Tarih Dergisi
Turkish Journal of History

İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Tarih Dergisi - Turkish Journal of History, 82 (2024/1): 1-26
DOI: 10.26650/iutd.1384759
Research Article / *Araştırma Makalesi*

Transforming the Religious Landscape: Emperor Leo VI and His Struggle for Supremacy over the Church

Dini Bağlamı Dönüştürmek: İmparator VI. Leo ve Kilise Üzerindeki Üstünlük Mücadelesi

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ABSTRACT
From the very outset of his reign, Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (r. 886-912) recognized the need for serious efforts to reassert imperial hegemony over the church. This article offers an analysis of Leo VI's multi-faceted program that aimed at reasserting the emperor's dominance over the ecclesiastical organization. In particular, the article stresses the incorporation of Leo's homilies into his program, which not been widely recognized by modern scholars. The various efforts Leo made, including his homilies, display a marked cohesiveness, interconnectivity, and consistency that affirm their inclusion in a singular, organized effort both imagined and executed as a composite whole.
Keywords: Byzantine history, Leo VI the Wise, homiletics, imperial ceremony, Constantinople

ÖZ
Bizans İmparatoru VI. Leo (886-912), tahta çıktıktan sonra kilise üzerinde imparatorluk hegemonyasının yeniden kurulması gerektiğini anlar. Bu makale VI. Leo'nun dini örgütlenmenin üzerindeki hakimiyetini yeniden kurmasını amaçlayan programının ayrıntılı bir tanımını sunmaktadır. Bu değişimde VI. Leo'nun çabaları vaazları (homiliai) da dahil olmak üzere belirgin bir bütünlük, bağlantı ve tutarlılık sergiler. VI. Leo'nun izlediği yolun planlama ve uygulama aşamasında tekil ve sistematik bir programın parçası olduğu söylenebilir. Makale özellikle günümüz araştırmacıları tarafından yeterince tanınmayan VI. Leo'nun vaazlarının (homiliai) izlenen yoldaki katkılarından dolayı, uyguladığı programın parçası olduğunu öne sürer.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Bizans tarihi, Bilge VI. Leon, homiletik, imparatorluk törenleri, Konstantinopolis

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Submitted/Başvuru: 01.11.2023
Revision Requested/Revizyon Talebi: 23.01.2024
Last Revision Received/Son Revizyon: 25.01.2024
Accepted/Kabul: 26.01.2024

Citation/Atıf:
Leidholm, Nathan. "Transforming the Religious Landscape: Emperor Leo VI and His Struggle for Supremacy over the Church." *Tarih Dergisi - Turkish Journal of History,* 82 (2024): 1-26. https://doi.org/10.26650/iutd.1384759

On Christmas Day in 886, the young Emperor Leo VI, just months into his reign, appeared before a crowd of senators, bishops, and other dignitaries who had gathered in the Hagia Sophia for the consecration of Stephen, the new Patriarch of Constantinople. The day was of special significance for Leo, as the incoming Patriarch was his own brother whom Leo himself had placed on the patriarchal seat. Stephen was replacing Photios, the famous Patriarch who had risen over the previous decade to the height of ecclesiastical and political power, wielding previously unheard-of authority with regard to the emperor, who in this case was Leo's father, Basil I. By forcibly deposing the powerful patriarch at the very outset of his reign, Leo was making an unmistakable statement of his own authority, announcing to all that the imperial throne would no longer be subject to the whims of the hierarch. In the ultimate expression of this change in policy, Leo ascended the pulpit and personally delivered the consecrating homily for his younger brother. In his sermon, Leo made clear that he had decided to preach on this occasion of his own volition: "I have come now unbidden and in anticipation of your questions."[1] Put lightly, Leo knew well that the clergy would indeed have many questions, for Photios had been immensely popular both within and outside of the church, and at the young age of 19, Stephen would seem an unlikely and potentially unpopular replacement for the highest position in the Byzantine church. Nonetheless, the bishops and other clergy are depicted in his address as "faithful subjects who have no objections to the elevation to the patriarchal throne of Stephen at the uncanonical age."[2] More than a hint of sarcasm is present when Leo claims that Stephen "indeed has a young life, but [one which] is illuminated by an unfading beauty, on account of which the blameless bride, the Church of Christ, should be delighted."[3] Leo was fully aware that many in the church were actually far from delighted, for Stephen's appointment was clearly a move intended to guarantee the Patriarch's docile cooperation with imperial wishes. His speech reinforced this image of imperial strength, for in so doing, he became the first emperor since Constantine the Great to personally deliver a homily to his subjects, the political implications of which Leo perfectly understood[4].

The Byzantine emperor exercised both civil and religious authority in the empire[5]. This power was taken to its most extreme by the emperors during the periods of the First (c.

1 *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae, Corpus Christianorum: Series Graeca* 63, ed. Theodora Antonopoulou, Brepols, Turnhout 2008, 301. (Hereafter cited as *CChr*). "ἦκω νῦν αὐτόκλητος ἐγὼ καὶ τὰς ὑμῶν ἐπερωτήσεις προφθάνω."

2 Theodora Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Emperor Leo VI*, Brill, New York-Leiden 1997, 246.

3 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 301. "Ἀλλ'ἔχει τὸν βίον κομῶντα φαιδρότησιν καὶ ἀμαράντοι κάλλει, ἐφ'ᾧι ἂν ἡ ἄμωμος νύμφη, ἡ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησία, ἡσθείη."

4 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 40-41. See also: *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th centuries. Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992,* ed. Paul Magdalino, Ashgate, Aldershot 1994.

5 Geoffrey Greatrex, "Political-Historical Survey, c.250-518", *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies,* ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys-John Haldon-Robin Cormack, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, 236-237. The definitive study of this phenomenon remains Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium,* transl. Jean Bivell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

727-787) and Second Iconoclasm (c. 815-843), at which time several imperial sovereigns had strengthened their own positions by outright attacks on the clergy and in particular on monastic communities[6]. When Iconoclasm was finally brought to an end in 843, the clergy now had the turn to push back against imperial control in an effort to safeguard their position against similar abuses of imperial power in the future. For the first time in Byzantine history, the position of the Patriarch of Constantinople was increasingly defined in opposition to and separate from the person of emperor[7]. This became a serious issue for the rulers of the second half of the 9th century, who found effective rulership difficult without ecclesiastical cooperation. For Basil I and Leo VI, then, the first emperors of the Macedonian dynasty (r. 867-886 and r. 886-912, respectively), "their aim was now more modestly and more concretely to remodel the religious landscape, to impose a system on it and to trace in it a topography and itineraries that would restore to the emperors what they had lost in the unfortunate dispute of iconoclasm."[8] This was particularly clear during the reign of Leo VI "the Wise."

The purpose of this paper is to give a detailed description of Leo's well-organized, multi-faceted program that aimed at reasserting the emperor's dominance over the ecclesiastical organization, most specifically over the Patriarch of Constantinople, and that attempted to restore the full authority of the emperor as God's sole regent on earth. In particular, the paper stresses the incorporation of Leo's homilies into this program, for these documents have too often been studied separately, rather than as an integral component of Leo's broader imperial policies.

Historians have long recognized that one of the primary goals of Leo VI's internal policies was the consolidation of all types of authority. This includes Ostrogorsky and his monumental study of the Byzantine state in 1940 and was made still more explicit in Romilly Jenkins' 1987 survey of the so-called "imperial centuries" of Byzantium (i.e., c. 610-1071 AD)[9]. More recently, Shaun Tougher asserted, "Leo's prime necessity [upon accession to the throne], like Basil's in 867, was to establish his authority."[10] This authority encompassed many spheres in which the emperor could expect (or hope) to exert his own influence, if not outright control. Thus, one can read in Leo's internal policies attempts at managing the Byzantine economy, military, political structure, and, most importantly for this study, the church[11]. While scholars

6 Romilly Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD610-1071*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1987, 74-75. In general, see Leslie Brubaker-John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680-850): A History,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.

7 The work of Photios was what had largely propagated this idea.

8 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* 7.

9 George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, transl. Joan Hussey, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1957, 218; Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries*, 200-209.

10 Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912): Politics and People,* Brill, New York-Leiden 1997, 36.

11 Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries,* 210.

have generally acknowledged these efforts, few have gone beyond mere acknowledgement to enumerate or qualify their sweeping statements and vague generalities, and no detailed study of Leo's comprehensive political program yet exists, particularly in its religious aspects. Seldom have Leo's actions with regard to the church received more than a sentence or two in the entire modern historiography. As Meredith Riedel has recently argued, a more thorough study of the homilies in their political context is still desperately needed[12].

For many historians up to the last quarter of the 20th century, the reign of Leo VI was remembered as one of generally ineffectual rule, almost singularly recognized by military reverses and the Tetragamy (i.e., fourth marriage) affair, which some viewed as the total victory of the patriarch and the church over the imperial office[13]. The former allegation stemmed largely from the fact that Leo was the only emperor of the 9th century who had not personally campaigned with his troops, preferring instead to remain in or near the capital of Constantinople[14], with the latter appearing simply to have been an exaggeration of actual events. Nevertheless, both of these charges overlook what I view as perhaps the most important aspect of Leo's rule: the massive effort and great strides he made in his internal religious policies, especially during the first half of his reign (886-c.900). This period entirely predates the Tetragamy affair, which in fact only severely affected the last few years of Leo's reign. In addition, such a concentration on internal affairs would help to explain Leo's sedentary style of leadership, though I should also mention that Justinian had not personally campaigned either and that Leo's choice became the norm for emperors of the 10th century until the reigns of the great general-emperors, such as Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) and John I Tzmiskes (969-976)[15]. Leo's plan for the acquisition of ecclesiastical authority was complex, and encompassed several varied aspects, all of which interlocked into a carefully conceived whole. Leo recognized the diverse range of media that was available to him as emperor through which he could convey his autocratic vision to his subjects. These included everything from preaching, public ceremonial, and the construction of new buildings throughout the capital to, of course, the enactment of law.

Leo as Lawgiver

Leo VI's *Basilika*, a reorganized Greek version of Justinian's *Digest* that include an additional collection of 113 *novellae*, was the most extensive legislative program undertaken

12 Meredith L.D. Riedel, *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity: Writings of an Unexpected Emperor,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, 140.

13 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 3.

14 Shaun Tougher, "The Imperial Thought-World of Leo VI: the Non-Campaigning Emperor of the 9th Century", *Byzantium in the Ninth-Century: Dead or Alive?, ed.* Leslie Brubaker, Ashgate/VARIORUM, Brookefield 1998, 53.

15 Ibid, 57.

by a Byzantine emperor since the *Codex Justinianus*[16] Leo was himself perfectly aware of this, and in the *prooemium* to the collection, he even refers to himself as Caesar Flavius Leo**,** a direct reference to (Caesar Flavius) Justinian[17]. This codex was the completion of the reforms envisioned but never completed by Basil I. The majority of Leo's own *novellae* were probably issued between 886-899[18]. Nearly all of them could be interpreted as furthering Leo's ideology of "imperial absolutism."[19] Many of the propagated ideas to a certain extent had been in effect for some time, perhaps even since the days of Constantine and Justinian, but they now required legal backing in the face of the Photian theories of imperial jurisdiction[20].

Photios' ideas represented a dangerous opposition to the emperor's authority over the church and were contained in a work known as the *Isagoge*[21]. While Basil never saw the completion of the massive reorganization of Justinian's legal work, which Basil had apparently envisaged, his reign did see the completion of the *Procheiron* (c. 870-879) as a kind of handbook intended for the practical use of lawyers and judges, and later on the *Isagoge*, a somewhat similar treatise that was much more concerned with the legal theory underlying legislation[22]. Although ostensibly published in the name of Emperors Basil, Leo, and Alexander, Photios was the one who was largely responsible for the majority of the theories contained therein, and his voice is the one that is represented by the work's content[23]. According to the *Isagoge*, the emperor is the "lawful [secular] authority," whose duty (*skopos*) is "the protection and stability of present and earthly powers through the use of goodness," and the aim or purpose (*telos*) of the office is "beneficence."[24] As for the patriarch, he is "the living icon (image) of Christ," whose duty is "first, to receive with piety those who [come] from God and to protect their dignity of life," and whose purpose is "the salvation of the souls entrusted to him."[25] In sum, "[a]s the polity consists, like man, of parts and members, the greatest and most necessary parts are the Emperor and the Patriarch. Wherefore the peace and felicity of subjects in body and soul is the agreement and concord in the priesthood and

16 Daphne Penna-Roos Meijering, *A Sourcebook on Byzantine Law: Illustrating Byzantine Law through the Sources,* Brill, Leiden 2024, 123-129.

17 Tougher, "Imperial Thought-World", 58.

18 P. Noailles-A. Dain, *Les Novelles de Léon VI le sage,* Société d'Éditions 'Les Belles Lettres', Paris 1944; *The Civil Law*, ed. & transl. S.P. Scott, vol. XV, The Central Trust Co., Cincinatti 1932. See also J.B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century,* Burt Franklin, New York 1911, 29-30.

19 Jenkins, *Imperial Centuries,* 208.

20 Ibid.

21 The work is alternatively known as the *Epanagoge*, both words meaning simply *introduction*. See: Penna-Meijering, *Sourcebook on Byzantine Law*, 117-23; Aleksandr Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire,* transl. S. Ragozin, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1928, 341.

22 Timothy Gregory, *A History of Byzantium,* Blackwell, Malden, MA 2005, 223.

23 Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Leo VI's Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages: An Interpolation in the Procheiros Nomos", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 30 (1976), 189. Because of the particular combination of the named co-emperors, the treatise must date from sometime between 879-886 and probably around 883.

24 *Eisagoge* II.1-3, in Vernadsky, 334.

25 Ibid.

kingship in all things."[26] These few sentences clearly separated the functions of the two offices, leaving "the salvation of souls" and the privilege of being "the living icon of Christ" to the patriarch alone, while relegating the emperor's authority only to "earthly powers." Such a division would have been unimaginable prior to Iconoclasm[27].

Although modern scholars are skeptical as to whether the *Isagoge* was ever put into effect as legally binding, the ideas Photios had put forward were far from secret and presented a serious threat to Leo's vision of imperial authority over the church. Little doubt can be had that Photios' theory permeated many levels of Byzantine thought, as is witnessed by a statement Leo the Deacon, a 10th century chronicler, attributed to the emperor John Tzimiskes: "I acknowledge two powers in this life: the Priesthood and the Empire; the Creator of the world has entrusted to the former the care of souls, to the latter the care of bodies. If neither part is damaged, the well-being of the world is secure."[28]

Leo was reacting against this theory of imperial power, checked and separated by that of the patriarch, not only in his legislation but also in the many forms through which Leo expressed his firm belief in and desire for sole leadership of the church under the person of the emperor. Perhaps the fact that Leo chose to counteract Photios' theories, which had been expressed within a legal context, with legal acts of his own is appropriate. Leo's *novellae* (imperial edicts) clearly display a tendency toward imperial absolutism, especially in regards to ecclesiastical authority and religious discipline[29]. Of the overall concerns expressed in the legislative collection, chief among them is the upholding of Canon Law and the rulings of the Church Fathers, the Sixth Ecumenical Council, and even Basil I. When any discrepancy was found present between contemporary civil law and the canons, Leo almost without exception sides with the Canon.

In the *novellae* addressing ecclesiastical issues, one primary concern is an increase in discipline, particularly among the clergy, and a more rigorous observance of Christian piety amongst all of his subjects. For example, Novella 8 states that monks abandoning the habit will be compelled to return to the monastic life, forcefully if necessary[30]. Novella 3 states that anyone wishing to become a priest cannot marry after ordination, only before, while Novella 6 sets down specific age limitations for those wishing to enter the monastery[31]. Novellae 76, 79, 86, and 87 all put into law specific penalties for clergy members who engage in activities

26 Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism", *Church History,* 34, no. 4 (Dec. 1965), 382.
27 Mary Cunningham, *Faith in the Byzantine World,* InterVarsity Press, Downders Grove, IL 2002, 48.
28 Geanakoplos, "Church and State," 382.
29 Riedel, *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 122-124.
30 Noailles-Dain, 38-39.
31 Ibid, 18-21; 32-35. Judging from Leo's words in Novella 6, the normal age at which one could enter a monastery as a monk appears to have had previously been 16.

forbidden to them, such as practicing law, committing perjury, or even playing games of chance[32]. Among numerous others, these examples show Leo placing himself squarely at the head of the church. Through these laws, he as emperor and not the patriarch was the one who was establishing the parameters of acceptable religious practices.

Perhaps the best demonstration of Leo's "absolutist" tendencies within his legislation can be found in Novellae 47 and 78. Novella 47 is an abrogation of previous civil laws authorizing the Senate to appoint praetors and for decurions to appoint prefects, and Novella 78 boldly declares that "no decree of the Senate will be enacted hereafter."[33] While the Roman Senate had not had any significant power since well before the time of even Constantine I, Leo was the one who legally abolished any rights they might claim to independent authority. In Leo's own words, "the authority of the Senate in this respect was abolished as soon as the supreme power was acquired by the emperor,"[34] and the Senate was simply no longer needed, because "now [*sic*] everything is committed to the supervision of the Emperor, in order that, with the aid of God and his own wisdom, he may dispose of the questions brought to his attention."[35] These statements served the double purpose of both asserting the supreme power of the emperor and, at the same time, highlighting the cooperation between emperor and God without any intermediary, stressing the independent wisdom (here *phrontis*) of the emperor in such matters. And if one trait exists that both contemporaries and modern scholars alike recognized in Leo, it was most certainly his wisdom.

Using his divine wisdom and taking full advantage of his position as "the viceroy" and "deputy" of God on Earth, Leo sought to completely transform the religious topography of the empire over which he ruled[36]. In Novella 88, Leo added the feasts of Sts. Athanasius, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Gregory "the gentle and illustrious fountain of ecclesiastical knowledge," Cyril, and Epiphanius to the church calendar[37]. Many of these saints already enjoyed recognition in practice throughout the Empire, but by instituting a law to this effect, Leo could be viewed by his subjects as the authority behind their permanent remembrance. This piece of legislation was later accompanied by the production of several homilies dedicated to these same saints. Leo may have even tried to put together a homiletic collection that would cover every major celebration in the Church calendar that could then be reused by others in their preaching activity[38]. This conclusion is supported by the organization

32 Ibid, 266-267; 270-273; 288-291; 290-293.
33 Scott, 271; Noailles and Dain, 270-271.
34 Ibid.
35 Scott, 249; Noailles and Dain, 187. "Νῦν δὲ τῆς βασιλικὴς φροντίδας πάντων ἐξηρτημένων καὶ σὺν θεῶι..."
36 Steven Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1929, 15, 25.
37 Scott, 276-277.
38 Theodora Antonopoulou, "Homiletic Activity in Constantinople around 900", *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics,* ed. Mary B. Cunningham-Pauline Allen, Brill, Leiden 1998, 323.

of the largest collections of Leo's homilies in the manuscript tradition, the so-called "Special Panegyrikon of Leo," which Leo himself seems to have put together and which places the homilies in order according to the liturgical calendar[39].

This reformation of the religious landscape in Constantinople also included the sponsorship of numerous new religious buildings in and around the imperial palace complex (the Great Palace) and their incorporation into and transformation of existing ceremonials. These buildings included churches dedicated to St. Thomas, the Zaoutzes family (the family of his second wife), a church and monastery dedicated to St. Lazaros whose relics he had moved to this new location[40], and a monastery of Psamathia, whose first abbot was none other than Euthymios[41]. Leo also added the feast of St. Demetrios, who had supposedly visited him during his three-year imprisonment from 883-886, to the liturgical calendar and built a church dedicated to the saint[42].

Leo and Imperial Ceremonial

If one follows the accounts in Constantine VII's *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* [*Book of Ceremonies*], significant changes had been made regarding Byzantine ceremonial between the reigns of Michael III and Leo VI. The treatise, which describes the exact protocol for everything from each day of Holy Week and Easter to the crowning of a new Patriarch and even an emperor's funeral, includes buildings such as the Church of Mary Theotokos of Pharos, built by Michael III, and Basil's Nea Ekklēsia in many of the public ceremonies contained therein[43]. Some form of the ceremonial was viewed almost every day in Constantinople, and many of the ritual observances were attended by the public, especially those on significant feast days or other major public holidays. The exact order and perfect observance of these ceremonies was crucial for the imperial court, as imperial ceremony was intended to mimic the heavenly court and to display this to the emperor's subjects[44]. This gave these ceremonies a certain religious gravity and lent much significance to even minute changes, especially easily visible changes such as the incorporation of a new church in the proscribed ceremonial

39 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 48-49.

40 Tougher, *Reign,* 36.

41 *Vita Euthymii,* V, *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP: Text, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary,* ed. and transl. Karlin-Hayter, Éditions de Byzantion, Bruxelles 1970, 28. The monastery was built on land that had been confiscated from a relative of Photios.

42 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* transl. Bivell, 208.

43 E.g., Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae,* 170-171 (Ch. 40), 187-191 (Ch. 46), *Le livre des cérémonies,* ed. and transl. Albert Vogt, Société D'Éditions 'Les Belles Lettres', Paris 1967, Vol. I, 158-159, 176.

44 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.5 (Ch. 1), ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 2; Constantine VII says, "ὑφ'ὧν τοῦ βασιλείου κράτους ῥυθμῶι καὶ τάξει φερομένου, εἰκονίζοι μὲν τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τὴν περὶ τόδε τὸ πᾶν ἁρμονίαν καὶ κίνησιν," that is, "De la sorte, puisse le pouvoir impérial, s'exerçant avec ordre et mesure, reproduire le movement harmonieux que le Créateur donne à tout cet Univers" (translation by Vogt, Vol. I, 2); Cunningham, 48.

procession or a change in the public exclamations expected of various parties. Such were many of the changes Leo had made.

Both Chapters 28 and 29 of the *De ceremoniis* record *scholiai* [footnotes] claiming Basil I as their founder and institutor. The former is the ceremonial surrounding the Feast of Elijah, while the latter celebrates the *enkainia* [dedication] of the Nea Ekklēsia (May 1)[45]. Both celebrations represented important occasions not only to Leo but also to the entire dynasty Leo's father Basil had founded. One of Basil's primary concerns as emperor had been the legitimation of his rule as a result of the violent means by which he had ascended the throne and of his obscure origins. Among other means, Basil had publicly adopted Elijah as a kind of protector of the upstart dynasty, and images of the Old Testament prophet appear in many of the works sponsored during Basil's reign[46]. This association was carried on by Leo and can be witnessed in the account contained in *De ceremoniis*.

Leo is known for certain to have instituted several additional innovations to the Elijah ceremony. He composed the hymn sung at Vespers on the eve of the feast[47], and "extended the festivities for three days, instituting games for the populace and banquets for the court."[48] However, the evidence of his involvement in the ceremony's construction goes much further. The procession incorporates the Church of Mary Theotokos of Pharos, which had been built by Michael III[49]. Basil had spent his entire time on the throne attempting to distance himself from the emperor whom he had killed to attain power, while one of Leo's first acts as emperor was to publicly restore Michael's memory, and he even held a public re-burial of the fallen emperor's body[50]. The procession also includes the lighting of candles before an image of Basil I, as does the ceremony for the *enkainia* of the Nea (hereafter referred to as the Nea Ekklēsia), almost certainly an addition Leo made in public remembrance of his father and imperial predecessor[51]. Finally, Leo personally composed and delivered a homily for the occasion, in which Elijah was credited with Leo's release from prison through his intercession[52]. Many signs point to Leo as the instigator of drastic changes to the ceremony of the Feast of Elijah.

Ceremonial had already been associated with the Feast of Elijah prior to Basil's reign, but both the content of *De ceremoniis* and the explicit *scholia* in the same treatise clearly reveal

45 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.115, 119, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 106, 110.
46 Magdalino, "Feast of the Prophet Elijah," 193.
47 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.115, in Vogt, Vol. I, 106. The author of the treatise tells us that the hymn "was composed by Leo, the most wise and good emperor." (οπερ εποιησε Λεων ο σοφωτατος και αγαθος βασιλευς).
48 Magdalino, "Feast of the Prophet Elijah," 196.
49 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.115, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 106.
50 Tougher, *Reign,* 36.
51 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis*, I.118, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 109.
52 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 235. Leo was imprisoned in 883 on charges of treason against Basil, only to be released three years later on the Feast of Elijah in July of 886.

that both Basil and Leo had completely changed the content of the July 20 celebration of their dynasty's patron. The same is true for the Nea Ekklēsia's *enkainia* celebration. In both ceremonies, however, significant evidence is found to suggest that Leo rather than Basil was the one who made the major changes to these rituals. As a final piece of evidence, the *Vita* of Leo's sainted first wife, Theophano, has a brief description of the Feast of Elijah as it had been celebrated in 886, when Basil had released Leo from prison and reinstated him as the rightful heir to the throne[53]. The account completely differs from the ceremony described in both the *De ceremoniis* and in the shorter ceremonial treatise of Philotheos, completed c. 899[54]. Based on the differences between the description in the *Vita* and that of Philotheos, Paul Magdalino has suggested that the ceremony described in the latter manual may have belonged solely to Leo[55].

Returning to the ceremonies associated with the *enkainia* of the Nea Ekklēsia, the church itself had been finished and given its initial dedication by Photios on May 1, 880, meaning the summary contained in *De ceremoniis* could only belong to the reigns of Basil I or Leo VI. The Nea Ekklēsia had been constructed sometime between 876 and 880 under the direct supervision and personal direction of Emperor Basil[56]. Constructed within the imperial palace complex, the sources variably refer to it as the "New Church" (i.e. Nea Ekklēsia), the "New Imperial Church", "New Great Church" (a reference to the Hagia Sophia), or the "Great New Church."[57] The church was one of Basil's most important contributions to Leo's future politics and singularly exemplified much of what Basil had tried to achieve for his dynasty[58]. The Nea Ekklēsia's central importance to the ideology of Leo's reign lay in the church's position as the New Great Church, a title which juxtaposed it with the original Great Church (i.e., the Hagia Sophia). The complex surrounding the Nea eventually included an open area for games, a bathhouse built by Leo VI, prominent outdoor statues, and a school[59]. This was the same type of complex that included the Hagia Sophia, the Hippodrome, Basilica, and the baths at Zeuxippos. Not only did the construction of a "New" Great Church directly call to mind the patron of the original, Emperor Justinian, it also became a kind of ideological rival to the Hagia Sophia in terms of ecclesiastical authority. One must importantly remember that

53 Paul Magdalino, "Basil I, Leo VI, and the Feast of the Prophet Elijah", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik,* 38 (1988), 194-195.

54 Magdalino, "Feast of the Prophet Elijah", 193; Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.115-118, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 106-109.

55 Magdalino, "Feast of the Prophet Elijah", 194-195.

56 Magdalino, "Nea Ekklesia", 51. Basil officially dedicated the church to five patrons: Christ, Mary Theotokos, St. Nicholas, the prophet Elijah, and the archangel Gabriel (Magdalino, "Nea Ekklesia", 55). The Nea Ekklesia also housed numerous relics, all of which came from Old Testament figures or from Constantine the Great. These included both the horn with which Samuel had anointed David and the sheepskin cloak worn by Elijah (Dagron, *Emperor and Priest,* transl. Bivell, 210; Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* ch.29).

57 Magdalino, "Nea Ekklesia", 51.

58 Basil even reportedly placed a statuette of Solomon in the base of the church (Magdalino, "Nea Ekklesia", 58).

59 Magdalino, "Nea Ekklesia", 62-63.

the Hagia Sophia was the seat of the patriarchate of Constantinople[60]. It was very much the church of the patriarch. By constructing the Nea within the imperial palace complex, thereby placing it directly under the authority of the emperor, Basil had given Leo a perfect setting for staging his own ceremonial that could project an image of the emperor as the sole head of the church.

In addition to the changes already described, Leo made numerous others to the ceremonial as well, changes which complemented his or his father's building projects and his homiletic production. Thus, for instance, Chapter 30 of *De ceremoniis* records the ceremony for the festival of St. Demetrios, for which Leo had composed the chant that was to be repeated, much like for the Feast of Elijah[61]. Two separate homilies are also found to have been written and delivered by Leo himself for the saint's feast day, with a third delivered on *enkainia* of the Church of St. Demetrios[62]. This is a great demonstration of the cohesiveness of Leo's religious policy in multiple spheres, as the emperor demonstrated his power and authority over religious matters in very public ways. Furthermore, a note in the ceremonial of the Nea Ekklēsia's dedication states that the same order of procession was used for the November 8 celebration of the archangel Michael, an addition also probably made by Leo[63].

In all three of the aforementioned ceremonies (Book 1, Chs. 28-30 of *De ceremoniis*), the processions take place almost entirely within the confines of the imperial palace complex, whereas other older ceremonies often ended at the Hagia Sophia[64]. This fact is of the utmost importance, for the Hagia Sophia (as mentioned above) was the seat of the patriarch, while any churches within the palace were clearly within the emperor's immediate jurisdiction. On the feast of the Epiphany, Leo apparently held a special feast in the Great Palace, during which the clergy and choir from the Hagia Sophia were invited. According to *De ceremoniis*, the choir would then sing a hymn "which was composed by the voice of our most wise Sovereign, Leo, elect of God; and by his own utterance and most skillful direction, all those that sit at table sing and chant in accord with the holy hymn that fell like honey from his lips for all his faithful subjects."[65] A mention is even found of the "Throne of Solomon" in the Magnaura, or Great Hall, where the emperor was supposed to meet foreign diplomats[66].

60 Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of St. Sophia", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 30 (1976), 153.

61 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.122-124, ed. and transl. Vogt, 113-115. Leo also added St. Demetrios' feast day to the liturgical calendar and dedicated a church to him.

62 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 25. They are listed as Homilies 17, 18, and 19.

63 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.121, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 112. Basil had always given special recognition to the archangel Gabriel, but Leo extended this to include both Gabriel and Michael.

64 For example, such is the case on the Feast of the Epiphany (*De ceremoniis,* I. 34, ed. and transl. Vogt, 131).

65 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* II.438; H.J.W. Tillyard, "Εωθινὰ Ἀναστάσιμα: The Morning Hymns of the Emperor Leo, Part I", *The Annual of the British School at Athens,* vol. 30 (1928/1929), 89. The translation from *De ceremoniis* is Tillyard's.

66 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis,* I.566-567; Tougher, "Wisdom", 174.

Whether this was the work of Basil or Leo is unclear, but it was certainly in use during Leo's reign, unmistakably recalling the Old Testament king[67].

The Staatliche Museen of Berlin currently houses the top of an ivory scepter that had belonged to Leo VI and which he used on certain ceremonial occasions[68]. The ivory is carved on all four sides; the front displays the figure of Christ, flanked on either side by Peter and Paul. The reverse depicts the Mother of God placing a crown on the emperor's head, with the Archangel Gabriel appearing on her left[69]. The image of Mary crowning Leo is significant, as Leo had been known to be particularly devoted to the Virgin, a fact to which is clearly attested not only in his four Marian homilies, but also in that Leo was the first Byzantine emperor to employ the image of Mary on one of his coins[70]. The two remaining sides of the ivory contain figures of St. Kosmas and St. Damian. The reason for the addition of two relatively unknown saints is somewhat obscure, but a church attached to the monastery that Leo had built for his spiritual advisor, Euthymios, is known to have been dedicated to them in 890[71]. Incidentally, Leo also personally delivered the homily for that church's dedication[72]. The scepter furthermore displays multiple inscriptions, two of which are quotes from Psalms 50 and 44. As Kathleen Corrigan has pointed out, the former "concerns the gifts that God gives to the ruler," while the latter "also emphasizes the special position of the emperor as the recipient of God's favor, giving him the strength to overcome his enemies."[73] The scepter is filled with the same symbolism exhibited in the rest of Leo's *novellae*, ceremonial, and homilies. The carved figures on the scepter even approximate the images in certain prominent mosaics of the Hagia Sophia, mosaics which Basil I had had restored in the wake of Iconoclasm[74]. Corrigan has suggested that the scepter was specially designed for the imperial ceremony on Pentecost, a celebration for which Psalm 50 was chanted by those in attendance and for which Leo also wrote and delivered at least one homily, if not more[75]. Using the scepter as an example, Corrigan confirmed, "[I]mperial interests were [*sic*] woven into the ceremony, transforming a religious feast into a reaffirmation and sanctification of imperial power."[76] This reaffirmation of imperial power was accomplished not only by sponsoring the construction of new churches and other buildings in and around the imperial palace complex

67 Tougher, "Wisdom", 174.
68 Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Inventory No. 2006; Kathleen Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo VI: A Statement of Post-Iconoclastic Imperial Ideology", *The Art Bulletin,* 60, no. 3 (Sept. 1978), 407.
69 Corrigan, 408-409.
70 P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection.* III, 2. *Basil I to Nicephorus III 867-1081,* Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C. 1973, 508-509.
71 Corrigan, 413.
72 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 25. It is Homily 31 according to Antonopoulou's numbering system.
73 Corrigan, 409.
74 Ibid, 413.
75 Ibid, 409-416.
76 Ibid, 413.

but also by writing and delivering numerous homilies that could act as the final touch in signaling to the public Leo's personal devotion and, more importantly, his singular agency behind these other acts.

While such ceremonial could have a powerful effect on the general populace when they witnessed the emperor performing these solemn acts, the clergy could be more difficult to convince. In order to accomplish this, Leo placed himself at the very center of religious life in Constantinople through a network of close, personal relationships. This is exemplified in Leo's choices for the Patriarchs of Constantinople whom he appointed throughout his reign[77]. All of the Patriarchs of his reign were intimates or relatives of the emperor and apparently "men whom Leo felt he could to a degree rely upon."[78] Leo also maintained intimate ties with numerous monks and abbots around the city, reportedly making surprise visits to monasteries on occasion[79]. Significantly, all the major preachers from Constantinople formed a veritable circle with Leo at their center. These included the Patriarchs Photios, Euthymios, and Nikolaos, Leo's court orator Arethas, a student of Arethas named Niketas, and Leo Choirosphaktes, one of Leo's major diplomats[80]. Sermons and homilies were a vital method for reaching the public conscience, and by having such close ties to all the major preachers in Constantinople, Leo had a hand in one of the most "effective means of large-scale spiritual guidance and political propaganda" available at the time[81]. Leo himself made excellent use of public preaching in just this way in what amounted to, in this author's opinion, the capstone of Leo VI's internal policy regarding the church: the production and delivery of his own homiletic corpus.

Leo as Preacher

Leo composed at least 40 separate homilies, with two more extant homilies arguably ascribable to him. Of these 42, most had been collected into a single collection by Leo himself, thereby leading to the conclusion that he may have been trying to put together a homiletic corpus that could be re-used each year covering every major feast day, somewhat akin to the collection of Gregory of Nazianzus' homilies gifted to Basil by Photios or other similar collections, usually of the Church Fathers[82]. The majority of the homilies were composed for specific feast days of the church and were probably delivered to a public audience at the Hagia Sophia, while a few were written for special occasions, such as the dedication of a

77 According to *De Ceremoniis* (II.14), when a new patriarch needed to be appointed, three candidates were chosen by the metropolitans and brought before the emperor, who could then choose one of these three or another of his own choosing, who the metropolitans were then obliged to recognize. The latter was such a case when Leo appointed his brother Stephen to the position.

78 Tougher, *Reign,* 38; See also G.L. Seidler, *The Emergence of the Eastern World: Seven Essays on Political Ideas,* Pergamon Press, Oxford 1968, 102.

79 *Vita Euthymii*, IX, ed. and transl. Karlin-Hayter, 50-52.

80 Antonopoulou, "Homiletc Activity", 344.

81 Ibid, 345.

82 Ibid, 323; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* xviii.

new church in the city, which seem to have been delivered in the newly-constructed house of worship[83]. Unlike previous centuries in Byzantium, this period is noted for having little to no evidence suggesting multiple preachers or multiple sermons being delivered on the same occasion, meaning that on those days when Leo ascended to the pulpit and preached, his was the only voice heard outside of the divine liturgy[84].

While some of these homilies are difficult if not impossible to firmly date, only four of the 42 homilies can securely be dated outside of the years c. 886-899, with at least 22 of the remaining able to be surely dated within this period. The remaining 16 were probably delivered before c. 900, making Leo's homiletic output coincide with his legislation and the majority of his building projects and changes to the ceremonial[85]. This was not an accident. For example, Homilies 17, 18, and 19 all deal with St. Demetrios[86]. This is the same saint to whom Leo built and dedicated a church that he incorporated into imperial ceremonial and whose feast day he added to the liturgical calendar. Leo's Homily 26 on St. Clement of Ancyra is the only known example of a homily to the saint, and only two churches dedicated to Clement are known to have existed within the Byzantine Empire[87]. One of these churches, incidentally, was within the imperial palace complex and had been built by none other than Basil I[88]. Homily 8, dedicated to "All Saints," was delivered on the dedication of the Church of All Saints, the only one of its kind in Constantinople that Leo had had built in memory of his first wife Theophano, who had died in 897[89]. Leo also wrote two homilies to St. Thomas, whose church had burned down early in Leo's reign and was subsequently rebuilt[90]. Homily 9 on St. Paul accompanied an oration dedicated to the saint in the palace complex, also built by Basil, and Leo's monastery of St. Lazaros was reportedly accorded its own homily, though it is now lost[91]. By personally writing and delivering the dedicatory sermons for churches that he had ordered built and for saints whose feasts he had added to the liturgical calendar, Leo was demonstrating to all his absolute control over the religious atmosphere of the Empire. He had shown that he could be visited by St. Demetrios in prison, as he had claimed, build and dedicate a church to the saint, add his feast day to the liturgical calendar, incorporate this church into imperial religious ceremonial, and even climb the pulpit and deliver an encomiastic homily on the saint, all with little or no contribution from the patriarch.

83 Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 24.
84 Ibid, 99-100.
85 Ibid, 69.
86 Ibid, 77-79; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 243-265. Homily 17 is an encomium of the saint, Homily 18 an after-dinner speech intended for either the evening before or of the saint's feast day, and Homily 19 was the special homily delivered on the church's dedication sometime between 886-893. The numbering system for the homilies follows Antonopoulou's.
87 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 127-128; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 345-369.
88 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 128.
89 Ibid, 161; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 103-122.
90 Homilies 32 and 33. Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 238-241; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 432-445.
91 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 48.

Undoubtedly, these instances in which legislation, building projects, and ceremonial were complemented by public orations represent a singular, concerted effort on Leo's part. As a result, one must also assume that Leo's homilies constituted a vital portion of his political campaign aimed at ecclesiastical authority. However, most scholars have strangely ignored this conclusion[92].

Leo was the first emperor since Constantine the Great to personally deliver sermons before his subjects[93]. This fact has not been lost on scholars, and some have recognized the political mileage inherent in such an obvious parallel to the archetypal Byzantine emperor[94]. Vogt and Hausherr recognized as early as 1932 how the political motivation and use of Leo's funeral oration for Basil and his wife, which he had delivered early in his reign in 888, had done much to solidify his dynastic legitimacy[95]. Others have recognized a similar use for his homily on the Feast of the Prophet Elijah[96]. Beyond these specific examples, however, the majority of Leo's sermons have been almost completely disregarded in terms of their contribution to his politics. Meredith Riedel is an exception to this, though, arguing that Leo's unusual penchant for giving homilies stemmed from "the need for a non-campaigning ruler to demonstrate his leadership and authority;" however, her own study only partially addresses this lacuna[97].

The utility these sermons possessed for Leo's goal of asserting his influence over the church went beyond mere form to include the content of the homilies themselves. Not only was Leo trying to garner popular support in a public arena by personally delivering homilies, he was also demonstrating his position as God's representative on Earth, a kind of liaison between the people and the Supreme Deity and one who had a special, intimate relationship with the Heavenly Court, on which the emperor's own court was modeled. The patriarch or other clergy played a very minimal part in such a view.

Leo was highly educated, and this comes through in his homilies, as he employs a heavy use of both classic and Byzantine rhetoric, generally remaining true to the accepted rules of encomium, such as in his homilies on the saints and the funeral oration for his parents[98]. In employing such high style, Leo may in fact have been purposefully demonstrating his vast knowledge with a very specific end in mind. George Kennedy has claimed that, when those highly-educated individuals such as Arethas or Leo VI employ such style, "They are speaking

92 Leonora Antonopoulou came closest to making this statement, conceding that "Leo used homiletics in the service of [his] politics, at least on a secondary level." (*Homilies,* 80).
93 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 40-41.
94 Ibid, 80; Tougher, "Wisdom", 173.
95 A. Vogt and S. Hausherr, "Oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Léon VI le sage", *Orientalia Christiana,* vol. 26.1, no. 77 (April 1932), 1-33.
96 Magdalino, "Feast of the Prophet Elijah", 193.
97 Riedel, *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 139.
98 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 120; Vogt and Hausherr, "Oraison funèbre", 25.

to be appreciated by others educated in the classics and expect the ignorant mob to admire their works without comprehending them."[99] While Kennedy goes too far in underestimating the public's ability to understand such an Atticizing oration as Leo's, his demonstrations of learning and ability could serve a double purpose. First, they would demonstrate to other educated elites, chiefly the clergy who placed a very high value on such learning, that Leo was indeed capable and competent as a leader. Second, for the average layperson, Leo's demonstration would have reinforced the idea of Leo as a kind of religious teacher, fulfilling the duty of the emperor as had originally been envisioned by Constantine I[100].

In many cases, Leo based his homilies on existing patristic models, most especially on Gregory of Nazianzus[101]. This was done according to the 19th Canon of the Quinisext Council (the Council "in Trullo") of 692, which required homilists to draw from Church Fathers for their sermons rather than write their own versions, especially concerning important holy days such as Pentecost or Easter[102]. As a result, Leo's innovations become all the more significant. Many of Leo's sermons often display very little or omit entirely the narrative events to which the particular feast day or sermon had been ostensibly devoted[103]. Instead, narrative elements are generally replaced by an increase in rhetorical devices such as *apostrophe* (i.e., direct address of biblical figures). In so doing, Leo was following a common trope in Middle Byzantine homiletics by putting himself into direct, rhetorical (or hymnal) conversation with biblical figures, though he did this far more often than his predecessors and tended to include the figures of David and Solomon in his sermons more often than usual[104]. These tactics were specifically designed to place the homilist in "the role of the prophet and the intermediary between God and His people through a poetic process which aims at transporting the audience to the divine realm."[105] So, when Leo addresses Adam and David in his homily on the birth of the Virgin (Homily 15)[106] or invites King David to sing with him and to offer the gifts for communion together with him (Homilies 12 and 20)[107], Leo is not breaking entirely with tradition. He is, however, innovative inasmuch as he makes these types of interactions the focus of these homilies, which placed the usual homiletic tropes of admonitions to the audience and narrative elements of saints' lives in the background. Leo even addresses Jesus Himself in his homilies on Easter and the Exaltation of the Cross[108]. The focus becomes the

99 George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors,* Princeton University Press, Princeton 1983, 289.
100 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 76.
101 Ibid, 173.
102 Ibid, 112.
103 Ibid, 91.
104 Ibid, 172.
105 Niki Tsironis, "Historicity and Poetry in Ninth-century Homiletics: The Homilies of Patriarch Photios and George of Nicomedia", *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics,* ed. Mary B. Cunningham-Pauline Allen, Brill, Leiden 1998, 295-296.
106 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 162-164; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 230.
107 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 165-166, 172; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 167-179, 267-276.
108 Homilies 4 and 16. Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 203, 223-224; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 44-59, 234-241.

emperor's conversations and intimacy with the divine, a clear signal of his importance to those listening. In most cases, in fact, Leo managed to move the focus of his homilies away from their avowed purposes, making them instead about himself and his special, divinely sanctioned position.

Unlike many preachers, Leo ensured that his own voice, his own involvement, and his own agency were not difficult to find in the sermons themselves. For instance, in his homily on the Feast of the Prophet Elijah, the prophet is not once named in the body of the text itself, nor is a single mention made of the prophet's own life. Instead, the events recalled are those surrounding Leo's time in prison and how Elijah had interceded on Leo's behalf to have him released and given the throne[109]. In his homily on St. Clement, Leo concludes with a prayer asking the saint to grant him personal glory[110]. His homily on St. Nicholas thanks the saint for saving him from illness, and his homily on St. Trypho states that Trypho through his martyrdom "is receiving the glorious crown, and Leo the imperial glory."[111] As in many other homilies, the one on Palm Sunday states Jesus is "*my* God and *my* king," with Leo in the same sermon both addressing the Logos and most explicitly comparing himself to David[112]. In many instances, Leo is a "shepherd" (*poimēn*) or "pilot" (*kybernētēs*) for his congregation[113]. Every time Leo knowingly introduces something new to the homiletic tradition in his homily on Christ's Ascension (Homily 5), he highlights it with phrases such as "As it seems to me…" or "I say...," or "I think…"[114] Throughout all of the homilies, instances of the first person (e.g., I/me) abound. Having homilies end with prayers for the emperor's protection or guidance was not unusual, especially in Constantinople, but such prominence of the preacher himself in Leo's homilies is very noteworthy indeed[115]. Leo even ordered a man who had previously made an attempt on his life to come forward as an example of the penalty for injustice and covetousness in one of his homilies on the beginning of Lent[116]. The effect of such repeated references to the speaker himself in conversations or comparisons with biblical figures or even God Himself should not be underestimated, especially when the speaker happens to be the emperor.

109 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 447-450.

110 Ibid, 367-369.

111 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 130.

112 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 13-26. "ο εμος και βασιλευς και Θεος." Having Leo refer to Jesus as "*Basileus*", which was indeed common practice, nevertheless would have reinforced the idea that Leo was God's sole representative on Earth, for the term used to refer to the emperor was the same, i.e. *basileus*.

113 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 74; Antonopoulou, *CChr*, 296 (e.g.).

114 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 215. The phrases used are, respectively, "ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ", "ἐγὼ γὰρ...φημί", and "ὡς οἶμαι."

115 Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople: English Translation, Introduction, and Commentary,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1958, 212.

116 Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 225; Antonopoulou, *CChr*, 407-08. The homily is no. 29, and was probably delivered in 904, the Spring after a conspirator had managed to strike a blow to Leo's head in the Church of St. Mokios during the ceremony for Christmas. Leo called out to the audience, "Let him come forward, he who changed the holy incarnation into a tragedy." (Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἡκέτω πλησίον ὁ εἰς τραγωιδίαν τὴν ἱερὰν μεταποιήσας ὑπόθεσιν).

Leo's personal devotion to Mary, witnessed by his coinage and his ceremonial ivory scepter, also comes through in his homilies. Leo composed four homilies to the Virgin, covering the major celebrations of her birth (Homily 15), the Annunciation (1), the Presentation (20), and the Koimesis or Dormition (Homily 12). All of them come from the period of 886-896, for his Annunciation homily had been written and delivered sometime in the first years of his reign, and the other three can be dated to sometime between 894-896[117]. The latter date is significant, for it was shortly after an unsuccessful attempt against Leo's life had been made by relatives of his advisor, Stylianos Zaoutzes, at Damianou. Thus, Leo gives the following address to Mary at the end of his homily on the Koimesis:

> *I am offering you this speech honoring your assumption to the best of my ability; near (the date of) this (feast), you consented that my life should endure contrary to the hopes of those who did not correctly reckon the days of my life, of which they are not the providers*[118].

Again, at the end of his homily on the Presentation of the Virgin, Leo prayed, "May you also grant that we remain unharmed by the storm of our enemies, which rises both among foreigners and our fellow-countrymen."[119] In statements like these, Leo personalized the celebrations of the Mother of God by stressing the divine protection she offered him. As in his homily on the Feast of Elijah, Leo's personal relationship with biblical figures is what takes center stage. Leo's homilies thus take on qualities of devotional texts, albeit with a public audience.

Whereas several of Leo's homilies were alterations of those written by Church Fathers, in the absence of this kind of model, Leo sometimes turned elsewhere for inspiration. Homily 3 on the Burial of the Lord offers an interesting example, for it seems to be based at least partially on a similar homily written and delivered by none other than Photios, and Photios' original survives to this day[120]. Photios' homily concentrates on the errors of the Jews at the time of Christ's Passion, and he utilized the Byzantine homiletic trope of rhetorical questions to the story's antagonists, which are intended to be pedagogical for the congregation[121]. Leo picked up on this trend, but took directly addressing the biblical figures involved to another level, as he instead scolded the Apostles for ignoring the needs of the Virgin Mary at such a difficult time[122]. The structure of the homily alternates between directly addressing the

117 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 69.

118 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 179. "...αὕτη σοι παρ'ἡμῶν ἡ τοῦ λόγου προσένεξις, τὴν σὴν ὅσον ἡμῖν ἐξήκει τιμῶσι μετάστασιν, πρὸς ἣν παρ'ἐλπίδας τῶν οὐκ εὖ τὰς ἡμέρας, ὧν οὐκ εἰσὶ χορηγοί, τῆς ἡμῶν βιώσεως ἐπιμετρούντων, τὸν ἡμέτερον βίον διαρκέσαι εὐδόκησας." (Translation by Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 58).

119 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 275. "...δοίης δὲ καὶ τῆς τῶν ἐχθρῶν τρικυμίας, ὅση τε ἀλλοφύλων καὶ ὅση τῶν ὁμογενῶν ἐπανίσταται, τὸ ἀπήμαντον." (Translation by Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 59).

120 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 202. This is particularly fortunate, for only eighteen of Photios' homilies have survived, the rest probably being destroyed during the reign of Basil I or even Leo. See: Mango, 3-8.

121 Mango, *Homilies of Photius,* 192-212. Mango lists this homily as Homily 11 (On Holy Saturday) in Photios' collection.

122 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 34-36; Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 198.

figures involved in Christ's Passion and hymns and exhorting the audience, demonstrating what Antonopoulou has called an "emphasis on the movement from the present to the past and back to the present."[123] Such a movement blurs the lines between the past and the present and would have had a powerful effect on listeners, as Leo seemed to enter into the Biblical narrative and himself become an ambassador to the present for those holy and revered personages from Holy Scripture.

A further example of Leo appearing as a kind of liaison between Scripture and his audience is found in Homily 36. In fact, this homily is not a homily at all. Instead, Leo called it an epistle (*epistolē*) in which he consciously and clearly imitates the form of the New Testament Epistles[124]. According to the manuscript tradition, Leo delivered this epistle sometime during Lent, and although whether it had been read aloud to an audience is unclear based on the text of the epistle itself, little doubt should exist that it had, similar to how the New Testament versions were also read during regular liturgies[125]. Leo faithfully followed the form and style of several New Testament epistles, especially II Corinthians, Ephesians, and I Peter, including an almost verbatim reproduction of the opening lines and closing farewells of these letters[126]. Despite his New Testament exemplars, Leo still included several Old Testament references and parallels, as in most of his other homilies[127]. Similar to the New Testament Epistles, Leo adopted in his epistle the persona of a *daskalos* [a teacher to his people][128]. This kind of scriptural imitation has no parallels with earlier Church Fathers and appears to have been entirely an innovation from Leo's own imagination[129].

A similar case occurs in Homily 6 on the Pentecost. With Leo's choice of words, he suggests that the Holy Spirit is filling him with the same grace the Apostles received on the original Pentecost, explicitly positioning himself as their successor[130]. Later, Leo again asserts that he has been specially chosen by God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and that he is a divine teacher to his subjects, presenting them with "insider" information about the Second Coming of Christ[131]. One should also remember that the Pentecost ceremonial is the one with

123 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 199.

124 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 459; Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 231-232.

125 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 231. This is further attested to by the manuscript tradition, as the epistle is included in several collections alongside and mixed in with Leo's other homilies. Furthermore, the audience is still just as visible (or invisible) in the epistle as in any of Leo's other sermons.

126 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 459. Compare Leo's opening words: "Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ὁ διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ..." with II Cor. 1.3: "Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ..." Taken from the Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th Edition, ed. Barbara and Kurt Aland-Johannes Karavidopoulos-Carlo M. Martini-Bruce M. Metzger, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1993, 472.

127 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 232.

128 Ibid, 231.

129 Ibid, 232.

130 Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 69; Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 215.

131 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 216.

which Leo's ivory scepter seems to be associated, and certain aspects of this ceremonial may suggest precisely when this homily was delivered. In structure, the homily follows somewhat closely a similar homily on Pentecost by Gregory Nazianzen. In the ceremonial for Pentecost, the morning office (*orthros*) consisted of a chanting of Psalm 50 (the same Psalm inscribed on the scepter) and a reading of Nazianzen's homily[132]. Leo's homily may possibly have been intended to (or, in fact, did) replace Nazianzen's for this ceremony[133].

At the very beginning of his homily on the dedication of the monastery of Kauleas (Homily 31), in another move toward identifying with Biblical figures, Leo directly juxtaposes himself with Solomon in the phrase "Solomon says that the people will be gladdened when just men have been praised; I say that they will be gladdened when houses of God have been dedicated."[134] Not only does Leo appear as an equal to the Old Testament king, he even sounds as if he has bested him in a game of words. This monastery, which Leo had had built for his spiritual father, Euthymios, was located adjacent to the Great Palace complex in Psamathia, which the *Vita Euthymii* attributed to Leo's desire to have his spiritual father nearer to him[135]. Its location is significant, for the land on which the monastery was built had been confiscated from a relative of Photios named Katakoilas, whom Leo had had exiled along with the deposed Patriarch at the beginning of his reign[136]. Interestingly, the church attached to this monastery was dedicated to Sts. Kosmas and Damian, the same two personalities whose busts are found on Leo's ivory scepter[137]. One can again witness here another example of the convergence of multiple facets of Leo's political program.

One of the best examples of Leo's homilies contributing to his vision of imperial ecclesiastical authority is Homily 22 on the consecration of his brother Stephen as Patriarch of Constantinople. First and foremost, the fact that Leo was the one who delivered the homily on this occasion exemplifies perfectly Leo's policy toward the patriarchate. In the homily, the bishops and priests are presented as "faithful subjects who have no objections to the elevation to the patriarchal throne of Stephen at the uncanonical age of 19."[138] Traditionally, one was not eligible for ordination until the age of 25, making Leo's appointment of his brother even more controversial. Novellae 16 and 75 of Leo's legislative activity being doublets of the same law is important to recall, as these allowed those who were of the

132 Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis*, I.59-71 (Ch. 9), ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 54-64; Corrigan 412.

133 Other changes had obviously been made to the ceremonial contained in the *De ceremoniis*, for the Church of Mary Theotokos of the Pharos, built by Michael III, had been incorporated into it (*De ceremoniis* I.70, ed. and transl. Vogt, Vol. I, 64).

134 Antonopoulou, *CChr*, 423. "Εγκωμιαζομένων δικαίων εὐφρανθήσονται λαοί, ὁ σοφὸς φησί Σολομῶν · ἐγὼ δὲ φημὶ, ἐγκαινιζομένων οἴκων Θεοῦ, εὐφρανθήσονται λαοί."

135 Homily 31. Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 77-78; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 423-29; *Vita Euthymii,* V, ed. and transl. Karlin-Hayter, 28.

136 *Vita Euthymii,* V, ed. and transl. Karlin-Hayter, 30.

137 Corrigan, 413.

138 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 246; Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 299-303.

age of 20 to be ordained subdeacons (thereby implicitly allowing them to be raised to the position of patriarch)[139]. Because Stephen was made Patriarch so early in Leo's reign, the legislation almost surely postdates his appointment, but the two acts are doubtlessly related. No manuscripts containing homilies attributed to Patriarch Stephen are known, and given the significant number of Leo's homilies that were written and delivered during the period of Stephen's patriarchate (886-893)[140], to suggest that Leo may have routinely preached in place of his brother would not be unreasonable to suggest, especially due to many of Leo's homilies having been expressly delivered in the Hagia Sophia[141], "thus exercising the same sort of control over the church as he did with the legislation he issued on ecclesiastical discipline and administration."[142]

The evidence that Leo's homilies firmly belong as a part Leo's comprehensive efforts to rein in control of the church is then overwhelming. Simply too many instances of overlap occur, too much consistent imagery between his homiletic output and his actions in other areas, to exclude them. Leo homilized on the same saints whose feasts he added to the liturgical calendar and to whom he had built and dedicated churches. His devotion to Mary and Elijah were demonstrated not just in his orations but also in their own ceremonies and even images on Leo's coins. Also, even without these numerous coincidences, Leo's homilies themselves exhibit enough discontinuity with the homiletic tradition to warrant a search for ulterior motives in their composition. One must remember that their special importance for Leo's reign lay in his innovations. His special emphasis on directly addressing biblical personages, their very personal nature, and such unique compositions as his Epistle represent total departures from typical Byzantine homiletics, and this is where one can discern more precisely Leo's own theories and ideas. His homilies acted as the perfect opportunity for Leo to demonstrate just the kind of church leadership his legislation, clerical appointments, building projects, and court ceremonial advocated.

Conclusion

Among the many buildings constructed during Leo's reign was an intricately adorned bathhouse built adjacent to the Nea Ekklēsia within the confines of the imperial Great Palace[143]. Though no remains of the structure can be found today, its *ekphrasis* [description]

139 Noailles-Dain, 60-63, 264-65; Scott, 270. Civil law had stated that the minimum age was to be 25 (Justinian, Nov. 123, ch. 13), while Canon 15 of the Quinisext Council "in Trullo" lowered the age to 20 (Noailles-Dain, 62, n.1-2).

140 Antonopoulou, *Homilies,* 69. As stated above, while many of the homilies are difficult or impossible to securely date, at least 15 (Homilies 1, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 27, 32, 33, 34, and 37) can be dated to this period.

141 Ibid, 36-7. Homilies 1, 22 and 35 were explicitly given in the Hagia Sophia, and many others are presumed to have been.

142 Antonopoulou, "Homiletic Activity", 343.

143 Paul Magdalino, "The Bath of Leo the Wise and the 'Macedonian Renaissance' Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 42 (1988), 99.

is found in the form of a thousand-line poem composed during Leo's reign by Leo Choirosphaktes, a relative of Leo's fourth wife Zoe Karbonopsina. The building displayed a curious combination of images depicting the emperor and empress alongside river gods and scenes of natural beauty[144]. It was a strange amalgamation of seemingly pagan motifs and imperial Christian symbolism. Choirosphaktes' poem, however, explains the significance of these odd representations as indicative of the emperor's wisdom and his role as *gēouchos* [ruler of the Earth][145]. Choirosphaktes tells how the scenes of natural beauty represent the cosmos and its four constituent elements of earth, air, water, and fire. The last two are given special emphasis as representative of "the paradoxical union of these two purifying agents and cosmic extremes that Leo, by his wisdom, produces in the healing hot waters of his bath."[146] Paul Magdalino has identified the four personified rivers in the baths with the Four Rivers of Paradise, which were also associated with the Four Evangelists and, therefore, divine wisdom.[147] The structure even had images of fire-breathing griffins, usually shown in depictions of the Prophet Elijah's ascent to heaven in Middle Byzantine iconography[148]. Leo's own writings generally equated fire-imagery with his dynastic patron, Elijah, and his homily on the prophet's feast centers upon this pyritic theme[149]. The bathhouse and its accompanying decorations were then very much representative of Leo's internal politics, not only because the structure, similar to so many other churches and buildings, had been sponsored by Leo himself, nor because of its location near the Nea Ekklēsia in the palace complex, or even the images of divine wisdom and imperial authority or illustrations of Elijah depicted within its walls. The structure was representative because it stood as a singular object encompassing all of these several varied aspects of Leo's vision and as a representation of imperial authority.

From the very outset of his reign, Leo VI had recognized the need for serious efforts to reassert imperial hegemony over the church. Just like the problem, the solution was neither simple nor straightforward, but rather complex and multi-layered. The challenge to his authority may have originated with the Patriarch, but Photios' ideas were able to permeate every level of society, from bishop to fisherman, and Leo was forced to make his campaign as diverse as his target audience. Utilizing tactics that ranged from preaching before a mixed congregation at the Hagia Sophia to strategic appointments to the patriarchate, he was able to reach out to these different strata in ways best suited to effect change in each. For the general public, grand ceremonies and personalized homilies projected an image of a ruler

144 Ibid, 101-02.
145 Ibid, 103.
146 Ibid, 104.
147 Ibid, 104-105; Gen. 2: 10-14.
148 Ibid, 109.
149 For an example, see: Antonopoulou, *CChr,* 448-449. Elijah is referred to simply as "the truly fiery man" (τοῦ τῶι ὄντι πυρίνου ἀνδρὸς) who "extinguished the fire of [Basil's] anger with the fire of his own authority" (τὸ πῦρ τῆς ὀργῆς, τῶι πυρὶ τῆς οἰκείας ἔσβεσε προστασίας).

truly connected to the divine. For the clergy, a combination of legally binding edicts and sheer political intimidation was more effective. Still, these various efforts display a marked cohesiveness, interconnectivity, and consistency that affirm their inclusion in a singular organized effort that was both imagined and executed as a composite whole. That Leo himself envisioned them in this way is beyond doubt, and as such, they should not and indeed cannot be divorced from one another in the current modern understanding.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.
Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.
Finansal Destek: Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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