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THE REFLECTION OF ANCIENT GREEK BIOGRAPHY IN CONSTANTINE VII PORPHYROGENITUS' *VITA BASILII*

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The Vita Basilii, compiled in honor of Byzantine Emperor Basil I (867–886) at the request of his grandson Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), claims a prominent place in the history of Byzantine literature as the first basilikos logos (βασιλικὸς λόγος), defined as a laudatory biography extolling an emperor's life and achievements. In earlier research it has been emphasized that, in compiling the work, Porphyrogenitus looked for inspiration in two models of ancient Greek biography: Isocrates' encomium Euagoras and Plutarch's Parallel Lives. The research focus of this paper is aimed at a comparison of the content and structure of Plutarch's Alexander, depicting the life and works of Alexander the Great, Isocrates' Euagoras, dedicated to the Cypriot ruler of Salamis, and Porphyrogenitus' Vita Bas., according to topoi typical for basilikos logos: prologue, homeland, origin, birth, physical appearance, upbringing and education, character traits, achievements in war and peace, fortune, comparison to the previous reign, epilogue and concluding prayer. All of these are examined with the aim of determining how Plutarch's and Isocrates' models of biography influenced the account of Basil's life, the goal being to discover the extent to which Porphyrogenitus inherited ancient models, and in which parts of the account his own innovations were implemented.

Keywords: *Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus; Vita Basilii; Basil I; basilikos logos; Byzantine literature; ancient Greek biography*

1. Introduction

1.1. The corpus and aim of the research¹

The text of the *Vita Bas.*, composed in honour of Byzantine emperor Basil I (867–886) at the behest of his grandson Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), has claimed a prominent place in Byzantine literature, as it represents the first panegyric biography in which the emperor's life and work are extolled, i.e. βασιλικὸς λόγος (Alexander, 1940: 198).² In scholarly literature Isocrates' encomium *Euagoras* and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are cited as templates used by Porphyrogenitus in composing the text.³ The authors of this paper have chosen to research this topic due to the curious fact that, from the end of antiquity all the way to the 10th century, there are no works of Greek literature belonging to the type of biography flourishing in antiquity. After several centuries in which hagiography reigned, it wasn't until the 10th century that the *Vita Bas.* arrived as a sort of continuation of the ancient type of biography in which the life of a secular individual was the work's focus (Alexander, 1940: 194–195).

In this paper, the ways in which Isocrates and Plutarch, the former as the first to write a detailed account of a person's life in a form still recognizable today as biographical, the latter as one of the main representatives of

¹ This paper is based on a reworked and supplemented thesis titled *Uzori iz antičke biografije za životopis cara Bazilija I. (867.–886.)*, written by Tihana Jurišić in partial fulfilment of a master's degree under the supervision of doc. dr. sc. Teuta Serreqi Jurić and defended at the University of Zadar in 2020.

² The *Vita Basilii* forms Book V of the historical collection known as *Theophanes Continuatus* (since Immanuel Bekker's Bonn edition), dated at the beginning of 11th century. On the dating and the authorship of the chronicle *Theoph. Cont.* see, for example: Bury 1908: 138–140; Moravcsik 1983: I/540–542; Markopoulos 1985: 171–182; Signes Codoñer 1989: 17–28; Ševčenko 1998: 77–93; on its language and style see Signes Codoñer 1995; Conca 2000: 249–264. On questions of dating and authorship of the *Vita Bas.* see, e.g.: Bury 1908: 121, 138–140; Ševčenko 1978: 91–127; Signes Codoñer 1989: 17–28; Ševčenko 1992: 167–195; Anagnostakis 1999: 97–139; Varona 2010: 739–775; Ševčenko 2011: 7*–9*. On linguistic, syntactic, and stylistic characteristics see: Tartaglia 1982: 197–206; Index graecitatis in Ševčenko 2011: 367–383; Serreqi Jurić 2016: 116–145, 156–174, 189–277; Serreqi Jurić 2017: 157–178.

³ Cf. Jenkins, 1954: 11–30; Van Hoof, 2002: 163–183.

ancient Greek biography, influenced the structure and contents of Porphyrogenitus' text are examined.⁴ The influence of ancient biography is contemplated through topoi specific to *basilikos logos*, as defined in the third century by Menander from Laodicea, also known as Menander Rhetor (prologue, homeland, origin, birth, physical appearance, upbringing, character traits, achievements in war and peace, fortune, comparison to the previous reign, epilogue and concluding prayer).⁵ In analysing and comparing Porphyrogenitus' representation of Basil with Isocrates' representation of King Euagoras and Plutarch's depiction of Alexander the Great (chosen from among Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* for the purposes of this investigation), the authors of this paper have attempted to note similarities and differences between them, with special attention given to not only the emphasis of those segments in which Porphyrogenitus clearly followed his ancient models, but also to innovations in certain portions of his work.

1.2. Genre determinants of the *Vita Basilii*

In Porphyrogenitus' literary opus the *Vita Bas.* stands out as his most valuable work from a literary point of view.⁶ It is the most stylistically refined of Porphyrogenitus' works, one whose strongly persuasive character, along with the fact that it was intended for a wider audience, determined the author's motivation regarding the stylization of the work. Porphyrogenitus' grandfather, Basil I, is praised in the form of encomium for two reasons. First, Basil needed to be cleared of the blame for two murders which preceded his rise to power, that of Emperor Michael III (842–867) and his uncle, Caesar Bardas. Furthermore, Porphyrogenitus wished to confirm his belonging to the Macedonian dynasty, inaugurated by Basil I,

⁴ On *Euagoras* and the origins of Greek biography see: Stuart 1928; Osley 1946: 7–20; Momigliano 1993; Usher 1999: 312–313; Hägg 2012: 30–41.

⁵ On Menander Rhetor see Russell, Wilson, 2004: xi–xiii; Heath, 2004: xii–xvii.

⁶ The structure of the *Vita Bas.* is divided thus: prologue (Chap. 1), origin (2–4), childhood and youth (5–8), career ascent (9–19), the rulership and death of Michael III (20–27), financial politics (28–30), judiciary reform (31), questions of church (32), law reform (33), the rebellions of Symbarios and Geogios (34), Basil's children (35), army reform (36), military campaigns to the East (37–51), military campaigns to the West (52–71), private life and interests (72), a digression on Basil's benefactors (73–77), civil undertakings (78–94), the spreading of Christianity (95–97), the death of Basil's eldest son, Constantine (98), the advancement of rural populations (99), conflict between Basil and his son Leo (100–101), Basil's death and successor (102).

seeing as there was doubt as to the legitimacy of the origin of Porphyrogenitus' father, Leo VI (886–912), since Basil's wife, Eudocia Ingerina, was also Michael's mistress.⁷

As it describes the life of an emperor and contains elements of praise, the *Vita Bas.* is classified as a *basilikos logos* (Alexander, 1940: 198; Jenkins, 1954: 21), as defined by Menander from Laodicea, according to which, in this literary genre, everything good in a subject's life ought to be extolled, while anything suspicious or negative should be imperceptibly ignored.⁸ In addition, the following *topoi* should be present: prologue (προοίμιον), homeland (πατρίς), origin (γένος), birth (γένεσις), physical appearance (φύσις), upbringing (ἀνατροφή), character traits (ἐπιτηδεύματα), achievements (πράξεις) – actions of war (πράξεις κατὰ πόλεμον) and actions of peace (πράξεις κατ' εἰρήνην),⁹ fortune (τύχη), comparison to the previous reign (τὸ ἀντεξετάζειν τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν πρὸς τὰς πρὸ αὐτοῦ βασιλείας), epilogue (ἐπίλογος) and concluding prayer (εὐχή).¹⁰

The *Vita Bas.*, however, does not completely follow the structure of the *basilikos logos* as defined by Menander. Basil's achievements are not narrated in order of wartime activities and peacetime activities, but rather chronologically; not according to the four virtues, but according to various domains (e.g., state administration, judiciary, laws, private life, etc.). Besides this, the *topos* of the comparison of the reign of the current emperor with that of his predecessor, normally placed near the end of the book, was inserted in the form of an account of the reign and death of Emperor Michael III (Chap. 20–27) before the description of Basil's deeds. The author himself calls it a digression to let readers know what type of life Emperor Michael led, and that he deserved death due to his foolish behaviour and deeds.¹¹ Also, the digression on Michael contains a strict judgement on his reign, even though Menander deems it unbecoming to reprehend and undervalue a previous ruler; rather, he should be admired,

⁷ Cf. Toynbee, 1973: 582–587, 593–594; Van Hoof, 2002: 181–183.

⁸ Cf. Men. Rhet. 368.3–7. The edition written by Russell, Wilson (2004) has been used in the writing of this paper.

⁹ The deeds should be divided according to four virtues (ἀρεταί): courage (ἀνδρεία), justice (δικαιοσύνη), temperance (σωφροσύνη) and wisdom (φρόνησις).

¹⁰ Cf. Men. Rhet. 368–377.

¹¹ Cf. Const. Porph. *Vita Bas.*, 20.4–14. The edition by Ševčenko (2011) has been used in the writing of this paper.

and the current emperor emphasized as perfect (Alexander, 1940: 197; Van Hoof, 2002: 167).¹²

Besides the elements of an encomium, the *Vita Bas.* has points in common with historiography and biography.¹³ Plutarch and Isocrates are noted as the most important ancient models regarding the examination of the *Vita Bas.* in the context of biographies.¹⁴ Taking into consideration the fact that the work contains characteristics pertaining to encomia, historiographic works, and biographies, and that it cannot be narrowed down to a single literary genre, in recent research *encomiastic biography* is considered the most appropriate term for such a work (Van Hoof, 2002: 179).

2. An analysis and comparison of the structure and contents of the works in question

2.1. Prologue

It may be concluded that the prologue of the *Vita Bas.* has more in common with that of Isocrates than with that of Plutarch. In both, the intent of the author that the representation of the chosen character and his virtues might serve as an example to others, especially youths, is evident. Both authors give the impression that they will focus more on the famous works and achievements of their subjects. Plutarch, however, highlights the description of Alexander's character and does not mention the reason for which he was chosen by him anywhere in the prologue.

In Porphyrogenitus' text (Chap. 1), the subject of praise is his grandfather, Basil I, the emperor who exalted the power of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁵ The writer wishes that Basil's life as described in his work serve as a good example for his successors to imitate:

... ὡς ἂν καὶ τοῖς μετέπειτα μὴ ἀγνοῖται βασιλείου στελέχους ἐπὶ πολὺ τοῦ χρόνου παρεκταθέντος ἢ πρώτη πηγὴ καὶ ρίζα, καὶ τοῖς ἐγγόνιοις ἐκεῖνου οἴκοθεν εἴη ἀνεστηκὼς ὁ πρὸς ἀρετὴν κανὼν τε καὶ ἀνδρίας καὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον τῆς μιμήσεως. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 1.15–18, ed. Ševčenko)

¹² Cf. Men. Rhet. 376.31–377.2.

¹³ For more details see Van Hoof, 2002: 170–179.

¹⁴ For more details see Jenkins, 1954: 20–23; Van Hoof, 2002: 173–179.

¹⁵ Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 1.11–14.

... So that to posterity the first source and root of the imperial stem, which has been growing for such a long time, not be unknown, and so that to his heirs a standard of virtue, a statue and a model for imitation be set from within their own house.¹⁶

Inspired by Nicocles' magnificent tribute to his father Euagoras, Isocrates mentions in his prologue that he is the first to write an encomium in prose. While it is more difficult to extol someone's praises in prose than in poetry, in which it is possible to use linguistic embellishment to a greater degree, as well as exotic words, neologisms and stylistic figures, Isocrates states that one must not renounce the task to try to praise the works of Euagoras using a rhetorical method, no worse than others do using metre.¹⁷

ὁ δὲ λόγος εἰ καλῶς διέλθοι τὰς ἐκείνου πράξεις, ἀείμνηστον ἂν τὴν ἀρετὴν τὴν Εὐαγόρου παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ποιήσειεν.
(Isoc. 9.4.6–8, ed. Van Hook)

If speech were to adequately describe his deeds, Euagoras' virtues would be made to never to be forgotten among all mankind.

Plutarch already notes in the prologue (Chap. 1) that he is writing a biography, not a history. Due to the wealth of material available, he will direct his narrative to the most significant achievements of the famous personage and attempt to reveal the character of the person through minutiae:

οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους, οὔτε ταῖς ἐπιφανεστάταις πράξεσι πάντως ἔνεστι δὴλωσις ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας, ἀλλὰ πρᾶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ῥῆμα καὶ παιδιὰ τις ἔμφρασιν ἤθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχαι μυριόνεκροι καὶ παρατάξεις αἱ μέγιστα καὶ πολιορκίαὶ πόλεων. (Plut., *Alex.*, 1.2.1–3.1, ed. Perrin)¹⁸

For I do not write histories, but biographies, and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always manifestation of virtue or vice; rather, often slight things, a word or a joke, better show one's character than battles with thousands dead, the greatest armaments and the besieging of cities.

¹⁶ All Greek citations in this paper have been translated by its authors.

¹⁷ Cf. Isoc. 9.8–11. In this paper, the edition by Van Hook (1945) has been used.

¹⁸ The edition by Perrin (1958) has been used in this paper.

2.2. Homeland, origin and birth

The second and third chapters of Plutarch's *Alexander* correspond to narration on origin and birth. Alexander's origin from both the paternal and maternal side is stated in one sentence at the beginning of the second chapter:

Ἀλέξανδρος ὅτι τῷ γένει πρὸς πατρὸς μὲν ἦν Ἡρακλείδης ἀπὸ Καρανίου, πρὸς δὲ μητρὸς Αἰακίδης ἀπὸ Νεοπτολέμου, τῶν πάνυ πεπιστευμένων ἐστί. (Plut., *Alex.*, 2.1.1–4, ed. Perrin)

It is confidently believed that Alexander was Hercules' descendant through Caranus on his father's side, and the descendant of Aeacus through Neoptolemus on his mother's side.

The rest of the second and third chapter are, for the most part, dedicated to stories on Alexander's conception, including miraculous signs (σύμβολα) heralding that Olympias would give birth to a son with an intense and wild character.¹⁹ Miraculous events also occur on the day of Alexander's birth. He was born on the 6th day of the month Hekatombaion, and on the same day the Temple of Ephesian Artemis was burned down:

εἰκότως γὰρ ἔφη καταφλεχθῆναι τὸν νεῶν, τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἀσχολουμένης περὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου μαίωσιν. (Plut., *Alex.*, 3.3.6–8, ed. Perrin)

He (sc. Hegesias of Magnesia) said that the Temple was burned down for a reason, for Artemis was occupied with the birth of Alexander.

Isocrates states that facts concerning the birth of Euagoras were known to many, but he feels the need to narrate them so that all could know that Euagoras was no less notable than other members of his bloodline. In seven chapters (Chap. 12–18) he focuses on Euagoras' paternal parentage, beginning with Zeus' son Aeacus,²⁰ through Aeacus' sons Telamon

¹⁹ E.g., Olympias' and Philip's dreams, an unfurled snake once found next to the sleeping Olympias, etc. Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 2.2.1–4.8.

²⁰ Aeacus, along with Rhadamanthus and Minos, was one of the three judges in Hades. He judged the Europeans (Greeks).

and Peleus, through to Telamon's son Teucer, the founder of Euagoras' bloodline.²¹

Αἶας δὲ μετ' ἐκείνον ἠρίστευσεν, Τεῦκρος δὲ τῆς τε τούτων συγγενείας ἄξιος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὐδενὸς χείρων γενόμενος, ἐπειδὴ Τροίαν συνεξείλεν, ἀφικόμενος εἰς Κύπρον Σαλαμῖνά τε κατόκησεν, ὁμώνυμον ποιήσας τῆς πρότερον αὐτῷ πατρίδος οὔσης, καὶ τὸ γένος τὸ νῦν βασιλεῦον κατέλειπεν. (Isoc. 9.18.3–9, ed. Van Hook)

Ajax was second to him (sc. Achilles) in valour, and Teucer, worthy of their kinship and no worse than the rest, after he destroyed Troy, arrived at Cyprus and founded Salamis, giving to it the name of his former homeland, and left behind him the bloodline which now rules there.

Isocrates, unlike Plutarch's stories of miraculous portents, abruptly interrupts his narration, explaining that he will not deal with issues that could be interpreted as portents of Euagoras' superhuman birth:

περὶ οὗ τὰς μὲν φήμας καὶ τὰς μαντείας καὶ τὰς ὄψεις τὰς ἐν τοῖς ὑπνοῖς γενομένας, ἐξ ὧν μειζόνως ἂν φανείη γεγονῶς ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον, αἰροῦμαι παραλιπεῖν (...) ἄρξομαι δ' ἐκ τῶν ὁμολογουμένων λέγειν περὶ αὐτοῦ. (Isoc. 9.21.3–6, 11–12, ed. Van Hook)

I prefer to leave aside stories of him, prophecies and visions in dreams, from which it could be thought that he was born as better than man or superhuman. (...) I shall begin to speak of him from that which is generally accepted.

In the work of Porphyrogenitus, the *topoi* of homeland, origin and birth are given in Chapters 2–5. Basil's paternal ancestors came from the Arsacid dynasty, whose members, exiled from their homeland due to rebellion, came to Macedonia from Armenia, settling Hadrianopolis during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (homeland – πατρίς).²² On his mother's side

²¹ Cf. Isoc. 9.12–18.

²² Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 2–4.

Basil is the descendant of Constantine the Great and Alexander the Great (origin – γένος).²³ Finally, the author concludes:

ἐκ τοιούτων γεννητόρων προελθὼν ὁ Βασίλειος εὐθὺς πολλὰ τῆς ὕστερον δόξης σύμβολα εἶχεν ὑποφαινόμενα. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 3.27–29, ed. Ševčenko)

Having been born from such parents, Basil displayed many signs of his future fame right away.

The topos of birth (γένεσις) is not accompanied by miraculous signs (σύμβολα) around the time of birth, as proposed by the Menander Rhetor.²⁴ The author mentions them later, when describing an episode from Basil's childhood in Chapter 5, believing that such events should not be kept secret:

ἐγένετο δέ τι περὶ αὐτὸν εὐθὺς κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἡλικίαν θαυμάσιον, τὴν εἰς ὕστερον τύχην παραδηλοῦν, ὅπερ οὐ θέμις οἶμαι σιγῇ παρελθεῖν. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 5.1–3, ed. Ševčenko)

A miracle had already happened to him in early childhood, which would herald his later fame; I believe it should not be passed by in silence.

While Basil's parents were working in the fields, an eagle flew over to the sleeping child, shielding him from the sun. Though his frightened mother shooed him away, the eagle returned and did the same thing twice that same day. Later, during Basil's childhood, an eagle would often shade him with his wings while he was sleeping. The eagle was interpreted as a sign from God of the important events which would await Basil in the future:

οὕτω τῶν μεγάλων πραγμάτων ἀεὶ πόρρωθεν ὁ θεὸς προκαταβάλλεται τινα σύμβολα καὶ τεκμήρια τῶν εἰς ὕστερον. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 5.29–31, ed. Ševčenko)

Thus God always, well beforehand, sends signs and portents of the great events that are to come.

²³ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 3.23–27.

²⁴ Cf. Men. Rhet. 371.3–14.

As far as the accounts of birth and origin are concerned, we may conclude that Plutarch focuses the most on miraculous portents foretelling Alexander's great fame, while Isocrates and Porphyrogenitus are more concerned with the renowned and noble origin of their subjects. Isocrates does not mention any miraculous events coinciding with the birth of Euagoras, while Porphyrogenitus takes the opposite approach, believing that miraculous signs accompanying the childhood of his grandfather Basil should not be kept secret.²⁵ We also note similarities between Isocrates and Porphyrogenitus in the fact that both begin with the founder of the bloodline. Both authors also concentrated more on the descendants of the male line, while Plutarch seemed to focus more on Alexander's mother Olympias and the secret of Alexander's divine origin through stories of Alexander's conception.

2.3. Physical appearance, character traits and upbringing

In Chapter 4, Plutarch describes Alexander's external aspect (φύσις), and in Chapters 5–8 character traits and virtues (ἐπιτηδεύματα), in which we find out who participated in his upbringing (ἀνατροφή). Alexander was light skinned, with a pleasant scent and a fiery temperament, due to which he was partial to alcohol and had a choleric temper. He was restrained in his physical pleasures even during childhood, and serious and noble of mind. He sought neither riches nor pleasure; rather, he sought success, renown, and ambitious deeds. Among Alexander's numerous teachers and educators two stand out: Leonidas, his mother's cousin, and Aristotle; the latter gave him not only a sympathy for philosophy, but also a love of medicine. Alexander was also by his nature fond of learning and literature.²⁶

²⁵ It is interesting to note contradictory information concerning Basil's origin in the *Vita Bas.* In Chapter 3 it is noted that he is a descendant of Arsaces, Constantine the Great, and Alexander the Great, while in Chapter 5 author states that Basil was born of an ordinary and simple family. Basil was, in fact, a newcomer to Constantinople and of inconspicuous ancestry. As a renowned origin was of great importance for an emperor, as stated by Menander himself in his instructions for writing *basilikos logos* (cf. Men. Rhet. 370.9–28), the problem of Basil's genealogy was solved with a fictive descent from the Parthian ruler Arsaces. According to Pseudo-Symeon (Ps.-Sym., 689.7–8, ed. Bonn), a fictive genealogy was invented by Photius. This was allowed for the writer of *basilikos logos*, who should not hesitate to make something up, with the caveat that it be believable (cf. Men. Rhet. 371.10–14).

²⁶ Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 4–8.

In Alexander's biography many examples can be found in which Plutarch attempts to describe Alexander's character through the description of some sort of event. One of the most prominent of these is the story in which young Alexander managed to rein the untameable Bucephalus (Chap. 6). Noting that the horse was afraid of the shade, he managed to calm him down and mount him, showing ingenuity and resourcefulness in comparison to older and more experienced people. His father allegedly said at the time:

... ὁ δὲ πατὴρ καὶ δακρῦσαί τι λέγεται πρὸς τὴν χαράν, καὶ καταβάντος αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν φιλήσας, “ὦ παῖ,” φάναι, “ζήτει σεαυτῷ βασιλείαν ἴσην· Μακεδονία γὰρ σε οὐ χωρεῖ.” (Plut., *Alex.*, 6.5.4–7, ed. Perrin)

It is said that his father cried in delight and, kissing him in the forehead when he mounted the horse, said: “Son, seek out a kingdom equal to yourself, for Macedonia is not large enough for you.”

Isocrates states that Euagoras, as a boy, had beauty (κάλλος), bodily strength (ῥώμη) and temperance (σωφροσύνη), joined in manhood by courage (ἀνδρεία), wisdom (σοφία) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) in such quantity that he surpassed all others. It is due to the excellence of his body and mind that kings of the time feared for their thrones.²⁷

Euagoras, however, did not strive to have power over others, but rather for that which was unjustly taken from his ancestors. The deity had greater plans in mind for him, the outcast:

... ἀλλὰ τοσαύτην ὁ δαίμων ἔσχεν αὐτοῦ πρόνοιαν, ὅπως καλῶς λήψεται τὴν βασιλείαν, ὥσθ' ὅσα μὲν ἀναγκαῖον ἦν παρασκευασθῆναι δι' ἀσεβείας, ταῦτα μὲν ἕτερος ἔπραξεν, ἐξ ὧν δ' οἷόν τ' ἦν ὀσιῶς καὶ δικαίως λαβεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν, Εὐαγόρα διεφύλαξεν. (Isoc. 9.25.4–26.3, ed. Van Hook)

But the deity took such thought for him that he honourably assume the throne, such that what ought to have been done involving impiety was done by another, while he saved for Euagoras those means whereby it was possible for him to gain the rule through piety and justice.

²⁷ Cf. Isoc. 9.22–24.

All the virtues mentioned, as well as divine intent, were shown in Euagoras' undertaking in which, with the help of about fifty others, he took back the right to reign in Salamis.

Unlike Alexander who had many teachers and educators at his disposal, Basil was instructed in all things honourable and valuable by his father: piety and reverence for God (ὀσιότης καὶ εὐσέβεια), awe and obedience toward his parents (αἰδώς καὶ εὐπέθεια), compliance toward his elders (ὑπειξίς), and honest good will toward his peers (ἄδολος εὖνοια). Toward those in power he showed subordination, and to the poor he showed compassion (ἔλεος):²⁸

... ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἀρεταῖς ἐπιδήλως ἐξέλαμπεν, σώφρων ἐκ νέου καὶ ἀνδρεῖος ἀναφαινόμενος, τὴν τε ἰσότητα μετὰ φρονήσεως ἀγαπῶν καὶ διαφερόντως τιμῶν, καὶ ἐν μηδενὶ τῶν ταπεινότερων κατεπαιρόμενος, ἐξ ὧν εὖνοια παρὰ πάντων αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ πᾶσιν εἶναι προσφιλεῖ καὶ ἐράσμιον. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 6.10–13, ed. Ševčenko)

Thus, brightly he (sc. Basil) shone in all virtues, appearing both moderate and courageous from a young age; he loved and greatly honoured righteousness coupled with prudence, never showing arrogance towards anyone of humbler station. All this brought to him the goodwill of all, and he was beloved by all and dear to everyone.

Porphyrogenitus concludes that Basil did not need teachers like Chiron, who taught Achilles; rather, he only needed his father's nurturing, alluding thus to his grandfather's exceptional intelligence.²⁹ Porphyrogenitus' grandfather often spent his free time in education and training, and sought to offer his children an adequate education.³⁰

If we examine all three descriptions of physical appearance and character traits, we may conclude that Plutarch transcends the other authors in his description of Alexander. He was the only one to offer a more detailed description of Alexander's physical appearance, while Isocrates and Porphyrogenitus were more restrained in this respect, mentioning only that

²⁸ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 6.

²⁹ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 6.1–5.

³⁰ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 72.6–18.

Euagoras and Basil were bestowed with beauty and physical strength. While many individuals were responsible for Alexander's upbringing and education, one gets the impression that Euagoras and Basil grew up to become great and wise individuals with little help from others. In the descriptions of character traits, it can be said that each subject possesses the highest virtues and that each of them was fated to become a renowned sovereign. Plutarch, however, is the only to mention his subject's negative traits along with the good.

2.4. Achievements in war and peace and a comparison to the previous reign

Plutarch spends almost all the rest of the biography (Chap. 11–74) describing in detail Alexander's many martial feats. Due to the many details in these chapters, we will concentrate here on the most prominent of Alexander's martial conquests, as well as few examples that illustrate his character.

Alexander came to power at the age of twenty. Soon afterward, he is chosen as the leader of a military campaign against Persia at the Hellenic Assembly at Isthmus. This campaign was characterized by divine omens and was the source of his fame, as confirmed in the following citation:

...Ἀρίστανδρος ἐκέλευε θαρρεῖν, ὡς ἀοιδίμους καὶ περιβοήτους κατεργασόμενον πράξεις, αἱ πολὺν ἰδρῶτα καὶ πόνον ὕμνουσι ποιηταῖς καὶ μουσικοῖς παρέξουσι. (Plut., *Alex.*, 14.5.6–9, ed. Perrin)

Aristander bade him (sc. Alexander) to be brave, because he was to perform famous and illustrious deeds, which would cost poets and musicians a lot of sweat and effort to celebrate.

After the descriptions of the first two key battles in the military campaign against the Persian Empire (Chap. 14–30), the Battle of the Granicus (Ch. 16), and the battle at the river Pinarus (Chap. 20), in the next few chapters (20–23), which take place before the decisive third battle against Darius, Plutarch gives examples from which Alexander's many virtues are evident. Despite the great wealth acquired in his battles, Alexander never showed a desire for wealth, spending his winnings on his army and sending them back to his homeland. He exhibited restraint in food and wine, in physical pleasures, and toward captives, especially Darius' wife and daughters. He tried to be just to both his soldiers and his enemies. In times of peace, he was busy with various tasks, and he often spent his free time ex-

ercising and reading.³¹ Plutarch notes, along with his virtues, one not-so pleasant characteristic exhibited by Alexander, which came to light during long feasts under the influence of alcohol, keeping in mind that what he most desired was fame:

καὶ τᾶλλα πάντων ἥδιστος ὦν βασιλέων συνεῖναι καὶ χάριτος οὐδεμιᾶς ἀμοιρῶν, τότε ταῖς μεγαλαυχίαις ἀηδῆς ἐγίνετο καὶ λίαν στρατιωτικός... (Plut., *Alex.*, 23.4.1–4, ed. Perrin)

And although in other ways he was the most delectable of all kings in his dealings with people, and endowed with every grace, at this time he would become unpleasant in his boastfulness and very like a common soldier.

After the victory in the great Battle of Gaugamela in Mesopotamia (Chap. 33–34), the Persian army was defeated, and Alexander was crowned the king of Persian Empire. He made sacrifices to the gods, awarding his friends and his own and allied armies honours and booty. Plutarch states:

οὕτω τις εὐμενῆς ἦν πρὸς ἅπασαν ἀρετὴν καὶ καλῶν ἔργων φύλαξ καὶ οἰκεῖος. (Plut., *Alex.*, 34.2.7–9, ed. Perrin)

So considerate was he (sc. Alexander) towards every form of virtue, and such a friend and guardian of noble deeds.

In the following chapters (Chap. 37–42) various scenes are described in which one of Alexander's most salient features is shown, his great generosity. When individuals surrounding him began to exhibit an ever-greater desire for wealth and an opulent way of life, something he was often warned about by his mother,³² Alexander only gently reprimanded them and held a "philosophical" speech on the harmfulness of excessive opulence. The long and tiring military campaigns, however, began to create dissatisfaction, so Alexander often heard unfavourable comments about himself. Plutarch notes that, after ignoring unseemly stories circulating about him, he later became cruel and pitiless, for he was more interested in having a good reputation than in having a kingdom.³³

³¹ It is noted as an interesting fact in Chapter 26 that Alexander carried Homer's *Iliad* on his campaigns.

³² Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 39.4.7–5.4.

³³ Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 37–42.

Alexander's virtue, in the shape of respect for his enemies, is especially evident when he finally managed to capture Darius, already on his deathbed as a captive of the Bactrian Satrap Bessus. He sent Darius' body to his mother dressed as befitting a king, and accepted Darius' brother into his service (Chap. 42–43). Plutarch highlights the fact that he took much care in bringing together Macedonian and Persian culture and, accordingly, chose 30,000 boys to learn the Hellenic tongue and to train with the strict Macedonian army, while he chose the Bactrian Roxana for his wife (Chap. 47), and later Darius' daughter Statira as well (Chap. 70).

In the final quarter of the work, the following events are mentioned: Alexander's military campaign to India; the victory against King Porus; Alexander's heavy wounds taken among the Malli; the return from India; unfavourable portents and the foreboding of Alexander's death.

Isocrates, before transitioning to the description of Euagoras' works, uses a rhetorical digression to praise Euagoras (τὴν τ' ἀρετὴν τὴν Εὐαγόρου καὶ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν πεπραγμένων),³⁴ elevating him to the status of the most honourable ruler to ever merit his throne. Of the many illustrious men and rulers praised by poets, Isocrates decided to compare Euagoras to the Persian king Cyrus, the most admired of men.³⁵ While Cyrus and his army completed deeds that any Greek or Persian would easily be able to do, Euagoras achieved the same through only his strength of body and mind. Euagoras' works are in line with piety and justice, while Cyrus did impious deeds to achieve his goals, killing his own grandfather, Astyages.³⁶ It is concluded that Euagoras deserves more praise than Cyrus for this reason:

... οὐδεὶς οὔτε θνητὸς οὔθ' ἡμίθεος οὔτ' ἀθάνατος εὐρεθήσεται κάλλιον οὐδὲ λαμπρότερον οὐδ' εὐσεβέστερον λαβῶν ἐκείνου τὴν βασιλείαν. (...) φανήσομαι γὰρ οὐκ ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου μέγала λέγειν προθυμούμενος, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν τοῦ πράγματος ἀλήθειαν οὕτω περὶ αὐτοῦ θρασέως εἰρηκῶς. (Isoc. 9.39.3–6, 9–11, ed. Van Hook)

³⁴ Cf. Isoc. 9.33.3–4.

³⁵ This is referring to Cyrus the Great or Cyrus III, who conquered the Medians and founded the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire.

³⁶ Cf. Isoc. 9.33–38.

No mortal, nor demigod, nor immortal will be found to have obtained his throne more nobly, more splendidly, or more piously. (...) For it will be manifest that I have spoken thus boldly about Euagoras through no desire for grandiloquence, but because of the truth of the matter.

Euagoras is successful in all fields. Keeping with the principle that the kingdom will only thrive if the mind of its ruler also thrives, he spent his time researching, thinking, and counseling. He ruled the city piously, was just toward everyone, and meted out punishment in keeping with the law. Keeping with his principles and staying true to his word, he gained the respect of both citizens and visitors to the island:³⁷

... καὶ δημοτικὸς μὲν ὦν τῆ τοῦ πλήθους θεραπείᾳ, πολιτικὸς δὲ τῆ τῆς πόλεως ὅλης διοικήσει, στρατηγικὸς δὲ τῆ πρὸς τοὺς κινδύνους εὐβουλία, μεγάλοφρων δὲ τῶ πᾶσι τούτοις διαφέρειν. καὶ ταῦθ' ὅτι προσῆν Εὐαγόρα, καὶ πλείω τούτων, ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων ῥάδιον καταμαθεῖν. (Isoc. 9.46.4–9, ed. Van Hook)

He was democratic in his service to the people, statesmanlike in the administration of the city, an able general in his good counsel in the face of dangers, and noble in his superiority in all these qualities. That Euagoras had these attributes, and even more than these, it is easy to learn from his achievements themselves.

After the characteristics of Euagoras' rule, an overview of his most significant works follows. Taking back his rule, Euagoras made Salamis influential and respectable in the Greek world, expanding its territories, building walls and a seaport, bringing art to the city, and soothing its formerly hostile citizens. The greatest proof of his success in this venture is the fact that many respected Greeks moved to the island, believing Euagoras' rule to be more just than that of the previous ruler.³⁸

Euagoras also showed himself to be an experienced strategist. Isocrates states that he and Conon, a famous Athenian general, created a successful

³⁷ Cf. Isoc. 9.41–46.

³⁸ Cf. Isoc. 9.47–51.

strategy in the Battle of Cnidus in 394 BC.³⁹ Furthermore, he managed to defeat Persian king Artaxerxes II. Isocrates concludes that the most unbelievable of all was that the great Persian king had not managed to subjugate Euagoras' city in ten years with such a large force, a city that Euagoras had previously managed to conquer with only fifty men.⁴⁰ Thus, Euagoras surpassed even the greatest Greek heroes in fame:

οἱ μὲν γὰρ μεθ' ἀπάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος Τροίαν μόνην εἶλον, ὁ δὲ μίαν πόλιν ἔχων πρὸς ἅπασαν τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐπολέμησεν (Isoc. 9.65.6–8, ed. Van Hook)

They,⁴¹ in company with all of Hellas, captured only Troy, but he (sc. Euagoras), although he possessed one city, waged war against all of Asia.

At the end of the speech (Chap. 65–81) Isocrates summarizes Euagoras' accomplishments and virtues in a complimentary tone.

Porphyrogenitus, before describing Basil's acts in war and peace, narrates Basil's career advancement from his arrival at Constantinople, his becoming close with Michael III and Caesar Bardas, his entering into the office of *protostrator* i *parakoimomenos*,⁴² all of which occurred before he became joint ruler (Chap. 9–19), after which there is an *excursus* on the reign and death of Michael III (Chap. 20–27). It is important to note in the chapters in which Basil's career has a meteoric rise that Porphyrogenitus' grandfather got to a high position due to his extraordinary skills, but also led by the providence of God. An example of this used by the author to highlight the acumen and strength of his grandfather is found in the episode concerning Basil and the horse (Chap. 13), which clearly uses Plutarch's description of Alexander taming Bucephalus as a model. Basil was successful in taming Michael's outstanding, wild horse, who once ran

³⁹ Cf. Isoc. 9.52–56. Isocrates mentions the fate of Conon in his fifth speech (cf. Isoc. 5.62–64).

⁴⁰ Cf. Isoc. 9.64.

⁴¹ This is referring to the famous war in Troy, to which Agamemnon went with all his Greek allies.

⁴² *Protostrator* is a term used to indicate a Byzantine court official, referring to the primary (imperial) groom (Ostrogorski 2006: 563). *Parakoimomenos*, also a Byzantine court official, refers to an individual who slept outside the emperor's bedchamber and was most often a person in whom the emperor had the greatest trust (Ostrogorski 2006: 556).

from the emperor, and as no-one had managed to tame him prior to this an amazed Michael admitted him to his service right away.⁴³

In the context of the divine providence which led Basil to power, the dreams of his mother ought to be mentioned, as described in Chapters 8 and 10, which point to Basil's future fame. In the first dream, she dreamt that a large plant grew from her, much like the mother of Cyrus, the Persian king. That plant was full of fruit, with a trunk, branches and leaves of gold, announcing Basil's brilliant future.⁴⁴ The account of a mother's dream is in keeping with Menander's instructions advising that supernatural signs appearing when an emperor is born should be mentioned and compared with either Romulus' or Cyrus' case, citing as an example the dream of Cyrus' mother.⁴⁵ In Basil' biography, maternal dreams, as an indication of his future renown, played a key role in inspiring him to go to Constantinople.⁴⁶

While Basil truly did have distinguishing qualities and abilities, his rise to power was hastened by the murder of Michael III and his uncle, Caesar Bardas.⁴⁷ As he could not keep such events a secret, the author decided to expound upon the circumstances of these murders, directing the responsibility for them away from his grandfather. The digression on Michael's reign and death (Chap. 20–27), representing the topos of comparison to the previous reign, is deliberately placed before the description of Basil's works, even though that topos should be placed near the end of the *basilikos logos*:

μᾶλλον δέ, ἐπεὶ ἐνταῦθα τοῦ λόγου ἐγενόμην, οἶμαι δεῖν τὴν μὲν κατὰ τὸν βασιλέα Βασίλειον ἱστορίαν σχολάσαι ἐπὶ μικρόν, ἄνωθεν δὲ ἀναλαβόντα δηλῶσαι διὰ βραχέων, ὡς οἶόν τε, οἷος ἦν ὁ βίος τῷ βασιλεῖ Μιχαήλ... ἴν' ἐντεῦθεν εἰδέναί λογίζομενος ἔχοι πᾶς ὁ βουλόμενος ὅτι καὶ τὸν Βασίλειον θεία ψῆφος σαφῶς ἦν ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρχεῖν καλέσασα... καὶ ὅτι μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτὸς ὁ Μιχαήλ καθ' ἑαυτοῦ τὰ ξίφη ἠκόνησεν καὶ τὰς τῶν ἀνελόντων αὐτὸν ἐτόνωσεν δεξιᾶς καὶ εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν σφαγὴν διηρέθισεν. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 20.1–11, ed. Ševčenko)

⁴³ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 13.

⁴⁴ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 8.7–14.

⁴⁵ Cf. Men. Rhet. 371.3–10.

⁴⁶ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 8.16–19.

⁴⁷ Cf. Toynbee 1973: 582–598.

In fact, since my account has gotten to this point, I think that I should let the history of Emperor Basil have a respite, and, going back to the very beginning, reveal in as succinct a manner as possible what kind of life Emperor Michael led ... so that anyone who wishes should be able to reflect on this and realize that it was clear that Divine Decree had summoned Basil to power... and that after this it was Michael himself who sharpened the swords against himself, who braced the right hands of his slayers, and who inflamed them to slaughter him.

According to Porphyrogenitus, Michael spent his life and public money on a wanton lifestyle, in which he broke divine, civil and natural laws, acted madly, would get drunk and indulge in vice, and killed innocents; in short, it was his own fault that he incurred rage, and condemned himself to death.⁴⁸ After the detailed descriptions of Michael's reign as emperor, his murder is summarized in one sentence.⁴⁹

The reasoning for Porphyrogenitus' relocation of the topos of comparison of the reign of emperors is that the author wished to bypass a chronological narrative of the events. Michael's murder occurred not long after Basil became co-ruler in 866, a fact which would have aroused suspicion about Basil's involvement in the murder. Instead, the negative aspects of Michael's reign are described, so his death is viewed as a deserving consequence of his impious and perverse lifestyle, while Basil was foreordained by God to become emperor. Porphyrogenitus found the inspiration for his approach in Isocrates' *Euagoras*, in which the comparison between Euagoras and the Persian king Cyrus the Great, also in the form of a digression, is placed before the description of Euagoras' works.⁵⁰ We must highlight that, according to Menander, it is inappropriate to criticize the previous reign; it should be admired, and the current emperor emphasized as perfect. It should also be noted that Porphyrogenitus did not conform with the directions for writers of *basilikos logos*, criticizing Emperor Michael more harshly than would be allowed in such a work.

⁴⁸ Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 20–26.

⁴⁹ Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 27.38–43.

⁵⁰ Such a device, common in prose enkomia, is called *psogos*. Jenkins (1954: 23) defines it as “an invective designed to show how bad things were before the hero came to power, so as to contrast them with the μεταβολή πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον which immediately followed his elevation”.

Following this digression is a description of Basil's work. The writer of *basilikos logos* should first state his subject's achievements in war (πράξεις κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον), followed by those in peace (πράξεις κατὰ τὴν εἰρήνην), described according to four virtues (ἀνδρεία, δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη, φρόνησις).⁵¹ Porphyrogenitus first describes Basil's achievements in peace (Chap. 28–35) by topic (financial politics, judicial reforms, questions of church, law reforms, civil undertakings and portrayals of his children), then achievements in war (Chap. 36–71), only to return to peacetime in Chapters 72–97 (Basil's private life and interests, a digression on good deeds, civil undertakings, missionary work and the spread of Christianity). The section on achievements in war (Chap. 36–71) begins with a digression on military reform (Chap. 36) and is divided geographically into military campaigns to the East (Chap. 37–51) and West (Chap. 52–71), and into tactics in ground warfare (Chap. 37–58) and naval battles (Chap. 59–71). The deeds in times of peace and war are described chronologically, through which the link with Plutarch's description of Alexander's military conquests is evident.

As soon as he began his rule, as with Alexander and Euagoras, Basil found the Empire to be in a poor and disorganized state. He first put into order that which had been neglected during the reign of Michael; that is, the state of finances, laws, the judicial system, and questions of church.⁵² For matters of state he chose the best and most honest people, and strove for justice and equality, the protection of the poor, and to offer help to all:

... καὶ ἰσονομία πᾶσα καὶ δικαιοσύνη ὡσπερ ἀπὸ τινος ὑπερορίου φυγῆς ἐδόκει κατιέναι πρὸς τὸν βίον καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμπολιτεύεσθαι. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 30.42–44, ed. Ševčenko)

Thus equality and justice seemed to be returning to life as if from some banishment, and were resuming their place among men.

Porphyrogenitus sought to depict Basil as a good Christian emperor, adorned with mercy (ἔλεος), justice (δικαιοσύνη) and philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία).⁵³ These are highlighted even in the way Basil handles his en-

⁵¹ Cf. Men. Rhet. 372.25–373.14.

⁵² Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 28–33.

⁵³ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 29.15–18; 72.34–41.

emies and those who conspired against him.⁵⁴ Similar characteristics, such as generosity or justice toward his enemies, were also exhibited by Alexander, even though his character became ever more severe with time.

Chapters 78–94 are dedicated to Basil's numerous civil undertakings. Many sacral buildings in Constantinople were beautified and renovated during his reign, and imperial palaces, porticos, gardens, water repositories and imperial baths, intended for the use of the imperial family, are mentioned. The spread of Christianity, one of the most important duties of every Byzantine emperor, was described in Chapters 95–97. One of Basil's most important successes in that realm was the Christianisation of tribes on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea (Chap. 52–55).

Besides his peacetime success, Basil also distinguished himself in numerous military campaigns through bravery and warcraft. As a true ruler, he took up arm and exposed himself to danger:

... ὡς ἂν τοῖς οἰκειοῖς πόνοις καὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ ἀνδρεία καὶ γενναιότητι
πλατύνοι μὲν τὰ ὄρια τῆς ἀρχῆς, πορρωτέρω δὲ συνώση καὶ
ἀπελάση τὸ δυσμενές... (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 36.3–6, ed.
Ševčenko)

...So that by his own labours, bravery and nobility he might
extend the borders of the Empire, repel and suppress even
further his enemy.

Basil had three great exploits: the conquering of Abara and Spatha (Chap. 37), the conquering of Zapetra, Samosata and other forts (Chap. 40) and the campaign in Syria with his eldest son, Constantine (Chap. 46–49).⁵⁵ Besides the victories achieved under the leadership of Basil, those achieved under the leadership of his generals are also depicted.⁵⁶

Much like Plutarch highlights Alexander's physical strength and his prominence in battle or sieges, similar examples can be found in the depiction of Basil as far as his incredible strength, e.g., in building a bridge during the campaign against Melitene in 837:

⁵⁴ Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 19, 34, 45.

⁵⁵ All the forts mentioned were situated on the territory of what is today central Turkey.

⁵⁶ Cf. Const. Porph, *Vita Bas.*, 41–43, 59–66, 71.

εἶδεν ἄν τις τότε ἰσομέγεθες βάρος οὔπερ ὁ βασιλεὺς ῥαδίως ἐβάσταζεν τρεῖς τῶν στρατιωτῶν ὁμοῦ μόλις διακομίζοντας. (Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 40.13–15, ed. Ševčenko)

At that time one could see that three soldiers together would be barely able to carry a load equal to that which the emperor alone would lift with ease.

Another similarity to the work of Plutarch is found in the omnipresent divine confirmation of the validity and success of military campaigns and conquest. This is confirmed for Alexander through miraculous signs and favourable sacrifices, and for Basil through the providence of God which followed him throughout his life. Besides this, Alexander and Basil often showed themselves to be benevolent and compassionate toward their subordinates, characterized also by their temperance in wealth and physical needs.

Along with these similarities to the work of Plutarch, it is necessary to cite one difference which manifests in the rationale for their conquests. Alexander exhibited a desire for ambition and the aim of reaching the end of the world, as noted by Plutarch.⁵⁷ For Basil, the waging of war was an imperial duty with the aim of fortifying the borders of the empire and offering security to its citizens. Also, there are no examples concerning Basil in which any faults are evident, and it is evident that Porphyrogenitus artfully finds excuses for his military failures or wrong moves.⁵⁸

2.5. Fortune, epilogue and concluding prayer

The final chapters of *Alexander* (Chap. 73–76) are dedicated by Plutarch to the topic of prophetic omens and the foretelling of Alexander's death. While he was advised to stay away from Babylon, he still goes there, where he will await his death, dying at 33 years of age after an eleven-day fever. Plutarch states that Olympias later began to suspect that poison was involved, but that most writers believe that to be contrived.

⁵⁷ Cf. ... καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς ἄχρι τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπεξέφερε τὴν φιλονικίαν ἀήττητον, οὐ μόνον πολεμίους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τόπους καὶ καιροὺς καταβιαζομένην (Plut., *Alex.*, 26.7.5–7), translated as: The high spirit in his (sc. Alexander's) undertakings surpassed his unconquerable ambition, such that it subdued not only his enemies, but also space and time.

⁵⁸ E.g., the failure of the Siege of Tephrike is interpreted as not having been fated for Basil, but rather for his descendant named Constantine (cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 48.24–36).

Isocrates, at the end of the work in Chapters 65–72, in a praising summary of Euagoras' achievements during his reign, speaks of him as of a mortal man who managed to distinguish himself almost as a demi-god through his virtues, strength and prudence. In the final chapters (Chap. 76–81) he reviews the successful completion of the assignment of writing an encomium in prose. He addresses other writers and youths with the advice that they choose dignified and honourable subjects, such as Euagoras, to praise in their works.

The topos of brilliant fortune (τύχη), which follows the emperor throughout his life,⁵⁹ is not treated separately in the *Vita Bas.*, being interwoven throughout. Signs from God and providence constantly followed Basil throughout his life. Instead of an epilogue (ἐπίλογος) in which prosperity achieved by the emperor during his reign should be depicted, in the *Vita Bas.* we find a meritorious summary for Basil, like the one found in Isocrates' *Euagoras*.⁶⁰ The closing prayer (εὐχή⁶¹) for the empire is replaced with the expression of Porphyrogenitus' credit for the creation of Basil's biography, much like Isocrates showed off his own literary contribution with a written encomium.⁶²

3. Conclusion

After an analysis and comparison of the structure and content of the works examined, certain similarities and differences between the depictions of the subjects of praise can be noted. In addition, some parts in Porphyrogenitus' description of the life of Basil can be isolated as evidently influenced by ancient Greek biographical templates. As would be expected, the lives of each of the three subjects are depicted chronologically, from birth to death.

The prologue of the *Vita Bas.* is more like Isocrates' work than Plutarch's due to the elements of praise involved and the naming of its objective. Plutarch's objective was to describe Alexander's character, while Isocrates and Porphyrogenitus sought to depict the life and works of their subjects so that they might serve as a paragon for future generations.

⁵⁹ Cf. Men. Rhet. 376.24–27.

⁶⁰ Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 102.4–16.

⁶¹ Cf. Men. Rhet. 377.28–30.

⁶² Cf. Const. Porph., *Vita Bas.*, 102.20–26.

The *topoi* which refer to the origin and birth of their subjects contain the common element of an ancient and renowned genealogy. As for interesting and miraculous signs which could have appeared during the birth of these renowned characters, Plutarch emphasizes Olympias' dreams before the birth of Alexander, while in the *Vita Bas.* the eagle which appears during Basil's childhood is present; Isocrates does not include this element.

Plutarch is the most detailed in his depiction of physical and character traits and more detailed in his description of Alexander's physical appearance. In the writings of Isocrates and Porphyrogenitus the description of appearance comes down to mentions of beauty and extraordinary physical strength. It is evident that all three subjects had numerous and sublime qualities by which they distinguished themselves and incited the admiration of others and earned the right to rule. A significant difference between the descriptions is evident, however, in the fact that Plutarch describes not only Alexander's virtues, but also his faults, while Euagoras and Basil are depicted as not having any faults.

The subject's deeds are depicted chronologically. In Plutarch's work we follow Alexander's military achievements, while Isocrates begins the depiction of Euagoras' deeds during peacetime, later moving on to military engagements. In the *Vita Bas.*, as a *basilikos logos*, the emperor's wartime deeds should be described first, then his peacetime deeds. The arrangement of the material is different here, as Porphyrogenitus sought to also describe Basil's works chronologically, beginning with achievements made during peacetime, then moving on to military campaigns, and ending the narration with Basil's achievements during peacetime.

The *topos* of the comparison of an emperor's reign with that of his predecessor, which ought to be found near the end of a *basilikos logos*, is placed in the *Vita Bas.* before the description of Basil's achievements, in the form of a digression on the reign and death of Emperor Michael III. While respect and admiration should be shown toward the former emperor in the comparison of their reigns, and the current emperor exalted, Porphyrogenitus depicted Michael in a negative tone. In maligning Michael, the author wished to create a contrast between Michael, as an example of a faulty emperor, and Basil, an exemplary ruler. Thus, Michael deserved death due to his poor actions, while Basil sat on the throne led by the providence of God. We find a similar example in the writings of Isocrates, in which there is a comparison between Euagoras and the Persian king Cyrus placed before the description of Euago-

ras' works, again in the form of a digression, which served as a model for Porphyrogenitus, who used a similar treatment in his own work.

The end of Plutarch's *Alexander* contains a description of Alexander's final days. Isocrates, in his final chapters, once again summarizes all of Euagoras' achievements in a praising tone. The topos of brilliant fortune following the ruler throughout his life is visible in all three works. At the end of the *Vita Bas.* there is a praising summary of Basil instead of an epilogue, like what is found in the writings of Isocrates. Instead of a closing prayer the author's credit for the creation of the work is highlighted, in which a connection to Isocrates is again evident, who also ends his encomium to Euagoras with a review of his successful completion of the task of writing an encomium in prose.

Finally, it may be concluded that both Isocrates and Plutarch, as the representatives of two types of ancient Greek biography, undoubtedly had a strong influence on the *Vita Bas.* The main difference regarding Plutarch's biography lies in the fact that Plutarch's aim is to depict Alexander's character, i.e., both his good characteristics and faults. Porphyrogenitus' aim is to depict Basil as the perfect Byzantine emperor, one without any faults, who will serve as a paragon to his descendants due to his virtue. There are several links that tie the *Vita Bas.* to Isocrates' type of biography. Isocrates' aim is also to depict Euagoras as an ideal ruler without fault, who will serve as an example for future generations. Besides this, the comparison between the reign of Michael III and Basil I is situated in the same place (i.e., before the depiction of Basil's deeds) in which Isocrates compares Euagoras and the Persian king Cyrus; the conclusions of both texts are also similar in that they contain a praising summary of the ruler in which the authors' merit for the creation of the work is highlighted. The *Vita Bas.*, however, differs in that it does not contain the excessively panegyric elements found in Isocrates' encomium.

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SAŽETAK

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REFLEKSIJA STAROGRČKE BIOGRAFIJE U SPISU

VITA BASILII KONSTANTINA VII. PORFIROGENETA

Spis *Vita Basilii*, sastavljen u čast bizantskog cara Bazilija I. (867. – 886.) na nalog njegova unuka Konstantina VII. Porfirogeneta (913. – 959.), u povijesti bizantske književnosti zauzima istaknuto mjesto kao prvi *basilikos logos* (βασιλικὸς λόγος), što se definira kao pohvalna biografija koja glorificira carev život i djela. U dosadašnjoj se povijesti istraživanja isticalo kako je pri njegovu sastavljanju Porfirogenet nadahnuće potražio u dvama modelima antičke grčke biografije, Izokratovu i Plutarhovu. U radu se na temelju analize i međusobne usporedbe strukture i sadržaja Izokratova pohvalnog govora *Euagora*, Plutarhove biografije *Aleksandar* i Porfirogenetova spisa *Vita Bas.* prema toposima karakterističnima za *basilikos logos* (prolog, domovina, podrijetlo, rođenje, fizički izgled, školovanje i odgoj, karakterne osobine, postignuća u ratu i miru, sudbina, usporedba careve vladavine s prethodnom, epilog i završna molitva) istražuje na koji su način Izokratov i Plutarhov tip biografije našli odraz u Bazilijevu životopisu. Cilj je rasvijetliti u kojim je segmentima spisa i u kolikom postotku Porfirogenet nasljedovao antičke uzore, odnosno implementirao vlastite inovacije.

Istraživanje je pokazalo da su Izokrat i Plutarh ostavili podjednako snažan utjecaj na *Vita Bas.* Glavna razlika u odnosu na Plutarhovu biografiju sastoji se u tome što Plutarh prikazuje Aleksandrov karakter, što uključuje i dobre osobine i mane, dok je Porfirogenetova namjera prikazati Bazilija savršenim bizantskim carem bez ikakvih mana, koji će upravo zbog svojih vrлина biti uzor nasljednicima. S Izokratovim pohvalnim govorom, osim što je *Euagora* također prikazan idealnim vladarom bez nedostataka, nalazimo i sličnost u tome što se u *Vita Bas.* usporedba vladavine careva Mihaela III. i Bazilija I. nalazi ispred opisa Bazilijevih postignuća, isto kao što se i u Izokratovu enkomiju usporedba *Euagore* i perzijskog kralja Kira nalazi prije prikaza *Euagorinih* djela, te što oba djela završavaju s pohvalnim sažetkom vladara te isticanjem autorove zasluge za nastanak spisa. Ipak, u *Vita Bas.* se ne uočavaju pretjerano pohvalni elementi koje nalazimo u Izokratovu *Euagori*, pa bi to bila i glavna razlika u odnosu na Izokratov tip biografije.

Ključne riječi: *Konstantin VII. Porfirogenet; Vita Basilii; Bazilije I.; basilikos logos; bizantska književnost; antička grčka biografija*