

Basiliscus the Boy-Emperor

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FOR THE FIFTH AND SIXTH centuries the *Chronicle* of Victor of Tunnuna is a valuable source that deserves close inspection. What may not always be sufficiently appreciated, because Victor is most frequently referred to as an African bishop and because he wrote in Latin, is that he spent a good deal of his later life in Constantinople. His *Chronicle*, which covers the years 444–567, was in fact written in Constantinople and is a generally well-informed source for events in the East during this period.¹

Like so many other African bishops, Victor fell foul of his sovereign Justinian by defending the works condemned by the emperor in 543 in the so-called Three Chapters edict. This resulted in a trying period of internment for Victor in the Mandracion monastery near Carthage, then on the Balearic Islands, then Algimuritana, and finally with his episcopal colleague Theodore of Cebaruscitana in the prison of the Diocletianic fortress behind the governor's palace in Alexandria (*Chron. s.a.* 555.2, p.204). In 556 after a twelve-day trial in the *praetorium* Victor and Theodore were transferred to the Tabennesiote monastery near Canopus, twelve miles east of Alexandria (556.2, p.204). Nine years later, at the request of Justinian himself, Victor and Theodore were summoned from Egypt. At the imperial court they stood their ground in the argument over the 'Three Chapters' with both Justinian and the patriarch Eutychius. As a punishment the two African bishops were placed under house arrest in separate monasteries in Constantinople (565?, p.205). As Victor himself tells us, Theodore died in 567 (p.206) while he himself lived on in monastic exile, where he wrote his chronicle a couple of years later.

The chronicle itself is constructed principally around tracing the changes of occupancy of the major sees—Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem (pp.181–82). For the period of Victor's own lifetime it is particularly full on ecclesiastical politics and

¹ Ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH AA* 11 (Berlin 1894) 178–206. On Victor: Isid. *De vir. ill.* 49, 50, with Schanz/Hosius/Krüger, *Ges.röm.Lit.* IV.2 (Munich 1920) 112–13, and Manitius, *Ges.lat.Lit.Mittel.* I (Munich 1911) 215. Its affinity with Theodore Lector's *HE* is well illustrated in G. Hansen, *Theodoros Anagnostes, Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin 1971).

local Constantinopolitan events. Of special interest to Victor, however, are the emerging persecutions in Africa, first by the Vandals and later by those supporting imperial policy on the ‘Three Chapters’.² Although the author indicates some sense of community among the African exiles in Constantinople (479.1, p.189), he was clearly influenced by his Greek environment. Several topographic and other phrases in the chronicle reflect this.³

There is one entry in an otherwise relatively careful and accurate work which appears preposterous at first sight. Under the year 475 Victor recounts a unique version of the last days of the young emperor Leo II, the son of Zeno and Ariadne, grandson of the emperor Leo I and his wife Verina. The irreproachable facts are that the young Leo was proclaimed Caesar in October 473 and later Augustus and ruled with his grandfather until the death of Leo I on 18 January 474. For three weeks the young Leo ruled alone until on 9 February he proclaimed emperor his father Zeno.⁴ A few months later, in November 474, Leo II died a natural death at the age of just seven years.⁵ Victor’s account, however, is very different. According to him Leo II did not die in 474. Instead, fearing a threat to his life from his own father, the boy’s mother Ariadne substituted another boy, a look-alike, in his place and smuggled Leo away to a local church. Victor concludes by noting that this Leo lived until the reign of Justinian:

Zeno imperator quaerens Leonem Aug. proprium filium occidere et eius imperium pervadere, alium pro eo eius uxor Ariadne Augusta similem puerum ad mortem obtulit et Leonem eundem Augustum occulte totondit eumque clericum unius ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae fecit. qui Leo usque ad Iustianiani tempora principis vixit (475.1, p.188).

² See *s.aa.* 464, 466 (p.187), 479.1 (189), 523.2 (197), 550.1–2 (202), 552.1–2 (202f), 553.1, 554.2 (203), 555.1–2, 556.1–2, 557.1–2, 558 (204), 565?, 566?.1 (205), 567?.2 (206).

³ Greek (especially ecclesiastical) expressions abound: *Constantinopoleos* (492.2 [p. 192]), *eisiensin* (?) (480 [190]), *podagros* (490.2 [191]), *idiotis* (560 [194]), *prasini* (566.2 [205]; 513 [195]), *venetorum* (513 [195]), *syncellus* (517.2 [196]), *hegumenus* (553.1 [203]; 557.1 [204]); some of these are of course not uncommon in Latin. There are also special locational designations given in Greek: *ἀπὸ τῆς Χαλκῆς quod vocant* (513 [195]), *intra palatium loco, quod δέλφακα Graeco vocabulo dicunt* (523.3 [197]).

⁴ For sources: *PLRE* II 665 *s.v.* “Leo 7.” See also J. B. BURY, *History of the Later Roman Empire* I (London 1923: hereafter ‘Bury’) 322–23, and E. STEIN, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* I (Paris 1959: hereafter ‘Stein’) 361–62.

⁵ There is no hint in the sources of any suspicious circumstances surrounding Leo’s death. We therefore have no option but to believe that he perished through illness. The relevant sources are *V.Dan.styl.* 67 (*ἐπορεύθη ἐν τῇ γῆ τῶν πατέρων*); *Jo. Mal.* 376.17 (*ἠρρώσθησε καὶ τελευτᾷ*); *Evagr. HE* 2.17 (*τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ παιδός*); *Thphn. A.M.* 5966 (120.7 de Boor: *νόσῳ τελευτᾷ*); *Zonaras* 14.2 (*ἐπαπῆλθε τῷ πάπῳ*); *Cedrenus* I 615.7 (*ἐτελεύτησε*); *Niceph. Call. HE* 15.29 (*τὸν βίον ἀπολιπόντος*).

What is odd is that this story should appear only in a chronicle of considerable quality and in the work of a man who himself lived in a monastery at Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. However it is interpreted, this looks like an authentic story repeated in the monasteries and perhaps in the streets in Constantinople, and therefore something the chronicler knew at first hand. In other words, irrespective of the veracity of this account Victor himself saw reason to believe it. The fact that he reported it in his chronicle means that he must have trusted his source sufficiently to be convinced that the former emperor living as a cleric in the capital was indeed the original and genuine Leo II whom everyone thought had died and been buried in November 474. Furthermore, the position of the story under 475 probably indicates that Victor's source located the event in the indiction 1 September 474 to 31 August 475, and thus, as so often happens with the overlapping dating systems in early Byzantine sources, it appeared under the next consulate (475) in a chronicle using consular dating only. Operating on the assumption that Victor's story at least requires explanation, this article seeks to suggest what lies behind it.

I

After the death of his son Leo II in November 474 Zeno ruled alone. The animosity against the new Isaurian emperor that had occasionally surfaced beforehand always threatened to break out again. In particular the emperor's mother-in-law Verina, the influential wife of Leo I who clearly enjoyed the rôle of empress, schemed to depose Zeno. She planned to put on the throne her lover Patricius and in order to effect this secured the support of her brother Basiliscus, a leading general. The whole plan backfired badly. Basiliscus fancied the throne for himself, and so Patricius met a sticky end and Verina was completely outmanoeuvred. By now Zeno and his family had fled and returned to Isauria, where they began to plan a return to Constantinople, now encouraged by the resentful Verina.⁶

In the meantime the régime of Basiliscus had brought an extraordinary character into the limelight—Armatus. Extant records depict Armatus as a capricious and effeminate fool, but this is clearly only part of the story. Although prone to prancing around the city dressed up as Achilles in order to attract attention, Armatus enjoyed a certain

⁶ Bury 391–94, Stein 363–64.

amount of influence as the secret lover of the new empress, Zenonis. In any case he was a nephew of Basiliscus, and so it was no surprise that he should become one of the new emperor's key generals.⁷

When the tide began to turn against the actively monophysite emperor Basiliscus, men of influence in the capital decided that the rule of the Isaurian Zeno was preferable after all and that his return should be encouraged. So when news arrived of Zeno's return journey from Isauria, Basiliscus despatched Armatus as head of an army to block Zeno. Basiliscus lost out, however. Armatus and Zeno did a private deal whereby in return for supporting Zeno's resumption of the throne Armatus would become a permanent *magister militum praesentalis*, with his young son, also (unfortunately for him) called Basiliscus, to be crowned Caesar with the right of succession upon Zeno's death.⁸

The régime of the emperor Basiliscus was now isolated and virtually defenceless. Armatus was duly appointed *magister militum* by Zeno, and on the way back to Constantinople the young Basiliscus, son of Armatus who had presumably been travelling with his father, was crowned Caesar in the imperial palace at Nicaea, doubtless with all the usual ritual and splendour.⁹ When Zeno and his young Caesar returned by ship to Constantinople they apparently met with no opposition. The elder Basiliscus, his wife and family, must have realized the futility of resistance and took refuge in a church. They were offered their lives in return for submitting to exile, but the Phrygian castle in which they were eventually confined was sealed up and became their tomb. They all starved to death.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in a customary but vital gesture for reinforcing legitimacy, Zeno and the boy-emperor presided together at games in the hippodrome at Constantinople, honouring the victorious charioteers (Thphn. A.M. 5969 [125.4–5 de Boor]).

Once the court of Zeno had re-established itself in the imperial capital, in the latter part of 476, the emperor began to think through the consequences of recent events. Either on his own or under the sway of others Zeno came to the conclusion that the support of Armatus was extremely fragile. Had Armatus not given his word to a

⁷ *PLRE* II 148–49 s.v. "Armatus."

⁸ Evagr. *HE* 3.24; Procop. *Wars* 3.7.20; Jo. Mal. 382.1ff; Candidus fr.1 (*FHG* IV 136 = Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 79); Thphn. A.M. 5969 (124.18–24 de Boor).

⁹ Evagr. *HE* 3.24 (Nicaea); Procop. *Wars* 3.7.23; Zonaras 14.53. In general: *PLRE* II 211–12 s.v. "Basiliscus *qui et* Leo 1" and L. Hartmann, *RE* 3 (1899) 102 s.v. "Basiliscus 3."

¹⁰ *PLRE* II 214 s.v. "Fl. Basiliscus 2."

previous emperor, only to betray him immediately he spied an opportunity for further advancement? Now that his son was Caesar with his guaranteed right of succession, might Armatus not try to hasten his expectations? Being subject to this kind of pressure and anguish Zeno resolved on decisive action. To begin with he had Armatus done to death.¹¹ What to do about the boy-emperor was a more delicate problem. Since he was so young, his life was spared and he was enrolled as a ‘reader’ in a church at Blachernai on the Golden Horn.¹² This was a safe and usual course of action with recent precedents. Avitus had become bishop of Placentia after being deposed as western emperor in 456, while in 474 Glycerius lost the western throne to receive the Dalmatian see of Salona.¹³ Furthermore, it was not uncommon for readers to be so young, at least not in the fifth century.¹⁴

Our sole evidence for the fact that Basiliscus was enrolled among the readers specifically at Blachernai comes from the contemporary historian Candidus, whose work is known almost exclusively through Photius’ summary.¹⁵ The ninth-century chronicler Theophanes, clearly drawing on a reliable source (perhaps a fuller version of Malalas than we now possess), adds that it was Zeno’s wife, the empress Ariadne, who took special care to protect the young Basiliscus because he was a relative of hers, his father Armatus and Ariadne being cousins.¹⁶

II

Exactly how long Basiliscus remained as a cleric at Blachernai is not known. What is known, however, is that he later became bishop of Cyzicus and is reported to have proven a very capable shepherd of his flock.¹⁷ In the light of these facts it is a justifiable hypothesis that

¹¹ *PLRE* II 149.

¹² Candidus fr.1; Procop. *Wars* 3.7.23; Jo. Mal. 382.7; Thphn. A.M. 5969 (125.10–11 de Boor). Basiliscus was probably confined to the Church of the Virgin at Blachernai built by the empress Pulcheria and in which Leo I had recently deposited the Virgin’s girdle (R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’empire byzantin* III [Paris 1953] 169–79).

¹³ *PLRE* II 198 s.v. “Eparchius Avitus 5,” 514 s.v. “Glycerius.”

¹⁴ H. Leclercq, *DAFL* 8.2 (1929) 241ff s.v. “Lecteur.”

¹⁵ Candidus fr.1; Evagr. *HE* 3.24 *παῖδα ἀντὶ Καίσαρος ἱερέα δεινύσιν*; Zonaras 14.2 *πεποίηκε κληρικόν*; Thphn. A.M. 5969 (125.11 de Boor) *ἐχειροτόνησεν ἀναγνώστην*.

¹⁶ Thphn. A.M. 5969 (125.12 de Boor); Evagr. *HE* 3.24.

¹⁷ Jo. Mal. 382.8–9 *ἐχειροτόνησεν ἐπίσκοπον ἐν Κυζίκῳ τῇ μητροπόλει τῆς Ἑλλησπόντου*; Evagr. *HE* 3.24 *ὄς ὕστερον καὶ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης ἠξίωτο*; Thphn. A.M. 5969 (125.13 de Boor) *ὄς μετὰ ταῦτα Κυζίκου ἐπισκόπησεν ἀρίστα*.

it was some two or three decades after 477, if not later still, that Basiliscus was of sufficient maturity to take charge of what was an important see and perform his task competently.¹⁸ If Basiliscus was born around 470 (he cannot have been born much earlier) he would only have become a bishop early in the sixth century aged (say) 30–40 years. It is at this point that our certain evidence dries up. We do not know if Basiliscus died as bishop of Cyzicus, or (if so) when. By the same token, however, there is no reason not to expect that Basiliscus lived into the reign of Justinian, either as bishop of Cyzicus or otherwise. When Justinian came to the throne in 527 Basiliscus would have been no more than in his mid 50's, if he was still alive. Moreover, a former emperor was bound to remain a celebrity for the rest of his life and as a cleric Basiliscus did not pose a threat to his successor emperors. So it is easy to understand how he would continue to attract local fame and attention, as imperial exiles always have done.

This brings us back to the curious story concerning the fate of the young Leo II which we find in the *Chronicle* of Victor. The actual fact of the boy-emperor who eventually became bishop of Cyzicus bears striking resemblance to the different elements that constitute Victor's version of the death of Leo II. Here is someone who, like young Basiliscus, had been emperor when only a little boy but had been spirited away to a Constantinopolitan church by his mother Ariadne who wished to shield him, in exactly the same way that Basiliscus had been protected by Ariadne. The coincidence is suspicious. It suggests that in the reign of Justinian—and in the earlier part, for Victor implies that he had long since passed away—there was a former boy-emperor still living as a cleric in the Roman East.¹⁹ If this information is accurate (and there is no worthwhile reason to reject it), then that cleric can *only* have been Basiliscus, the Caesar in 476/7 who was installed as a reader in a church at Blachernai after the liquidation of his own father at the hands of Zeno Augustus. No other emperors or pretenders from the fifth-century East lived to the reign of Justinian, let alone boy-emperors.

If, as I propose, we can safely accept the historical kernel of Victor's story, then the real problem is to explain how Victor came to

¹⁸ That Basiliscus' tenure of the see of Cyzicus was considerably later is stated specifically in Niceph. Call. *HE* (16.8 πολλῶν δὲ ὕστερον οὗτος καὶ τὴν Κυζικηνῶν ἐκκλησίαν ἐποίησαν ἐρίστω), which generally made good use of now lost fifth-century sources.

¹⁹ There can be no doubt that Victor understood the former emperor to be an ordained member of the regular church clergy (*clericum unius ecclesiae*) rather than merely an unordained monk. Victor's *totondit* indicates clerical rather than monastic status; see A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout 1954) s.v. "tondeo," cf. "tonsuro." I am grateful to the journal's reader for this point.

consider that this Byzantine cleric was in fact Leo II, the son of Ariadne who had died of natural causes in 474 at the age of seven. Above all, it raises the possibility that as Caesar Basiliscus too was known as 'Leo'. This suggestion is not as gratuitous as it may appear, and if true, it would provide the most satisfactory solution thus far to a notorious riddle of late Roman numismatics.

III

Needless to say, the rapid and uncertain changes on the eastern throne in the period 473 to 477 presented moneyers with a constant demand for new issues, and each new development is clearly reflected in the coinage. When Leo I raised his grandson to the throne, the *solidi* of Constantinople took on a new legend SALUS REIPUBLICAE to express the expectation of a smooth succession. Both Leos were depicted enthroned on the reverse of the coinage. After his grandfather's death Leo II ruled for three weeks, and it seems that in this brief period belongs a *solidus* depicting the emperor standing on a dais. When Zeno was crowned by his son in February 474 the coinage displayed the novel feature of actually naming both emperors on the obverse: DN LEO ET ZENO PP AUG. After Leo's death the coinage continued in Zeno's name until his flight to Isauria. When Basiliscus ascended the throne he ruled alone at first, although there are no coins extant from this period, then proclaimed his son Marcus as co-emperor, whence coins with the names BASILISCI ET MARC P AUG. The coins of Basiliscus and Marcus bear two reverse types: enthroned emperors and cross with victory.²⁰

It is with the immediately subsequent coinage that a major problem arises. From precisely this period there survive Constantinopolitan *solidi* such as the following (Carson's description):

Obverse: DN ZENO ET LEO NOV CAES. Bust, pearl-diademed, helmeted, cuirassed, facing, holding spear over shoulder in right hand and shield in left.

Reverse: VICTORIA AUGGZ. Victory standing left, holding long cross in right hand. (4.42 gm)

In addition, there are *tremisses* such as this:

²⁰ For all the details: P. V. Hill, J. P. C. Kent, R. A. G. Carson, *Late Roman Bronze Coinage* (London 1960), and R. A. G. Carson, *Principal Coins of the Romans III* (London 1981).

Obverse: DN ZENO ET LIEO NOV CAES. Bust, pearl-diademed, draped, cuirassed, right.

Reverse: VICTORIA AUGUSTORUM. Victory standing facing, head left, holding wreath in right hand, and cross and globe in left. (4.40 gm)²¹

Several attempts have been made to establish the precise circumstances for these issues bearing the names DN ZENO ET LEO NOV CAES. Earlier attributions to the joint reign of Leo II and Zeno were based on a misreading of western *solidi* of Zeno. More recently, Ulrich-Bansa suggested that this coinage reflects an otherwise unrecorded stage in the recognition of Zeno, that Zeno and Leo II were first recognised as Caesars—whence this coinage—and later Leo II alone was elevated to Augustus.²² Subsequent research, however, has established that the DN ZENO ET LEO NOV CAES coinage must immediately post-date that of Basiliscus and Marcus, for the simple reason that several of the *tremisses* were struck from a die that had previously borne the names of Basiliscus and Marcus. Further, the reverses display close affinity with those of Basiliscus and Marcus. There is therefore good reason for the opinion of Kent that “Clearly, Zeno and Leo . . . were either contemporary with, or immediately followed, the reign of Basiliscus and Marcus.”²³

In the absence of any coins from the reign of Zeno and the young Basiliscus in 476/7 it is therefore attractive to consign the DN ZENO ET LEO NOV CAES coins to this period, which would mean that Basiliscus must have been known, while emperor, as Leo. This solution was proposed long ago by Marchant²⁴ and was in fact accepted by Stein,²⁵ but (to judge from recent catalogues) it seems to have been put aside in favour of an attribution tentatively advanced by Kent, namely that Zeno and Leo were otherwise anonymous sons of Basiliscus who were made Caesars while their father and other brother Marcus were Augusti. Kent’s argument deserves closer inspection. On the positive side he asserts “We know that Basiliscus had other children besides Marcus, though their names have not been preserved. It seems at least possible that on the promotion of Marcus to the rank of Augustus, Basiliscus proclaimed as Caesars two younger

²¹ Carson (*supra* n.20) 100 nos. 1639, 1640.

²² O. Ulrich-Bansa, “Note sulle monete dell’ imperatore Leone II,” *Numismatica* 8 (1942) 8.

²³ J. P. C. Kent, “Zeno and Leo, the Most Noble Caesars,” *NC* VI.19 (1959) 96.

²⁴ *Lettres du Baron Marchant sur la numismatique et l’histoire* (Paris 1851) 128, cited in Kent (*supra* n.23) 95.

²⁵ II 8–9; also, implicitly, by *PLRE* II 211–12.

sons, and that we should regard the coinage of Zeno and Leo Caesars as complementary and parallel, and not consecutive to that of Basiliscus and Marcus Augusti. I claim no documentary support for my hypothesis, but Zeno and Leo are likely names for sons of the husband of Zenonis and brother of Leo I's widow."²⁶

Admittedly Kent is reticent about this suggestion; as well he might. It is dangerous enough (even for this period) to assume a development for which there is no literary evidence at all. In fact we have no way of knowing whether any of Basiliscus' other children were even male, let alone Caesars.²⁷ There is an additional numismatic difficulty in that if the Zeno and Leo coins were designed to be contemporary with those of Basiliscus and Marcus then it is odd that the original dies should have been struck out. Kent's hypothesis is, at best, inconclusive.

Still, what appears to have driven Kent to this hypothesis was actually a suspicion about the more compelling attribution of the coins to the short joint reign of Zeno Augustus and Basiliscus Caesar in 476/7. To Kent the title CAES constituted a real problem: it appears to apply to both emperors, yet Zeno was Augustus; on the other hand, if we assume that CAES applies to Leo only, then the omission of Zeno's title would be quite unusual. Yet, whichever way we look at it, this *is* an unusual issue. In the first place, it was the first time since Julian (361–363) that a Caesar figured on the coinage at all. So it is perhaps not so surprising if, in the process of accommodating both an Augustus and a Caesar on the one coin, the title of the former should get left off. It seems to me quite acceptable that CAES should be singular and refer only to Leo.²⁸

On balance the numismatic evidence, although not absolutely definitive, points to the conclusion that the DN ZENO ET LEO NOV

²⁶ Kent (*supra* n.23) 96.

²⁷ The sources speak only of 'children': Candidus fr.1 τέκνοις; Evagr. *HE* 3.8 τέκνοις; Jo. Mal. 380.16 τέκνα; Thphn. A.M. 5969 (124.31 de Boor) τέκνα; Zonaras 14.2 παιδων; Cedrenus I 617.3 τέκνοις; Niceph. Call. *HE* 16.8 τέκνοις. This suggests that when the Latin sources (Anon. Val. 9.43 and Vict. Tonn. 476 p.189) mention *filiis* they can only mean 'children' in general.

²⁸ So far as I can discover, coins bearing more than one Caesar always indicate the plural in the legend: e.g. CRISPUS ET CONSTANTINUS NOBB CC COSS II, a gold medallion from Sirmium A.D. 321 (*RIC* VII 470); DD NN LICINIUS ET CONSTANTINUS NOB CAESS, a copper *folles* from Nicomedia A.D. 320 (*RIC* VII 606). There does not appear to be any known coin of multiple Caesars with a singular legend (DN, CAES). On the other hand, it was not unusual for the title AVG to be omitted from legends. It was certainly common practice for coins of both Leo I and Zeno. In the light of these facts it seems that this novel juxtaposition of Augustus and Caesar on a coin was handled simply by adding ET LEO NOV CAES to the normal legend DN ZENO.

CAES coinage denotes the joint reign of Zeno and Basiliscus in 476/7 and that Basiliscus must have reigned under the name of Leo.²⁹ If this is so, it means that within three years there had been two boy emperors known as 'Leo'. No wonder conflation and confusion crept into subsequent accounts of these years.

IV

That Basiliscus the boy-emperor was known as Leo provides the key to unlocking the mysterious story of Victor of Tunnuna. That is, Victor (or the tradition he was following) knew that Zeno's son Leo II died naturally in 474, yet here was someone still alive in the time of Justinian who had once been a boy-emperor known as Leo. Assuming this could only be Leo II, Victor (or the tradition) was forced to explain how this came to be so. Since, as indicated by Theophanes, it was also known that Ariadne was responsible for having this particular young emperor Leo confined to the protection of a church at Blachernai, then this must mean that Leo II did not die after all in 474. Instead it must have been some other young boy substituted by Ariadne who died then. If this were the case, then it probably meant that Leo II's safety was endangered. Perhaps his own father preferred to see him dead. Thus the story grew.

Having largely forgotten about the brief reign of the young Basiliscus (known as Leo) as Zeno's Caesar in 476/7, Byzantine popular opinion invented a story to explain the continuing presence of an erstwhile boy-emperor named Leo, and this is what we find reflected in Victor. Faced with this fact, the chronicler (or the tradition) could not but doubt the traditional and perfectly reliable facts about the death of Leo II and so was obliged to explain the situation as best he could. When all is said and done, this story is not an obscure and wilful invention which can be used to impugn the integrity of Victor, but is capable of reasonable explanation. If this argument is acceptable, then we have learnt something new from Victor's story: confirmation that Basiliscus ruled in the name of Leo and that he lived into the reign of Justinian, possibly retiring to a Constantinopolitan church (at Blachernai?) from the see of Cyzicus. On the other hand, even if the historicity of Victor's account were to be completely

²⁹ Stein II 8: "Il semble qu'à parler de ce moment [inauguration] l'enfant s'appela Léon, parce que le nom qu'il avait porté jusque-là évoquait des souvenirs désagréables."

rejected, it still demands explanation. Victor's work clearly suggests that he was no indiscriminate chronicler with a penchant for fanciful fictions.³⁰

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³⁰ I am grateful to F. M. Clover and C. E. V. Nixon for rescuing me from several oversimplifications.