Tzitzak

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*This individual is sometimes confused with **Byzantine Empress Irene,** who was her daughter-in-law.*

Tzitzak (Çiçek in Turkish, died c. 750), baptised **Irene** (Greek: Ειρήνη), was a Khazar princess, the daughter of *khagan* Bihar who became the first wife of Byzantine Emperor Constantine V (r. 741-775).

Tzitzak	
Byzantine empress	
Full name	Tzitzak (baptismal name Irene)
Born	8th century
Died	c. 750
Consort to	Constantine V
Offspring	Leo IV the Khazar
Dynasty	Isaurian Dynasty
Father	Bihar

Empress

In 732, the Byzantine Empire was under threat of invasion from the Umayyad Caliphate. Seeking allies, Leo III the Isaurian sent an embassy to Bihar, *Khagan* of the Khazars. The alliance was sealed with the marriage of Tzitzak to Constantine V, son and junior co-ruler of Leo.

Tzitzak was escorted to Constantinople for her marriage. Constantine was about fourteen years old. She may have been even younger as she would not give birth for eighteen years. Tzitzak became a Christian under the baptismal name Irene. Tzitzak's wedding gown became famous for having started a new fashion craze in Constantinople for male robes called *tzitzakion*.

The chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor records Tzitzak learning to read religious text. He comments her as pious and contrasts her with the "impiety" of her father-in-law and husband. Leo III and Constantine V were Iconoclast Emperors while Theophanes was an Iconodule monk. His praise was probably reflective of Irene herself sharing his views.[1]

Whether her mother-in-law Maria was still senior Empress at the time of her marriage is uncertain. Leo III died on 18 June 741. Constantine V succeeded him with Irene as his Empress consort. However almost immediately civil war started as Artabasdos, brother-in-law of Constantine, claimed the throne for himself. The civil war lasted to 2 November 743. The role of Irene in the war has not been commented by Theophanes.

On 25 January 750,Constantine and Tzitzak had a son, Leo, who succeeded his father as Emperor Leo IV. He was better known as "Leo the Khazar". His birth happens to be the last mention of Irene in the historical record. By the following year, Constantine was already married to his second wife Maria. Lynda Garland has suggested Tzitzak died in childbirth.[2]

The word "Tzitzak" is most likely the hellenized version of the Turkic word "çiçek", meaning "flower."

References

- Kevin Alan Brook. *The Jews of Khazaria.* 2nd ed. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006.
- Douglas M. Dunlop. *The History of the Jewish Khazars,* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954.
- *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford University Press, 1991.

1. ^ "Irene, wife of Constantine V" (2000) (http://www.roman-emperors.org/irenev.htm)

2. ^ "Irene, wife of Constantine V" (2000) (http://www.roman-emperors.org/irenev.htm)

External links

- A short article on her by Lynda Garland (http://www.roman-emperors.org/irenev.htm)

Royal titles		
Preceded by **Maria**	**Byzantine Empress consort** 741–750 *with Anna (741–743)*	Succeeded by **Maria**

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