

A Forgotten Friendship:

The Byzantine Empire and the Early Bagratids

By

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One of the most important eras in Byzantine domestic and foreign policies toward the Armenians began with the reign of Emperor Basil I (r. 867-886). Basil inaugurated the longest-lasting ethnically Armenian Byzantine dynasty. Moreover, Basil and his heirs promoted friendly relations with the Armenians settled in the Byzantine Empire and Armenia. This prompted the formation of alliances with the new Armenian state and its ruling Bagratid Dynasty, initiating a period of peace and good relations between Armenia and Byzantium. In instituting this policy of goodwill towards the Armenians, Basil I furthered the model of his predecessor, Bardas Caesar. These amicable relations continued under Leo VI (r. 886-912) and his wife, Zoe Karbonopsina.

Although several works exist on Byzantium and its relations with other peoples, there has been a deficiency in research on its interactions with the Armenians. Exact population numbers are not known for this period, but, along with Slavs and Jews, Armenians constituted one of the largest and most influential Byzantine minorities during the period from 582-107.¹ Several historians who have studied Byzantine-Armenian interactions during this era concluded that the Macedonian Dynasty had planned to conquer Armenia since Basil I took the throne. Sirarpie der Nersessian claimed that Byzantine emperors aimed to subjugate Armenia since the reign of Emperor Zeno (474-475, 476-491).² However, her argument ignores that at the time of Zeno, Byzantium barely controlled any of Armenia. Moreover, she implies a direct connection between

¹ The Armenians and Slavs comprised the two largest Byzantine minorities for much of Byzantine history. For more information on the Slavs inside Byzantium and for a point of comparison with the Armenian case, see Dimitri Obolensky, *Byzantium and the Slavs* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

² Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire: A Brief Study of Armenian Art and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 17-18.

Zeno's policies and Byzantine actions in the eleventh century and assumes that the Byzantines maintained a steady plan to absorb Armenia. Timothy Greenwood recognizes the difficulty in determining whether Byzantine expansion into Armenia was always intentional, but also admits that from 860 to 976 "Byzantium fostered tensions with the Armenian noble houses and came to acquire rights which enabled it to intervene at times of political stress."³ His article on Byzantine-Armenian relations implies a strong Byzantine effort to take over Armenia as far back as 860 — far before any trends to this effect appear in the historical record. Peter Cowe, on the other hand, believes that Byzantium maintained alliances with Armenia to counter the Abbasid Caliphate, "replacing this approach with territorial annexation."⁴ This argument suggests that there were no genuine periods of amicable relations between Byzantium and Armenia during the early reign of the Macedonian Dynasty; rather, Byzantium used Armenia for its own benefit. Meanwhile, Nina Garsoïan states "The false pedigree linking Basil I to the early Arsacid kings might well have foreshadowed the claim of the Macedonian dynasty to the Armenian crown."⁵ However, her assertion implies that the Macedonian dynasty claimed ownership over the Armenian territory since the reign of Basil I, an implausible assumption. These four scholars argue that Byzantium had aimed to conquer Armenia for centuries. While the precise relationship between the Byzantines and the Armenians—

³ Timothy Greenwood, "Patterns of Contact and Communication: Constantinople and Armenia, 860-976," in *Armenian Constantinople*, ed. Richard Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2010), 75.

⁴ Peter S. Cowe, "Relations between the Kingdoms of Vaspurikan and Ani," in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 80.

⁵ Nina Garsoïan, "Armenia, History," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 1, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 481.

both inside the Byzantine Empire and in its foreign relations—varied over time, there existed a strong, amicable relationship between the two around the turn of the tenth century.

Basil's pro-Armenian policy built upon the policies of his predecessor, Caesar Bardas, the uncle of and acting regent for the young Michael III. Bardas was Armenian, as was his sister, the empress Theodora; this made Michael III himself half-Armenian.⁶ In 856, upon taking effective control of the government, Bardas created, for all practical purposes, an Armenian court in Constantinople.⁷ He promoted several Armenians to high positions in the military and civil service. Bardas also sponsored Armenian intellectuals such as Leo the Mathematician and John the Grammarian. He appointed Photios, a fellow Armenian, to the position of patriarch. In writing to Ashot I of Armenia (r. 885-890), Photios used the terms *συγγενῶν* and *συγγενοῦς αἵματος*,⁸ or relative and blood relative;⁹ by identifying himself as a relative of the Armenian king, Photios pointed to his own Armenian heritage. Photios also attempted to strengthen relations between Byzantium and Armenia—which, at the time, was still under Muslim rule—by opening dialogues with Armenian leaders and trying to reunite the Orthodox and Armenian Churches. In a

⁶ Speros Vryonis Jr., "Byzantine Images of the Armenians," in *The Armenian Image in History and Literature*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (Malibu: Undena Press, 1981), 73. Here Vryonis translates a passage from Theophanes Continuatus that states that Theodora and Bardas were Armenian.

⁷ For more information on this Armenian characterization of Bardas' regime, see Manea Erna Shirinian, "Armenian Elites in Constantinople: Emperor Basil and Patriarch Photios," in *Armenian Constantinople*, ed. Richard Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2010), 53-72.

⁸ In Latin transliteration this would be *suggenōn and suggenoūs aimatos*.

⁹ Photius, *Epistulae et Ampilochia*, 3, ed. Basilius Laourdas and Leendert G. Westerink, (Lepizig: B.G. Teubner, 1985), 284.83, 284.371.

short period of time, Caesar Bardas created a staunchly Armenian ruling power in Constantinople in the name of the half-Armenian Michael III.

Meanwhile Basil, known as the Macedonian, entered the royal palace as a stable hand and eventually drew the attention of Michael III. Although Arab historians later refer to him as Bāsīliyūs al-Šaqḻabī, or Basil the Slav, Basil was an ethnic Armenian born in Macedonia.¹⁰ As Basil's influence over Michael grew, he had Bardas—still the de facto Byzantine leader at the time—killed, after which Michael appointed him co-emperor. A few months later, Basil killed Michael and seized the imperial throne.

Basil maintained positive policies with Armenians inside and outside the Byzantine Empire during his reign. Sirarpie der Nersessian notes no real difference in any ethnically Armenian Byzantine emperors' actions towards the Armenians, perceiving the same religious persecution and territorial expansion at the Armenians' expense characteristic of all emperors in this period.¹¹ However, Basil and his son Leo VI's amicable policies towards the Armenians inside the Byzantine Empire and with the ruling Bagratid Dynasty in Armenia contrasts with der Nersessian's view. All of Basil's co-conspirators in the murder of Michael III were Armenian, illustrating the connections between Armenians residing in the multicultural Byzantine capital. Under both Basil I

¹⁰ Patricia Karlin-Hayter, trans., *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP* (Bruxelles: Editions de Byzantion, 1970), 4-5. The *Vita Euthymii* relates that "it was Stylianos, called Zaoutzes in the Armenian dialect, seeing he was a Macedonian of Armenian descent like himself, whom [Basil] left in charge, committing to him the direction of all matters, ecclesiastical and political." John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116. John Skylitzes describes Basil as an Armenian from Macedonia. Ihor Ševčenko, *Chronographiae Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur* (New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 10-11. Constantine VII is perhaps the most important source here, saying of his grandfather, "Now Emperor Basil – hailed from Macedonia, but traced his origins to the nation of the Armenians."

¹¹ Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*, 21.

and Leo VI, various Armenians rose to positions of prominence, including the λογοθέτης Symbatios, the *Ishkhan* Kurtik of Locana, Artavasdos, captain of the *ἐταῖροι*; and Theophylact Abastaktos.¹² Constantine the Armenian also served Basil in his administration, holding the rank of patrician and later λογοθέτης.¹³ Stylianos Zaoutzes, an Armenian and the father-in-law of Leo VI, held the title of βασιλεοπάτωρ and was an important minister under his son-in-law.¹⁴ Armenians continued to enjoy prominent positions in the military as well as the administration. These appointments indicate at the very least some preferential treatment towards fellow Armenians. Basil I's conquests also enlarged the border between Byzantium and Armenia, allowing more Armenians to immigrate into the empire. Overall, the general picture of Byzantine domestic policies toward the Armenians at this time is one of relative harmony.

At the same time, during Basil's reign Byzantium faced a new development in its foreign policy: an independent Armenia. Under the Bagratids, Armenia regained independence for the first time since the fourth century. Ashot Bagratuni took advantage of the Abbasid Caliphate's weakness; the caliph sent him a royal crown in 885, signaling

¹² The title λογοθέτης (Logothete) was a Byzantine administrative position equivalent to that of a minister of state. *Ishkhan* was a medieval Armenian title that meant prince. The *ἐταῖροι* (hetaireia) was an imperial guard corps that was primarily composed of foreigners. The term translates to "the company," which harks back to the old Macedonian Companions of Philip II and Alexander the Great. For more information on the importance of these individuals in the governments of Basil I and Leo VI, see Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*, 21; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 242; and Nicholas Adontz, "Basil I the Armenian," *Armenian Review* 9 (1956), 13-14.

¹³ Joseph Genesios, *On the Reigns of Emperors*, trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies), 74. Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 125.

¹⁴ Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii*, 4-5. Βασιλεοπάτωρ (basileopator) was a special created post that literally means "father of the emperor," although the figures it was conferred upon were not the emperors genetic fathers, but rather an important administrator for the state who held an important role in relation to the emperor. It was only conferred on Stylianos Zaoutzes and Romanos Lekapenos, both fathers-in-law of emperors.

Armenian independence and acknowledging Ashot's position as king.¹⁵ Basil recognized Armenian autonomy two years later; he dispatched another crown, indicating the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two autonomous monarchies. The Byzantine embassy to Ashot was led by a certain Nikodemos, who carried a letter from Basil that referred to Ashot as his beloved son and stated that Armenia would always be the closest ally of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁶ This blossomed into a formal alliance between Basil I and Ashot I a few years before the former's death. The gifts from Basil I and his communication with Ashot I prove the conciliatory, amicable relations between Byzantium and Armenia at this time.

Byzantine actions in the religious sphere also attest to this amicable relationship. Photios tried to revive relations with Armenia after he was restored as Patriarch of Constantinople. Photios was deeply interested in reuniting the Armenian and Orthodox Churches, and had acted towards this goal during his first patriarchate under Michael III. Many had tried to achieve reconciliation between the Orthodox and Armenian Churches over the centuries, but Photios came closest to succeeding. The Council of Širakawan, inspired by Photios, was perhaps the only honest, equal attempt at reconciliation based on communication between parties without imperial bullying or saber-rattling. This period of improved relations between the Byzantines and Armenians also saw the discovery of three relics in Constantinople, reportedly belonging to St. Gregory the Illuminator, St.

¹⁵ Krikor Maksoudian, trans., *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), XXIX.5. Cf. Timothy Greenwood, "The Emergence of the Bagratuni Kingdoms of Kars and Ani," in *Armenian Kars and Ani*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2011), 44-45. Caliph Al-Mutawakkil's murder in 861 started the period known as the Anarchy at Samarra. Al-Mu'tamid (870-892) sent the royal crown to Ashot.

¹⁶ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XXIV.13-14.

Hripsime, and St. Gayiane, the three most important saints in the Armenian Church. In the aftermath of this discovery, Basil sent a diplomatic mission to Armenia, notifying them of the remarkable news, including the fact that the relics supposedly produced miracles.¹⁷ Regardless of the story's factuality—which was very much in doubt even among Armenians of the ninth century—the fact that the Byzantines reported that Constantinople was the guardian of the relics of three of the holiest Armenian saints, and that they could still perform miracles while preserved in a Chalcedonian church, is significant. For one thing, this shows a close awareness of Armenian historical tradition and a willingness to revise it for contemporary matters. In addition, it signifies a sincere effort to reunite the two churches, or at least improve their relationship. The purpose of this 'discovery' was to foster closer relations between the Orthodox and Armenian Churches, circumventing the Chalcedonian matter by using St. Gregory as a unifying figure for the Armenian people. The Armenians reciprocated this with a remarkably tolerant religious policy toward those that followed the Chalcedonian creed under Ashot I, Smbat I, and Ashot II. This policy was undoubtedly tied to the Byzantine-Armenian alliance and Byzantine recognition of the Bagratid kings.¹⁸

All of this is more remarkable when the circumstances are considered. Ashot I was by no means a staunchly pro-Byzantine ruler. Like many Armenian lords, he excelled at the game of playing the two great regional powers—the Abbasids and the Byzantines

¹⁷ For more information on the relics and the subsequent embassy, see Timothy Greenwood, "The Discovery of the Relics of St Grigor," in *Byzantine Style, Religion, and Civilization*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 178-181.

¹⁸ Krikor H. Maksoudian, "The Chalcedonian Issue and the Early Bagratids: The Council of Sirakawan," *REArm* (1988-1989): 341.

—against each other to achieve and preserve Armenian autonomy. To do this, however, Ashot had to stay in Byzantium’s good graces. The Council of Širakawan helped him fortify his power in Armenia as the leading *nakharar*, or Armenian noble; this may have influenced the Abbasids’ recognition of Ashot as Prince of Armenia soon after the council in 862.¹⁹ While Basil and Photios were eager to improve relations, Ashot was more interested in preserving his independence. Another issue was the lack of direct territorial contiguity between the two states. In 860, Byzantine fortresses were concentrated in the north and west of Anatolia to guard the coastal plains and Constantinople rather than the borderlands. In comparison, the Arabs had several bases along the frontier, including Tarsus, Melitene, and Theodosiopolis. This denied Byzantium much direct influence and access to Armenia, since the only point of territorial contact was in the far north of Anatolia, and even this point of contact suffered from basic logistical complications.²⁰ Basil’s conquests in the east, including Sebastia and the Paulician base, Tephrike, increased the amount of shared border between the two peoples. This allowed for safer and more regular contact between Byzantium and Armenia and opened the route to increased negotiations and contact between the two peoples.

The effect these efforts had on Ashot I is evident in two ways. The first is a formal alliance between Ashot I and Basil I in the 880s, which continued under Basil’s son and heir, Leo VI. After gaining political power, Ashot had to face a variety of uprisings by the

¹⁹ For more information on Ashot I and his policies, see Maksoudian, “Chalcedonian Issue and the Early Bagratids,” 338-339.

²⁰ For more on communication between Constantinople and Armenian regions, see Greenwood, “Patterns of Contact and Communication,” 74.

nakharars, the Armenian nobility. The *nakharars* had created a dangerous structure of landed dependency and regional power that had plagued previous rulers of Armenia for centuries, even before the joint annexation of Armenia by the Byzantines and the Sasanians at the end of the fourth century.²¹ After pacifying this initial unrest, Ashot went to Constantinople to seek aid from Leo VI to better fortify his throne against internal discord with a powerful partnership, built upon the alliance he had made with Leo's father, Basil I. Ashot and Leo signed commercial and political treaties, and promised to support each other militarily. Such cooperation illustrates positive foreign policies on the part of both Byzantium and Armenia towards each other. Ashot's son, Smbat I (r. 890-914), continued his father's pro-Byzantine policies, renewing the treaties with Leo VI.²² Smbat and Leo even signed a new bilateral treaty in 893 that included military and economic components. Through this alliance Leo helped Smbat rescue his nephews from the Taronites that had taken them captive.²³ This was a sensitive internal issue, with which only the closest of allies would be asked to help; that Smbat requested Leo's aid thus demonstrates the extent to which he trusted the latter. Even when Muslim powers, alarmed by the budding relationship between the two Christian powers, began to threaten Armenia, Smbat maintained the alliance with Leo, and even strengthened it at times.²⁴

²¹ Levon Avdoyan, trans. *Pseudo-Yovhannes Mamikonean: The History of Taron* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 178-186. This passage relates the betrayal of Mushel Mamikonean by Vahan, Prince of Taron, in the early seventh century, which is emblematic of the rivalries among the *nakharars*, the Armenian nobility, that plagued Armenia for generations.

²² Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XXXI.1-2.

²³ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, trans. Gyula Moravcsik and Romilly Jenkins (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 188-191.

²⁴ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XXXI.3-6, 13, XL.22-23, XLII.26.

The Byzantine-Armenian alliance, however, was put to the test just two years after Leo's death. Leo's brother, Alexander, died shortly after him, and was succeeded by Leo's young son, Constantine VII (r. 913-959). Constantine's mother, Zoe Karbonopsina, ruled as Constantine's regent, but her power was relatively insecure, since the Byzantines disapproved of her because of her status as a woman and as the uncanonical fourth wife of Leo VI. Nevertheless, she took and held power for a period of time after weathering a challenge from the head of the regency council, Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos.

At this time, the new Armenian king, Ashot II (r. 914-928), visited Constantinople. Armenia was in a state of disorder and chaos. Muslim forces had ravaged Armenia during the reign of Ashot's father, Smbat I: Yusuf, Sajid Amir of Azerbaijan, consistently defeated Smbat's armies and isolated him from the support of the *nakharars*. In the hope of saving his kingdom, Smbat surrendered to Yusuf, only to be tortured, beheaded, and crucified.²⁵ Leo VI had planned to send a Byzantine army to assist Smbat, but he died before he could act.²⁶ Following Smbat's death, the Kingdom of Armenia fractured. Without a recognized leader, the creation of new Armenian states—which had begun to occur even a few years prior to Smbat's death—such as the Kingdom of Vaspurakan under Gagik Artsruni, accelerated.²⁷ Other nobles, including Aposebatas, Aposesphouet, and Aposelmis, also broke away from the Armenian state and established

²⁵ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XLIX.8-13.

²⁶ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XLVIII.7.

²⁷ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, XLIII.3-4.

their own autonomous territories in cities such as Mantzikert and Chliat.²⁸ Yusuf also conquered substantial territories in Armenia.

The stage for Ashot's visit to Constantinople had been set by a series of letters between leading Armenians and Byzantines. Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos had sent Ashot a letter, promising military aid, and Armenian Katholikos [Catholicos] Yovhannes Drasxanakertci had sent a letter to Constantine VII asking for imperial assistance in exchange for supporting the Byzantines in perpetuity and coming under their aegis.²⁹ Constantine VII's regency council sent a letter to Ashot II urging him to come to Constantinople. Ashot II arrived in 914,³⁰ asking for assistance according to the treaties the previous two Armenian kings and Byzantine emperors had signed. Ashot gained the sympathy of the court and the regent, Zoe Karbonopsina, who sent him back east with Byzantine troops to establish his rule.³¹ This is all the more remarkable since at the time Constantinople was in conflict with the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon, one of Byzantium's most dangerous enemies and whose forces ravaged within sight of Constantinople itself. Byzantine policy, however, deemed Armenia so important that they sacrificed crucial troops to assist Ashot. Ashot returned to Armenia at the head of a Byzantine army and

²⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 198-205.

²⁹ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, LIV. Cf. Greenwood, "Patterns of Contact and Communication," 81.

³⁰ See Steven Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His Reign: A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 249-251. Cf. Greenwood, "Patterns of Contact and Communication," 81. Greenwood argues that Ashot II fled to Constantinople as a "last refuge," because it was far removed from Armenia.

³¹ Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i's History of Armenia*, LVI.2.

achieved several victories over the fractious *nakharars*.³² Over the following years, Ashot retook all of western and much of eastern Armenia from Yusuf. He formally ascended the throne as Ashot II in 920. Byzantine assistance and recognition was crucial to Ashot's success in avenging his father's death and recapturing Armenia. The Byzantines also recognized him as ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων,³³ like his two predecessors, and the Emir of Azerbaijan recognized him as King of Armenia in 921 or 922.³⁴

Ashot's retaking of the Armenian throne with Byzantine support was both the apex of friendly Byzantine policy towards Armenia, and the beginning of its decline. Ashot's reclamation of his throne in 920 was the culmination of the amicable relations for which the early emperors of the Macedonian and Bagratid dynasties had hoped and worked. After Ashot regained power, Byzantine-Armenian relations worsened. Under the following emperors, a new policy of reinvigorated imperial expansion began, especially on the eastern frontier, where the Abbasid Caliphate had become all but impotent.

The period between 867 and 920 should be remembered as a period of remarkable rapprochement between Byzantium and Armenia, inaugurated by the new ethnically Armenian dynasties of the Macedonians in Byzantium and the Bagratids. Predominant theories claim that from its inception, the Macedonian Dynasty had wanted to annex

³² Maksoudian, *Yovhannes Drasxanakertc 'i's History of Armenia*, LVI.3, 7.

³³ This is a title granted by the Byzantines to foreign rulers, usually in the singular ἄρχων, which translates to lord or ruler, but in the case of certain Armenian kings the Byzantines granted the more powerful-sounding title of ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων (*archon tōn archonton*), which translates to lord of lords or ruler of rulers.

³⁴ For more information on Ashot II, see Krikor H. Maksoudian, "Ašot II Erkat," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 1, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 588-589.

Armenia.³⁵ Regardless of what might have happened in the following century, in this period the idea of a Byzantine master plan to incorporate Armenia into its empire is unsubstantiated by extant sources, which, in contrast, suggest a sincere alliance between the two. Such theories rely on unverifiable suppositions, given that the historical record only shows positive actions by Basil I and Leo VI vis-à-vis Armenia. Rather, the forging of alliances with Armenia and dispatching military support to Armenian leaders suggests that Basil and Leo genuinely desired to improve relations with their neighbor.

Armenia was by no means subject to Byzantine rule at this time, and it continued its age-old strategy of playing the Byzantine and Muslim states against each other to preserve its own autonomy. The treaties and communications between the two peoples, however, show the importance of each state in the other's foreign policy, as well as the general goodwill reciprocated between the Byzantine and Armenian leaders. Historians such as Greenwood and Garsoïan saw only hostilities and machinations between the Byzantines and Armenians during this period. However, the consistent contact and alliances between Basil I and Ashot I, and then Leo VI and Smbat I, show otherwise. There existed amicable Byzantine policies towards Armenia during these fifty years. Even when Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria, one of Byzantium's greatest foes, was at the gates of Constantinople, Byzantine leaders still saw fit to send troops to help Ashot II retake his throne. The period from 867 to 920 was one of good relations and positive foreign policy

³⁵ Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*, 17-18. . Greenwood, "Patterns of Contact and Communication," 75. Cowe, "Relations between the Kingdoms of Vaspurikan and Ani," 80. Garsoïan, "Armenia, History," 481. These four historians have been the most persistent in their argument that the Macedonian Dynasty was trying to annex Armenia since the reign of Basil I. None of them have provided any substantial proof to this effect, however, merely drawing hypotheses looking back from later events rather than understanding the Macedonian Dynasty's policies towards Armenia as organic and changing.

between the Byzantine Empire and Armenia, headed by the new ethnically Armenian dynasties of the Macedonians in Byzantium and the Bagratids in Armenia.

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