

# Recovering a disfigured Empire. Institutional maintenance in Tenth-century Byzantium

## Recuperando un imperio desfigurado. El mantenimiento institucional en el Bizancio del siglo X

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### Abstract

*Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (945-959 AD) implements a peculiar institutional maintenance, based on the collection of books and materials from the past. A closer scrutiny of the sources shows some deeper meanings and reveals that the recurring metaphors of the body and the family shape his grand project, shedding light onto the institutional and social agenda which underpinned his embodied maintenance.*

### Keywords

*Byzantium, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, collection of books, metaphors of the empire as a body, oikeliōsis, Excerpta Constantiniana, De Cerimoniis, embodiment, imperial legitimacy.*

### Resumen

Constantino VII Porfirogénito (945-959 d.C.) pone en práctica un peculiar *institutional maintenance*, basado en la recopilación de libros y materiales del pasado. Un examen más detallado de las fuentes muestra algunos significados más profundos y revela que las metáforas

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recurrentes del cuerpo y la familia dan forma a su proyecto, aclarando la agenda institucional y social que sustentaba su *embodied maintenance*.

### Palabras clave

Bizancio, recopilación de libros, imperio bizantino, Constantino VII Porfirogénito, *Excerpta Constantiniana*, *De Cerimoniis*, *oikeiōsis*, metáfora del cuerpo, incorporación, legitimidad imperial.

SUMMARY. 1. Introduction. 2. A bookish maintenance? 3. Court ceremonial: the *De Cerimoniis (de Cer.)*. 4. Roman historiography: the *Excerpta Constantiniana (EC)*. 5. Embodied maintenance. 6. Conclusion.

## 1. Introduction

While every institution needs maintenance, albeit in different ways according to its age (Catanzaro, 2024), middle Byzantium, i.e., 6<sup>th</sup> to the (beginning of) 13<sup>th</sup> century can prove an intriguing case study about recovering a disfigured empire.

Firstly, one must bear in mind that the Byzantines, as they are called from 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> c. AD, are fully aware of their Romanness: they are the continuation –not just the heirs– of the Roman empire and, as such, they strive to fulfil their task. In other words, they consider the maintenance of the imperial institution a priority and their perception stays firm on this point –even though they change a lot over the centuries in various respects (Ševčenko, 1992, p. 180; Cresci – Gazzano eds., 2018; Stouraitis, 2014; Kaldellis 2019; Stouraitis ed., 2022).

Moreover, Byzantium is no monolith: there is a plurality of political, religious and ethnic identities, sometimes fiercely opposed to each other, sometimes allied, mitigated and integrated or mixed (Roberto, 2018, pp. 25-53; Gnoli - Neri eds., 2019; Stewart - Parnell - Whately eds., 2022).

## 2. A bookish maintenance?

Whenever it comes to the tenth century, an age of splendour and expansion but also recurring problems (not only) on the borders, scholars can be surprised at the explicit connection between institutional maintenance and a vast literary program of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945-959). As some literary productions of his are explicitly involved with the restoration of the common good, it is worth considering the relevance both for institutions and for literature, to grasp some deeper meanings of their relationship.

A premise is necessary: for those who wanted to restore the imperial institutions, recovering ancient texts seems a priority to such an extent that, (a) many textual collections are commissioned by the emperors; (b) they are gathering not only literary texts such as histories and imperial biographies, but also «texts for administrative use» (Schreiner, 2018, p. 238), as well as agricultural and veterinary treatises, hagiographical texts for the liturgy, ceremonial protocols and so on (Gaul - Menze - Bálint eds., 2018; Németh, 2018; Carolla, 2022, pp. 46-47 with essential bibliography).

Imperial sources show that those collections are intended to restore the well-being of the empire itself. Modern scholarship during 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c. had used to label them as anthologies or even encyclopaedias, until Paolo Odorico brought the term

*sylogai* (collections) into focus (Büttner-Wobst, 1906; de Boor, 1912, 1914/19; Lemerle, 1971, pp. 267-300; Odorico, 1990, 2011, 2017a, 2017b; Németh, 2010, 2018; Manafis, 2020). While the practice of *sylogai* is very common throughout the Byzantine millennium, one may be surprised by the fact that several collections revolve around the name of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, whose actual reign spans less than fifteen years (*PmbZ* 23734; Toynbee, 1973; Ševčenko, 1992; Magdalino, 2013; Antonopoulou, 2018; 2019; etc.).

He is born in the purple –i.e., *Porphyrogenitus*– in 905 AD, is proclaimed co-emperor with his father Leo VI at the age of three, becomes an orphan at seven, and is *de facto* ousted from power by his father-in-law Romanos I Lekapenos (*Pmbz* 28987) as early as fifteen-years-old. Therefore he benefits from a long private life, which according to sources allows him to take care of his beloved books and icons: he is also said bending over books of history night and day, to learn everything.<sup>1</sup>

These narrations represent him as a humble, faithful servant of God, earning his living like st. Paul (2 *Thess.* 3,10); and they show that he willingly sacrifices himself to acquire wisdom. Whenever he gets rid of his rivals in power and becomes the sole emperor (945 AD), he considers the event a miracle and feels his throne like a task given by God. The latter perception was customary, of course, for Roman emperors even before Constantine I the Great moved the capital to Byzantium and inaugurated his «second Rome», Constantinople; furthermore, the doctrine of the emperor as the imitator of God *par excellence* has Hellenistic (pagan) origins, and Christian writers develop on it, starting in the 4<sup>th</sup> century with Eusebius of Caesarea (Ahrweiler 1975; Alvino 2019, pp. 29-65 and pp.166-168). And yet, Constantine VII's (auto)representation has relevance to the present contribution.

To focus on institutional maintenance, it is important to mention a couple of collections among those of Constantine VII: (i) the one on court ceremonial – the so-called *de Cerimoniis*, and (ii) the collection of historical extracts – the so-called *Excerpta Constantiniana* (Ševčenko, 1992, pp. 168, 182-186; Magdalino, 2013, pp. 194-200, Odorico, 2017a, 2017b; Németh, 2018; Carolla, 2022, etc.).

### 3. Court ceremonial: the *De Cerimoniis* (*de Cer.*)

To approach the *De Cerimoniis*, i.e., the collection on court ceremonial, the reference book is the 2020 critical edition with French translation and vast commentary by Dagron, Flusin, Feissel and others (*de Cerimoniis*, 2020<sup>2</sup>). Under the name of Constantine VII, the *Proem* represents the state like a body with disproportionate limbs and in dire need of healing. The metaphor of the city/state/empire as a sick body is part of the literary tradition<sup>3</sup>, and the specification of the disfigured body is easy to understand: Constantine VII is criticising his father-in-law Romanos I, together with his sons and political organisation (Ševčenko, 1992, p. 176; Flusin, 2020, pp. 18\*-25\*). What is intriguing is the type of cure that is proposed and deserves some attention.

How to recover the order (*taxis*) which, in Constantine's opinion, was missing under Romanos I? In addition to carefully looking after the army, as one does with

<sup>1</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis* III 37, p. 216 «he earned his living from the work of his hands: he was very good at painting»; V 21-22, p. 345 he is «bending over his books» during his brothers-in-law's plots; see also Evaristos, *Synaxarion CP*, col. 14; Flusin (2020, p. 28\*).

<sup>2</sup> See also Kresten (2000); Featherstone (2002); Featherstone – Gruskova – Kresten (2005); Sode (2009, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Classical and early Christian literary models: McVay, 2000; see also, e.g., Aristoteles, *Politica* 1253a 20-28; Synesius, *de regno* 19 (5th c. AD), etc.

one's head in relation to one's body (*Novella* 5<sup>4</sup>; Kaldellis 2015, pp. 195 and 252 n. 137), the emperor is credited with the initiative of collecting sources from Late Antiquity. In his perspective, the empire cannot succeed without proper ceremonial (*taxis*), a crucial requirement because this is the one that restores order and proportion to the whole living body.

This is the focus of the *Proem of de Cerimoniis*:

*De Cer. Proem.* 1, p. 3 Flusin<sup>5</sup>

To others, perhaps, who are less concerned with necessary things, this undertaking [i.e., of collecting the court ceremonial] would have seemed superfluous, but to us it is very dear, very worthy of our solicitude, and more appropriate (*oikeiotes*)<sup>6</sup> than any other, since it is using the commendable ceremonial order (*taxis*) that the imperial power makes itself seen with more harmony and propriety, which makes it admirable in the eyes of foreign nations as well as our own.

Institutional maintenance is necessary after a long time of degeneration, as the same *Proem* says:

Many things come to an end over a long time, because they are accomplished in it and consumed by it, and among these is the great and precious good (τὸ μέγα χρῆμα καὶ τίμιον), namely the display and presentation of imperial ceremonial, which was neglected and, as it were, necrotic, so that it was inevitable to see the empire devoid of beauty and disfigured.

The author uses the metaphor of the defective body, both in the sense of disproportion in the limbs –a defect which can be described as a *disorder* (*ataxia*, i.e., *non-taxis*)– and in the sense of slowly degenerating into a corpse because some parts are consumed.

Here the court ceremonial, precisely because it is essentially *order* (*taxis*), is represented as the lifeblood of beauty, in the absence of which the empire falls apart and accelerates necrosis.<sup>7</sup> It is worth insisting on this point: however peculiar the imperial perspective can be, one has to acknowledge that Constantine VII shows (a kind of) institutional maintenance concerns, whereby ceremonial is an antidote to political degeneration.

There is no point in having an emperor, therefore, if he does not submit to the ceremonial of his predecessors. That is why the undertaking of collecting is «more appropriate than any other».

The Greek word for «more appropriate» is here *oikeiotes* (from the adjective *oikeios* = of the house), which means «more relevant to the owner», as well as «more akin»: a notion related to ownership and, ultimately, connected with house/household/family (*oikos*). This is somehow ironic: Romanos I is Constantine's father-in-law, so they *are* familiar with each other, but the elder's influence on the empire is not appropriate in the sense of suitable, or even acceptable.

Doubtless, the educated audience understands the political meaning between the lines during the tenth century, as it has always done throughout the Byzantine millennium. After all, a harsh judgement on the predecessor can also be found in book VI of the so-called *Continuation of Theophanes*, which tells that Constantine VII finds

<sup>4</sup> *Novelles* ed. Svoronos (1994, p. 118); transl. McGeer (2000, p. 71).

<sup>5</sup> Translation by the author.

<sup>6</sup> Lit. «more familiar»; in Greek οικειότερον.

<sup>7</sup> A similar comparison also in the Proem to book II (Flusin, 2020, p. 3\* n. 5).

the empire fallen «into indignity and neglect».<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, the *Continuation of Theophanes* (*ThC*) revolves around Constantinian propaganda.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Roman historiography: the *Excerpta Constantiniana* (*EC*)

Not only about the notions of family and *oikeios*, but also for institutional maintenance it is useful to compare the other collection mentioned above: the *Excerpta Constantiniana* (*EC*).

The collection is planned as a huge series of 53 sections, generally encompassing the Roman historiography in Greek, from several authors, namely from Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> c. BC) to George the Monk (9<sup>th</sup> c. AD).

Each section draws on different authors and works, selects passages and arranges them by theme. Most of the series is lost, but large parts of five thematic sections have survived<sup>10</sup>:

- Ambassadors of the Romans (*Excerpta de Legationibus Romanorum* = *ELR*)
- Ambassadors of the Foreigners (*de Legationibus Gentium* = *ELG*)
- Attacks to the Emperors (*de Insidiis* = *EI*)
- Virtues and Vices (*de Virtutibus et Vitiis* = *EVV*)
- Words of Wisdom (*de Sententiis* = *ES*)

The Proem is the same for every section, while the table of contents is different. Even though both the Proem and the table of contents are poorly attested nowadays, the manuscripts show that the emperor wanted a list of the excerpted authors and works to be appended at the end of the Proem for each thematic section (Carolla, 2022, p. 49).

The Proem names Constantine VII as the commissioner of the collection, and explains his reasons and purposes. Firstly, historiography has fallen into oblivion. Hence, Constantine's *EC* enterprise consists of (a) collecting historical books, (b) splitting them into short passages, and (c) rearranging the texts into thematic sections. The vision of *EC* consists of including/enclosing «the whole magnificence of history».<sup>11</sup>

Before the table of contents, at the very end of the Proem, the text says that the collection is no *synopsis* (i.e., epitome or abridgement) of the primary works, but it is an *oikeiōsis* (οικείωσις), usually understood as «familiarisation».

In light of the present concerns, it is important to understand the term *oikeiōsis*, both because it is a definition of the work and, more to our point, it is presented as a way out from degeneration – as regards historiography, education and, ultimately, empire.

The text of the Proem and its keyword *oikeiōsis* have deserved a recent monograph by Andras Németh, which is relevant in many respects. He takes *oikeiōsis*

<sup>8</sup> ThC VI 14, p. 445 Bekker εἰς ἀχρεϊότητα καὶ ἀμέλειαν (*eis achreióthta kai améleian*).

<sup>9</sup> ThC I-IV: Signes-Codoner – Featherstone, eds., 2015; Wahlgren 2019, *passim*; Signes Codoñer (1989, 1995; 2017); Treadgold (2013, pp. 176-180). Forthcoming are (a) the critical edition of *ThC* VI by M. Featherstone and J. Signes Codoner, as well as (b) St. Wahlgren's edition of the chronicle by Ps.-Symeon.

<sup>10</sup> The number five is debated. *Contra*: Lemerle (1971, p. 281); Odorico (2017). *Pro*: Németh (2018, p. 194); Flusin (2020, p. 30)\*; Carolla (2022, pp. 50-51); Porro (2023, p. 27).

<sup>11</sup> ἅπασα ἱστορικὴ μεγαλοῦργία [*hápasa historikē megalourgía*], p. 1 ed. de Boor.

as «appropriation» and links it to the theory and the practice of attribution of the single textual extracts (*excerpts*) to a different theme. Because the *EC* collection takes the excerpts from, e.g., the primary texts by Polybius or other authors, splitting them by theme in different sections, one can say that the *EC* work ‘appropriates’ them. More specifically: a thematic section appropriates suitable passages, turning them into something new (Németh 2018, *passim*).

Of course, this is always the case with anthologies everywhere: a text is extracted from the primary context, inserted in a new collection and taken to convey a new message. A huge collection such as *EC*, focussing on Roman historiography in Greek, is bound to convey messages about the empire: imperial institutions, their problems and solutions are on the front page. This is why, in another perspective, institutional maintenance is very important, albeit in disguise.

Yet there is more about *oikeiōsis* in the light of Constantine VII’s grand project, since it is not only a cultural, but also a political and institutional, as well as an educational enterprise. Therefore, this *oikeiōsis* needs to be further investigated.

The end of the Proem reads as follows:

And there is nothing of the contents that will escape the present enumeration of topics, absolutely of nothing is deprived the narrative sequence by the distinction of concepts, indeed preserves the whole in one single body and adapts to each topic the present non-synopsis, but rather *oikeiōsis* (Carolla 2022, p. 54<sup>12</sup>).

In other words, the last message of the Proem states that the entire collection of *EC* is no epitome or abridgement (*synopsis*), but rather consists of an *oikeiōsis* which saves the whole of the primary texts even after excerpting, i.e., fragmenting them.

The metaphor, again, is that of the body: the collection «preserves the whole [narrative sequence, i.e., primary text] in one body (*syssōmon*)». The reader grasps the message, namely that these extracts are no dismembered limbs, nor are they taken for ornamental purposes: instead, they are now thriving in one living body. The latter keyword –the adjective *syssōmos*, etym. *syn+sōma*, i.e., «together in one body»– is taken ultimately from the *New Testament*, and precisely from the *Letter to the Ephesians* 3.6, where «the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body (*syssōma*), and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel<sup>13</sup>»: they share the very same promise of salvation as the Jews.

This biblical quotation cannot be disregarded as obvious: the end of a Proem is a key passage for the genre of (classical and) Byzantine historiography, the lexicon is carefully chosen, and from this *NT* Epistle only one keyword is selected.

Therefore, the author insists on the same metaphor of the body which is present in the *de Cerimoniis*. One may wonder whether the lifeblood here, instead of the ceremonial/order (*taxis*), is the *oikeiōsis* –and what is the full meaning of it. While the ceremonial is both recovery and life of the whole political body, is this resource (*oikeiōsis*) also connected with institutional maintenance?

<sup>12</sup> *ELR Prooemium*, pp. 2, 8-12 de Boor κούκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν τῶν ἐγκειμένων, ὃ διαφεύξεται τὴν τοιαύτην τῶν ὑποθέσεων ἀπαρίθμησιν, οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν ἀφαιρουμένης τῆς τοῦ λόγου ἀκολουθίας τῇ διαιρέσει τῶν ἐνοιῶν, ἀλλὰ σύσσωμον σωζούσης, καὶ ἐκάστη ὑποθέσει προσαρμοζομένης τῆς τηλικαύτης οὐ συνόψεως, ἀληθέστερον δ’ εἰπεῖν οἰκειώσεως. Translation by the author.

<sup>13</sup> *Eph.* 3.6 NRSVUE. In Greek: εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.

Following the contents of the *EC Proem*, the reader learns that the emperor wants a collection of historical texts, he orders it to be arranged thematically, and he cares even about the order of the selected passages: the emperor has to be recognized everywhere between the lines. At the very end, something related to familiarisation (*oikeiōsis*) is specified.

The Greek term *oikeiōsis* has a wide range of meanings both in Antiquity and in Byzantium, from «appropriation» to «inclination», including «friendship», «familiarity with» and others (Radice, 2000; *LSJ* 1202, Lampe 938-9 sv οἰκείωσις); consequently, in Christian contexts it indicates relationship with (or within) the divine Trinity, communion (of men/women with God), reconciliation, association and incarnation (i.e., appropriation of the human flesh by Logos), etc.

It has been a great surprise to find the term in a late antique summary of the same *Letter to the Ephesians*: the list of *Chapters (kephalaia)* transmitted under the name of a deacon Euthalius, i.e., the *Euthalian Apparatus* (Allen, 2022), where exactly chapter 3 bears the following title: «The *oikeiōsis* of the Gentiles and the Jews in God through Christ for hope by grace». <sup>14</sup> The *Eph. 3* context leads to take *oikeiōsis* here as «familiarisation», in the active sense of (Jesus Christ restoring) «familiarity» of both Gentiles and Jews with God, hence the term can be taken in the sense of «reconciliation», a useful find which brings us back to the *EC Proem*.

However diverse the extracted texts about Roman history, the emperor wants them to be united in one single body (*syssōmos*), a body which, in terms of books, is the *EC work*: a practical «reconciliation» (*oikeiōsis*) of classical/pagan, Jew and Christian historiographies.

On the other hand, in terms of institutions, the body is at the same time the empire and the Church; furthermore, as every living body needs a head, the reader is reminded of *Eph. 4.15-16* «We must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love» (NRSVUE; see also *Col. 1.18-20* etc.).

Recovering history from oblivion, and thus restoring the empire as regards both education and politics, is no little project according to Constantine VII's purposes: he is participating in the redemption of the empire and the church by imitating Jesus Christ, the head of the body.

Constantine VII is no exception in this respect: he knows the imperial tradition, so he exercises power in the name of God, and indeed he is emperor *in God (en Theō)*, see below). Furthermore, a close imitation of Christ shapes the official propaganda around him. Firstly, his long «private life», in imitation of Jesus' 30 years: even though Constantine is the legitimate heir to the succession of Leo VI, he remains in the shadows from the age of seven until thirty-nine. Secondly, he looks quiet, obedient and peaceful throughout the decades, reminding of *AT Is. 53*, the Gospels of the Passion, and st. Paul. Thirdly, he credits Jesus Christ with the merit of his ascent to the throne, due to the arrival of the sacred Image of Edessa, i.e., the Holy Face of Jesus, not made nor painted by human hands, in Constantinople in 944 AD (Flusin, 2011; 2020; Nicolotti, 2014; Carolla, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Περὶ τῆς τῶν ἔθνων καὶ Ἰουδαίων οἰκειώσεως πρὸς Θεὸν διὰ Χριστοῦ ἐπ' ἑλπίδι κατὰ χάριν.

## 5. Embodied Maintenance

Tellingly, a famous episode regarding the eve of the procession with the Image narrates that three co-emperors visit the relic: the two sons of Romanos I Lekapenos, who in the sacred cloth cannot discern anything but a face, and Constantine VII, who sees Jesus' eyes and ears. Immediately, the monk Sergios comments: «Not me, but David the prophet says: *The Lord's eyes are on the righteous, and his ears are toward their petition. But the Lord's face is against evildoers, to destroy the remembrance of them from Earth*».<sup>15</sup> Less than six months later, the two «evildoers» are deposed and exiled while Constantine VII finally ascends to the throne that he has always deserved.

In other words, Jesus Christ has come with His sacred image, swept away the wicked, and put Constantine in power. Therefore, he can restore a beautiful and orderly life in the empire, starting with the palace as in *De Cerimoniis* Proem (dated ca. 945-946 by Flusin, 2020, p. 90\*) and continuing with other areas, such as the education of young scholars in Roman history (*EC* Proem), as well as the military expeditions against the Arabs. Around 958 AD his speech to the generals in the East reads as follows:

I give you not my only son, but my whole self, in body and soul, and I bind and join my flesh to your flesh and my bones to your bones, and I consider each of my limbs as innate and generated together with you, and my soul, though it is one, I divide it and apportion among you all, and in my part I want my people assembled by God to be animated and vivified by me.<sup>16</sup>

Visual and written propaganda agrees on these points, to the extent that institutional maintenance is embodied by the emperor.

The embodiment can be perceived in both senses: (a) as «incarnation», because Constantine presents himself as the concrete expression of Jesus on earth, and also (b) as «incorporation», because universal history is reconciled to form one body.

In the first, so to speak «active» sense (a), it is the emperor who proclaims and orders the necessary improvements of institutions; in the second, «passive» sense (b) Constantine is «incorporated» into the mystery of the Church, where the peoples are called to be members of the whole, one and single body guided by Jesus (*Eph* 3.6 and 4.15).

This is why some official titles of works attributed to Constantine presents him as «emperor of the Romans in Christ», who is the «eternal emperor». The latter formula is a vivid example of an embodiment in the sense of «incorporation»: whereas Christ is the eternal emperor, Constantine is an emperor to the extent that he stays *in* Him.<sup>17</sup>

Since he is the emperor, he, in turn, calls the peoples to form the whole of the Roman empire blessed by God; he fulfils the task both via a *corpus* of texts in the case of *EC* (*oikeiōsis*), and through evangelisation of the new pagan peoples, such as the Rus' or the Hungars. Therefore, Constantine VII is the godfather to Princess Olga from

<sup>15</sup> Ps.-Sym. *chron.* 52, 750-751 Bekker, quoting Ps. 33 (34), 16-17; transl. Nicolotti (2014, p. 97); Flusin (2011, p. 269).

<sup>16</sup> Constantine VII, *Public Speeches [Dem.] I*, Taragna ed (2016, pp. 240-242) (translation by the author).

<sup>17</sup> *De Cerimoniis* ed. Flusin (2020, I p. 2); *Treatise C*, ed. Haldon (1990, p. 94); also *ibid.* II. 203-204; see Zuckerman *Campaign blueprints*; *DAI* ed. Moravcsik (1967, p. 44); *Narratio de Imagine Edessena* ed. von Dobschütz, p. 39\*\*.



Kiev as well (Poppe, 1976; Zuckerman, 2000). Unsurprisingly, the *EC corpus* pays special attention to the history of Eastern Europe, both in Antiquity and in Late Antiquity.

In other words, the *EC* project is far from bookish: it consists of correcting Byzantine high education in history, which is in turn related to the improvement and expansion of the Roman empire and the Constantinopolitan Church (Odorico, 2017b; Nemeth, 2018, Carolla, 2019).

The same is valid for a foreign policy *vademecum*, the so-called *De Administrando Imperio (DAI)*, which Constantine VII leaves to his son: it is a collection of materials that teaches how to distinguish peoples to approach from those to fight (*DAI* Proem, ed. Moravcsik, 1967, p. 46, ll. 24-27). Even here, the good part is expressed with the verb *oikeiōmai*, «to conciliate» (*DAI* Proem, Jenkins' transl., p. 47), with the same linguistic and semantic background as *oikeiōsis*: familiarity is allowed with those peoples whom God wants, and the Christian emperor is called upon to discern them carefully.

## 6. Conclusion

Even though most sources deal with manuscripts of literary and documentary works, Constantine VII's projects goes far beyond books. Precisely because his concerns are for education and codices, they are linked to his political priorities and, as such, they show his institutional and social agenda: first of all, cleansing the empire of the ugliness of his father-in-law Romanos I's regime; secondly, recovering from oblivion the glories of the Roman empire; thirdly, transmitting a solid and lasting power onto his son in order to continue the Macedonian dynasty. From his grandfather Basil I, through his father Leo VI, until his son Romanos II: this is the Roman line according to Constantine and his *entourage*.

Constantine VII can see the eyes and the ears of Jesus Christ, whereas his brothers-in-law cannot: this means that Romanos I's family is an obstacle on the right path, and that the righteous emperor has overcome the hindrance by the grace of God and for the good of all. At the same time, it means that the imperial task is embodied: it is related to physical perceptions such as the sense of sight, and the emperor embodies not only the demands of order, reconciliation, and justice of the entire empire, but also the redemptive activity of Christ, which can lead to the common good.

This is why Constantine VII stays firm in the traditional understanding of his role, and at the same time he reworks old motifs into new actions (*taxis, oikeiosis*) to improve, restore and consolidate the institutions.

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