Of all the figures in Byzantine history, the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus is perhaps one of the most intriguing. Born illegitimate, but in the royal Porphyra (‘purple house’) like his father Leo to assure his rule, he became a child emperor in 913 CE at seven years old, only to be deposed, overruled and challenged by his relatives for much of his forty year reign. He was a sickly boy and spent much of his life amongst books, only at a late age gaining any practical knowledge of politics, diplomacy and war. Conversely, history is indebted to him for his work de Administrando Imperio’s unique political insights into the cultural dynamics of the Baltic and Central European regions during the ninth and tenth centuries CE, and Byzantium’s interrelations and attitudes towards these neighbours. In this paper, I will dissect and analyse one specific event in this work - that of the fall of the nation of Greater Moravia in what is now Slovakia and the Czech Republic. By doing this I will examine the way in which Porphyrogenitus, with his wealth of knowledge of the classical tradition, reappropriates one of its greatest lessons on the power of concord between sons to aetiologically explain the nation’s failure. Further, I plan to scrutinize this event not only in

relation to Byzantine historiographical *mores*, but also in relation to Porphyrogenitus’ own historical and familial situation, especially that of his son Romanus II, for whom this didactic work was intended.\(^7\) Porphyrogenitus writes:

> It should be known that the ruler of Moravia, Sphendoplocus, was powerful and terrifying to those peoples who neighboured him. Sphendoplocus had three sons, and being about to die, he divided up his land into three portions. Having bequeathed a portion to each of the three sons, he left the oldest as the ruler and the others under his authority. He also exhorted them not to quarrel amongst themselves by giving them the following example. He took three sticks, having bound them together, and gave them to his first son to break. The son not being able to do this, he then gave the bundle to the second and swiftly in turn to the third. Then taking them apart, he gave the three sticks to each of them individually. They, having taken them and been ordered to break them, immediately broke right through them. He then instructed them, saying with regard to this example: “If you remain unseparated in concord and love, you will be indomitable to your enemies and impossible to capture. But if strife and ambition come into being amongst you, and you are divided into three rulers, and having not obeyed your oldest brother, you will be destroyed by each other and will be utterly annihilated by your neighbouring enemies.” After the death of Sphendoplocus, a year having passed in peace, strife and quarrelling arose, and the sons made civil war with one another. As a result the Turks destroyed them utterly and they took control of the land where they had once dwelt. Those of their people who still remained alive scattered and fled to neighbouring tribes: to the Bulgars, the Turks, the Chrobati and others.\(^8\)

**Origins of Fable**

The first thing that might strike a reader in relation to this episode is the centrality of the use of bundled sticks to analogically represent the strength and capability of the brothers working together. This allegory, whether illustrated with sticks or arrows, is found widely across Eurasia during antiquity and the middle ages and is still cited today in many cultures in relation to political efforts at solidarity.\(^9\) However, no other record of the history of Moravia includes

\(^7\) Const. Porph. *de Admin.* I. 1-5.


this fable, and its placement in Porphyrogenitus’ text has not received detailed
analysis by scholars. We must therefore begin our search by determining what
sources Porphyrogenitus would have had available to him in relation to this
fable, and thereafter analyse in detail the rationale for its inclusion.

For a European audience, whether Byzantine or modern, perhaps the most
well known rendition of this fable pattern is found in the classical tradition in
association with the sixth century BCE sage Aesop, where it is usually referred
to under the title of The Farmer and His Quarrelling Sons. This version is in itself
the product of many recensions and historical readaptations,\textsuperscript{10} though it most
likely came to be fixed between the second and fifth century CE by scholars in
the eastern half of the Roman Empire as part of the Aesopic corpus the Recensio
Augustana.\textsuperscript{11} This compendium was widely used in teaching written composition
in Byzantine schools, and would have been very well known to the highly
literate Porphyrogenitus.\textsuperscript{12} It is given as:

The sons of a farmer were quarrelling. But he, advising many things,
was not able to convince them with words. He realised that he needed
to make a practical demonstration of this and instructed them to fetch a
bundle of sticks. Having done what they were told, he gave the bundled
sticks to them and ordered them to break them. When in spite of all their
forcefulness they were not able to do this, he then loosed the bundle and
gave one stick to each of them. Having easily broken these, he said: “You
then, O sons, if you are ever in concord, you will be unassailable to your
enemies, but if you ever quarrel, you will be defeated.” This story shows
how much stronger concord is and how most easily subduable discord
is.\textsuperscript{13}

In spite of this, the Augustana is but one of several possible sources for this
pattern of fable in the classical tradition that Porphyrogenitus most likely had
at his disposal. Others are slightly older than this Byzantine recension of the

\textsuperscript{10} B.E. Perry, \textit{Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop} (Lancaster, Penn-
sylvania: Lancaster Press, American Philological Association, 1936), 53; A. Hausrath, \textit{Corpus
Fabulae Aesopicae Soluta Oratione Conscripta} (Teubner: Lipsiae, Teuberi et Acedemiae Litterarum
ad Opis Sociatis, 1957), 73.

\textsuperscript{11} F. R. Adrados and G. Van Dijk, \textit{History of the Graeco-Latin Fable Vol II: The Fable During
the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages} (Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill Academic Publishing,
1999), 64-6.


\textsuperscript{13} B.E. Perry, § 53; A. Hausrath, §73, trans. J. Ratcliffe.
Aesopic tradition, and as will be shown, each possesses unique characteristics that suggest themselves as exerting influence on including this fable in the analysis of Moravia’s failure. However, there are obviously a great many historical and cultural discrepancies between the semi-mythical figure of the story-telling slave Aesop at the dawn of the Greek Classical period, and the Byzantine product, *The Farmer and His Quarrelling Sons*. Thus, as many scholars suggest, we are obliged to realise that the Aesopic tradition is a long series of reinterpretation of common tales for individual artistic purposes, which in turn are reattributed to the famous figure of Aesop to legitimise them.\(^\text{14}\) If we delve back as far as we can, however, the earliest version of this pattern of fable in question is found in Babrius’ *Mythiambi Aesopei*, which is also the earliest surviving collection of Aesopic tales, and dates between the late first and early second century CE.\(^\text{15}\) This is:

> In former times there was a very old man who had many sons to whom, giving instruction (for it seemed that he would indeed end his life soon), he ordered them to fetch a bundle of weak sticks, wherever such a thing might be found. One of them went and brought it. “Try for me, children,” he said, “With all your might, to break these sticks bound together.” But they were not able to do this. “Now try a single one,” he said. Each of them having been deftly broken, he said: “If you were of the same mind as one another, then no one would be able to beat you, even if he were the strongest. But if any of you is at variant with any other in his opinions, each of you will be relying in all matters upon but a single stick.” (Brotherly love is the greatest good to mankind, which bears even those who are lowly up to heights).\(^\text{16}\)

Firstly, although Babrius’ work was not known in Western Europe until it was rediscovered at Mt. Athos in 1842, in relation to Porphyrogenitus’ time there exists a Grottaferata codex composed by Byzantine scholars during the tenth century CE which contains twenty-one fables.\(^\text{17}\) This specific fable is not amongst them, though we may suggest that if texts of Babrius had been available, then Porphyrogenitus, with his wide knowledge of classical literature, had


\(^\text{16}\) Babrius §47, trans. J. Ratcliffe.

most likely read them. We may also see that compared with the *Augustana* the father figure in this version is on his deathbed, like Sphendoplocus in Porphyrogeneritus’ Moravian rendition. Thus, it would appear highly likely that the Babrian version played some part in the development of the Moravian version and the shared narrative structure of requiring one’s sons to act in concord because of one’s imminent demise and the handing over of power.

Furthermore, the appeal of this structure of fable in the classical tradition is not limited to that of the various strands attributed to Aesop. In Plutarch’s *Moralia*, which in many ways ‘constitute the bulk of the surviving documentation of the intellectual life of the period between Nero and Hadrian’, 18 and thus fall into the same period as that of the works of Babrius, we find this fable used twice, and moreover within contexts that present a far greater scope than merely that of the non-specific father of Babrius or the farmer of the *Augustana*. In relation to Porphyrogeneritus it should be mentioned that Plutarch’s *Moralia* were relatively well known during his time, and like the *Augustana* were used for teaching written composition and stylistics, and thus would appear a highly relevant source. 19 Even more pertinent is that Porphyrogeneritus himself has often been described as an inheritor of the moral tradition of history and its pedagogical emphasis on ‘the early inculcation of precept’ from Plutarch, stretching back to Aristotle. 20 It is with this in mind that we should attend to Plutarch’s own usage of this pattern of fable, as well as to the impetus for Porphyrogeneritus to reappropriate it as a moral teaching on the superiority of concord.

Plutarch’s fable in both versions is given in relation to the second century BCE Indo-Iranian Scythian ruler nomad Scilurus, who was already famous before Plutarch’s time for the supposed fifty or eighty sons he produced. 21 The context of the first fable variant is that of Plutarch’s list of *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, where it appears listed along with many other exempla (moral examples) and maxims of wise rulers:

Scilurus leaving behind eighty manly sons, when he was about to die,

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offered to each of them a bundle of darts and began ordering them to break it. All of them having given up, he took each of the darts singly and broke them easily, teaching them that those who stand together will remain strong and that those who are separate and quarrel will be weak. 22

An almost identical version of the Scilurus story is yet again cited by Plutarch in an essay called On Talkativeness later in the Moralia. This second version is:

Scilurus the king of the Scythians, leaving behind eighty sons, asked them for a bundle of shafts, when he was about to die. He ordered them to take these and break them and to snap those that had been bound together and bundled. And when they said that they could not do it, he himself took them one by one and easily broke all of them, showing that harmony and accord are strong and indestructible, and that dissention and lack of unity is weak. 23

We may note in relation to this second context into which Plutarch inserts this story what appears to be the fable pattern of The Farmer and His Quarrelling Sons’ chief appeal for moral lore collectors such as Plutarch- as well as later scholars such as the composers of the Augustana and Porphyrogenitus himself. This is in relation to the perceived elegance and effectiveness inherent in the allegory of bundled sticks itself. The section of On Talkativeness in which this fable appears concerns a multitude of famous historical examples of practical illustrations of far greater efficacy than mere words. 24 Plutarch himself says of the fable and those in this same section: ‘εἰ δὲ ταύτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα συνεχῶς τις σκοποῖ καὶ ἀναλαμβάνοι, παύσατ’ ἄν ἰσοὺς ἠδόμενος τῷ φλυαρεῖν’ (‘Indeed if a person were to continuously scrutinise and pay heed to these and similar things, perhaps he would stop taking pleasure in idle talk’). 25 In returning to the Augustana tradition, we may note that this aspect of practical efficacy in relation to the bundle allegory is more or less spelled out in an obvious realisation both for the father/farmer and reader, when: ‘Ἡ [the farmer] realised that he needed to make a practical demonstration of this’ (‘Ἐγνω δὲ ἔν διὰ πράγματος τῷ τοῦτο πράξει’). 26 In other words, it is only through the physical demonstration of the bundled sticks that it becomes possible to avert the

22 Plut. Mor. 174f, trans. J. Ratcliffe.
24 ibid. 510e-11d.
25 ibid. 511d.
26 B.E. Perry, §53; A. Hausrath, §73.
sons’ quarrelling. Thus it would seem only relevant for Porphyrogenitus to have been aware of this fable pattern’s appeal and links with perceived effectiveness in relation to exhorting collectivity, when choosing to include it in his analysis of Moravia’s collapse.

In light of the historical and literary contexts put forward regarding each of the variants of this fable in the Classical Tradition and their relevance to Porphyrogenitus’ period, it would seem difficult to deduce exactly which variant or variants Porphyrogenitus was aware of in the constructing his Moravian fable. Indeed, with Porphyrogenitus we must bear in mind that we are not dealing with a minor historian, but perhaps one of the greatest intellects of his age, described aptly as ‘… one of the few Byzantine scholars who had a sense of the style and meaning of the prose writers of antiquity.’ 27 Thus it would not seem unwarranted for him to have been familiar to some degree with all three major variants of this fable pattern’s tradition and to have been influenced by these in his construction of a particularly exact historicised exemplum on the failure to heed the simple, demonstrable allegory of concord inherent in this fable pattern. For example, as noted, the Augustana version does not feature the key element of the father’s imminent demise, which is shared by all the other versions including Porphyrogenitus’ text. Moreover, very close affinities would seem to be present in relation to Plutarch’s variants and the version of Porphyrogenitus in that both are intrinsically bound to notions of a king and his children and the handing over of power, which are not found in the other variants. Equally, we should also note that Plutarch’s variants do not possess a speech by the father elucidating the meaning behind the bundle allegory to the children and exhorting their cooperation, as is common to both Aesopic variants and Porphyrogenitus. In spite of this, Scilurus’ tale remains a piece of barbarian wisdom capable of being applied to the internal civilised culture of the Greco-Roman world. Although Byzantine historians such as Porphyrogenitus still considered later nomadic peoples such as the Turks, Khazars and Bulgars in Central Asia and the Black Sea region anachronistically to be ‘Scythians,’ 28 the Moravians do not appear to have fitted into this way of thinking, though this would not seem to detract from the fable’s value in relation to representing kingship amongst barbarian peoples. In a similar way to Scilurus, Sphendoplocus’ evocation of the bundle of sticks may fulfil a similar exemplary usage from outsiders, though of course inverted as a warning of failure to Byzantine readers regarding the priority of internal threats over external ones.

27 R.J.H. Jenkins, Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries, 256.
28 Const. Porph. de Admin. XIII. 25, XLIII. 2; LIII. 126, 129.
to the survival of an empire. Such observations as these regarding the purpose behind the fable will be of great significance when we come to analysing the historical sources Porphyrogenitus made use of in constructing the Moravian fable.

**Applying the Fable**

Porphyrogenitus’ sources and the history of this fable pattern having been discussed, it is now necessary to explain why he would have taken a traditional and well attested fable pattern such as this and inserted it into the historical record of Moravia at all. Indeed in comparison with the largely informative and practical tone of the rest of *de Administrando*’s catalogue of neighbouring peoples, the presence of one of Aesop’s fables is a curious addition. In beginning to answer this, we should perhaps look to what other records attest of the country’s collapse during this same period and the falling out between Sphen doplocus’ successors. These other historical sources do indeed roughly agree with Porphyrogenitus on both accounts. They record that turmoil definitely existed between two of Sphen doplocus’ (Sváto pluk I’s) children, Sváto pluk II and Mojmir II, and agree on the destruction of Moravia following the ruler’s death in 894 CE. Moreover, Sphen doplocus’ death and the fall of the kingdom appear actually to have been due to the intrigues of his enemy Arnulf the King of Germany, which finally culminated in 898 CE with Sváto pluk II’s imprisonment and subsequent death in Bavaria. Following this Moravia appears to have been overrun by Magyars in 907 CE, whom both Constantine and his father Leo called ‘Toúçkov’ (‘Turks’), as is found in the Moravian fable, and one must read between the lines carefully to deduce them from actual Turkic peoples in Byzantine writings of this period.

In light of this information, we may strongly suggest that the basic details on Moravia’s collapse were available to Porphyrogenitus. Perhaps this was through records of earlier ambassadors from the turn of the tenth-century CE, though compared with the more detailed diversity of sources we possess on other peoples discussed by Porphyrogenitus, such as the Crobati and

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32 ibid. 53-4.
their religious history,33 direct links remain opaque. However, more important
than debates as to the sources of Porphyrogenitus’ information for a coun-
try that had disappeared around the time he was born, would seem to be his
reappropriation and reshaping of the events in Moravia around the didactic
fable of the bundle of sticks and Sphendoplocus’ quarrelling sons. The choice
to condense the years between 894 CE and 907 CE into a single year of peace
and subsequent dissolution would not seem half-knowledge or ignorance of
Moravia’s history by the author, but rather a narrative choice to reinforce the
moral example of the sons’ foolishness. Thus we must consider in detail the
mores of Byzantine historiography, in which moral purpose often took centre
stage in comparison with historical fact.

In addressing the ways in which these historical events were reshaped
by Porphyrogenitus, and moreover what value they had for him, much
research by modern scholars strongly suggests that Byzantine historians
and chroniclers, especially from the vastly influential ninth-century The-
ophanes onwards, actively engaged in a ‘virtual plagiarism’ of classical
texts in the composition of their own histories.34 Often this was consciously
announced to the audience to lend an account credence,35 though it is
necessary to be aware that many of these uses of older texts also included
the chronicler’s own reinterpretation and the borrowing of classical mo-
tifs and tales to explain or ornament later events.36 Tellingly, Porphyro-
genitus himself undertook the task of bringing up to date Theophanes’
works, albeit in his own idiom.37 It has also been deftly remarked in re-

tation to both the Byzantine scholar and diplomat of this period that ‘…
wide ranging knowledge about the Classical and Judaeo-Christian past
was a tool of rhetoric, more a source of moralising exempla than a stock of

33 T. Živković, ‘Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ Source on the Earliest History of the Cro-
ats and Serbs,’ RADOVI – Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest 42 (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2010),
117-131.
34 R. Scott, ‘Text and Context in Byzantine Historiography,’ in A Companion to Byzant-
tium, ed. L. James (Richmond: John Wiley & Sons Press, 2010), 254.
35 ibid. 254.
36 H. Hunger, ‘On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature,’
Dumbarton Oaks Papers 23/24 (Washington D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Stud-
ies, 1969-1970), 21; M. Hinterberger, ‘Envy and Nemesis in the Vita Basilii and Leo the Deacon:
Literary Mimesis or Something More?’ in History as Literature in Byzantium: Papers from the
Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 2007, ed. R. J.
37 A. Každan, The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
information valuable for its own sake.’\textsuperscript{38} It is this final notion which I believe will prove most helpful to us in attempting to understand the moral value of the Aesopic elements in the construction of the fall of Moravia and its overall purpose in Porphyrogenitus’ text. As we shall see, the \textit{de Administrando} remains a thoroughly rhetorical and pedagogical work, wherein the historical context of Moravia in this episode would appear of lesser importance compared with the Aesopic moral lesson around which it is based.

Indeed, \textit{de Administrando}, like much of Byzantine historiography, would seem to belong to a long tradition of didactic literature, and has been perhaps not too overgenerously described as ‘… a statement of practical wisdom that would have warmed the heart of an Aristotle or Cicero.’\textsuperscript{39} We should also note that it is written consciously and deliberately in the vernacular of the period for ease of comprehension, further cementing the accessibility for moral instruction.\textsuperscript{40} As has been outlined in the introduction, its immediate target audience was Porphyrogenitus’ son Romanus II, to whom scholars believe the work was gifted in 952 CE when he was only fourteen years old.\textsuperscript{41} In fact it is a composite of several treatises loosely tied together by subject matter, written between 948 CE and the given terminus.\textsuperscript{42} Whether it was ever intended to be read beyond this single recipient or the palace is a matter which is very hard to determine, though Jenkins has gone as far in suggesting that it was only held by a few diplomats, as some of the intelligence it contained on neighbouring peoples may have made it ‘top secret.’\textsuperscript{43} In spite of such intriguing postulations as these, it is perhaps more reasonable to note the title of the work itself and its introductory

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Jenkins1} R.J.H. Jenkins, \textit{Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries}, 259.
\bibitem{Rona-Tas} A. Róna-Tas, \textit{Hungarians}, 54; R. J. H. Jenkins, General Introduction in \textit{de Admin.}, 12.
\bibitem{Jenkins2} R.J.H. Jenkins, \textit{Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries}, 260.
\end{thebibliography}
Jonathan Ratcliffe

statements. Firstly it should be explained that it was not until 1611 CE that it was to take on Johann Meursius’ familiar Latin name de Administrando Imperio (‘How the Empire Ought to be Managed’).\textsuperscript{44} The actual title is:

\begin{quote}
ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙ ΑΙΩΝΙΩΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΙΔΙΟΝ ΤΙΟΝ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΣΤΕΦΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΡΦΥΡΟΓΕΝΝΗΤΟΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΑ.
\end{quote}

Moravcsik and Jenkins translate this as:

\begin{quote}
Constantine in Christ the Eternal Emperor, Emperor of the Romans to His Son Romanus, the Emperor Crowned of God and Born in the Purple.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

It should be emphasised here that these scholars have neglected to emphasise the integral Greek word ‘διον’ (‘his very own’) in this passage that is used by Porphyrogenitus to describe his ‘υιόν’ (‘son’). Thus this title is very much a recognition and invocation from legitimate ruler to legitimate heir and co-emperor. Even more telling than this title, which may have been merely the work of one of Porphyrogenitus’ scribes and not his ipsissima verba, is the recognition inherent in the evocation with which the work begins: ‘Τίς σοφός εὐφραίνει πατέρα, καὶ πατήρ φιλόστοργος ἐπὶ υἱῷ τέρπεται φρονίμῳ’ (‘A wise son makes his father happy and a father takes pleasure in a prudent son’).\textsuperscript{46} With this said, some attention also deserves to be given to what the Byzantine historians say of the close and didactic relationship between Porphyrogenitus and his son. In Theophanes Continuatus we find a curious example of the father’s means of teaching, and moreover the priority he appears to have had for his son to be a successful and stable ruler:

He loved and adored his son, the king Romanus, in a way that nobody else did. Above all he instructed him to have piety towards God, and as well as this he educated him in royal speech, custom, gait, humour, garments, the throne and comportment. Porphyrogenitus also put much stock in divine appearances, and said to his son, as if prophesying: “If you preserve these things, you will be long lived in the rulership of the

\textsuperscript{44} Gy. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, Critical Introduction in de Admin., 23.
\textsuperscript{46} Const. Porph. de Admin. I.1-2, trans. J. Ratcliffe.
Taking note of these facts is in many ways integral to developing a closer view of the *de Administrando*’s intention and contents, and like the lesson of Sphendoplocus it shows the passing of power and knowledge from father to son to maintain an empire’s stability.

It is with regard to the maintenance of the Byzantine Empire that Porphyrogenitus’ attention to Moravia would seem to be very much aimed at using its destruction to evoke a warning for his son concerning solidarity and the inheritance of great responsibility against the same overwhelming enemy, the ‘Turks’ (Magyars), who had destroyed the country. In relation to the lessons set out for Romanus II in *de Administrando*, we must note that such ‘Turks’ remain one of the ruler’s greatest concerns for his own and his son’s empire’s immediate future, along with the indomitable hordes of nomadic Turkic Pechnegs.48 In fact, aside from *de Administrando*’s concentration on the origins, invasions and politics of such peoples, its most solid aim and practical lesson is on how to turn such peoples against one another for political benefit.49 Key to Porphyrogenitus’ instructions in *de Administrando* in order to prevent the destruction of Byzantium at the hands of these nomadic invaders is his continual bribing of them with great quantities of tribute.50 Porphyrogenitus proposes that if peoples such as the Pechnegs are kept at peace with Rome through a zakana (‘oath’) and bribery, then other enemies such as the Russians, Bulgars and Turks will be unable to harm the Byzantines.51 This placing of such concerns in the very first chapters of the work suggests that to Porphyrogenitus it was imperative for his political machinations to continue uninterrupted lest Byzantium be attacked from all directions.

In the same way, the lesson of internal solidarity and its failure inherent in Porphyrogenitus’ description of Moravia’s fable would also seem to possess a very immediate relevance to the infighting and competition for the throne that coloured the history of Porphyrogenitus’ own family’s rule and the state his son Romanus II was soon to inherit. In order to understand this, it is imperative to detail the long chain of political upsets that had filled Porphyrogenitus’ life.

48 Const. Porph. de Admin. I-VIII, XXXVII, XXXVIII, XL.
50 ibid. I-IV.
51 ibid. IV, VIII.
As a child he had been in the care of his uncle the regent Alexander,\textsuperscript{52} following whose death there was an unsuccessful attempt made by Constantine Doukas to seize the throne.\textsuperscript{53} From age seven onwards Porphyrogenitus shared power with his mother Zoë and his lord protector Nikolas,\textsuperscript{54} until the admiral Romanus Lecapenus himself married Zoë, and married his daughter Helena to Porphyrogenitus to gain proximity to the throne.\textsuperscript{55} In 927 CE Romanus elevated his own son Christopher above the fourteen year old emperor through the agency of the ruler of the Bulgars, who had married his own granddaughter to Christopher.\textsuperscript{56} Romanus was in turn ousted by his other sons Constantine and Stephanus, the second of whom plotters later tried to restore early during Porphyrogenitus’ reign.\textsuperscript{57} In fact, Porphyrogenitus did not come to exercise power properly until he was almost forty, and at one stage may have been demoted to as low as fifth in line to the throne.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, it would appear only reasonable that these misfortunes and intrigues should be very much present in Porphyrogenitus’ mind as he prepared the \textit{de Administrando} and its Moravian fable to teach his son Romanus II the value of good rulership and internal stability. In defence of this, there certainly appears evidence of such formative experiences in the rest of \textit{de Administrando}. For instance, we may detect these in Porphyrogenitus’ own account of the previously mentioned event of Romanus Lecapenus marrying of his son to a Bulgar foreigner - an act the author characterises as flying in the face of imperial traditions established by Constantine the Great.\textsuperscript{59} The straw man defence Porphyrogenitus makes concerning Romanus’ ignorance of custom and illiteracy would seem to be nothing more than a chance for him to denigrate his usurper in an extremely ironic manner under the pretext of teaching his son the value of respecting the \textit{mores} of different cultures.\textsuperscript{60} This is further cemented by Porphyrogenitus when he describes Romanus with all too personal hyperbole as ‘… despised by his council and all of the common people and even the church itself, so that their hatred became

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Theo. Cont. VI. 235a, 238c, 238d, 242c-d, 243a-d, S. Magister, 475a-b; J. Skylitzes, 193.
\item \textsuperscript{53} J. Skylitzes, 197-9.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Theo. Cont. VI. 238d-9a, 242 c-d 243a-d, S. Magister, 477d- 8b.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Theo. Cont. VI. 244a, 245c-d, 248a-b; S. Magister, 479a, 481a, d.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Theo. Cont. VI. 256d-7a; S. Runciman, \textit{The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His reign: A Study of Tenth Century Byzantium} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 67.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Theo. Cont. VI. 270b, 274c; S. Magister, 491c; Liudprand of Cremona, V. 20-2; A.J. Toynbee, \textit{Constantine Porphyrogenitus}, 8-12; W.T. Treadgold, \textit{A History of the Byzantine State}, 473-83.
\item \textsuperscript{58} R. J. H. Jenkins, General Introduction in \textit{de Admin.}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Const. Porph. \textit{de Admin} XIII. 145-75.
\item \textsuperscript{60} ibid. XIII. 175-9.
\end{thebibliography}
extremely obvious in the end, and after his death he is still equally loathed and slandered..." Thus the emphasis here is placed on the effects precipitated by poor decision making on the ruler’s part leading to massive internal dissonance, as with the Moravian fable. Yet, just as importantly, it is Porphyrogenitus’ own experience that is the leading cause behind the content’s inclusion and the way in which it is represented.

Such concerns regarding the stability of the empire and internal order under the correct ruler are manifest all the more on Porphyrogenitus’ part when one considers the Moravian fable’s disastrous outcome. In relation to this it is striking to note how the Aesopic and Plutarchic predecessors of this fable tradition, which usually merely terminates simply with the moral of concord, becomes one of tragedy in Porphyrogenitus’ work. Not only do the Moravians lose the land in which they once lived and a great many of their people are slaughtered, which is understood but not stated outright - rather it is that their remaining people lose their identity by becoming members of other tribes. The core of the tragedy remains the inability of the sons to follow their father’s instruction in prioritising the rulership of his elected successor, the eldest son. Here in relation to Porphyrogenitus’ family it is crucial to note that he had been appointed as successor by his father at two years old in 908 CE, though, as shown, this had not been heeded. Equally, scholars believe that Romanus II had been appointed successor at six years old in 946 CE, only just after his father had managed to finally gain the throne independently in 945 CE. The prioritisation of internal rather than external conflict in the fall of Moravia not only strengthens the moral of concord within the work as a lesson, but as has been shown, plants it squarely in the context of Porphyrogenitus and his son Romanus II’s own dangerously quarrelsome ruling family. If rulers do not act with concord and diffidence towards the chain of command, the result will be the ending of their entire people and culture. With such bitter, unconditional statements as these we see that Porphyrogenitus has expended great effort in the careful construction of this fable and its context. It is intended to remain with Romanus II as the worst thing that might possibly happen - the absolute failure of a ruler, recalled as a historical example that no other king hopes ever to imitate.

61 ibid. XIII. 170-3.
62 Cf. B.E. Perry, Studies, §§53; Babrius §47; Plut. Mor. 174f, 511c.
63 Const. Porph. de Admin. XLI. 21-3.
In conclusion, the placing of an Aesopic tale amidst tribal aetiologies and in-depth political analysis of international politics would appear a well thought out and effective creation on Porphyrogenitus’ part. At its most basic we may see mirrored both in the fable and in the historian’s own life the figure of a father appealing to his offspring in the most demonstrable and simple manner to bring order to their own house, even before that of the surrounding world. In relation to this, it has been established that Porphyrogenitus most likely drew upon multiple strands of the fable pattern in question in order to construct this moral *exemplum* on the destruction of Moravia. This more than anything would seem to cement the importance in presenting this moral to Romanus II. Although Romanus II died suddenly after ruling for only three and a half years, during this time he managed to prevent Byzantium’s destruction at the hands of its nomadic neighbours, as his father had instructed him to do, and his generals even made significant inroads against the ‘Turks’. The rumours of John Skylitzes that both Porphyrogenitus and Romanus II died in mysterious circumstances - poisoned in turn by the latter’s wife Theophano, should perhaps not be trusted, due to dislike for the woman’s power at court but clearly, to the historians of this period at least, the notion of discord within the Porphyrogenitan house remained a popular topic. Nonetheless, the empire of the Byzantines unlike that of Greater Moravia lived on. Without its preservation of works such as that of Porphyrogenitus’ guide to his son, however personal the originally intended audience, much less would be known of Byzantium’s attitudes towards its enemies and neighbours during this complex period of history. In the same way, we would also know much less of the personal struggles of one of Byzantine history’s most interesting figures and his use of one of the classical tradition’s most enduring fable patterns to reshape the events of history as an all too relevant practical and moral lesson.

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67 *Theo. Cont.* VI. 300c; Leo the Deacon, II.10.
68 J. Skylitzes, 253. 35-55.