

Historical Figures of the Byzantine Empire Playing Cards Descriptions- Hearts

H-A Byzantine Weapons Collection



The illustrations seen here feature a variety of weapons from different centuries of the Byzantine Empire's history. The 3 swords that are seen here include the standard straight double-edged sword known in Greek as a *Spathion* which anyone in the battlefield from the lowest-ranking foot soldier to a general wielded- it would just appear more ornate depending on the rank of who wielded it- then the next sword is another commonly used Byzantine sword which was the curved single-edged sword known in Greek as a *Paramerion* in which a more historically accurate one is less curved than the one seen here, and the last one being the standard late Roman double-edged longsword known as a *Spatha* which was much more useful for cavalymen in order to attain a longer reach with their sword or for infantrymen as well to attain a longer reach when battling cavalymen, as opposed to the *Spatha's* predecessor which was the Classical Roman *Gladius* short sword which was usually only effective for infantry against infantry.

The other weapons seen here include two Byzantine maces- which the Byzantines knew by the Greek name *Apelatikion*- which were preferred weapons for Byzantine soldiers including the elite Cataphract cavalry for close combat, especially when the range between both soldiers combating each other is too short as here a mace would be a perfect weapon to immediately strike against an opponent. Another type of close-combat weapon Byzantine soldiers preferred to use- although not as commonly used as maces- were axes in which the Byzantines knew by the name *Tzikourion*. Lastly, another weapon seen here is a bow and an arrow, wherein the Byzantine Greek term for a bow is *Toxo* and for arrow either *Velos* or *Saita*.

H-2 Byzantine Consul, 5th century



As the Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire, a lot of institutions from the old empire remained in place throughout Byzantine history including the centuries old Roman Senate. When the Roman emperor Constantine I the Great (r. 306-337) moved the Roman capital to Constantinople in 330, he also moved a number of Roman senators from Italy to the new capital in exchange for free land and grain, while some senators from the west also opted to go east. Basically, in the Byzantine era the senate functioned as a kind of city council as true enough other major cities in the empire in the late Roman period such as Antioch and Carthage had a senate and not only Constantinople. The senate in Constantinople though was the most “powerful” one in the empire despite

them not really wielding any real power except in advising the emperor when it came to creating policies and in managing the budget for public events such as chariot races and shows. Although there were still some instances when the senate actually made decisions for the empire as a whole such as in plotting to overthrow an emperor, as seen with the Nika Riot in 532 when several members of the senate in Constantinople supported the rioting against the emperor Justinian I. In the Eastern Roman Empire, the senate basically consisted of members of aristocratic families and usually the position of senator was hereditary. The Eastern Roman Senate too was divided into 3 positions wherein each one ranked higher above the other, and here the highest ranking of the divisions (*Illustres*) consisted of the most senior generals and Constantinople's *Prefect* or mayor, the second rank (*Spectabiles*) consisting of important politicians from Constantinople and the provinces, and the third and lowest rank (*Clarissimi*) consisted of provincial governors.

A lot of the old positions in the Ancient Roman Senate though ceased to exist in the Byzantine Empire such as that of *Aedile*, *Tribune*, and *Quaestor* and thus the head of the Byzantine Senate- at least only in Constantinople- was the mayor of the city, though the one senatorial rank from Ancient Rome that continued in the Eastern Roman Empire was that of *consul*. Now, in the era of the Roman Republic before it transformed into the empire in 27BCE, there were two consuls that served as the heads of the Roman Senate and therefore as the two heads of the Roman state itself, and even in the age of the empire from 27BCE onwards the rank of consul still existed, although sometimes the Roman emperor had held it. Although, the position of consul no longer held real power during the Roman imperial era and in the Byzantine era beginning 330 when the Roman capital was moved to Constantinople, the position of consul was a very prestigious one to have as it was a centuries old government position that had not died out. However, the role of the consul especially in the Byzantine Empire was basically all ceremonial, although like in Ancient Rome two consuls would be elected each year and sometimes a consul can be re-elected a number of times. The consul's role in Byzantium really came into motion in starting public races and leading military parades and since the role of consul was basically ceremonial, any male with influence could hold the title whether it was the successful general of the moment or a high ranking general or *Magister Militum* (Master of Soldiers), an influential politician or eunuch, a wealthy aristocrat, the emperor himself, or even the emperor's underaged son.

Notable people in Byzantine history who held the rank of consul included the future emperor Justinian I the Great (r. 527-565) himself in 521 when he was still known as "Flavius Petrus Sabbatius" while even a number of foreign barbarian rulers of that time held the position too basically as an honorary title granted to them by the Byzantine emperor, and such foreign rulers that held the title of honorary consul were the Ostrogoth king Theodoric the Amal (r. 475-526) and the Frankish king Clovis I (r. 481-511). Reigning Byzantine emperors too had held the position of consul for a year, and the last one to hold it was Emperor Constans II (r. 641-668) in 642. The position of consul in the Byzantine Empire would slowly disappear by the 7th century and this most possibly happened during the reign of Emperor Justinian II (685-695) as he unified the position of consul with that of the emperor himself, hence it was under his reign when the emperor began wearing the long wrapped-around robe known as the *Loros* which was originally the ceremonial outfit

of the Byzantine consul. The position of consul in Byzantium had been completely abolished during the reign of Emperor Leo VI (886-912) as a way to give more power to the emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Although the position of consul disappeared, the Byzantine Senate continued to live on for the next centuries, yet the Byzantine Senate true enough still existed until the empire's very last day being May 29, 1453, and thus the Senate died with the empire itself as Constantinople fell to the Ottomans.

This illustration depicts a Byzantine consul from the 5th century, and here he is seen wearing the ceremonial consular robes which here is gold in color with ornate patterns sewn into it while underneath it is a tunic. This ceremonial robe worn by the consul here is the evolved version of the Ancient Roman *Toga* and would eventually become the imperial *Loros* worn by Byzantine emperors beginning in the late 7th century, while on his left hand the consul holds a ceremonial staff held by Byzantine consuls. The image of this consul in this illustration including his robes, the ceremonial staff, and his facial features is very much based on the 5th century carved ivory diptych depicting Flavius Felix, who was a Western Roman consul in 428. This ivory diptych of Flavius Felix is notable for depicting a Byzantine (or late Roman era) consul's attire in complete detail; however, the diptych doesn't show what the color of the consul's robes were, hence the gold color of the robes and its green interior was based on an existing colorized artwork that was also based on this diptych of Flavius Felix.

H-3 Genoese Crossbowman, 15th century



The Republic of Genoa in Italy was known to have one of the finest and most well-known military corps in medieval history which were the Genoese Crossbowmen which either served as soldiers of the Republic of Genoa or were outsourced as mercenaries that were usually hired by other Italian states, the kingdoms of Europe, and even the Byzantine Empire itself in its last years of existence. True enough the Byzantine army never really fought with crossbows as it was a more “Western European” weapon, thus the Byzantines instead relied on hired mercenaries that specialized in using them. Members of this military unit did not necessarily come from the city of Genoa itself but from other parts of Liguria which is the region of Italy Genoa is in, Piedmont, several parts of Northern Italy, and Corsica, though the members of this unit were organized and trained in Genoa and their leader was usually a member of the Genoese aristocracy.

The first time the Genoese crossbowmen were recorded as a military unit in battle was during the First Crusade’s Siege of Jerusalem in 1099, and following that they took part in major battles such as the 3rd Crusade Battle of Jaffa in 1192, and at the Hundred-Years’-War Battle of Crecy in 1346 where these Genoese mercenaries fought at the side of the French but were defeated by the English who used the famous longbow in battle. Additionally, a unit of about 700 Genoese mercenaries with crossbowmen included led by the Genoese noble turned pirate- who was also outlawed by the Genoese government- Giovanni Giustiniani Longo came to the defense of Constantinople against the Ottomans in 1453. Out of the mere 8,000 Byzantine defenders under the overall command of the last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1449-1453) that stood up against the

80,000 army of the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, it were the Genoese crossbowmen specifically under the command of Giustiniani- who was an expert at defending cities- that fought the bravest wherein they would launch surprise attacks against the Ottomans by charging out of the walls at night while they too during the night repaired the damage on Constantinople's land walls done by the Ottomans' cannons. Although the defenders including the Genoese crossbowmen fought bravely, they were still outnumbered, and on May 29 of 1453 Constantinople fell to the Ottomans while Giustiniani who was wounded in battle managed to escape by ship to Chios but died upon arrival there. The Genoese crossbowmen though would still remain a formidable military force in Europe- due to the deadliness from crossbow bolts fired by them- until the 16th century with the introduction of gunpowder weapons in Europe.

This illustration here shows more or less what a Genoese crossbowman during the 1453 Siege of Constantinople looked like, and here the crossbowman is equipped with his primary weapon being a large crossbow wherein a pouch holding the crossbow bolts is attached to his belt and so is his secondary weapon being a dagger which here is seen sheathed, although the soldier in this illustration does not appear to have a shield despite the Genoese crossbowmen always wielding one known as a *Pavise* at all times to defend themselves while reloading their crossbows which was a rather long process. As for his armor, this soldier in the illustration is seen wearing a standard 15th century metal breastplate with the addition of tassels sticking out of it to protect the arms and legs and inside his armor is a chainmail shirt wherein only its bottom is visible, and under that a thick leather tunic, while he also wears leather gloves and leather boots. As for his helmet, the soldier here is seen wearing an open-faced version of the well-known 15th century Italian helmet known as a *Barbute*.

H-4 Byzantine Officer, 7th century



In the 7th century, the Byzantines were engaged in multiple endless conflicts, where in the first half of the century they fought a long brutal war against their traditional enemy being the Sassanid Empire in the east all while they fought off Avar and Slav invasions in the Balkans and the Lombards in Italy. At the second half of the 7th century, the new expanding power being the Arabs replaced the Sassanid Empire as the new traditional enemy of Byzantium and thus from here on the Byzantines were forced to fight on the defensive against them. At difficult times like these when war was the standard of living, the Byzantine army had to innovate and thus this century saw distinct types of military units equipped with a wide range of weapons. One such unique type of military unit in the 7th century Byzantine army is this one seen here which is also a rather obscure one as there is really no specific name for this unit or its functions.

This unit seen here although not having a specific name was more or less not really a unit but a type of uniform worn by certain soldiers in the 7th century especially in desert combat, although the safest name to call this unit is the Greek term *Saytarioi* which simply means “archer” as true enough this kind of soldier’s main weapon was a bow. The basis for this illustration came from various illustrations of 7th century Byzantine soldiers which were based on the images of Byzantine soldiers as seen on the silver “David Plates” from 7th century Byzantium. These silver plates depict soldiers wearing the same kind of open-faced helmet this soldier here is seen wearing which is covered by a kind of cloth and has feathers above it. It is still not clear too whether the helmet this soldier wears is made of leather and painted blue- as seen in recreated illustrations of this kind of unit- or is made of

metal and covered by a blue cloth to protect it from overheating, but it is most likely that it is covered by a blue cloth. This soldier's armor consists of a chainmail shirt with a chainmail coif included to protect the head beneath the helmet, and to protect the neck and shoulders a leather collar. The tunic and trousers this soldier wears beneath his chainmail armor is a peculiar white one with green trimmings which hints with its white color that this soldier was fighting in a desert climate, first against the Sassanid Persians and next against the Arabs. Additionally, this soldier's equipment is held up by a simple belt while he too doesn't wear any gloves, and he too wears leather boots. As for his weapons, this soldier is seen holding a bow- known to the Byzantines in Greek as a *Toxo*- which is seen sheathed while his right hand holds a quiver which doesn't show any arrows loaded. His secondary weapon meanwhile is a short sword which is seen sheathed, although usually this soldier also holds a shield but in this illustration he doesn't have one.

H-5 Hun Bucellarius, 6th century



In the late Roman army, a specific military unit that were used as either escort troops for important military leaders or as shock cavalry troops were the *Bucellarii* (singular: *Bucellarius*). The name of this unit means "biscuit eater" in Latin and this unit's name is derived from the type of bread rations they ate known as *bucellatum*. In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Bucellarii provided the best cavalry for the Roman army both to the Western Roman Empire (which fell in 476) and to the Eastern Roman Empire (or Byzantine

Empire), and those in the Bucellarii were recruited from Romans, Persians, Goths, Huns, and others, although barbarians whether Germanic ones or Huns were the most preferred ones by late Roman generals. These units too received generally high salaries and were armed with the best armor and weapons from the empire's factories. One notable general who preferred using Bucellarii most especially Huns was the 6th century Byzantine general Flavius Belisarius (505-565), and in his battles, his Hun Bucellarii were really the ones that were instrumental in winning his victories whether against the Sassanid Persians, Goths, or Vandals due to the ruthlessness of these troops and their adept skill in horse riding.

Now, this illustration depicts a Hun Bucellarius cavalryman from Belisarius' army that is although not mounted on a horse but standing on foot, and he is illustrated this way to show his full set of armor and weapons. The Hun Bucellarius in this illustration wears something more Hunnish than Roman first being his lamellar scale *Spangenhelm* style helmet with 3 feathers sticking above it which appears to look more Oriental. His body armor on the other hand is simply a scale armor vest tied by a belt and beneath it is a Hunnish style red tunic and trousers, while he also wears high-cut leather boots. As for his weapons, this Hun Bucellarius' primary weapon is a bow where this illustration shows him wielding a Hunnish recurve bow and his secondary weapons are two daggers which here are seen sheathed. This illustration is based on an existing one of a Hunnish Bucellarius cavalryman standing next to the general Belisarius himself and other Byzantine army units of that time.

H-6 George Mouzalon, 13th century



For 57 years during the 13th century (1204-1261), the Byzantine Empire's central authority was broken and split into 3 successor states due to the 4th Crusade's sack and capture of Constantinople in 1204. The most successful of the 3 post-1204 Byzantine successor states was the Empire of Nicaea which started out in Western Asia Minor but eventually expanded into Europe recapturing lands that had been recently captured by the Latins of the 4th Crusade or by their rival Byzantine successor state which was the Despotate of Epirus. In its 57-year history, the Empire of Nicaea had 4 emperors which were Theodore I Laskaris (1205-1221), John III Vatatzes (1222-1254), Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258), and John IV Laskaris (1258-1261), however behind these emperors there were still powerful and influential ministers. One such person who was not an Emperor of Nicaea but held a lot of power as a high official in this brief period of history when the Byzantine Empire was in exile as the Empire of Nicaea was George Mouzalon, a man of humble origins who eventually rose to one of the highest administrative and military positions in the empire. George was born in 1220 near the Western coast of Asia Minor to a family of commoners, however young George and his brothers Theodore and Andronikos were somehow recruited into imperial service by the emperor John III Vatatzes to be companions of the emperor's son and heir Theodore. The Mouzalon brothers and the imperial heir Theodore grew very close to each other as they were educated together, and when John III Vatatzes died in 1254 while his son Theodore II became the new emperor, George was appointed as the commander-in-chief of the army or *Megas Domestikos* of the Empire of Nicaea while his brother Andronikos Mouzalon was appointed as the grand chamberlain and Theodore Mouzalon as the grand huntsman, though out of the 3 Mouzalon

brothers it was George according to chroniclers of that time that the emperor Theodore II loved most that in letters he even called George “son” or “brother”.

For Theodore II Laskaris, he chose to appoint George and his brothers to the highest positions in the imperial government as a way to curb the influence of the powerful nobility as Theodore did not really trust the aristocrats and instead preferred men of more “experience” in running imperial affairs who did not necessarily have to be of high birth, and true enough the nobility resented the Mouzalon brothers, most especially George who was the emperor’s most trusted advisor especially since George and his brothers were commoners by origin. True enough, sources from this time such as the historian and statesman George Akropolites (1217-1282) calls the Mouzalon brothers “loathsome little men”, “worthless specimens of humanity”, and “false of tongue, nimble of foot, peerless at beating the floor in dance”. Throughout Theodore II’s 4-year reign (1254-1258), George remained as his most trusted advisor and top general even accompanying the emperor in his military campaigns in Greece, such as the one in 1256 against their rival successor state which was the Despotate of Epirus. By 1257 however, the relatively young Theodore II had become terminally ill due to a brain tumor and being unable to fully run the empire, a lot of the responsibilities in running the state was left to George while Theodore II’s long-time rival the young aristocrat Michael Palaiologos who was the empire’s *Megas Konostaulos* (police general) was recalled from the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor- wherein he served their sultan- back to the Empire of Nicaea to finish off their battles in Greece against Epirus.

In 1258, as Theodore II was dying he named George as regent for his 7-year-old son John, and this appointment sure enough enraged the aristocracy most especially the ambitious Michael Palaiologos who had eyed the imperial throne. Theodore II died in August of 1258 at the age of 36 and was succeeded by his young son John IV Laskaris wherein George was to rule the empire as his regent, however Michael had already devised a plan to eliminate George and take over as the boy’s new regent. During Theodore II’s funeral in the city of Magnesia in Asia Minor just 9 days after Theodore II’s death, George and his brothers who were in attendance were suddenly ambushed by the Latin mercenaries under Michael’s command and thus George together with his brother Andronikos were slain, although the other brother Theodore managed to escape but was never heard from again. George’s wife who survived later on fled to Michael Palaiologos’ house but Michael there told her to remain silent about her husband’s murder or she too would suffer the same fate as her husband. With George eliminated, Michael took over as the new regent for the young John IV Laskaris and in 1259 became John IV’s co-emperor and would basically be the one running the empire whereas John IV was emperor only in name. In 1261 when the Byzantines of Nicaea recaptured Constantinople from the Latins, Michael VIII Palaiologos was crowned as the restored Byzantine emperor while John IV was blinded and imprisoned.

For this illustration, the appearance of George Mouzalon was based on modern illustrations depicting Byzantine court officials from the 11th to 13th centuries in lavish court attire. The outfit George is seen wearing here is most likely that of the Byzantine *Protovestiaros* or Grand Chamberlain, which was although the position held by George’s

brother Andronikos. Although George was a general, he was also a court official and administrator, hence for this illustration he is depicted as a court official. The outfit George is seen wearing here includes a triangular shaped green hat known to the Byzantines as a *Skiadion* with cloth sticking out of it at the bottom to protect the neck, a long ornate vest, below it an embroidered tunic, leather boots, and over it a green silk mantle. Here, George is also seen holding a ceremonial staff on his right hand and a carved ivory box on his left as ivory boxes were apparently an item collected by the rich and powerful in the Byzantine Empire. Since George Mouzalon was born in 1220 and died in 1258, he was around 38 at his death, hence for this image he appears to be in his 30s-40s.

H-7 Empress Aelia Ariadne, 5th-6th centuries



In Byzantine history, there are very few people like the empress Ariadne who had witnessed so many crucial historical events from a position of power, and no one too had so much relations to different emperors the way Ariadne had being a daughter of an emperor, husband of two emperors, mother of an emperor, and even a niece of an emperor! Ariadne was born in around 450 to the Thracian military officer Leo and his wife Verina who was also a native of the Balkans. In 457 when Ariadne was only 7-years-old, the Byzantine emperor Marcian (r. 450-457) had died and without any sons, the *Magister Militum* or “Master of Soldiers” Aspar who was the power behind Marcian proclaimed his chief-of-staff which was Ariadne’s father Leo as his new puppet-emperor despite Marcian

having a son-in-law which was the aristocrat Procopius Anthemius while Aspar could not become emperor due to his barbarian origins and being an Arian Christian. Leo I thus became the new emperor in 457 and was the first emperor in Roman history to be crowned by the Patriarch of Constantinople while Leo's wife Verina too became empress and their daughters Ariadne and her younger sister Leontia part of the imperial family.

Now as emperor, Leo I did not want to be a puppet of the barbarian general Aspar and so to balance out the power of Aspar and his army which were mostly of Germanic origins, Leo recruited the warlike Isaurian warriors from the mountains of Isauria in Southern Asia Minor into a new military unit which he founded known as the *Excubitores* whose duty was to serve as the emperor's loyal bodyguards as well as palace guards. The leader of these warlike Isaurians that Leo recruited was their chieftain Tarasikodissa, and to seal the alliance with the Isaurians, Leo married off the 17-year-old Ariadne to the 42-year-old chieftain in 467. To appear more acceptable and civilized to the Greek-speaking people of the imperial capital Constantinople, the chieftain Tarasikodissa changed his name to "Zeno", and following his marriage to Ariadne they had a son named Leo named after his grandfather born in the same year. In 471, Leo fully eliminated Aspar by having him assassinated in the palace, thus the Germanic element in the Byzantine army was cleared out whereas Leo earned the nickname *Macelles* meaning "the Butcher" for killing the powerful Aspar, and therefore Zeno took Aspar's place as Magister Militum. In 473, Ariadne and Zeno's young son Leo was proclaimed as *Caesar* by his grandfather Leo I and therefore his grandfather's successor as they were of the same blood, and not too long after, Leo I died in early 474 at the age of 73 whereas his 7-year-old grandson Leo II succeeded him, but due to his young age which disabled him to rule alone, his father Zeno by the request of his wife Ariadne and her mother Verina was a month later made his co-emperor and therefore the one really in charge of the empire. However, before the year 474 ended, the child Leo II was dead probably from an outbreak of plague leaving his father Zeno to succeed him as emperor, but just 2 months later in early 475 Zeno was overthrown in the course of a single night due to a conspiracy plotted by his mother-in-law Verina and her brother Basiliscus, the uncle of Ariadne.

Zeno easily lost the throne due to his massive unpopularity among the people of Constantinople who saw Zeno as primitive due to his Isaurian origins, and so Zeno to avoid being killed fled Constantinople together with his wife Ariadne and loyal Isaurian soldiers back to the mountains of Isauria in Asia Minor whereas Basiliscus took over as emperor. Just a year later though in 476, the usurper emperor Basiliscus proved to be very incompetent and thus even more unpopular than Zeno which then allowed Zeno to march back to Constantinople the moment the Isaurian general Illus who Basiliscus sent to hunt down Zeno defected to Zeno. Basiliscus then lost the throne and was imprisoned in a cistern in Cappadocia where he would die in 477 while Zeno ruled again as emperor with his wife Ariadne as his empress, though the rest of Zeno's reign would be troubled by uprisings against him left and right by anyone brave enough to challenge him as Zeno was still seen as "illegitimate" due to his "barbaric" Isaurian origins despite him being a Roman citizen and speaking both Latin and Greek.

True enough, at one point in 479 Ariadne had actually come into conflict with her husband Zeno over the fate of her mother Verina who was imprisoned by Zeno's general Illus for supporting first the rebellion of Basiliscus in 475 which was crushed in 476 and later the rebellion of their relative Marcian in 479 which was also crushed. Verina though was never released and thus she died in prison in a fortress in the mountains of Isauria in 484, though before Verina's death she and Ariadne plotted to assassinate Illus which failed as Illus evaded the assassin's attempt to kill him and thus blamed Zeno for trying to have him killed leading Illus to rebel against Zeno. Illus' rebellion was however finished off by the forces loyal to Zeno in 488 with Illus himself killed whereas Zeno died in 491 from natural causes, although it is believed that before death, Zeno had an epileptic seizure and while having it Ariadne had him buried alive, though this was not all true as the source mentioning Zeno's death that way was a source made to slander him.

Ariadne too remained married to Zeno until his death in 491 and following Zeno's death the widowed empress Ariadne who was childless- as her and Zeno's son Leo II died back in 474- selected Zeno's successor and her new husband being the finance minister Anastasius who then became the new emperor and shortly afterwards he married Ariadne. Unlike Zeno who the people of Constantinople saw as an unrefined provincial and even a "barbarian", Anastasius I was the opposite being a strategic thinker and sophisticated aristocrat. Due to their old age whereas Anastasius was in his 60s and Ariadne in her 40s by the 490s, they had no children, although Ariadne remained married to Anastasius I until her death in 515 at the age of 65 while Anastasius followed her in death just 3 years later in 518 at the very old age of 87. Possibly, Ariadne in her last years could have met the future emperors Justin I (r. 518-527) who served as the commander of the Excubitor palace guard force under Anastasius I and Justin's nephew Flavius Petrus Sabbatius who would be the future emperor Justinian I the Great (r. 527-565). Ariadne is also a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church and so is her father the emperor Leo I.

For this illustration of Empress Ariadne, it is not really based on any sculptures such as the bust which is said to be depicting her or the full-body ivory diptych depicting her but rather on recreated illustrations of late Roman fashion for noblewomen and empresses. The jeweled crown Ariadne wears here somewhat resembles the crown seen on Ariadne's ivory sculpture as this one and the sculpture shows 4 strains of pearls sticking out of it known as a *Pendilia*. The outfit Ariadne wears here resembles the outfits worn by Roman (or Byzantine) empresses of the 5th and 6th centuries wherein a long veil is attached to the crown behind while another feature in the outfit is a gold jeweled collar known as a *Superhumeral*. The dress Ariadne wears here consists of a white tunic as the innermost layer, above that an embroidered purple outer dress wherein the purple color is to indicate she is an empress, and above that the classic *Palla* which was a piece of cloth Roman women wore over their dresses, and holding the entire outfit together is a gold jeweled belt. She is also seen wearing red shoes here which is not entirely proven if empresses wore it although as seen in the 6th century mosaic of Empress Theodora in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy it shows her wearing red shoes, which was therefore the basis for Ariadne's red shoes here. This outfit worn by Ariadne here may not be all historically accurate but it was at least heavily based on the attire worn by Roman noblewomen of the

5th and 6th centuries. In terms of facial appearance, Ariadne appears to look young here, therefore this illustration shows her at the time she was the wife of Zeno.

H-8 Imperial Excubitor, 6th century



One of the well-known elite bodyguard units in Byzantine history were the *Excubitors* which were literally the main imperial guard force sworn to protect the emperor and the imperial palace. The name of their unit is Latin for “those out of bed” or simply “sentinels” and from the 5th to 7th centuries they were an active military unit exclusively in charge of guarding the Byzantine emperor and the imperial palace while the commander of this unit being the *Comes Excubitorum* was a very powerful position in the empire as he was someone always close to the emperor and true enough some of these people of this position achieved the imperial throne due to having this position as seen with Justin I (r. 518-527) who prior to being emperor was the commander of the Excubitors and so were the emperors Tiberius II Constantine (r. 578-582) and Maurice (r. 582-602) who prior to being emperors held this position too. Although at times, the commander of the Excubitors was always a relative of the emperor as a way to ensure the full loyalty of the Excubitors.

The elite bodyguard unit of the Excubitors were founded in 460 by the Byzantine emperor Leo I the Thracian (r. 457-474) wherein the first recruits were the warlike Isaurians from the mountains of Southern Asia Minor while Leo’s purpose to recruit them

was to balance out the mostly Germanic elements in the Byzantine army. Originally, the entire force of the Excubitors consisted of just about 300 men wherein in the early years almost all recruits were Isaurians, but over the decades they were of different ethnicities from within the empire, though they would only be stationed within Constantinople and not anywhere else. The Excubitors ended up replacing the old imperial guard unit known as the *Scholae Palatinae*- which was founded in the 4th century- as the imperial bodyguard force that would even join the emperor in battle as infantry troops if needed while the old Palatini force was demoted as ceremonial troops used for parades. True enough, the Excubitors although being a palace guard force went to battle as the unit protecting the emperor as seen in the campaign of Emperor Maurice against the Avars in Thrace in 598 and in the campaigns of Emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641) against the Sassanid Persians from 622-628.

By the end of the 7th century, the Excubitors just like the Palatini before them also became demoted to parade troops, though in 760 under the emperor Constantine V (r. 741-775), the Excubitors returned as fighting troops and no longer as palace guards but were this time integrated into the new elite imperial army known as the *Tagmata* which Constantine V had founded while a new unit known as the *Vigla* replaced the Excubitors as the imperial bodyguard force. Although part of the elite Tagmata force, the Excubitors still did not lose their significance as in fact one emperor being Michael II the Amorian (r. 820-829) prior to becoming emperor was the commander of the Excubitors under Emperor Leo V the Armenian (r. 813-820) while the Excubitors were present too in numerous battles such as the Battle of Pliska in 811, Battle of Boulgarophygon in 896, and the Battle of Anchialos in 917 in which all saw Byzantine defeats to the Bulgarians. The last mention of the Excubitors fighting in battle was at the Battle of Dyrrhachion in 1081 where the Byzantines were defeated by the Normans, and after that the Excubitors are not mentioned anymore.

Now, this illustration depicts a Byzantine imperial Excubitor most likely from the 6th century as this illustration is based on existing illustrations of Excubitor palace guards, and almost all details in this illustration were based off on the existing modern recreated illustrations of an imperial Excubitor as true enough there is no existing image from the Byzantine era depicting an Excubitor in full armor. As a palace guard force, the Excubitors most likely wore an ornate looking uniform with a lot of fancy details, thus this one seen here appears to wear an expensive purple tunic beneath his armor as a way to indicate that he is in charge of guarding the emperor and the palace. This Excubitor's helmet meanwhile appears to be of the classic "Attic" style helmet which is open-faced and above it is a horse-hair crest which was always seen in the helmets of Roman imperial bodyguards like the Praetorian Guard of Ancient Rome. Although it is not clear on what kind of armor the Excubitors wore, for this illustration he is depicted wearing gold scale armor as a way to indicate his prestigious position guarding the palace and its riches whereas it is supported at the chest area by a harness while leather tassels (*Pteruges*) are attached to it both at the upper arms and thighs. The illustration this one was based on shows that the tassels on his thighs have 4 layers with different colors being blue, red, yellow, and white, and true enough this colorful combination as well as his bright blue trousers is to show off his position of guarding the emperor. When it comes to what weapons the Excubitors wielded,

historical records do not really mention anything much except that they held maces and as they were bodyguards intended to guard the palace, they were definitely infantry troops. The Excubitor in this illustration appears to be an infantryman, and although he doesn't hold a mace he holds an axe which appears to look like a ceremonial one- which is what the Excubitor in the illustration this was based on was holding- while his secondary weapon is a dagger which is seen sheathed. As for his shield, the one in this illustration appears to be ceremonial too which shows the initials of Christ in Greek or the *Chi-rho* painted on it and jewels encrusted on the shield's borders, and this particular shield seen here was based on the ceremonial shields seen in the mosaic of Emperor Justinian I the Great (r. 527-565) from the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy held by what appears to be a palace guard, although it is not clear if the guard holding this kind of shield in the mosaic is an Excubitor or not.

H-9 Harald Hardrada, 11th century



One of the most famous military units of the Byzantine Empire was the Varangian Guard which consisted of Scandinavian, Rus', and Saxon warriors who travelled from their distant homelands in the north to serve the Byzantine emperor as an elite bodyguard force wherein they had usually gone out to battle especially if the emperor was there, or they were also sent to battle across the empire despite the emperor not present. A large number of Norsemen true enough joined the legendary Varangian Guard force especially in the 11th

century, and the most famous of them was Harald Hardrada who would later become King Harald III of Norway. Harald was born in 1015 in Ringerike, Norway as the son of a local chieftain named Sigurd Syr hence Harald had the name “Harald Sigurdsson”, though Harald’s older half-brother in his mother’s side was the King of Norway Olaf II (r. 1015-1028). In 1028 though, Olaf II lost the throne of Norway to rival leaders but in 1030 Olaf returned to fight back against his enemies, and here his 15-year-old half-brother Harald joined him but at the end they were defeated at the Battle of Stiklestad wherein Olaf was killed. Harald was then the one this time to be banished from Norway and thus he found himself in Sweden and a year later (1031) in the land of the Kievan Rus’ (today’s Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) where apparently his late half-brother Olaf fled to between 1028 and 1030.

When in the land of the Kievan Rus’, Harald and his Norwegian companions were recruited into the army of the Kievan Rus’ prince Yaroslav I the Wise as Yaroslav was in desperate need of more soldiers to fight his wars against the Poles to the west, Baltic tribes to the north, and Pechenegs to the south. By around 1033 or 1034, Harald was done with his time serving the Kievan Rus’ and so he and his companions travelled south this time to Constantinople (known to the Norsemen as *Miklagard*) which was the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and when there Harald and his men joined the elite Varangian Guard wherein several Rus and Scandinavian warriors have been enlisting into it ever since the Varangian Guard unit came into existence in 988. Although the role of the Varangian Guard was to protect the emperor, Harald being one did not necessarily do that as the moment he enlisted he was deployed to fight in different parts of the empire and soon enough, Harald himself became what was known as the “leader of all the Varangians” which in Byzantine terms was known as an *Akolouthos* and in Byzantium, Harald too was known by the Greek name *Araltes*.

When serving in the Varangian Guard, Harald’s first mission was a campaign against Arab pirates in the Mediterranean which ended with a Byzantine victory and then following that Harald went as far as the Tigris River in the east wherein he helped the Byzantine army push the Arabs out of Asia Minor and back to Mesopotamia, and after that Harald took part in a campaign north in the Balkans against the Pechenegs. Although it is not mentioned in Byzantine sources, the Nordic sagas discussing the feats of Harald in Byzantium says Harald went all the way to Jerusalem in around 1036 and fought off the Arabs there, or rather he went there to assist Christian pilgrims by protecting them against bandits. In his time serving the Byzantines, Harald was best known for taking part in the expedition to reclaim Sicily from the Arabs which began in 1038 ordered by the emperor Michael IV (r. 1034-1041) and led by the experienced Byzantine general George Maniakes known in the Nordic sagas as *Gyrgir* while fighting along the Byzantines were Norman and Lombard mercenaries. According to the Icelandic historian Snori Sturlson (1179-1242), Harald himself leading his own division captured 4 towns in Sicily from the Arabs, and by 1040 this expedition was almost entirely over and in favor of the Byzantines until mistrust broke out between George Maniakes and the admiral Stephen who was the emperor’s brother-in-law all while the Lombards and Normans of Southern Italy who were not content rebelled against the Byzantines. Harald staying loyal to the Byzantines assisted the Byzantine army in Southern Italy led by their overall commander known as the *Catepan*

which was Michael Dokeianos in crushing the Lombard-Norman rebellion where the Byzantines seemed to be successful at the beginning but at the end were defeated by the rebels in two battles.

Following these said defeats, Harald was recalled to Constantinople in 1041 all while the general George Maniakes was imprisoned for being suspected of plotting against the emperor, although shortly after returning to Constantinople Harald was sent on a mission to Bulgaria to crush a local rebellion there led by Peter Delyan who proclaimed himself "Tsar of Bulgaria" as an act of declaring Bulgaria independent from Byzantine rule. This Bulgarian rebellion was over just a year after it began and Harald played an instrumental part in crushing it which also earned Harald the nickname "Bulgar-burner" while Nordic sagas even claim that Harald himself cut down Peter, though Byzantine sources say Peter was eventually captured by the Byzantines and brought over to Constantinople where he was executed later in 1041. Harald on the other hand after the Bulgarian rebellion was crushed was awarded with the high-ranking military title of *Spatharokandidatos* by the emperor Michael IV himself, but later that year (1041) Michael IV died and was succeeded by his nephew Michael V. With the new emperor Michael V in power, Harald was no longer in the emperor's favor and thus Harald was imprisoned- at least according to Nordic sagas- though the truth was that with the new emperor in power, Harald used his position as the overall leader of the Varangian Guard to lead a military rebellion against Michael V in favor of Empress Zoe, the legitimate member of the Macedonian Dynasty that ruled the empire for more than a century and the widow of Michael IV.

At the end, just a few months into 1042 the reign of Michael V was over whereas Michael V who sought refuge somewhere was dragged out, blinded, and banished to a monastery where he died later that year, although again the Nordic sagas claim that Harald blinded Michael V himself. By 1042, Harald's time serving the Varangian Guard was over the moment Zoe returned as empress and married Constantine Monomachos who became Emperor Constantine IX, and thus Harald requested to return to Norway as a reward for helping Zoe come back to power, although Zoe refused to let Harald leave but Harald and his surviving companions still managed to escape the capital's harbor. Before returning to Norway though, Harald first returned to the land of the Kievan Rus' though no longer to serve in the army but to marry the princess Elisiv who was the daughter of the Grand Prince Yaroslav, and following that Harald with Elisiv headed to Norway while Yaroslav in 1043 attacked Constantinople as he possibly obtained intelligence to attack the city from Harald.

When back in Norway, Harald who now amassed a lot of wealth in Byzantium used his wealth for his ambition to seize the Norwegian throne, although Harald's nephew Magnus II who was Olaf II's son was already in power, and so to claim the throne Harald allied with the deposed Danish king Sweyn II against Magnus. Not willing to fight his uncle Harald, Magnus II in 1046 agreed to co-rule Norway with Harald until the next year (1047) when Magnus died making Harald III the sole ruler of Norway while his nickname as king which was *Hardrada* meant "hard-ruler" which described his iron-fisted though effective way of ruling his kingdom. As King of Norway, Harald III brutally crushed all local

opposition against him and thus unified Norway into something like a “central administration”. His reign saw an age of relative peace and stability for Norway and yet Harald wanted to further expand his territory and turn Norway into a “North Sea Empire” and so in 1064 Harald prepared to invade Denmark, but at the end the conquest was not achieved. Instead of invading Denmark, Harald in 1066 chose to invade England using the political instability there as an opportunity while Tostig Godwinson who was the brother of the newly crowned Saxon king of England Harold Godwinson travelled to Norway asking for Harald’s help against his brother. Harald with an army of 10,000 then set sail for England in September of 1066 and initially scored victories against the Saxons until he was defeated and killed at the Battle of Stamford Bridge which wiped out almost his entire army. It is said by modern historians that Harald Hardrada’s death in 1066 ended the Viking Age while just a month after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, the Saxons were defeated by the Normans led by William the Duke of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings thus beginning the Norman rule of England.

In this illustration, Harald Hardrada appears dressed in the attire of a Byzantine Varangian Guard commander (*Akolouthos*), although since it is not recorded what specific armor Harald wore when serving in the Varangian Guard, this drawing is based on a modern day illustration of a Byzantine Varangian Akolouthos. Here, Harald wears a distinct type of Byzantine lamellar armor with alternating gold and silver scales wherein there are tassels (*Kremasmata*) attached to it while a metal pauldron is seen here protecting his shoulders, and as for the tassels protecting his thighs there are metal plates studded into it to provide extra protection. As seen in the illustration this one was based on, the Akolouthos- which in this case is Harald- wears a red tunic beneath his armor, a distinct pair of white socks with blue embroidery, a white cloth cap to protect his head, and a padded blue cloak over his armor while he too wears leather boots and no gloves. As for his weapons, Harald here is wielding a Dane-axe as his primary weapon which the Varangians true enough used as their main weapon when serving the Byzantines, while here Harald’s secondary weapon which is the classic straight Byzantine *Spathion* sword is seen sheathed. Additionally, Harald here is also holding a Byzantine kite-shaped shield or *Skouton* which is seen reversed. To give the illustration a dramatic effect, Harald is standing over two rocks.

H-10 Isaac II Angelos, Byzantine emperor (1185-1195/ 1203-1204)



If there was a time when the Byzantine Empire saw a disastrous chain reaction of events, it was the age of the Angelos Dynasty (1185-1204) which saw the reigns of 3 Byzantine emperors being the brothers Isaac II (1185-1195) and Alexios III (1195-1203) and Isaac's son Alexios IV (1203-1204) wherein things for the Byzantines went from bad to worse eventually culminating in 1204 when the capital Constantinople fell to the army of the 4th Crusade and would remain under their rule for 57 years (1204-1261). The Angelos family now was an aristocratic family in 12th century Byzantium wherein it became a branch of the ruling Komnenos Dynasty when Theodora Komnene the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118) married the nobleman Constantine Angelos in around 1122. With the Angelos family becoming related to the ruling dynasty, members of it were given important positions in the imperial administration such as Constantine and Theodora's son Andronikos Doukas Angelos who was a general during the reign of his first cousin the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). Andronikos Angelos with his wife Euphrosyne Kastamonitissa had 6 sons and the youngest of them was Isaac who was born in 1156, although he does not appear in historical records until the reign of Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185) where Isaac and his relatives who were part of the aristocracy played an important role in rebelling against the anti-aristocratic emperor Andronikos I. One day in 1185, the paranoid Andronikos I ordered Isaac arrested after listening to his soothsayer who predicted that Isaac would be the one to end Andronikos' reign. The emperor attempted to arrest Isaac but Isaac ended up killing the henchmen sent to arrest him and following that, the people of Constantinople rallied behind the young charismatic Isaac and proclaimed him emperor in the Hagia Sophia.

Andronikos I who then lost the support of the people was beaten to death in public by the people who now switched their support to the new emperor Isaac II Angelos all while the Normans from Southern Italy invaded Byzantine Greece sacking Thessaloniki, the empire's second city.

Isaac II's reign had a promising start when the Byzantine army led by the general Alexios Branas won a decisive victory over the invading Normans in Thrace in November of 1185 thus expelling them for good. The Norman navy in their retreat though still defeated the small Byzantine fleet that Isaac not only sent to chase them away but to recapture the island of Cyprus that recently declared independence from the empire. Apparently, at around the same time as the Byzantine victory over the Normans in Thrace, over in Bulgaria to the north the local Bulgarian warlord Asen and his brother Theodor started an uprising against Byzantine rule over Bulgaria mostly due to the oppressive tax policy imposed on them especially due to Isaac using the tax money he imposed on the Bulgarians to fund his lavish wedding with the young Hungarian princess Margaret, the daughter of the King of Hungary Bela III (r. 1172-1196) which took place in early 1186. Isaac although before marrying the 10-year-old Hungarian princess Margaret was already married to a Byzantine woman and together had a son named Alexios who was born in 1182, although it is not clear on what the fate of Isaac's first wife was, while in the meantime Isaac also married off his niece Eudokia to the Serbian prince Stefan Nemanjic, the son of the Grand Prince of Serbia Stefan Nemanja (r. 1166-1196) in order to seal an alliance with the Serbian principality.

As emperor, Isaac II was said to be rather incompetent, powerless to stop the rising threat of the Bulgarian uprising and the expansion of the Seljuk Sultanate in Asia Minor, and neglectful of his imperial duties wherein he left the job of administering the empire to his two uncles being his father's brother John Angelos and mother's brother Theodore Kastamonites- who died in 1193- in which both were at least competent administrators. According to the contemporary Byzantine historian of that time Niketas Choniates (1155-1217), Isaac "sold off government posts like they were vegetables in a market" which shows how corruption became so increasingly dominant in Byzantine society during his reign as true enough Isaac came to power in 1185 by the backing of the aristocrats who wanted to continue their corrupt practices that the former emperor Andronikos I tried to crush so brutally. Isaac however did not recognize Bulgaria's independence from the empire and thus he continued in sending military expeditions to quell the Bulgarian uprising wherein Alexios Branas, the same war hero who crushed the Norman invasion in 1185 managed to defeat the Bulgarians in a number of battles but at the end used his success to turn against Isaac by marching his army to Constantinople in 1187 only to be killed outside the city's walls in an ambush by Isaac's loyalist forces who decapitated Branas whose head was allegedly played around by Isaac like a football.

In 1187 as well, shocking news spread around Europe which was that Christian held Jerusalem fell to the new Islamic empire of Saladin, and when the pope Urban III received the news of it, he died of shock while his successor Pope Gregory VIII immediately called for the 3rd Crusade. The leaders of the 3rd Crusade included the Holy Roman emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, the King of France Philippe II Auguste, and the King of England

Richard I the Lionheart, and out of the 3 kings that led the Crusade Philippe II and Richard I at least bypassed Constantinople by travelling to Jerusalem by sea, though Richard I captured Cyprus from the Byzantine separatists later on in 1191. The one of the 3 kings that really posed as a threat to Isaac II's Byzantium was Frederick Barbarossa as Isaac suspected Frederick of having ambitions to capture Constantinople and the reason for Isaac's suspicious feelings towards Frederick was Frederick allying himself with the Serbians and Bulgarians who were Byzantine enemies at this time. Isaac however only made things worse for Frederick when he imprisoned Frederick's German diplomats in Constantinople which thus led Frederick to capture Byzantine Philippopolis in 1189 and following that even crushed a Byzantine attempt to recapture the city. Frederick in 1190 once again defeated another Byzantine army in Thrace which then scared Isaac forcing him to release the German diplomats and following that, Isaac even allowed Frederick and his Crusading army to leave Byzantine territory unharmed wherein Isaac even provided them with ships to help them cross the Dardanelles strait into Asia Minor.

With the threat of Frederick Barbarossa out of the way, Isaac returned to dealing with the Bulgarian uprising wherein Isaac led several expeditions in person as well as a number of expeditions against the Seljuks in Asia Minor, although these expeditions led by Isaac whether against the Bulgarians or the Seljuks were not all successful for the Byzantines. One such battle against the Bulgarians that resulted in a great catastrophe for the Byzantines was the Battle of Tryavna in 1190 wherein a large percent of the Byzantine army was annihilated by the Bulgarians in the forest whereas Isaac barely escaped with his life. The Asen brothers who led the Bulgarian rebellion thus used this victory in 1190 to expand their territory to the Black Sea after capturing a number of Byzantine settlements thus eventually establishing the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire also known as the "Second Bulgarian Empire" which would be a revival of the old Bulgarian Empire that was destroyed by the Byzantines in 1018. Isaac meanwhile unable to accept his defeat to the Bulgarians attacked Serbia in 1191 and defeated the forces of the aged grand prince Stefan Nemanja thus making the Serbian principality a Byzantine vassal, and following this victory Isaac returned to campaigning against Bulgaria. However, in 1194 the Byzantine army was once again defeated by the Bulgarians at the Battle of Arcadiopolis but this still did not stop Isaac from organizing an even larger offensive against Bulgaria wherein Isaac also planned a joint operation with his father-in-law the King of Hungary Bela III who would invade Bulgaria with his forces from the north. This expedition though was never achieved as in 1195 while preparing for it, Isaac while away from the army camp as he was hunting in the woods of Thrace with his son was suddenly usurped by his older brother Alexios- who Isaac had returned to Byzantium in 1190 after being in captivity in the Middle East- and as Isaac returned to the camp it was too late as the soldiers there already switched their loyalty to Isaac's brother and thus Isaac was brought to a nearby monastery where his older brother had him blinded and afterwards imprisoned in Constantinople together with his son.

Alexios III Angelos as the new emperor was true enough greedy for power and the position of emperor that he would even blind his own brother that saved him from captivity 5 years earlier, yet Alexios III when in power showed little to no interest in ruling to the point of making Isaac II's rather incompetent rule seem like a golden age for

Byzantium. Isaac II's blinding and imprisonment in 1195 however was not yet his end, as eventually his son Alexios escaped prison and found himself in Europe joining the 4th Crusade which assembled in Venice in 1202, and in 1203 the army of the 4th Crusade was shipped to Constantinople as the young Alexios requested for their help to oust his uncle Alexios III and return his father to power as well as himself. Alexios III was then forced to flee as the 4th Crusade's army attacked Constantinople in 1203, and following the attack Isaac II was broken out of prison and despite being blind he was crowned as emperor again, although as co-emperor of his son Alexios IV who was crowned as well. Due to 8 years of imprisonment, Isaac lost a lot of his mental faculties while his body deteriorated as well, hence his son ruled as the effective emperor but only for less than a year as he failed to pay the Crusaders the debts he promised all while a faction of the aristocracy led by the court official Alexios Mourtzouphlos led a coup that overthrew, imprisoned, and killed Alexios IV, and when hearing of his son's death the already broken and traumatized Isaac II Angelos died of a heart attack. Just a few months later, the 4th Crusade army camped outside Constantinople both impatient for loot and claiming to be avenging the death of Alexios IV breached into Constantinople and captured it the moment the remaining Byzantine army left inside as well as their new emperor Alexios V Mourtzouphlos lost morale and fled.

This illustration of Isaac II Angelos depicts him most definitely during his first reign (1185-1195) as here, he is not blind. For the attire Isaac II is seen wearing here, it is based off almost entirely on the imperial robes of the Byzantine emperor John II Komnenos (r. 1118-1143) as seen in his mosaic in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and just like John II's robes the one of Isaac here includes the signature purple robes worn by Byzantine emperors wherein a long gold scarf with jewels studded into it known as a *Loros* is wrapped around it wherein one end of it without a place to hold it is held up by the emperor's left arm. This imperial attire seen here also includes a gold jeweled collar known as a *Superhumeral* wherein the design of this one has the *Loros* scarf over it- similar to how it appears in John II's mosaic. Byzantine emperors too wore red shoes as part of their uniform, and here Isaac is seen wearing these said red shoes while the item he holds in his right hand is an imperial banner which was based off on historical manuscripts depicting Byzantine emperors in which some shows them holding ornate banners while Isaac's left hand holds a scroll which appears to be some kind of document. As for his crown, it is based on the design of the crown John II is seen wearing in his mosaic which is more or less the best example of a 12th century style Byzantine crown. In the meantime, the kind of imperial robe Isaac is seen wearing here was certainly ceremonial attire in Byzantium as the emperor would definitely not wear this lavish attire every day, and true enough Isaac II was reported to be so vain wherein he would not wear the same outfit twice. For his facial appearance, it is mostly based off on imagination and not on historical sources as the particular source being Niketas Choniates from the 12th century describes Isaac as "ruddy in complexion with red hair, was of average height and had a stocky body" while here Isaac appears to have dark brown hair though is also stocky in body in this illustration.

H-J Zeno, Byzantine emperor (474-475/ 476-491)



Very few Byzantine emperors have witnessed such pivotal turning points in world history the way the emperor Zeno did in the 5th century as it was during Zeno's reign when the Roman Empire had ceased to exist in the west leaving the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire based in Constantinople as the only Roman Empire, hence it was here in Zeno's reign where it could be said that the "Byzantine Empire" began at least as the half of Rome that survived. Now, Zeno himself was in fact originally someone seen as an outsider by the Greek speaking Roman citizens of Constantinople and his birthname was not even Zeno but *Tarasikodissa*. He was born in around 425 in the mountainous region of Isauria in Southern Asia Minor as the son of an Isaurian chieftain, and the Isaurians which were the people he belonged to were rough and warlike mountain people seen by the Greek and Latin speaking city people of the empire as "internal barbarians" despite these Isaurians having been Roman citizens for centuries and Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Christians, basically because the Isaurians neither spoke Greek nor Latin and lived in tribal societies. Tarasikodissa and his Isaurian warriors first came into the orbit of the imperial court in Constantinople in around 465 when he at this point happened to be a tribal leader of the Isaurians and here, he was recruited by the emperor Leo I the Thracian (r. 457-474) into the imperial army.

At this point in history, the armies of both Eastern and Western Roman Empires were heavily dominated with Germanic barbarian elements wherein its senior commanders were of Germanic barbarian origins and so were a lot of troops while some of these Germanic commanders even held influence over the emperor's rule such as the *Magister Militum* (Master of Soldiers) Aspar in the Eastern Roman Empire who was the

power behind Leo I. As emperor, Leo I came to realize that he did not want to be under the control of a barbarian general, thus he came up with a plan to slowly eliminate Aspar which began with Leo recruiting the Isaurians into a military unit that would be fully loyal to him as Leo believed the tough Isaurian mountain men to be fiercely loyal. Leo I then used these Isaurian recruits by creating a new military unit known as the *Excubitores* which were the imperial bodyguard force while their leader Tarasikodissa immediately became a close ally of Leo, and to appear more acceptable to the mostly Greek speaking people of Constantinople, the chieftain Tarasikodissa changed his name to the Greek "Zeno" which would be his official name from here onwards. To fully seal an alliance, Leo married off his 17-year-old daughter Ariadne to the 42-year-old Zeno in either 466 or 467, and in 467 Zeno and Ariadne's son Leo named after his grandfather was born. Zeno then rapidly rose up the ranks in the imperial army eventually earning the position of Magister Militum which Aspar held, and as Magister Militum, Zeno campaigned across the empire against enemy raids and had been assigned to different parts of the Eastern Roman Empire including Thrace and Antioch. Back in Constantinople, Leo I finally got rid of Aspar and his influence in 471 when Leo and his loyal Isaurian bodyguards hatched a plot which resulted in the murder of Aspar thus eliminating the Germanic influence in the army. Zeno then took Aspar's place as the most senior Magister Militum being the *Magister Militum Praesentalis* while Leo I on the other hand did not have much longer to live and thus in 474 Leo I died at the age of 73 and was succeeded by his grandson being Zeno's and Ariadne's 7-year-old son Leo II which Zeno was not all happy about as he believed he was destined to succeed his father-in-law.

As a child though, Leo II could not fulfill his duties as emperor and so just a month after he was crowned, his father Zeno had to be crowned as co-emperor by the request of Ariadne and her mother Verina, and thus it would be really Zeno that would be in charge of running the empire. Before the year 474 ended, Leo II died possibly from an outbreak of a local plague in Constantinople and back then with the child mortality rate very high, it was very likely for young children like Leo II to die and it did not matter if the child was a lowborn peasant or even the emperor himself. Zeno then succeeded his son as emperor which makes him have the rare case of being a father succeeding his son as a ruler, and now as the sole emperor, Zeno's first act was to conclude peace with the Byzantines' long-time enemy which was the Vandal Kingdom of North Africa ruled by their king Genseric (r. 428-477), but despite his success here, the new emperor Zeno was not seen as acceptable again by the people of Constantinople especially the elite as they could not accept a provincial like him who they saw as a "barbarian" as their emperor especially since the Isaurian troops under Zeno had been behaving so badly by getting drunk in public and going as far as looting homes in Constantinople and randomly beating people up in the streets. After just 2 months in power, Zeno's mother-in-law Verina and her brother Basiliscus hatched a plot to overthrow Zeno in early 475, though Zeno had already been informed of the plot and so he fled Constantinople in the middle of the night with his wife Ariadne, a few loyal Isaurians, and the imperial treasury for his homeland of Isauria. With Zeno gone, Basiliscus usurped the throne despite Verina wanting her lover Patricius as emperor, but instead Patricius was executed and Basiliscus proved to be a very incompetent ruler who became even more unpopular than Zeno. In his short reign (475-476), Basiliscus permitted Constantinople's people to massacre the Isaurians out of

revenge, raised the taxes to such high levels as Zeno fled with the treasury, supported the Monophysite sect of Christianity which was seen as heretical, and when a fire broke out Basiliscus did not seem to care about it. The fire in Constantinople was the last straw for the people and thus Basiliscus drastically lost his popularity whereas the people thought of restoring Zeno all while the Isaurian general Illus who Basiliscus sent to hunt down Zeno defected to his fellow Isaurian Zeno and together they marched back to Constantinople where the people opened the gates for Zeno.

Basiliscus was then banished together with his wife and son to Cappadocia where they all died possibly due to starvation in 477 as they were locked up in a cistern but as Zeno returned to power in 476 he received the shocking news of the fall of the Western Roman Empire wherein the last Western Roman emperor the teenage Romulus Augustus (r. 475-476) surrendered to his barbarian general Odoacer who refused to rule as emperor but simply as "King of Italy". Odoacer then sent Romulus' crown to Zeno in Constantinople as a symbol that there is no more Western Roman emperor and that Zeno is the only Roman emperor wherein Odoacer was a vassal of his. Zeno thus recognized the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire but at the same time, the former Western Roman emperor Julius Nepos (r. 474-475) who was exiled in Dalmatia also requested Zeno for Eastern Roman troops to take back Italy from Odoacer and restore the Western empire but Zeno refused and just recognized Nepos as emperor in name only as well as his small holdings in Dalmatia. Nepos now never achieved his goal to take back Italy as in 480 he was assassinated by his own troops and with no more authority in charge of Dalmatia, Odoacer annexed it to his Kingdom of Italy all while Zeno although back in power was dealing with opposition against him left and right again because many did not accept Zeno as their emperor for his Isaurian origins while many were also discontent with the government especially due to the lack of funds the empire was having at this time and the fall of Western Rome which was not prevented by the Eastern Roman emperor.

One challenger to Zeno's rule was the Ostrogoth general Theodoric Strabo in Thrace who went rogue following the murder of his master Aspar in 471, and Strabo on the other hand even supported the late Basiliscus' revolt back in 475 while in 479 Strabo supported the rebellion of the aristocrat Marcian- who was also an in-law of Zeno being the husband of Ariadne's sister Leontia- against Zeno. Marcian's revolt however failed right before Zeno was almost overthrown as the Isaurian garrison led by Illus came right in time to defeat Marcian thus sending Marcian and his two brothers into exile. In the meantime, Theodoric Strabo was still up in arms against Zeno and so Zeno fought back by making an alliance with the Ostrogoth king in the Balkans Theodoric the Amal and with a new Nomadic people raiding the Balkans which were the Bulgars. The Bulgars Zeno hired however were defeated by Strabo's rebel army while Theodoric the Amal used Zeno's offer for alliance to pillage Thrace. Strabo's rebellion though ended in 481 when Strabo who intended to march to Constantinople accidentally fell off his horse into a spear and died while Strabo's men joined forces with Theodoric the Amal, and Zeno not wanting another conflict chose to simply keep the Amal as an ally even giving him the title of "Magister Militum" and in 484 the title of "honorary consul". Another enemy Zeno had to deal with was his own mother-in-law Verina who he had imprisoned at a fortress in the mountains of Isauria under the watch of Zeno's trusted Isaurian general Illus, though Zeno's wife Ariadne pleaded to have

her mother released but the request was refused by Illus and in return both Ariadne and Verina hired an assassin to kill Illus. The attempt on Illus' life however failed and only succeeded in wounding Illus by cutting off an ear, and now blaming Zeno for plotting his murder, Illus declared rebellion against Zeno in 484 holding himself up in the same Isaurian fortress Verina was imprisoned in, and it was also here in 484 when Verina died in prison.

Knowing that Zeno was not seen as legitimate because of his Isaurian origins, the Isaurian Illus did not proclaim himself emperor but instead made a general named Leontius as his puppet emperor while Zeno sent an army to attack Illus which at first failed. Zeno tried again in 485 to crush Illus' rebellion, this time sending his new ally the Ostrogoth king Theodoric the Amal to Asia Minor, and at the end this attempt partially succeeded wherein Zeno's brother Longinus who was held hostage by Illus was released and returned to Constantinople wherein he would begin a military career. In the meantime, Zeno had to deal with other issues such as the first schism with the pope in Rome which began in 482 due to a decree Zeno issued known as the *Henotikon* which allowed toleration towards the Monophysite heretics which was an act that angered the pope while in 484 Zeno brutally crushed a rebellion of the Samaritan Jews in Palestine who revolted against Zeno's policy of forcing them to convert to Christianity. Meanwhile, Zeno too began seeing the King of Italy Odoacer as a threat especially due to Odoacer first being in correspondence with the rebel Illus and annexing Dalmatia to his kingdom which Zeno saw as an act to stage an invasion of the Byzantine Balkans while Zeno too started seeing Theodoric the Amal as a potential danger, and true enough the Amal made an attempt to capture Constantinople in 486 going as far as cutting off the city's water supply. To settle off the problem of Theodoric the Amal, Zeno concluded an agreement with him which was for the Amal to invade Odoacer's Italy which Zeno saw as a solution to get rid of the two barbarians Theodoric and Odoacer, and so in 488 the Amal headed for Italy wherein he would successfully seize it from Odoacer in 493 when Theodoric himself killed Odoacer at a dinner in the palace at Ravenna whereas the victorious Theodoric became "Theodoric the Great".

Back in the empire, Zeno finally managed to destroy Illus' revolt in 488 wherein Zeno's loyalist forces managed to capture both Illus and Leontius and thus both rebel leaders were beheaded. Now that the rebellion of Illus was over, Zeno would finally be able to rule in peace, and with no more major conflicts, Zeno in 488 as well recognized the independence of the Church of Cyprus from the Church of Antioch all while also maintaining peaceful relations with the Sassanid Empire in the east. Zeno then died in 491 at the age of 66 either due to epilepsy or dysentery, and although he was still not very popular at the time he died, Zeno at least died bringing stability to the Eastern Roman Empire after so many years of chaos and had died while still in power without being overthrown again. According to legend, Zeno was buried alive by the people when seeing him have an epileptic seizure, though this is highly unlikely and this was written in the 12th century which however shows that even so many centuries after his time, Zeno was still seen as an unpopular emperor. Following Zeno's death, his wife Ariadne chose his successor by marrying the finance minister Anastasius as after their son Leo II's death in 474 the couple had no children afterwards. It would turn out that the new emperor

Anastasius I was the right choice for Ariadne to marry as he was a highly competent financial genius that grew the empire's economy to greater levels all while further restoring stability. Without Zeno's strong rule in stamping out all rebellions against imperial rule and the strategic financial policies of his successor Anastasius I (r. 491-518), then perhaps the golden age the Byzantine Empire had under Emperor Justinian I the Great (r. 527-565) may not have happened.

This illustration of the emperor Zeno was not really based on any historical sources except for his facial features, hairstyle, and imperial crown or *diadem* which were based on the profile of Zeno as seen in his coins which depicts him having a long straight nose and a bowl-shaped haircut like how he is seen in this illustration. In this illustration, instead of wearing imperial robes, Zeno is seen wearing a late Roman version of imperial armor which was based on recreated pieces worn by late Roman army reenactors. The armor Zeno wears here consists of a breastplate made of gold scales and leather accessories attached to it which are painted purple to indicate his role as emperor. The tassels (*Pteruges*) as well have some purple linings also to indicate his role as emperor the way his large purple mantle over his armor does which is fastened by an ornate jeweled brooch known as a *Fibula* at his right shoulder. Beneath his armor, Zeno wears a red tunic with gold trimmings, the purple stockings to indicate him as emperor, and the red shoes which also indicates his position. The red shoes Zeno is seen wearing here was based on the full-body mosaic of the 6th century emperor Justinian I the Great at the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy which shows Justinian wearing this kind of red shoes wherein only he wears it therefore showing only emperors wore these kinds of shoes. For this illustration, Zeno does not wear imperial robes but imperial armor to show him as a tough warrior emperor. To further depict his ruthlessness and courage as emperor, he holds a sword in which the one here is the late Roman longsword or *Spatha*, and true enough Zeno was a rare exception in his time being an emperor that went to battle due to his reign being frequently challenged by usurpers whereas many emperors before and after him just stayed in the palace.

H-Q Empress Helena Dragas, 15th century



As the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) was the continuation of the Roman Empire itself that lived on for over 1,100 years, its emperors held the title of “Roman emperor” all the way until the last emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1449-1453) who died as the last emperor in 1453 during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Although it is known that Constantine XI was the last Roman emperor and that usually every emperor had an empress, the topic on who was the last Roman empress is not always talked about. The last empress now was actually Constantine XI’s mother the Serbian princess Helena Dragas who died in 1450 while her son was emperor and thus she was the last to hold this title as Constantine XI remained unmarried during his reign. Helena was born in Serbia in 1372 to the Serbian feudal lord Konstantin Dejanovic who was also an Ottoman vassal and his grandson being the last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI was true enough named after him. Helena is not mentioned in historical records until 1392 when she at the age of 20 married the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391-1425) who was 22 years older than her, though it was only in 1399 when Helena became empress.

In the meantime, Helena’s father the Serbian magnate Konstantin Dejanovic assisting the Ottoman army of the sultan Bayezid I died at the Battle of Rovine against the forces of the Prince of Wallachia Mircea I in 1395. Helena on the other hand who was married to Manuel II had at least 6 sons with him first being the future co-emperor and later emperor John VIII (r. 1425-1448) who was born in 1392, the future Byzantine Despot of the Morea Theodore II (r. 1407-1443) born in 1396, the future Despot of Thessaloniki

Andronikos (r. 1408-1423) born in 1399, the future emperor Constantine XI born in 1405, and the future Despot of the Morea Demetrios (r. 1449-1460) born in 1407 and Thomas (r. 1428-1460) born in 1409. In her time as empress being the wife of Manuel II, nothing much is said on what Helena had been doing except giving birth to sons, and following Manuel II's abdication and death that shortly followed it afterwards in 1425, Helena too became a nun in a monastery in Constantinople while her eldest son John VIII ruled as emperor. During the time her eldest son was emperor, Helena helped establish a home for the elderly in Constantinople known as "The Hope of the Despaired". Throughout his reign, although John VIII had been married 3 times, he never had children and when he died childless in 1448 there was a power vacuum wherein his 3 remaining younger brothers Constantine, Demetrios, and Thomas all competed for the imperial throne, and in the meantime following John VIII's death Helena who was still alive but very old was practically the empress-regent of the empire.

Constantine now had been the semi-autonomous Byzantine Despot of the Morea (Peloponnese Peninsula) for about 20 years whereas his youngest brother Thomas was his co-despot while Demetrios was often sidelined causing him to frequently cause trouble for his brothers, although Demetrios was the choice of the proud Orthodox Christian population as Constantine and Thomas supported the pro-Catholic policy that would have the Orthodox Church of Constantinople submit to the authority of the pope to receive military assistance from Western Europe against the ever-growing expansion of the Ottoman Empire. For Helena, among her 3 surviving sons Constantine was actually her favorite and thus she while still having the title of empress backed him all while the Ottoman sultan Murad II (r. 1421-1451) who was after all Byzantium's overlord that they paid tribute to in order to avoid a full Ottoman invasion also backed Constantine's claim to the imperial throne. When Murad II who having the final say decided that Constantine was to be the Byzantine emperor- which was partly also because Helena wrote to him convincing him that Constantine was the most able of her sons- Constantine in early 1449 was crowned by the local bishop of the Morea in Mystras before departing by ship for Constantinople whereas his younger brothers Demetrios and Thomas were assigned to the Morea to rule as its co-despots but still answering to Constantine.

The emperor Constantine XI though having "Palaiologos" as his last name often preferred to use his mother's Serbian surname "Dragas" in the Greek form of *Dragases* in his titles which shows how close he was to his mother. Helena at least lived long enough to see her son Constantine become emperor as just a year later (1450), Helena died at the very old age of 78 as the last woman to hold the title of empress as Constantine XI although being married twice before was unmarried by the time he became emperor in 1449 as both his wives died, and as emperor he never married. Constantine XI then died 3 years after his mother in 1453 at the last day of the Ottoman siege (May 29), and here died the Byzantine Empire too as the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II captured Constantinople. Ironically enough, it is not only coincidental that the last emperor in Constantinople Constantine XI had the same first name of the first Roman emperor to be in Constantinople which was Constantine I the Great (r. 306-337) but that the last emperor's mother Helena also had the same first name as St. Helena who was the mother of Constantine the Great. Helena Dragas too is commemorated in the Eastern Orthodox Church as St. Hypomone and coincidentally too,

her feast day is on May 29 which was the same day Constantinople fell to the Ottomans. Today, Helena's skull remains a relic in the Monastery of St. Patapios in Loutraki, Greece.

For this illustration of the Byzantine empress Helena Dragas, it is based on both Helena's appearance as empress being the wife of Manuel II from a miniature illuminated manuscript found at the Louvre in Paris, France which shows her with her husband Emperor Manuel II and her 3 eldest sons John, Theodore, and Andronikos and also on the outfit of the Serbian princess Milica Hrebeljanovic found in various frescos depicting her. The type of crown Helena is seen wearing here which is a tall jeweled crown as well as the scepter she is holding on her right hand was based on her image from the said manuscript, however the rest of Helena's robes as well as her face appears to be almost faded in the said manuscript. The type of outfit Helena wears here which consists of a long blue dress with a gold central part and gold borders with jewels sewn into it, as well as the red cloak over it fastened by a large jeweled brooch or *Fibula*, and the headdress beneath the crown which is a white veil was based on the outfit of the Serbian princess Milica Hrebeljanovic from the late 14th century as seen in various church frescos depicting her. This Serbian princess Milica (1335-1405) was in a way a contemporary of Helena Dragas as Helena who was born in 1372 was alive during the time Milica was a Serbian princess being the wife of the Serbian prince Lazar who was killed in the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottomans in 1389. Lazar and Milica's son the Serbian prince Stefan Lazarevic became an Ottoman vassal prince following the Battle of Kosovo and true enough both Stefan and Helena's father Konstantin were Serbian vassals to the Ottomans at the same time, so they most definitely met each other especially when fighting for the Ottomans in their battles, of course before Helena's father Konstantin died in battle against Wallachia in 1395. In this illustration too, Helena appears to be much younger in appearance, thus it definitely doesn't show her during the time she was empress-regent (1448-1449) when there was a power vacuum but more definitely as empress-consort when her husband Manuel II Palaiologos was emperor (1391-1425).

H-K Basil II, Byzantine emperor (976-1025)



If there is a definite example of a military Byzantine emperor who was not only just a fierce warrior but a highly skilled administrator active in all aspects of the state that ruled the empire at a golden age where Byzantium was THE medieval cultural and military superpower, it was Basil II from the Macedonian Dynasty. Basil II too was the longest reigning Byzantine emperor who ruled as senior emperor for 49 eventful years (976-1025), however his actual reign was actually much longer than that as ever since he was only 2-years-old in 960 he was already made by his father the emperor Romanos II (r. 959-963) as co-emperor thus making Basil have a total of 65 years as an emperor in title. Although no matter how feared Basil II was even in name alone as he would be known by history as the “Bulgar-slayer”, he still did not have an easy start as in fact in his first years of ruling, he was practically powerless. Basil was born in 958 as the firstborn child of the imperial heir and co-emperor Romanos II and his wife Theophano who was said to be an innkeeper’s daughter, and when Basil was born his paternal grandfather Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 913-959) still ruled as emperor. Just a year after Basil’s birth though (959) his grandfather the emperor died and was thus succeeded by his son Romanos II while in the following year (960), Romanos had his eldest son Basil crowned as his co-emperor to ensure his succession while it was also in this year when Romanos II’s and Theophano’s second child Constantine which was Basil’s younger brother was born who in 962 was then also crowned as co-emperor. When only 5-years-old in 963, Basil II’s father Romanos II suddenly died at a young age and thus Basil with his younger brother Constantine and younger sister Anna (born 963) were put under the care of their great-uncle the eunuch minister Basil Lekapenos all while their mother Theophano married the

successful general Nikephoros Phokas who after marrying Theophano became the new senior emperor Nikephoros II whose job was to basically rule the empire while the brothers Basil and Constantine ruled in name only until they would come of age wherein their protector and stepfather Nikephoros II would step down and retire as a monk.

This however would not be the case as in 969, Nikephoros II was assassinated in his sleep by his nephew the general John Tzimiskes who had a reason to get rid of his uncle for firing him from command. John I Tzimiskes after banishing Basil's mother Theophano then took over from his uncle as the new senior emperor and again acting as the protector of the young co-emperors Basil and Constantine in which both continued to stay as emperors only for ceremonial purposes as John I basically ran the empire. Basil however soon enough began developing some kind of desire to one day rule as the effective emperor leading the troops in battle himself instead of being stuck in the palace as he was most definitely influenced by both of his guardian senior emperors Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes who were both formidable military men that won numerous victories for the empire. As Nikephoros II Phokas in his reign successfully won victories over the Arab powers in the east thus neutralizing them and expanding Byzantine territory, John I Tzimiskes meanwhile further neutralized the Arabs to the point of putting them on the defensive while also defeating the deadly army of the Kievan Rus' in the north and annexing most of what was the Bulgarian Empire into the Byzantine Empire. John I however also met a sudden end in early 976 after returning to Constantinople from a successful campaign against the Arabs which annexed Byzantine territory all the way south to Palestine.

With John I dead, Basil II at 18 was the new senior emperor of the empire with his brother Constantine VIII as his junior co-emperor, although Basil was still not yet fully in charge as his great-uncle the eunuch Basil Lekapenos very much still controlled the imperial administration. When John I died, his most trusted general and right-hand-man Bardas Skleros declared rebellion after raising a large army that proclaimed him as emperor, although Bardas was not really rebelling against Basil II who he saw as weak and incapable of ruling but against Basil's "puppet master" Lekapenos who fired Bardas from command in the first place. As Bardas Skleros marched for Constantinople, Lekapenos released a powerful rival from prison which was the late Nikephoros II's nephew the general Bardas Phokas, and thus civil war broke out between Bardas Skleros and his rebels against the imperial forces under Bardas Phokas who for the meantime was "loyal" to the administration. The conflict between both generals Phokas and Skleros concluded in 979 when their armies met in battle only to watch their generals have a one-on-one duel with each other which resulted in Phokas mortally wounding Skleros. Although Skleros was presumed dead, he actually managed to flee to the court of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad to make an alliance with the Arabs and one day return to leading his rebellion against the administration.

Basil II was now safe for the meantime, however he was at this point already tired of the luxuries of the palace as true enough he never saw himself wanting to become a scholar or someone like his younger brother who enjoyed luxury, but rather he wanted to already rule the empire himself and command the armies. Basil's chance came to put himself above

the empire's administration in 985 when he and his great-uncle Basil Lekapenos came into a dispute, and here Lekapenos who was proven to be corrupt was completely fired from the imperial court after serving in it for decades and thus sent into exile wherein he would die shortly after. In the meantime, trouble was brewing again in Bulgaria as in the Western half of it that John I Tzimiskes had not conquered years earlier, a Bulgarian resistance against Byzantine expansion was building up led by a nobleman and warlord named Samuil. In 986, Basil II tested his ability to command an army in battle when he personally for the first time led an army to combat Samuil and the Bulgarians, though this ended with a humiliating defeat for the Byzantines wherein Basil II's army was routed by the Bulgarians at the Battle of Trajan's Gate. Basil II would never forget his defeat here which then gave him a grudge against Bulgaria which he swore to one day destroy while this defeat Basil led the army to also triggered the general Bardas Phokas to turn against Basil and declare his own rebellion against him in 987 as he saw Basil as incapable.

True enough, a lot of the powerful military aristocracy of the Byzantine Empire joined forces with Phokas against Basil II all while Bardas Skleros was recalled from Baghdad where he too joined forces with his old enemy Phokas despite Phokas still not trusting him as both Phokas and Skleros in fact proclaimed themselves as emperors using their own troops. As for Basil who did not really have much military support here, he turned to the powerful weapon of diplomacy by seeking help from a potential powerful ally which was the Kievan Rus' grand prince Vladimir I the Great. Basil II agreed to give his sister Anna in marriage to Vladimir and in return Vladimir would allow Byzantine Orthodox missionaries in his Kievan Rus' empire while he too and a lot of his men would convert to Orthodox Christianity, and not only that but Vladimir too would send Basil an army of 6,000 men to assist him against the rebels. In 988 the deal was sealed and thus 6,000 warriors of either Rus or Scandinavian origins came to Byzantium and thus became the first members of the new loyal imperial guard unit established by Basil II known as the "Varangian Guard" which would then be a contingent of professional foreign warriors- mostly Nordic and Rus'- serving the Byzantine emperor for a said number of years before returning to their homelands amassing riches earned from spoils of war and salary for serving the emperor. The first group of Varangians true enough helped Basil II destroy the rebellion of Bardas Phokas in 989 wherein Bardas was killed in battle either dying from a heart attack after seeing a massive army of the large sized Varangian Guards charging at him or by being hit by a spear thrown by Basil's brother Constantine. Whatever the cause of Phokas' death was, a large number of Phokas' men that survived defected to the victorious Basil and just 2 years later (991), the rebellion of Bardas Skleros was over as Skleros peacefully surrendered to Basil and died a peaceful death within the year.

From here on, Basil II had completely evolved from a seemingly useless palace prince to a formidable military emperor the way his predecessors Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes were, and now developing this new way of life, Basil's personality greatly evolved too turning him into someone very serious about his role as emperor that he did not bother to relax and care about people that he true enough had no close friends but instead loyal soldiers willing to die for him. Aside from being a warrior, Basil II also proved to be a great reformer in which his reforms greatly changed Byzantium's structure as seen when he got rid of the old military aristocracy he saw as troublesome which

included the Phokas and Skleros clans all while Basil replaced them with new clans that were of humble origins but became new members of the military aristocracy due to their loyalty to Basil and such clans included that of Komnenos and Diogenes. Basil II also passed laws that further protected peasants and small landowners across the empire which made it difficult for them to sell off their lands but more so prevented the landed aristocrats from expanding their lands by buying them off from the small landowners and peasants as in the past years a lot of peasants lost their lands as the military aristocrats bought it from them thus decreasing the number of tax payers who owned land. The whole purpose behind this policy was really to increase the imperial treasury as the more people owned land, the more taxes they paid, and at the end this policy really grew Byzantium into an economic power under Basil II.

The 11th century Byzantine historian Michael Psellos (1018-1078) in his works true enough describes Basil II's character as "two-fold, for he easily adapted himself both to the crisis of war and the calm of peace; he was a villain in wartime, and an emperor in peace" which shows that he was a true "badass" emperor who was competent all around whether in running the administration or in making reforms or in fighting battles. It was also said that Basil preferred the fast-life of leading the army in battle wherein he liked to eat with his soldiers, wear military attire, and sleep in tents while he was said to also be a micromanager in the battlefield as he insisted his soldiers strictly follow orders especially fighting altogether in formation and that any soldier who bravely charged into battle was not rewarded for bravery but dismissed from the army for insubordination. Now during the rest of the 990s, Basil focused on campaigning against the Arab Fatimid Caliphate in the south wherein he was mostly successful, but not wanting to risk a lot of his men in battling an enemy as powerful as Byzantium which were the Fatimids, Basil II in 1000 concluded a truce with the Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim in order for Basil to primarily focus on his campaign against Tsar Samuil's Bulgaria to the north. In the rest of the 1000s, Basil's generals focused their attention in subduing the Bulgarians, and true enough they scored a number of victories which annexed a lot of Bulgarian lands into Byzantium.

The turning point in the war against Bulgaria was the Battle of Kleidion in 1014 where the Byzantine army including the new Varangian Guard unit led by Basil II himself won a decisive victory wherein it ended with 15,000 of Samuil's men blinded by Basil II's orders wherein one man out of every group of 100 was left with one eye in order to lead his men home. However, it is probably just legend which says that a total of 15,000 were blinded as true enough Basil only had a number of them blinded just to scare Samuil, and whether a total of 15,000 were blinded or not Samuil died anyway later on in 1014 from the shock of seeing his men blinded which thus showed that Basil II was really a formidable enemy. From 1014-1018, Basil's generals namely Constantine Diogenes and Nikephoros Xiphias subdued the rest of Bulgaria by annexing what is now the northern parts Greece, North Macedonia, Albania, the western parts of Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Serbia into the Byzantine Empire, and with the death of Samuil's nephew who would be the last Bulgarian tsar Ivan Vladislav in 1018, the entire Bulgarian Empire was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire, and thus practically all of the Balkans was under Byzantine rule. Basil II's victory over Bulgaria earned him the reputation of a warrior emperor no one would dare challenge whereas for this, he would be remembered by history as the "Bulgar-slayer"

(*Boulgaroktonos* in Greek) and thus neighboring powers such as the Serbian principalities, Croatia, and even the Georgian and Armenian states chose to surrender to Basil II's Byzantium as vassals or else suffer the same fate as Bulgaria in being wiped off the map.

By 1018, Byzantium was really THE power of the medieval world both militarily as seen through their conquests and culturally as not only did they almost entirely convert the Kievan Rus' empire (today's Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) to Orthodox Christianity but other powers in Europe such as the new Holy Roman Empire looked up to the Byzantines culturally. Now with Basil II's Bulgarian conquest over, the Byzantine army in Southern Italy in 1018 as well defeated a local Lombard rebellion and it was also here when the Byzantines first came into contact with the Norman knights who although fighting for the defeated Lombards were noticed for their bravery in battle by the Byzantines and were thus allowed to settle in Byzantine territory in Italy only for them to later cause trouble long after Basil II's death. In the east meanwhile, Basil II further expanded Byzantine territory into Armenia which he mostly did not by war but by diplomacy, although he never achieved the conquest of the Kingdom of Georgia as in 1022 his rule was challenged out of the blue by his loyal general Nikephoros Xiphias who was stationed in Asia Minor. The rebellion of Xiphias however failed and despite his loyalty to Basil in the past, Xiphias was given no special treatment but was instead fired from command and forced to live the rest of his years as a monk.

Basil II on the other hand would die in December of 1025 from a fever at the age of 67 right when he was about to prepare a massive naval campaign to take back Sicily from the Arabs. Throughout his life, Basil was never married and thus had no children, and so he was succeeded by his rather weak-willed younger brother Constantine VIII who in 1025 was now 65 with very much no skill in running an empire, and just 3 years later (1028) Constantine VIII died and so everything Basil II achieved would not really go on for a long time as many of his successors would not be the same kind of brilliant soldier and statesman the way he was. At Basil II's tomb at the Church of St. John the Theologian in the suburb of Hebdomon outside Constantinople, it is inscribed "from the day that the King of Heaven called upon me to become emperor, the great overlord of the world, no one saw my spear lie idle. I stayed alert throughout my life and protected the children of the New Rome, valiantly campaigning both in the west and at the outposts of the east. O man, seeing now my tomb here, reward me for my campaigns with your prayers".

The appearance of Basil II in this illustration is almost all entirely based off on the famous historical image of Basil II from the *Psalter of Basil II* which is part of the 11th century Byzantine era *Menologion of Basil II* which is an illuminated manuscript compiled for Basil himself. The famous image of Basil II shows him dressed in imperial armor which gives us an example of what a Byzantine emperor from this time (11th century particularly) wore in battle, or it could rather be a military costume. In this historical image, Basil II is being crowned by an angel while he stands on an ornate platform and on his right hand holds a spear. The image in this illustration shows Basil II in almost exactly the same pose he is seen in the psalter, except this illustration does not show Basil standing on a platform and crowned by angel, and additionally this illustration shows Basil holding his spear-known to the Byzantines as a *Kontos*- with his arm in a more relaxed position unlike in the

psalter where his arm is raised. In the meantime, the armor Basil is seen wearing here which consists of a golden scale breastplate and golden scaled bracers for his upper arms is exactly the same type seen in the psalter and so is the purple tunic with golden trimmings and socks he wears inside the armor the same one seen in the psalter, except the tunic in the psalter appears to look more blue in color than purple. The cloak meanwhile that Basil wears over his armor which is fastened by a jeweled brooch known as a *Fibula* which is light blue in color is exactly the same type as seen in the psalter and so is the fibula. In this illustration, Basil is seen with a Byzantine straight sword or *Spathion* sheathed in an ornate red sheath, though in this illustration the sword and sheath is attached to a red leather strap studded with pearls that goes over his right shoulder whereas in the psalter Basil holds the sword and sheath with his left hand which is not attached to a strap across his shoulder. Just like in the psalter, Basil II in this illustration appears to be wearing the high-cut red boots encrusted with small silver pearls which happens to be the red boots reserved for emperors only, though it can also be suggested that these boots were only worn on ceremonial occasions and not in battle especially since there were pearls sewn in to it. The crown Basil is seen wearing in this illustration is more or less the same type seen in the psalter which has pearl extensions known as a *Pendilia* sticking out of it on both sides, although the crown in this illustration shows a small pearl cross above it unlike in the psalter where it doesn't have that feature. In terms of facial appearance, Basil in this illustration appears to look similar to how he looks in the psalter with his hair already gray, and true enough for this illustration Basil is depicted as a military emperor in armor at the time when he fully conquered Bulgaria in 1018 which puts him at around 60 in age while at the same time, this illustration shows him to be rather short in height as apparently the same historian Michael Psellos from the 11th century that wrote about him described Basil as being short in height.