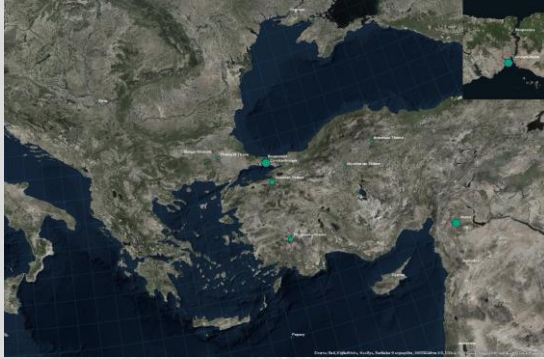


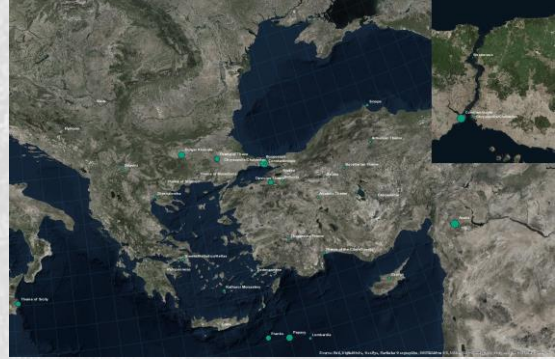


# Contrast and Continuity in the Reigns of Irene, 775-811

## Visualizing Administrative Change in Byzantium through Theophanes' Chronicle



Map of Leo IV's reign according to Theophanes (fig. 1)



Map of Irene and Constantine VI's reigns according to Theophanes (fig. 2)

### Abstract

Byzantinists have suggested that Irene's on and around the Byzantine throne saw a shift away from the military's dominance in state policy towards a dominance by the bureaucracy and clergy. Our research sought to use Theophanes' (758-817) *Chronicle* and ArcGIS to see if it was possible to visualize the administrative changes thought to be happening.

### Leo IV's Continuity

Leo IV's reign is typical of this period, his focus is one of military matters and his administration promoted military men. Our analysis of Theophanes' chronicle shows little interest by Leo in non-military locations. All his efforts seem pointed towards making war with the Arab Caliphate in the east. The Bulgar Khanate is barely mentioned despite its immediate proximity to Constantinople. Analysis of figure 1 shows Theophanes paid inordinate attention to the western Anatolian Themes, this despite regular Arab raids on the eastern Themes. This suggested the western Themes were being used for extraordinary purposes, i.e. offensive campaigns against the Arabs. The growing confidence in the army's offensive capability forced the emperors to reconsider how best to use it. Combined with the Iconoclast controversy, Leo's death left significant room for a sufficiently motivated monarch to make serious changes to Byzantine state policy.

### Irene's Contrast

Unsurprisingly, many more locations are mentioned during Irene's 22 years of power as opposed to Leo's five. Still, the locations mentioned show a different pattern. Several non-military locations are mentioned, the most important being Nicaea, where an ecumenical council was held. Foreign affairs gain prominence with the Arabs maintaining importance but with the Papacy, Franks, and Bulgars also receiving attention. This marks a stark contrast from Leo who had little contact even with the Papacy. Most strikingly the Asian Themes are barely mentioned while the Theme of Thrace takes on a new significance. Taken together this shows Irene has used the uncertain situation of Byzantium's policies to take the state in a radical new direction, that being a renewed focused towards the west.

It is difficult to map administrative changes being made to the empire, especially given Theophanes' emphasis on military affairs. Still, the sudden shift in attention towards Bulgaria and renewed ties with the Papacy show that a significant change in who is administering the empire has occurred. Such a radical geographic shift in the Empire's attention supports the theory that Irene's reign saw a strengthening of the bureaucracy and the clergy.

