants, some of whom have left inscriptions, but they were a minority in a Latin-speaking world. The Roman and Latin imprint would have been much stronger in Africa than anything

³⁰ Fredegarius 4.65 (52–54 Wallace-Hadrill). Cf. Georgios Kedrenos, *Historiarum compendium*, ed. I. Bekker (CSHB, Bonn, 1838) 1.714. Barry Baldwin, "Physical Descriptions of Byzantine Emperors," *Byzantion* 51 (1981) 19, does not cite Fredegarius, whose indeterminate source may well be oriental. See M. Mango, "Imperial Art in the Seventh Century," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994) 124–126.

³¹ Hrabanus Maurus, *PL* 110: 132. Hrabanus' source is unknown. Although non-contemporary, this report is of some value.

³² Leo Grammatikos, *Hist.*, ed. I. Bekker (CSHB, Bonn, 1842) 147. Trans. by Constance Head, "Physical Descriptions of the Emperors in Byzantine Historical Writing," *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 230–231; another physical description: Georgios Kedrenos, *Hist.* 1.714 (CSHB).

that he or his father would have experienced in Armenia, other parts of the Caucasus, or near the Persian frontier in any part of upper Mesopotamia. This was a very different and broadening experience. His engagement to marry a girl from a very prominent local family reinforced that. He did not restrict himself to Armenian circles or to the circles of those who came from the east. Presumably his family approved and encouraged his action. The Christian church was very active in the vicinity of Carthage and so he would have in some way encountered the devotional commitment among local Latin Africans. Yet no local African chronicler or panegyrist has left any record of Heraclius in Africa or Africa's impressions of Heraclius.

It is unclear precisely what official capacity Heraclius the Younger held in Africa. Certainly he aided his father, the exarch, but his precise title is unknown. Did it remain the same throughout his stay in Africa, until his revolt against Phokas in 608?

Probably Heraclius the Younger learned something of Roman fortification methods in North Africa in the face of raids from Berbers in the past, recently, presently, and prospectively. One does not know anything about the transfer of military techniques from North Africa to Byzantine frontiers in the east and vice versa.³³ In general, it appears that Byzantine defense efforts in Africa did not involve intensive search and destroy efforts, but instead, defensive tactics to hold critical regions, crossroads, with fortified bastions and places of asylum for troops and civilians and limited numbers of livestock, usually at sites chosen for the availability of fresh water or supplies from large cisterns.³⁴ Whether or not Heraclius the Younger made any inspections of such sites out in the countryside, he surely heard about them from those visiting his father's seat of administrative control in Carthage. Worth attention is the extent to which any of the conditions and methods or failures in Africa impressed themselves on Heraclius. It is worth reflecting on the extent to which he learned anything of value to retain and to exploit or avoid when he later campaigned in western Asia or was involved in making policy decisions about setting defense policies for western Asia. His later order, in the middle or late 630s, to avoid fighting the Arabs in the open, to avoid the dangers of their potential ambushes, may have been the result of his or his father's experiences or the counsel of others who had faced Arabs in western Asia, but his own observations or

³³ D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa*, does not discuss this issue, perhaps because there is insufficient evidence. On the geography of Byzantine control, arguing for a larger region than often has been assumed: Pol Trouset, "Les 'Fines Antiquae' et la reconquête byzantine en Afrique," in *Histoire et Archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord, IIe Colloque International (Grenoble, 5-9 avril 1983)* = *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, n.s. 19B (1985) 361-376.

³⁴ Pringle, *Defence of Byzantine Africa* 94-112.

perceptions in Africa about the best ways to handle Berber raiders and unsuccessful ways of coping with them may have also influenced or reinforced his preferences for how to fight Arab raiders. Some of the terrain in Africa Proconsularis resembled that of western Anatolia, and there was much grain and pasturage for sheep, but unlike Armenia and upper Mesopotamia, this was a land of the olive.

Heraclius may have seen or more likely simply heard something of oases in Africa, and their irrigation systems, and possibly learned of their vulnerability to raids from Berbers, lessons that he may have made use of when he invaded Persian Mesopotamia several decades later. What he cannot have learned in Africa is how to handle large armies, because the Byzantine garrisons and their scattered deployments could not have given him or anyone else any experience with that challenge. That he might have learned from chatting with his father about experiences in the east. He could have learned something of the latest experiences in blocking *cleisuræ* in North Africa, but nothing of large-scale mobile warfare or large battle formations and the latest techniques and practices for large-scale combat. Yet he would have learned how Byzantines coped with challenges in North Africa, not a carbon copy of the situation in western Asia or the Caucasus. He would have observed how one coped with a dearth of soldiery. We do not know how local recruitment functioned in Africa, or precisely what relations the authorities had with Berbers and to what degree, by 600, the government made any use of Berbers as military allies. These experiences may have been much more important for Heraclius than any theoretical ones about the combining of civil and military powers in the exarchate that previous scholars speculated would have been the principal effect on Heraclius the Younger of having stayed in Africa. Others could not easily have learned by reading or having others consult military manuals about warfare and defenses in Africa, because, for example, the contemporary *Strategikon*, which was written ca. 600, contains no discussion of Berbers or anything else about warfare in North Africa or fortification in North Africa.³⁵ One could have consulted the writings of Prokopios of Caesarea, or Corippus' Latin verse panegyric *Johannidos*, but there were no known military manuals that explained warfare in Africa ca. 600 or later. So one could not easily learn about it by reading. It was difficult to find a substitute for the direct experience, wisdom, and stratagems that Heraclius had gained and learned there.

³⁵ Maurikios, *Strategikon*, ed. G.T. Dennis, trans. E. Gamillscheg (*CFHB*, Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981); Eng. trans. by G.T. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

Heraclius' African years gave him a perspective that no other Byzantine emperor had, with the possible exception of some members of his own dynasty, because of his, their ancestor's, involvement in Africa. He had some feel for a central Mediterranean perspective.

Although there is no evidence that Heraclius made any travels west of Carthage, for the Byzantine hold on Mauretania was tenuous and only at a few ports, such as Septem (Ceuta) and possibly Tingis (Tangier), as far as we know, he learned something of the western Mediterranean, Gibraltar's straits, Spain, and shipping from Gaul and the islands of Sardinia and Corsica.³⁶ This was an asset for him. He probably heard something of the mineral riches and maritime potential of Carthago Nova (modern Cartagena) in Spain, the strategic and commercial significance of the straits of Gibraltar and of the special value of the stronghold of Septem as a listening and observation post, and of the vague trading potential of Mauretania's Atlantic coast and its river mouths. There was potential out there in the west, and it was not to be forfeited lightly. Everything did not depend on the environs of the Bosphoros, or on the eastern frontier.

There was another dimension, there was depth, to the empire. While in Africa Heraclius gained an appreciation of the interrelationship of African geography and the potential for shifting troops from Africa to Egypt and possibly even on further east to help to defend the empire from external invaders, be they Persian or Arab. He probably learned something of such ancient Tripolitanian ports and emporia as Gigthis and Tripoli, both of which still functioned in the seventh century. His experiences in the west made it more difficult for his opponents to understand him fully, because they had no basis for sharing or comprehending what he had experienced. He took advantage of his Armenian background and familiarity with circumstances in the Caucasus and on a critical part of the empire's eastern frontier. These assets helped to make him unique.

Heraclius' experiences in Africa brought an introduction, addition, or some might say an injection or intrusion of an African, Latin African or central Mediterranean dimension into an already rather matured Byzantine worldview. It was a different, although not entirely new element in what had become a very stable, traditional, and slowly changing outlook. It was a dash of something new and different. It was potentially stimulating and

³⁶ Broader perspectives: Paul Reynolds, *Trade in the Western Mediterranean, AD 400–700: The Ceramic Evidence* (Oxford: BAR International Series 604, 1995), esp. fig. 174, "Shipping Routes." Also: Michael McCormick, "Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort. Maladie, commerce, transports annonnaires et le passage économique du bas-empire au moyen âge," in *Settimane di Studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 45 (Spoleto, 1998) 35–118; McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

creative. Its addition did not in itself solve anything, but it gave him new or different ways of looking at things. It was, to be sure, untried. Even his and his father's initial travel to Africa from Constantinople, certainly by ship, probably via Greek ports, islands, including Sicily, to Africa, opened new perspectives and enriched his understanding of his world, conditions, and opportunities. He saw something very different from the highlands of landlocked Armenia and the plains and fortresses of upper Mesopotamia. He came to understand that there was a very rich and abundant world to the west, one that had some similar but also very different conditions from the lands where he had lived and his father had exercised various military commands. His travels to and from Africa and his stay there were stimulating and exerted a life-long effect on him and even more, an effect beyond the term of his own life, on most of the members of his dynasty who succeeded him on the throne.

Heraclius' experiences in Africa taught him that there was another rich land in reserve, one sheltered at that time from the threats of the eastern and Danubian frontiers. It was lush, a kind of paradise, however much of a veneer of coastal strip to which it was limited. It was potentially a source of comfort, that everything did not stand or fall in terms of landbased threats to the empire, that it was a rich land sheltered by the sea from the land threats of the Avars, Slavs, and Persians. From the perspective of Carthage it was almost too easy to ignore the dangers of rebellion (reprisal from Constantinople) and risks of Berber raids from the not-too-distant interior. From the port and hill (Byrsa Hill today) of Carthage it was easy to ignore, misunderstand, or underestimate the severity of problems elsewhere in Africa or elsewhere in the empire. Life was splendid, easy, and even lush there, far from other worries. Because descendants of his first marriage to an African, Fabia/Eudokia, continued his dynastic line, some particulars of his African heritage and connections may have survived a little better than others, namely, better than traditions favorable to his niece and second wife Martina and their offspring.

Above all, Heraclius the Younger probably gained some appreciation of the Roman Empire's Latin side, not merely, as he would have seen in Constantinople and other places in the east, the Roman Empire through a Greek filter. There is no evidence as to whether he ever learned to speak or understand, let alone read, Latin, however. Other emperors had often known the Latin perspective from the very different Latin world of the Balkans. But Latin Africa's conditions and perspectives were very different from those of the disappearing Latinity and Latin thought world of the Balkans; Africa was wealthier and enjoyed a much milder climate, more

agricultural abundance, and relatively more security. So Heraclius had the opportunity to acquire a unique group of experiences that helped to shape his unique outlook.

Heraclius' mother Epiphania³⁷ remained, or at least for some part of the time stayed, in the east, reportedly in Cappadocia, with her son's fiancée Fabia/Eudokia, while her husband and son and brother-in-law were serving in Africa. These women probably provided later insights, perhaps very valuable ones, to Heraclius about Cappadocia, but were unlikely to have been able to communicate with him while there. For that and other reasons, Heraclius and his father potentially had various means of receiving communications from the east about the situation there, but only with great difficulty, given that Cappadocia was in the Anatolian interior. Late in his stay in Africa Heraclius the Younger became engaged to marry Fabia, who changed her name to Eudokia,³⁸ the daughter of an African landowner Rogas,³⁹ so he sank his roots deep there and had even more family ties. There is no information on how he met her or how the marriage was arranged. It did not take place until immediately after he had seized power, and in fact it occurred the same day as his coronation and her elevation to the rank of Augusta and her imperial coronation, 5 October 610. Presumably that substantial and very prominent landowning family was Latin-speaking. Eudokia was with his own mother somewhere in Cappadocia.

The reason for their residence in Cappadocia is unclear, perhaps an attraction of a more protected life in the east. We do not know the background of Epiphania. Perhaps she inherited property or had family of her own in Cappadocia, or possibly there was even the desire of the imperial government to retain some hold on governors by insisting that key members of their families remain at home as potential hostages for internal security reasons. Epiphania may have had Cappadocian origins. John of Nikiu reports a confused and sensational story that Emperor Phokas summoned Epiphania and Fabia/Eudokia from Cappadocia with sexual desires for Fabia in mind.⁴⁰ It is possible that Epiphania had been in Cappadocia when she received the call to go to Constantinople, allegedly to the convent of Nea Metanoia, under the supervision of Theodore. It is quite likely that the women were at great personal risk in Constantinople until the triumph of Heraclius. Reports of Phokas' sexual desires for Eudokia are probably just salacious and malevolent gossip, but she was at risk there. Heraclius

³⁷ *PLRE* III: 445, s.v. "Epiphania 1." ³⁸ *PLRE* III: 457, s.v. "Eudocia *quae et* Fabia (= Aelia Flavia)."

³⁹ *PLRE* III: 1089, s.v. "Rogatus 2." Theoph. *Chron.* A.M. 6102 (427–428 Mango-Scott). *PLRE* III: 457, s.v. "Eudocia."

⁴⁰ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 106.1–6 (167 Charles). John, for example, wrongly identifies Fabia as the daughter of Epiphania.

and Eudokia were part of a well-traveled empire-wide elite whose ties and relationships crisscrossed the entire empire, in an era when the empire's girth still had a very long stretch.

Priskos, the powerful Count of the Excubitors or imperial watch, and probably Prefect of the City of Constantinople, and son-in-law of the usurping Emperor Phokas, who had seized power after violently overthrowing and murdering Emperor Maurice and his family in late 602, reportedly contacted Heraclius the Elder and encouraged him to open revolt against the government.⁴¹ A crisis of legitimacy existed from the beginning, because Phokas' usurpation had broken the precedent of no successful violent usurpation since the reign of Constantine I, a record that the ecclesiastical historian Evagrius Scholastikos had proudly boasted as recently as the year 594.⁴² The rebellion of General Narses at Edessa had already failed, with an ensuing brutal repression in 603/604. The new emperor had no constitutional or legitimate basis for his authority; there was only the naked power that he wielded for the moment. The murder of Maurice and his family shocked contemporaries, and caused some to tremble and wonder about and fear for the future of the empire, as the early seventh-century (630s) *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati* indicates.⁴³ There was no immediate acceptance of Phokas everywhere in the empire. There was some resistance, which Phokas sought to repress.⁴⁴

Motives for rebellion against Phokas were multiple. The regime lacked legitimacy, having seized power violently and, in the eyes of many, profaned its seizure of power by murdering the reigning emperor Maurice and his family. Widespread reports of a tyrannical reign of terror with ruthless purges and displays of cruelty all added justification to any explanation for the very serious decision to rise in rebellion.⁴⁵ Yet there is a need for caution, because only the justifications of the rebellious cause remain today, not the explanations on the part of Phokas and his officials for their actions.⁴⁶ The

⁴¹ Nikephoros, *Short History* I (34–37 Mango); *PLRE* III: 1056–1057, s.v. "Priscus 6."

⁴² Evagrius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.41, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London: Methuen, 1898, repr. Amsterdam: Hakker, 1964) 143–144. W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1968) 220–221; David Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation in the Seventh Century* (Amsterdam, Las Palmas: Hakker, 1993) 23–24, 139–142.

⁴³ *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati* 3.10, 3.12, ed. trans. Vincent Déroche, *TM* II (1991) 168–169, 170–171.

⁴⁴ Sebeos, *History* 106, ch. 31 (57–58 Thomson); *Chronicon Paschale* 142–143 Whitby. Olster, *Politics of Usurpation* 101–115; Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ Contemporary reputation: Olster, *Politics of Usurpation* 165–182, 183–185. George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* 2.8–36 (250–253 Pertusi); *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn* c. 125, 133 (I: 100–101, 105–106; II: 104–105, 110–111 Festugière).

⁴⁶ Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation* 1–21. Purges: *Chronicon Paschale* 143–146 Whitby; Olster, *Politics of Usurpation* 67–80.

court poetry and historiography of the reign of Heraclius cannot provide a sure guide to the truth. It is difficult but necessary to discount the later Heraclian court propaganda about the events of 608–610. Heraclius the Younger probably burned with ambition to become emperor himself. Simple ambition for power was a large part of the explanation for the rebellion.

The author of the *Patria* may well be correct that at Constantinople Heraclius or his father conceived the ambition or dream of becoming emperor, at the palace of Sophiai.⁴⁷ Heraclius and his father may have feared that they too might fall victim to the purges of Phokas, and so acted preemptively to forestall that fate, but there is no explicit evidence that the life of either one was in mortal danger before they began to plan their rebellion and to contact others to join them. But there is no doubt that there was an atmosphere of terror abroad that could have contributed to their decision to act. Stories of Phokas' alleged desire to violate Heraclius' fiancée Fabia may be retrospective, but they became another justification for the revolt and may have circulated in some sensational fashion even at that time.⁴⁸ Heraclius the Elder had previously served in the east where he had direct experience with military mutiny, most notably that at Monokarton, where troops rejected Priskos in favor of their previous commander Philippikos.⁴⁹ He had not been an instigator, but had been closely associated with Philippikos. He was familiar with techniques, practices, and psychological dimensions of military unrest. No doubt he had heard much about the Phokas rebellion on the Danube in 602 by word of mouth from other commanders. So he was no novice, and his son had probably heard much from others as well.

The powerful Egyptian family of Apiones may well have opposed Phokas, and may have helped Niketas' ultimately victorious campaign in Egypt.⁵⁰ Indicative of Phokas' stature there is his huge column in the Forum in Rome. Under Justinian, the Apiones seem to have supported the Blues (in Constantinople), but they funded both Blue and Green factions in Egypt (there are many more references to the Blues, however; the last one in 618).

⁴⁷ *Patria Constantinopoleos* 3.125 (= *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitarum*, ed. Th. Preger, II: 255).

⁴⁸ Ps.-Isidore, *Continuationes Isidorianae Byzantia Arabica et Hispana*, ed. Th. Mommsen (*MGH AA* II) 334.

⁴⁹ Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest* 68–72; M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian* 287–288.

⁵⁰ Pope Gregory I the Great advised Apion III's wife Eusebia to stay out of things. If so, they may have helped Niketas in Egypt during the revolt. Gregory I favored Phokas: Gregory I, *Registrum epistolarum* 13.34–35 = ed. Paul Ewald and Ludwig Hartmann (*MGH Epistolae*; Berlin: Weidmann, 1899) 2.397–398. Under Justinian, the Apiones seem to have supported the Blues (in Constantinople), but they funded both Blues and Greens in Egypt. Apion III's marriage to the western Eusebia, as well as the subsequent relationship with Gregory (through mother-in-law Rusticiana) is a good example of "relationships crisscrossing the Empire." I thank Todd Hickey for advice.