

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

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Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (lived 905–59 CE) was a Byzantine emperor of the Macedonian Dynasty (crowned co-emperor probably May 15, 908). His nickname alludes to the purple room of the imperial palace where legitimate children of reigning emperors were born. Constantine was the son of Leo VI and his concubine Zoe Karbonopsina, whom Leo married as his fourth wife shortly after the birth of Constantine. This illegal union provoked the controversy known as the Tetragamy of Leo VI (Oikonomidès 1963: 46–52). In 912 Leo died and was succeeded by his brother Alexander, with Constantine VII as the nominal co-emperor. Alexander deposed Euthymios, the patriarch who had condoned Leo's fourth marriage, and reinstated Nicholas Mystikos, the patriarch who had been deposed by Leo for condemning the marriage. The implication of this act was that the marriage was illegal and that Constantine was illegitimate. Nevertheless, on the sudden death of Alexander on June 6, 913, Constantine succeeded to the throne at the age of seven. His reign was interrupted by the rule of the admiral of the imperial fleet and usurper Romanos I Lecapenos (920–44), who married his daughter Helena to Constantine in May 919 and was crowned on December 17, 920. Romanos was dethroned by his own sons Stephen and Constantine on December 20, 944 and exiled to the island Protos. On January 27, 945 Constantine VII expelled Romanos' sons and began his personal rule (Toynbee 1973: 1–14). Constantine died in November 959 and was succeeded by his son, Romanos II (959–63).

Constantine's main political interests lay in legal reform and the fair redistribution of land among the peasants; he proclaimed a complete rupture with his father-in-law's

policy. His army had little success against the encroaching Arabs. The expedition to Crete in 949 was a failure, and although in 952 Constantine conquered Germanikeia and crossed the Euphrates, the following year the Arab Amir Saif ad-Dawla seized that city and entered imperial territory. Constantine maintained intense diplomatic relationships with foreign courts, including the Caliph of Cordoba Abd ar-Rahman III and Otto I of Germany. Despite the baptism and the visit of Olga, princess of the Kievan Rus', to Constantinople in the autumn of 957, Constantine VII was unable to establish a strong alliance with the Rus' (Ripoche 1977: 1–12).

Constantine is significant for his abilities as a writer and a scholar. He is recorded as a natural-born scholar and a competent self-taught painter (Theophanes Continuatus 6. 22), with interests in encyclopedic and historical writings. He worked on, or had commissioned, several books on the empire's administrative system and foreign relations: *De administrando imperio*, *De thematibus*, *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* (see Toynbee 1973: 575–605), the latter describing the ceremonies mentioned later in a more negative light by the western envoy, Liutprand of Cremona. The encyclopedia of ancient and medieval historians preserves many otherwise lost authors (see *CONSTANTINIAN EXCERPTS*).

An ivory plaque in Moscow (State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts) of the tenth century portrays Constantine crowned by Christ. On an icon at Sinai, also from the tenth century and illustrating the story of the Mandylion (brought in triumph to Constantinople in 944), the facial features of king Abgar are those of Constantine.

SEE ALSO: Byzantium, political structure; Dynasty, idea of, Byzantine; Legal literature, Byzantine; Legislation, Byzantine; Letters, letter writing, Byzantine; Literature and poetry, Byzantine; Marriage, Byzantine.

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