

XI METAPHIS.

NICEPHOROS II PHOCAS

— A GREAT SOLDIER, A MINOR RULER? —

By DOROS ALASTOS

A thousand years ago, on 10 December 969, the Emperor Nicephoros Phocas ^{of Byzantium} was murdered by a group of high ranking officers. He was fifty-seven years old.

Those who plotted and carried out the murder were famous ~~people~~ ^{men} and ^{all were} close to the Emperor. Chief among them was John Tzimiskes. He was a nephew of Nicephoros. He succeeded him ~~on~~ the throne and proved himself eminently successful both as statesman and administrator. The other was Bourtsis a distinguished military commander who achieved fame fighting under Nicephoros. The Empress Theophano, ex-tavern girl (she should now be dignified with the professional appellation of actress) and reputedly very beautiful, was piny to the conspiracy.

Theophano had already lost one husband — Lecapenos II, son of Constantine Porphyrogennetos, a fun-loving, spendthrift, impressive ^{looking} young man, yet a very able ruler, in his middle twenties. Rumour had it that she poisoned her young husband because of her love for the veteran soldier, Nicephoros. Undoubtedly, the second murder ~~made~~ ^{gave} ^{credibility to} the rumours about the first. ~~appear more credible~~. However, even a cursory look at the evidence is sufficient to ~~dispel them~~ ^{dispel them} ~~to destroy the accusation for~~ ^{two} very simple reasons: — a) Lecapenos II, died when Theophano was in bed with a two-day old child; b) it was by no means certain that Nicephoros would have made the throne for Theophano to have both her cake and eat it. In fact the strongest candidate for the throne ^{in the absence of grown up heirs,} was Lecapenos's chief minister, Joseph Bringas. ^{It was known that} ~~the~~ young Lecapenos was very fond of the old and successful ^{commander of his armies} ~~general~~. But Bringas held power and, further more, he ^{happened to be} ~~was~~ on the spot. He was efficient, purposeful and unscrupulous.

Nicephoros was popular. This Bringas feared. He set about

to destroy both the man and his fame. He accused Nicephoros of plotting to usurp the throne. ^{It is probable that,} perhaps, at the same time he ^{began to} circulate ~~the~~ rumours about the alleged poisoning of Iecapenos with Theophano and Nicephoros ^{singled out as} the culprits. His policy must have met with some success ^{for he proceeded to} ~~because he had~~ make arrangements to have Nicephoros arrested and blinded. ^{It was standard Byzantine practice for rendering a man harmless.}

Nicephoros who was then campaigning on the frontiers, got wind of what was afoot and asked the Patriarch of Constantinople and other dignitaries for their protection. Such was his ^{reputation} ~~name~~ as a man of integrity that the people he ~~was~~ approached sided with him and rejected the accusations. Bringas's "legalistic" murder-plan miscarried.

Thwarted, Bringas did not give up. He resorted to conspiracy. He approached Tzimiskes the ablest general on Nicephoros's staff and offered him the supreme command of the army — the ^{very} ~~army~~ ^{which} Nicephoros ^{had} fashioned into a powerful, offensive instrument — provided he arrested his chief and sent him in chains to Constantinople.

The choice of Tzimiskes for the task is interesting. Unfortunately, we know very little as to why. Did Bringas simply gamble, or did he have a clear understanding of what the rising general was capable of ^{in order} ~~to~~ to achieve the object of his ambitions? The future showed that Bringas knew well or perceived clearly, the character of his would be accomplice. But he was premature!

Tzimiskes, somehow, ^{thought} ~~from~~ becoming a hired assassin. He harboured, ^{perhaps,} greater ambitions and larger designs. He wouldn't destroy a relative, even for state reasons, ⁱⁿ ~~in order~~ ^{simply} to smooth someone else's path to supreme power who had no legitimate right to it. Not only he did not do ^{what} the prime-minister's ~~bid~~ wanted but took the letter to Nicephoros and asked him there and then, to assume the title of Emperor. Nicephoros refused. He was a soldier, not a courtier. And who knows, he might have had other dreams! Two years earlier, his friend and confessor St. Athanasius the Athonite, established the first monastic foundation on a coenobitic basis ^{on} ~~near~~ ^{the} ~~mount~~ Athos peninsula which became

known as the Great ^{LAVRA} Laura. He drew up ~~the~~ rules of the monastery and reserved a cell for Nicephoros.

Monasticism was then an "in" phenomenon. It satisfied a spiritual need, it provided ^{for} ~~some people~~ ^{some people} with a dignified opting out from the responsibilities and stresses of social and of public life and ^{for} others a quiet and uncomplicated retirement. Nicephoros was a religious ^{man} ~~Perhaps~~ ^{Did he look} forward after the toils of a hundred campaigns, to a few years of peace in a monastery? ^{It is highly probable.} ~~Consequently~~ ^{In any case} his refusal to accept the crown appears to have been genuine. It flows logically ^{from} what we know of the man.

Nicephoros must have persisted in his refusal. At last, it is said, John Tzimiskes and Romanos Kourkouas ^{ouas} son of a famous general and himself famous, entered Nicephoros's tent drew their swords and threatened to kill him ^{on the spot} ~~there and then~~ if he persisted in his refusal. It was pointed out to him, with the convincing ^{force} of an argument ~~aimed~~ ^{aiming} by two swords at his throat that the only way to protect himself, his friends and the army from Bringas and the other imperial hangers-on, was by making himself Emperor.

Nicephoros yielded. Still, the imperial crown was a long way off. ^{Ultimately} ~~it~~ ^{all} depended on the mood of the capital and there Bringas was in complete control. Speed was essential. Nicephoros marched at once from Caesaria in the interior of Asia Minor, to Chryso polis modern Scoutari, opposite Constantinople where he encamped. The presence of a victorious army so near the capital proved decisive. People and palace guards rose up in favour of the army. All opposition collapsed and Nicephoros was invited to enter the capital. He was crowned in Hagia Sophia on ¹⁶ August ~~#~~ 963.

^{It is grimly ironic} ~~The irony of it is~~ ² that the ~~same~~ sword ~~which~~ of Tzimiskes which propelled Nicephoros to the imperial throne was the ~~same~~ one ^{which} ~~that~~ ^{was} to strike him down six years and four months later.

Along with the imperial crown, though not coincidentally, came Theophano young, beautiful and aberrant. Nicephoros was now Emperor, husband of the Empress and step-father to the legitimate future rulers of Byzantium. He was already a legend. ~~because of his military prowess~~ ^{the chroniclers inform us.} his soldiers were devoted to him; they fought and died for the love of him. ~~But~~ ^{now} he was supreme ruler with hardly any political experience to back him up, ^{living} in a palace ~~surrounded~~ surrounded by smooth courtiers, eunuchs and bigots whom he had to instruct and ^{get to know how to} handle, and married to a young and, doubtlessly, demanding wife. He became, all of a sudden, very vulnerable. The sharp transition from camp to court with so many problems, political, military, economic and administrative crowding ~~created~~ ^{created} many difficulties for a man getting on in years and set in his ways. In addition, Nicephoros encountered strong opposition from a totally unexpected quarter - the church. Why ~~was~~ that was is difficult to know though, as is to be shown later, easy to understand.

The light of history beats down hard on Nicephoros Phocas. It reveals ~~very~~ little. We see, occasionally, a clear outline, some sharp features and areas of decisive action. The essential man escapes us. Even, G. Schlumberger's courageous study, Un Empereur Byzantin au Xe Siècle: Nicéphore Phocas (Paris 1890) does not fully succeed in unwrapping the various layers of denigration and of patronising obloquy with which he has been covered like a mummy.

For one thing, Nicephoros had never had what ~~can~~ ^{can} be deserved as, "a good press". He ~~was not~~ ^{did not prove} a hit with the intellectuals. The chroniclers did not like him. Nothing monstrous or downright evil can be attributed to him and ^{made to} stick in view of what is known about him, ~~and~~ ^{there is} yet ~~obspiration~~ ^{obspiration} though unauthenticated. He has been called mean, pompous, cruel, impious and, in ~~contemporary~~ ^{modern} social terms, he has been labelled reactionary.

^{Bishop} Liutprand bishop of Cremona is often quoted by historians. ^{The} ~~he~~ is invariably ~~is~~ ^{is} accused of ^{spite, falsehood,} unreliability and gullibility. But quoted he is, evidently on the principle that there ^{can} never ^{be} smoke without fire. He may be ~~a~~ liar but what he says cannot be entirely

without some foundation in fact! A valid enough argument. But what ~~follows~~ ^{follows}? The "textual" accusation, even if it is ^{thought} generally accepted ~~to be invalid~~ is maintained, ^{it is} quoted and its implications hang on.

Liutprand was the envoy of the West Roman Emperor, Otto the Great. He visited Constantinople to arrange for the marriage of Otto to Nicephoros's ^{step} and Theophano's daughter. He ^{failed in his mission} ~~succeeded in this~~. Because of this, ~~perhaps~~, ^{what follows being the cause} ~~nothing else~~ pleased him; ^{Constantinople} he possessed ~~the~~ determination to decay; it was the barbarian's envious rejection of civilisation. He found Nicephoros ^{avaricious} ~~mean~~ and ^{brutally} ungenerous towards his ^{prospective} ~~future~~ son-in-law. He would not give Otto ^{the southern} ~~Rome and other~~ parts of Italy as dowry which, in any case, were not ^{strictly} his to give. He found him boastful. Nicephoros ^{his} ~~the~~ claimed that the Greeks ^{were the sole} ~~possessors of~~ the ^{of a northward} ~~strangest~~ navy; ~~in the world~~. ^{fleet the} ~~It was true, at the time~~ ^{It was, however,} a statement significantly true, at the time. Further, Liutprand says that the ministers of Nicephoros Phocas taunted him ^{by saying} that, with their wealth in gold, they could lead the people of the whole world against King Otto and break him like "an earthenware jug which, once broken can never be mended again". An insubtle threat inelegantly expressed! Hardly in keeping with what we know of the suave sophistication of Byzantine diplomat unless, of course they had been in this case, unenaturally provoked by ~~the~~ the "bull in a china shop" envoy. Liutprand appears to have had no tact and little understanding. He visited Constantinople twenty years earlier ^{reported that} ~~where~~ he saw the "singing trees", the "metal lions that roared" and ^{that he had} ~~met~~ Bardas, the father of Nicephoros, whom he estimated to be hundred and fifty years old. He had learnt nothing in between except ^{that} being the trusted emissary of ^{strong} ~~and~~ aggressive-minded potentates and secure in his obliquity to his master, ^{he} could throw his weny about ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~the~~ ^{predicably} ~~the~~ the representatives and emissaries of twentieth-century dictatorships behave at conferences and ^{of} international gatherings re. with coarse rudeness and a repertory of invective.

Bishop Liutprand was, ^{an outsider and} ~~almost~~ by definition ^{an} ~~critical~~ ^{critical} if not ^{an enemy} ~~unfriendly~~. He had ^{also} ~~made~~ his point in history - ~~been~~ ^{been} an enduring one. But ~~rather~~ ^{the}

Actium must have demonstrated to the Romans and the lesson ^{was} ~~has~~ not ~~been~~ lost on the Byzantines, that Empires relying on the arm of the sea can be lost in a day ^{and} ~~afternoon~~. Hence, strong ^{Imperial} ~~armies~~ ^{armies} ~~based~~ ^{on adequate hinterlands} ~~and~~ ^{thus} ~~ports and sea lanes~~ ^{became} a subordinate arm. The Arabs ~~destroyed~~ ^{destroyed} the ^{comfort} of this Orthodox strategy. They would raid into cavalry far ahead of their armies and ^{create} ~~create~~ ^{and enable the army to advance} ~~confermaton~~ ^{confermaton} and ~~confusion~~ ^{they began} building ships and ^{reached} ~~reached~~ ^{by sea from the Syrian coast} before they ~~secured~~ ^{had consolidated their hold of the} ~~the~~ ^{hinterland}. Within three quarters of a century after they had ^{appeared} ~~appeared~~ on the Sinai peninsula, ready to plunge into Byzantine Egypt, their ^{armadas} ~~armies~~ ^{were besieging} ~~Constantinople in~~ ^{Constantinople in} the East and their armies were advancing ^{on the Loire and} ~~then Paris in the west~~ ^{in the west}. The Greek liquid fire saved Constantinople and ~~MARTEL~~ ^{MARTEL} the HAMMER reversed the direction of the Moorish advance in France. The two points of the Arab pincer movement against Europe were blunted ^{irreparably} ~~and~~ from then on began the long, ^{slow} ~~and~~ discontinuous agony of the Arab decline. But decline only in the sense that Arab power could get no further. ^{It} ~~still~~ ^{still} had a lot of energy left to keep ~~hammering~~ ^{hammering} the ^{Europe} ~~west~~ ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{provinces} in Asia Minor, and ^{to} ~~to~~ establish itself permanently on the North African areas from Suez to the Atlantic and turn the Mediterranean into an Arab lake.

Cyprus was conquered, though not completely and not permanently. Crete became a bastion of Arab power. Sicily was invaded and areas of the Côte d'Azur became Arab colonies and naval bases. But the central area of ^{the Moslem} ~~Arab~~ expansionist pressure remained the heartland of the Byzantine Empire, Asia Minor. There the war ^{went on remorselessly} ~~was~~ ^{and the losses were} ~~grievous~~. Frontiers were ~~fluid~~ ^{constantly} changing. ^{Treaties lasted only as long as it} ~~in addition~~ ^{the} ~~breath~~ suited the aggressors. In addition, the Byzantines themselves underwent the debilitating ordeal of the iconoclastic controversy which ~~reached~~ ^{reached} civil-war dimensions and engulfed several generations.

By the time the Byzantine ^{Empire} ~~Empire~~ overcame its internal difficulties and the direct of ~~its~~ external dangers from the east in the second

half of the 9th century it was no longer the same old state. It had discovered the weakness of which it was acutely conscious during the first ~~phase~~^{period} of the victory of christianity and before it ~~became~~^{was} overlaid ~~by~~^{by} growing Theocracy, ~~spirit~~. People began to remember their Hellenic heritage. True, their ancient forefathers were ~~heathen~~^{pagans}, knew nothing ~~about~~^{of} salvation, bore their unsheddable share of the original sin but ~~were~~^{could} not all ~~be~~^{be} uniformly bad or socially sinful! The university of Constantinople and Photius's ~~myriables~~^{myriables}, the ~~completion~~^{the} of abstracts from his wide reading of ancient writers, stimulated interest in classical learning. Socially, there was a growing tendency towards land-ownership and ~~the~~^{the} enlargement of ~~the~~^{the} great estates. The frontier wars continued with varying intensity. But within those wars other little wars were ~~being~~^{developing} ~~carried~~^{carried} on which provide history with the first large-scale case-study of guerrilla warfare - a ~~warfare~~^{guerrilla warfare} which lasted for the best part of a century and which spread over wide areas from the Pontus and the Caucasian regions, to Cyprus. Guerrilla warfare gave rise to ~~a~~^a new ~~type of~~^{type of} songs, ~~the~~^{the} heroic ballads of the Akritic Cycle which became the foundation ~~and~~^{of the great artistic creation} ~~of~~^{of} the 10th century Byzantium, the epic of Digenis Akritas. These Akritic poems constitute the beginning of Modern Greek literature.

Thus, the Greeks ~~had~~^{had} discovered themselves and began, at the same time to create their ~~literature~~^{new national literature}. Up to then, Byzantine literature was ... a-national.

With the coming of the tenth century, however, ~~pressures~~^{pressures} ~~mounted~~^{mounted} ~~once~~^{against Byzantium} ~~again~~^{again} from many directions. In the East, the caliphate and the ~~various~~^{various} ~~emirates~~^{autonomous} emirates though enfeebled, would pack a powerful punch. In the north and west, the Bulgarians, the Serbs and later ~~the~~^{the} Hungarians and the Russians carried on rebellions ~~was~~^{was} against Byzantium. The Balkan Danubian areas, Thrace, Macedonia ~~and~~^{and} even Central Greece were repeatedly invaded. The invaders lived on the land, looted, killed, destroyed and moved on or ~~pushed~~^{were} ~~back~~^{back} by the imperial army. Destruction was on a prodigious scale ~~and~~^{and} was recurring with every invasion. There were so many of these that it is impossible to have them catalogued here. The student looking closely at these developments ~~will~~^{cannot but} find it remarkable that people have

half of the 9th century it was no longer the ^{same} (old state). It has rediscovered its greatness of which it was

Byzantine commanders have proved themselves adept ^{in all kinds} at ~~every tactic~~ of military tactics. ~~form and method for waging war.~~ The military manuals from the eighth century to the so-called Strategic Strategicon of Cecaumenos in the 11th, which have survived, are a proof of this. Nicephoros's contribution to military thinking was the introduction of a new theoretical dimension to the art of strategy — guerrilla war. The ^{frontiersman} half-brigand, half-soldier and totally lawless except for ^{his} ultimate obedience to the church was dignified with a new role — that of being the ^{pathfinder, the long-range} eyes, ears and lance-point of the army. ~~his study~~

Out of his ^{experience} ~~study~~ of the frontiers, ~~and~~ ~~against~~ the Arabs, Nicephoros produced the booklet Peri Paradromis Polemon (On the Accompaniment of War) which demonstrated the ^{military} ~~value~~ of guerrilla war and ^{ascribed importance} ~~and gave significance~~ to the guerrilleros ~~at~~ — ^{importance} ~~and~~ ^{up to the} ~~importance~~ denied them by history ^{through} ~~but~~ ^{generously} ~~of~~ ^{accorded} ~~by~~ the people in the songs and lays of the Akritic Poetry. Not all the authorities accept Phocas as the author of Peri Paradromis Polemon. Some suggest that it was written by an officer of his entourage. It is, ^{in appearance,} ~~of~~ ~~no~~ ~~material~~ ~~importance,~~ ~~who~~ ~~actually~~ ~~penned~~ ~~the~~ ~~instructions.~~ The name of Nicephoros Phocas ~~at~~ ~~as~~ ~~everybody~~ ~~agrees~~ is associated with.

Perhaps ~~it~~ ^{was} ~~as~~ a result of his tutelage ~~on~~ the frontiers ~~that~~ Nicephoros saw ^{the significance of the} ~~the~~ ~~special~~ ~~relationships~~ of a fighting commander with his troops. A soldier will fight if he is well-trained, well-armed, well-fed, ~~and~~ ^{and sternly led,} sufficiently disciplined. He will fight better if he believes in what he is fighting for. He will fight magnificently if he is inspired by, loved by and has ~~absolute~~ ^{great} confidence in his commander. Alexander the Great won, united by an ^{unbroken} bond of fraternity with his companions and ^{with something like a community of will} ~~was~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~wavelength~~ ~~with~~ ~~his~~ ~~troops.~~ It was as if both ^{soldiers and} ~~commander~~ ~~and~~ ~~soldiers~~ ~~were~~ ~~strung~~ ~~out~~ ~~as~~ ~~impulses~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~wavelength~~ ~~and~~ ~~shared~~ ~~their~~ ~~duty~~ ~~in~~ ~~action.~~ Caesar ^{possessed} ~~that~~ the austerity of auster men, ^{seized} ~~him~~ ~~and~~ ~~followed~~ ~~him~~ ~~dutifully~~ ~~as~~ ~~they~~ ~~are~~ ~~eliminated~~ ~~by~~ ~~him~~ ~~as~~ ~~if~~ ~~by~~ an implacable power. Belisarius inculcated the élan of fight. Nicephoros set out to win the ~~the~~ ~~devotion~~ ~~of~~ ~~his~~ ~~troops.~~ Having learned ^{as much as he could} ~~what~~ ~~there~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~learn~~ ~~of~~ ~~war~~ ~~through~~ ~~study~~ ~~and~~ ~~practice,~~ and having added to

its storehouse of ~~knowledge~~ ^{knowledge}, inescapably he must have come up ^{against} ~~the~~ ^{intricate} ~~obscure~~ ^{intricate} the problem of human relationships ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ stress of conflict; a problem which cannot be solved by reading textbooks and one which, when even moderately ~~mastered~~ ^{mastered}, makes all the difference between a good or successful commander and a great one. Napoleon in defeat was greater than his opponents and Themistocles would have been great even if his critical gambler's throw at Salamis did not come off.

How Nicephoros ~~failed~~ ^{it} ~~the~~ ^{it} ~~problem~~ ^{problem} we do not know. He did handle it however, and ^{must} ~~have~~ ^{brought it within grasp,} ~~mastered~~ ^{it} for we have adequate evidence of the ^{interest} ~~devotion~~ ^{which} of his soldiers ^{had for him;} ~~to him;~~ ^{to him;} "they fought and died for love of their Marshal" say the historians. ~~proofs.~~

Out of this relationship, Nicephoros fashioned a strong, dependable ~~army~~ ^{and} ~~capacitated~~ ^{capacitated} himself to the first rank of ~~the~~ ^{the} military leaders. He ~~displayed~~ ^{displayed} ~~later on,~~ ^{later on,} ~~great~~ ^{great} qualities as strategist. He could handle, and co-ordinate the activities of armies over difficult terrain, ^{plan} meticulously the combinations of separate units to be achieved during battle action, proved himself capable of ruses and feigned attacks and above all master of surprise and of audacious fighting action.

IN SUPREME COMMAND.

Sometime during the last years of the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (944 - 959) the decision ^{was} ~~must~~ ^{was} ~~have~~ ^{have} been taken to build a strong navy. To strike at the enemy hard the Empire needed ^{at least} the command of its "front-garden" sea, the Aegean. ^{Thus} ~~to~~ ^{to} the ~~seas~~ ^{seas} they were now to be added the ~~old~~ ^{old} ~~guerrillas~~ ^{guerrillas} of the sea, the ^{fighting} ~~sailors~~ ^{sailors}. Both were to be appendages to the army. Doubtless, Nicephoros ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{of Nicephoros,} ~~counsel~~ ^{counsel} to this end ~~to~~ ^{to} must have been invaluable.

The navy was built. ~~At~~ ^{At} last the Byzantines were ready to take the war to the enemy ^{camp} ~~They~~ ^{They} ~~first~~ ^{chase, to reduce} ~~invasion~~ ^{invasion} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~reduced~~ ^{reduced} ~~not~~ ^{not} Crete to allow for freedom of movement, and ~~manoeuvre~~ ^{manoeuvre}. In 961 the expedition was ready. The ~~Emperor~~ ^{Emperor} Leo VI, entrusted the supreme command of the expedition to Nicephoros Phocas. It proved a wise decision and perhaps the only one that rescued any

young Emperor from anonymity, some far ~~the~~ place in the list of the occupiers of the throne.

So many ~~troops~~ had been ~~supplied~~ ^{the reserves which were} met by the Byzantine forces in their encounters with the Cretan Arabs, ^{it is almost impossible for} that Nicephoros could not ~~be~~ ^{be} apprehensive. ^{However,} ~~he~~ reached his destination without loss. The Arabs tried but failed to impede his progress. Once in Crete, ^{he} ~~Nicephoros~~ made straight for the capital, the strongly fortified town of Chandax and ~~began to~~ ^{invested} it by land and sea. He cut ^{it} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~city~~ ^{from} all communication with the outside and began the long task of reducing its defences.

The ~~detachments~~ ^{He} sent ^{detachments} to occupy the island. ^{These} ~~met~~ with strong opposition. Reinforcements, ^{meanwhile} ~~reached~~ the Arabs. One of the Byzantine units was cut off and strong Arab forces were marshalled for an all out attempt to relieve the beleaguered ~~city~~ ^{capital}. Nicephoros, leaving enough troops behind to continue the blockade, took the field in person surprised the Arabs in their camp and defeated ^{with} ~~them~~ ^{feared} slaughter. George Finlay, fighter for Greece and a historian of Greece, writes as follows: "The Byzantine general, in order to intimidate the defenders of Chandax, ordered the heads of those slain in the country to be brought to the camp, stimulating the activities of his soldiers in this barbarous service by paying a piece of silver for every head. They were then ranged on spears along the whole line of the circumvallation towards the fortifications of the city; and the number of slain was so great that many more were cast into the place by means of catapults, in order to let the besieged see the full extent of the loss of their country-men."

This single but decisive victory of Nicephoros so ruthlessly "advertised" broke the Arabs' heart. Their moral was ^{sapped} ~~gradually~~ and in the following May the city was stormed. Arab ^{rule} ~~and~~ ^{presence} were irrevocably removed from the island. Undoubtedly, the methods used towards this end ^{can} ~~may~~ arouse strong feelings in many of ^{our} ~~the~~ contemporaries. Finlay, not given to ~~given to~~ philistinism or ~~the~~ patronising, uses the word "barbarous". From one can ^{now} use the word "genocide".

dimension of fanaticism to their task of conquest and imposed tyrannic government on the territories of the Byzantine Empire they brought under heel which ~~was~~ practically the entire Byzantine world. Unlike the Arabs, the Turks were not affected by the emollient influences of the civilisation of the Greeks, even ~~that~~ ^{or} of the Arabs, with which they came into contact. They remained stubbornly rooted to their primitive urges for loot and rapine, tyrannised over by their absolutist system of ~~state~~ ^{state} authority and themselves tyrants, till Kemal Atatürk strove ~~valiantly~~ ^{manfully} to bring them within the European orbit.

Nicephoros's action in Crete was loaded with beneficial potential. It ~~was~~, historically, ~~justifiable~~ ^{it was justified} though, not necessarily in the totality of its details.

THE EMPEROR

From Crete Nicephoros Phocas, after a short visit to Constantinople took himself and the bulk of his army to Asia Minor.

There, he set upon the task of rolling the Arabs back. It was at the start of this campaign that he found himself involved in ~~the thick~~ ^{of} high political intrigues which ~~resulted in~~ ^{compelled} him to mount the throne. ~~But~~ ^{Clearly,} the palace could not contain him for long. ~~At whatever time was available to him was spared to him~~ ^{the prince that he could possibly spare during the campaigning season he wanted} ~~to~~ ^{he} ~~with~~ ^{with} his army.

In ~~Asia~~ ^{the} ~~he~~ ^{liberated} Cilicia, and Cyprus ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ succession and in the following year he invested Tarsus, ~~which~~ ^{the fall of} would open the way for ~~advance~~ ^{advance} to Alexandretta and on to Syria. Other of his forces crossed the Euphrates. Everywhere the Arabs were hard pressed. The fall of Tarsus was ~~another~~ ^a major blow. But Nicephoros did not hurry readily. He wanted ~~to~~ ^{to} consolidate what he won and leave no fifth-column to rise up ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ his rear.

Events in Europe compelled him to mark time in the East for a while but in 968 he ~~again~~ ^{again} assumed command of the army and resumed the offensive. He marched into Syria, occupied Tripoli, Damascus, Aleppo and laid siege to the great city of Antioch,

the old hellenistic cultural centre, before returning to Constantinople for the winter. Next year Antioch fell and became Greek after nearly 330 years in Arab hands. The armies marched south and entered Iakofine. At this point ^{in time} Nicephorus back into ~~the~~ ^{his} capital ~~met~~ ^{met} a violent end.

As general he died undefeated. The only reversal ~~he~~ ^{suffered by his army} ~~his~~ ^{army} ~~had~~ ^{had} suffered while he was ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ supreme command was in Sicily where a force, consisting mostly of cavalry ~~and~~ led by Nicetas, the liberator of Cyprus, was despatched to eject the Moorish conquerors - was defeated by the Arabs. Nicetas was taken prisoner. Nicephorus ^{managed to have him freed} ~~obtained his release~~ by sending to his captors the sword of Mahomet which fell into his hands in Syria.

The luck of the soldier did not smile on the career of the Emperor. He started out with great advantages. He possessed exceptional abilities, had fame, was popular.

But he was ^{also} a complex personality: - religious mystic, ruthless conqueror, tender husband and father ~~was~~ ^{was} wounded beyond consolation ^{by} the loss of his family, Spartan warrior, spendthrift on occasions, more ^{and} ~~but~~ ^{capable} of deep ~~emotional~~ ^{emotional} feeling. ~~and~~ All these ^{were} ~~cloaked~~ by ~~an~~ unemotional pragmatism.

He was dogged ^{during} ~~in~~ his imperial career by two disadvantages: by ~~his~~ ^{the} inability to master the art of saying harsh ~~but~~ unpopular things gently, i.e. the art of diplomacy, a prerequisite to the sycophancy by subordinates which smooths the path of ~~one's~~ power, and by ~~his~~ lack of good "public relations" ~~efficiency~~. Other Emperors managed to find the latter in ^{some} efficient ministers ~~and~~ ^{or in} the Church. None, Nicephorus failed abysmally. He knew what was needed to be done but did not know how to go about doing it with political expertise. ~~His~~ ^{The} first major and ultimately ruinous step was his marriage to Theophano. He was 52, she 22. Tongues began to wag. Many envied Nicephorus both the Basileus and the Basileissa. His confessor, ^{a hermit on Mt. Athos} ~~was~~ ^{was} aghast. ~~He~~ ^{He} visited Constantinople to re-monstrous. Instead of Nicephorus becoming ^{taking monastic vows} ~~a monk~~ he became ~~an~~ Emperor and got himself a young wife. It was insupportable!

Then, ^{there were} rumours spread about incest a very damaging accusation. Nicephoros, it was alleged, stood god-father to one of Theophano's children ^{and he thus ~~was~~ ~~their~~ ~~committed~~ ~~incest~~ ~~father~~} according to canon law ^{by} marrying ^{the} his god-child's mother. The accusation was ^{widely spread} ~~widely spread~~ and ^{had} ~~had~~ ^{been} ~~been~~ ^{investigated} ~~investigated~~ ^{ecclesiastically}. I was ^{he had, committed incest} ~~he had, committed incest~~ ^{proven unfounded}. For ^{some not clearly expressed reasons,} ~~some not clearly expressed reasons,~~ the Patriarch who performed the marriage ceremony ^{had} ~~had~~ ^{second thoughts} ~~second thoughts~~ for soon afterwards ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{denied} ~~denied~~ the Emperor ^{extremely} ~~extremely~~ in the inner sanctum of ~~the~~ ^{the} Hagia Sophia - penance for ^{his} ~~his~~ ^{second} ~~second ^{marriage} ~~marriage~~. A wave of opposition, the obvious and tut-tutting type, was rising against ^{Nicephoros} ~~Nicephoros~~ generated by the clergy. This, to a deeply religious man ^{like} ~~like~~ ^{Nicephoros} ~~Nicephoros~~, was doubly wounding.~~

He retaliated by enacting a law to the effect ^{that} ~~that~~ ^{the} ~~the ^{consecration} ~~consecration~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{bishops} ~~bishops~~ ^{required} ~~required~~ ^{imperial} ~~imperial~~ ^{authority} ~~authority~~. ^{Further} ~~Further~~ ^{this} ~~this~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{motivated} ~~motivated~~ ^{by} ~~by~~ ^{pique} ~~pique~~ ^{or} ~~or~~ ^{avarice} ~~avarice~~ (to make the ~~people~~ ^{people} ~~bishops~~ ^{bishops} ~~pay~~ ^{pay} ~~for~~ ^{for} ~~their~~ ^{their} ~~sees~~ ^{sees}, some ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{which} ~~which~~ ^{they} ~~they~~ ^{were} ~~were~~ ^{very} ~~very~~ ^{wealthy} ~~wealthy~~) or ~~even~~ ^{even} ~~even~~ ^{by} ~~by~~ ^{genuine} ~~genuine~~ ^{desire} ~~desire~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{curb} ~~curb~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{independence} ~~independence~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{Church} ~~Church~~ ^{and} ~~and~~ ^{combat} ~~combat~~ ^{nepotism} ~~nepotism~~ ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{its} ~~its~~ ^{higher} ~~higher~~ ^{reaches} ~~reaches~~, it is unprofitable to speculate. Perhaps all ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{factors} ~~factors~~ ^{counted} ~~counted~~. But ^{how} ~~how~~ ^{Nicephoros} ~~Nicephoros~~ ^{erred} ~~erred~~. He ^{erred} ~~erred~~ ^{tactically} ~~tactically~~ ^{because} ~~because~~ ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{antagonised} ~~antagonised~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{Church} ~~Church~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{second} ~~second~~ ^{pillar} ~~pillar~~ ^{of} ~~of ^{Byzantine} ~~Byzantine~~ ^{authority} ~~authority~~, and ^{potentially} ~~potentially~~ ^{dangerous} ~~dangerous~~. ^{because} ~~because~~ ^{it} ~~it~~ ^{represented} ~~represented~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{thin} ~~thin~~ ^{edge} ~~edge~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{wedge} ~~wedge~~ ^{towards} ~~towards~~ ^{absolute} ~~absolute~~ ^{monarchy} ~~monarchy~~.~~~~

Essentially, the Byzantine civilisation was dualistic. There was the State, possessing all legislative and executive power headed by the Emperor; ~~and~~ there was the Church which represented and expressed the spiritual life of the people ^{and} ~~and~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{ultimate} ~~ultimate~~ ^{arbiter} ~~arbiter~~ ⁱⁿ ~~in ^{all} ~~all ^{aspects} ~~aspects ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{human} ~~human~~ ^{behaviour} ~~behaviour~~, headed by the Patriarch. The Church could ^{not} ~~not~~ ^{formulate} ~~formulate~~ ^{policy} ~~policy~~ ^{but} ~~but~~ ^{could} ~~could~~ ^{influence} ~~influence~~ ^{it} ~~it~~ ^{if} ~~if~~ ^{it} ~~it~~ ^{chose} ~~chose~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{do} ~~do ^{so} ~~so~~. ~~The~~ ^{All} ~~All~~ ^{the} ~~the ^{public} ~~public~~ ^{actions} ~~actions~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{the} ~~the ^{Emperor} ~~Emperor~~ ^{were} ~~were~~ ^{ultimately} ~~ultimately~~ ^{subject} ~~subject~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{sanctions} ~~sanctions~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{Church} ~~Church~~ - the ^{sanctions} ~~sanctions~~ ^{were} ~~were~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{Church's} ~~Church's~~ ^{and} ~~and~~ ^{were} ~~were~~ ^{inalienable} ~~inalienable~~. On the other hand the Emperor could not define dogma but could, if he chose, offer advice and guidance. He could not interfere with the Church's ^{structure} ~~structure~~ ^{and} ~~and~~ ^{authority} ~~authority~~ ^{unless} ~~unless~~ ^{without} ~~without ^{subordinating} ~~subordinating~~ ^{it} ~~it~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{State} ~~State~~.~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Any upsetting of this delicate balance of seemingly unequal

But in reality, harmonising and counter-poising powers would result either ^{on the one side} to Papism or ^{on the other side} to unbridled Caesarism, or the other to Papism. It is no accident that in its eleven centuries of existence the Byzantine system ~~had~~ proved itself a ~~proof~~ ^{proof} against the rise of a Hitler or a Stalin. ~~Many~~ ^{There} ~~have been~~ ^{was not lack} many of fanatics, cruel ~~men~~ ^{people} and pathological degenerates, in high places, even the highest, but none ~~had been~~ ^{had been} ~~allowed~~ ^{would have a free field} to violate the common standards of human conduct ^{as so}, many of modern dictators ~~have been~~ ^{are} doing. The two legs could not become a monolith ^{without a fundamental and catastrophic restructuring of the state.}

Consequently the action of Nicephorus, however well-meant ~~at the~~ ^{and may be} necessary at a given time, was fraught with incalculable dangers.

Further, Nicephorus tried to restrict the growth of monasticism and forbade, in general, new foundations and ~~the~~ ^{the} endowments of the monasteries with land. At a period when the Empire — and it must be remembered that it was the only state that represented civilisation in Europe ^{at the time} — was facing so many dangers to have so many men ~~withdrawing~~ ^{withdrawing} themselves from production and citizen responsibility ^{could hardly be} the condoned. Nicephorus ~~also~~ ^{he} did not deny the monastic ideas of prayer and sanctity, ^{he} ~~also~~ ^{praised} the poverty of his Egyptian fore-runners of the monastic orders, ^{looking around the} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~influenced~~ ^{influenced} by the wealth and luxury of the monasteries of his day. He attacked them harshly. ~~But~~ ^{unfortunately} ~~he~~ ^{only} ~~decried~~ ^{decried} ~~to~~ ^{to} increase his enemies, even among ~~the~~ ^{the} poor people who ~~to~~ ^{saw} even criticism of Church as a sacrilege. We find this hostility against Nicephorus ~~biting~~ ^{biting} expressed in Philopatoris an anonymously written satirical dialogue patterned on Lucian, directed against Nicephorus.

Another attempt by Nicephorus to get the Church to declare every ~~one~~ ^{person} who perished in war fighting infidels ~~declared~~ ^{declared} as martyr, failed — to the credit, of course, of the Church. ~~A killing and sanctification~~ ^{sanctification} would ^{have} become synonymous and as all the enemies of the state would die, or could be called infidels the Church would ~~automatically~~ ^{have} ~~automatically~~ ^{have} automatically behind every war. It would have become an instrument of policy.

But every year, Nicephorus met with church oppo-

his law retroactive to the year 927. A courageous ^{and} necessary ~~act~~ ~~Roman~~ Nicephorus strengthened the law of Leca-
pepos by making the acquisition of land from the humiliores
by the potentiores illegal. No magnate could buy from the ^{poor} ~~poor~~
either through pressure or ^{by means of} ~~strong~~ ~~forward~~ agreement. It was a
measure calculated to ensure the continuing economic viability of
the peasantry as the backbone of the nation ^{and left from their horizon} ~~but~~ ~~not~~ ~~horizon~~
the dreaded ~~threat~~ of being forcibly sold out. ^{This law} ~~Though~~ ~~the~~ ~~law~~
was not at first ^{rigorously} applied at first ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~gradually~~
^{fell into desuetude} ~~put into cold storage~~ in the future.

Simultaneously, ^{but without intending as paradox, Nicephorus} ~~Nicephorus~~ ~~the~~ ~~law~~ ~~was~~ ~~decreed~~ ~~that~~
~~Nicephorus~~ that as the rich should not buy out the poor
peasants ^{neither} ~~should~~ ~~the~~ ~~peasants~~ ~~the~~ ~~humiliores~~ buy out
the ^{magnates} ~~the~~ ~~potentiores~~. This has been ^{generally} ~~interpreted~~
by historians as ^{equitation} ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~rich~~. ^{Nicephorus, a landowner himself} ~~the~~ ~~law~~ ~~became~~ ~~a~~
^{magnates' man} ~~But~~ ~~is~~ ~~that~~ ~~so?~~ ^{Usually} ~~the~~ ~~historians~~ ~~omit~~ ~~the~~ ~~fact~~
^{is glossed over that} ~~the~~ ~~forces~~ ~~which~~ ~~ranged~~ ~~themselves~~ ~~in~~ ~~opposition~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~Empire~~
~~peasants~~, ~~the~~ ~~nobles~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~clergy~~ ~~the~~ ~~poor~~, ~~the~~ ~~virtuous~~, ~~but~~
~~the~~ ~~church~~ ~~leadership~~, ~~the~~ ~~rich~~ ~~church~~ ~~establishments~~ ~~but~~ ~~the~~ ~~rich~~
^{class of the feudal lords,} ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~political~~ ~~establishments~~.
^{the big merchants etc.} ~~Why~~ ~~was~~ ~~this~~ ~~a~~ ~~perhaps~~ ~~the~~
^{restrictions on the buying and selling of land between classes along with this} ~~measure~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~decisions~~ ~~of~~ ~~Nicephorus~~ ~~to~~ ~~devalue~~ ~~the~~ ~~base~~
the currency and ~~thus~~ provide cheap money, ~~to~~ ~~curtail~~ ~~the~~ ~~pensions~~
of the courtiers and cut-back on largesses to the Court (i.e. the
administrative machinery) can provide part, if not the whole,
of the answer.

Now easy it is to ridicule ~~the~~ ^a law forbidding the rich to
sell land to the poor or ^{vice versa} ~~the~~ ~~poor~~ ~~from~~ ~~buying~~ ~~the~~ ~~land~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~rich~~. ^{It sounds, to say the least,} ~~the~~ ~~self~~ ~~being~~
~~out~~ ~~his~~ ~~land~~. But in the context of the times ^{not only} ~~it~~ ~~made~~ ~~sense~~,
it was imperative. ~~Rich~~ ~~land-owners~~, ~~and~~ ~~property-owners~~,
~~or~~ ~~big~~ ~~money-makers~~ in contemporary ~~or~~ ~~Britain~~ ~~turn~~
themselves into public companies ^{or trusts} ~~to~~ ~~escape~~ ~~some~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~burdens~~
of taxation and ^{on demise} ~~reduce~~ ~~the~~ ~~enormous~~ ~~amount~~ ~~of~~ ~~death~~ ~~duties~~.
They can issue shares to friends, relatives, employees, ^{presently} ~~presently~~

keep ~~control~~ ^{control} of the company if they desire ^{in their own hands} and so ~~have~~ ^{can keep preserve} their property in tact, provide ^{themselves with additional} remuneration through expenditure (expense accounts) and pay less in tax ^{living & dead} than is perfectly legal. But were a British government to forbid the ^{turning} ~~transfer~~ of estates into trusts and companies by which the exchequer ^{that is} ~~and~~ the tax-paying public loses money and ~~forbid~~ ^{make it illegal for any} any man, rich or poor, ~~from buying~~ ^{to acquire} shares in ~~such~~ such company would that be an anti-social and "reactionary" move?

Large estates during the time of Nicephorus, had certain public rights attached to them such as, tax gathering, the payment of tribute, the maintenance of fortresses, the supply of troops, the upkeep of communications etc. If they fell below a certain level the obligations ceased. By making ^{his} property over to a monastery under some agreement or other, one could still have it and be rid of all obligations accruing from its possession. Similarly, if one divided his property among a number of tenants under ~~various~~ ^{some} instalment ^{system} which in fact turned the cultivator into a free man nominally turned the cultivator into freeholder but in fact tied ^{him} ~~up~~ to the landlord ^{in perpetuity} through repayment in the form of mortgage, the result ~~was~~ ^{would be} the same. One need not assume ^{that the} Byzantine mortgages and business tycoons ^{of a thousand years ago} were less ^{able} ~~able~~ in preserving by various "legal" means their wealth and property and of enhancing it than ^{are} their modern counterparts.

Nicephorus, to my mind tried to stop ^a ~~one~~ ^{such} "legal" loopholes ^{which enabled people to "discharge" from their obligations to the state. Power} ~~by~~ ^{without responsibility, wealth without taxation,} ~~the~~ ^{peasants.} ~~alteration~~ ^{Many would have us believe that this was a measure} ~~of~~ ^{calculated} ~~to~~ ^{to uphold the} ~~social~~ ^{power} of the class upon which imperial administration depended. But there is no evidence that the wealthy ^{welcomed} ~~the~~ "freezing" of their property and obligations in the interest of the state. Even more violent reaction was produced by the issuing of a new coin, the tetarteron. ^{This} ~~devaluation~~ ^{was} a deliberate policy of devaluation and the creation ^{to create} of cheap money; ^{to devalue the currency} Devaluation when judiciously controlled can stimulate economic activity. Modern states found it so. The same can be said for the supply of cheap

money. ~~The~~ ^{To the} Byzantine historians have described this economic action ~~as~~ ^{as} much ahead of its time in conception ~~and~~ ^{this} well-intentioned economic ~~action~~ ^{measure} ~~activity~~ - it would have been condemnable if all it aimed at was the amassing of wealth for the court to squander - appeared odious. It was a violation of public feeling, an act tantamount to sacrilege. The honour of the Empire ~~was~~ ^{was} at stake! What the merchant-adventurers of Constantinople thought ~~of~~ ^{of} it can well be imagined. ~~The~~ ^{the} wealthy ~~soon~~ ^{rose to} ~~its~~ ^{its} ~~triumph~~ ^{triumph}.

And so the chorus of criticism and obloquy ~~grew~~ ^{rose to} ~~the~~ ^{its} ~~point~~ ^{triumph} of ~~its~~ ^{its} ~~own~~ ^{own} ~~and~~ ^{and} multiplied enemies. ~~And~~ ^{And}, unfortunately, ~~for~~ ^{for} Nicephorus ~~he~~ ^{he} was not allowed a long enough time to see the effects of ~~his~~ ^{of} ~~measures~~ ^{what he had decreed}. ~~Another~~ ^A ~~few~~ ^{few} ~~years~~ ^{more} of power might have demonstrated their validity ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~reforms~~ ^{reforms} and made them acceptable. Even so, his ~~few~~ ^{short-lived} ~~years~~ ^{but} of ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~active~~ ^{active} ~~rule~~ ^{rule} based on rigid pragmatism unencumbered by strict adherence to precedence and dogma, plus his military ~~victories~~ ^{victories} opened up a great period in Byzantine history. ~~He~~ ^{He} ~~was~~ ^{became} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~founder~~ ^{founder} of the epopée.

It is, I believe, ~~wrong~~ ^{wrong} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~attribute~~ ^{attribute} his downfall to the intrigue of his wife ~~Theophano~~ ^{Theophano} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~her~~ ^{her} ~~kinsman~~ ^{kinsman} ~~Tzimiskes~~ ^{Tzimiskes} ~~as~~ ^{as} his crime ~~passionelle~~ ^{passionelle}, ~~cherchez~~ ^{cherchez} ~~la~~ ^{la} ~~femme~~ ^{femme} ~~etc.~~ ^{etc.} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~reason~~ ^{reason} ~~are~~ ^{are} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~assassinations~~ ^{assassinations} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~emperors~~ ^{emperors} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~people~~ ^{people} ~~who~~ ^{who} ~~supported~~ ^{supported} ~~him~~ ^{him} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~event~~ ^{event} of a showdown. ~~Both~~ ^{Both} were estranged from the Emperor but still very powerful. Discontent found a focal point. Practically the whole of the institutional world of Byzantium turned against Nicephorus. The soldiers and the people ~~could~~ ^{could} ~~only~~ ^{only} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~help~~ ^{help} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~him~~ ^{him} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~event~~ ^{event} of a showdown.

This, ~~however~~ ^{however}, the conspirators ~~could~~ ^{could} ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~contemplate~~ ^{contemplate} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~any~~ ^{any} ~~hope~~ ^{hope} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~success~~ ^{success}. They aimed not at revolution which must be backed by courses but at assassination. Tzimiskes became the agent of the conspiracy and put himself at its head. Far from Theophano ensnaring him, he made use of her love for him - he may even have set about deliberately to seduce her in order to go with that aim in view; his subsequent treatment of her adds colour to this view -

He get his men and himself into the palace through the
 women's quarters. Theophanes ~~was~~ The rest was easy.
 Nicephorus died with his ^{imperial} work only half-done. A ^{man} ~~great~~
~~of remarkable ability, a great~~ captain ~~he~~ still awaits ~~the~~ recognition as a ~~great~~ ~~emperor~~.
~~a man of remarkable ability, and~~ a great one in the whole
 humane. ruler.

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Βιβλιοθήκη Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου