

INTRODUCTION

On an overcast afternoon in November 2016, Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, unveiled a massive new monument just outside the walls of the Kremlin, in the heart of Moscow. Beside him at the ceremony stood Patriarch Kirill, primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, and several leading members of the capital's political and clerical elite. 'I greet and congratulate all of you with the opening of the monument to Saint Equal-of-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir,' Putin said in the televised address. 'The new monument is a tribute to our great ancestor, the esteemed saint, statesman, and warrior, the spiritual founder of the Russian state.' An enormous bronze statue, rising over sixty feet into the sky, towered over the president as he spoke. It depicted the grand prince with a gigantic cross in one hand and a sword in the other. A cap reminiscent of the *shapka* of Monomakh, the ancient symbol of Russian monarchy, adorned the saint's head. 'Vladimir's era knew many achievements,' Putin continued, 'and the most important of these, the definitive, key achievement, was the baptism of Rus.'¹

The patriarch was next to take the podium. He too stressed the importance of Vladimir's conversion, without which, he claimed, 'there would be no Rus, no Russia, no Russian Orthodox state, no great Russian Empire, and no contemporary Russia'. Behind the patriarch, in a semicircle around the base of the sculpture, stood three bronze reliefs. Each depicted a key event in the national conversion. The first portrayed Vladimir's siege of Cherson, a port city on the Black Sea. The second depicted his baptism there at the hands of Byzantine clerics. The third showed the grand prince baptising his subjects *en masse* in Kiev in the year 988. 'Vladimir was not afraid to alter profoundly the direction

¹ A full transcription of the speeches as well as television footage of the event is available at: 'V Den' narodnogo edinstva v Moskve otkryt pamiatnik kniazii Vladimiru', *Ofitsial'nye setevye resursy Prezidenta Rossii*, www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211 (accessed November 2017).

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of society's development,' the patriarch proclaimed. 'And this determination, this zeal for Christ and integrity in following the Gospel, made him like the apostles, even though they were separated by a thousand years.'

The ceremony concluded with a brief liturgical service. The patriarch solemnly turned and faced the massive statue. In the background, a mixed chorus triumphantly sang the troparion, the main festal hymn, from the liturgical services for Saint Vladimir:

Уподобился еси купцу, ищущему добраго бисера, славнодержавный Владимире, на высоте стола сидя матере градов, богоспасаемаго Киева: испытуя же и посылая к Царскому граду увести православную веру, обрел еси безценный бисер – Христа, избравшаго тя, яко втораго Павла, и оттрясшаго слепоту во святей купели, душевную вкупе и телесную. Темже празднуем твое усупение, людие твои суще, моли спастися державы твоя Российския начальником и множеству владомых.²

You were like a merchant seeking a fine pearl, O glorious sovereign Vladimir. Sitting on the throne of the divinely saved Kiev, the mother of cities, you tested [the faiths] and sent servants to the Imperial City to behold the Orthodox faith. You thereby found Christ, the priceless pearl, who chose you as a second Paul, and washed away your spiritual and physical blindness in the holy font. We, your people, therefore celebrate your falling asleep. Pray that the rulers of your Russian state, and the multitude of their subjects, may be saved.

The choir concluded, and a deacon loudly intoned the opening prayer of the rite of consecration. The patriarch took up an aspergillum, the liturgical instrument used to sprinkle holy water, and blessed the statue three times with the sign of the cross. The holy water ran down the base of the monument and over the inscription chiselled there in giant Church Slavonic letters: 'Saint Prince Vladimir Baptiser of Rus'. The choir sang a second hymn, in honour of the life-creating cross, and the ceremony came to a close.

The president and patriarch looked into the television cameras that late autumn day and retold an ancient tale. The speeches, the hymns, the honorifics, the bronze reliefs, the massive cross, the inscription: all of these repeated a story about Prince Vladimir recorded in the *Rus Primary Chronicle* in the early twelfth century and subsequently used as the preface to most major chronicles for the next 500 years. It was a story many in the audience knew by heart. They had learned it in school textbooks and seen it depicted in novels, films, and cartoons. For centuries before that, their

² Mineia. Mai (Moscow, 2002), p. 186. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

The Great Church and Stoudite Reform

ancestors had recounted it in church hymns, lives of the saints, folk songs, and epic tales.³ To the Russians in attendance, and those watching at home, the new statue therefore symbolized more than a revered historical figure. It represented an ancient myth of origins: a myth that had taught the east Slavic peoples who they were and where they had come from since it was first committed to parchment some 900 years earlier.

THE GREAT CHURCH AND STOUDITE REFORM

Now picture a different scene. It is a bright spring morning in tenth-century Constantinople. Romans from across the city stream towards the Great Church, Hagia Sophia, where they will celebrate the feast of the city's founder and namesake, Saint Constantine the Great, and his mother Saint Helena. Inside the massive cathedral, incense rises from the altar and candles flicker before icons of the saints. The verses of the fiftieth psalm echo across the vast domed sanctuary.⁴ The chant concludes and a choir of nearly 200 voices takes up the troparion of the feast:⁵

Τοῦ Σταυροῦ σου τὸν τύπον ἐν οὐρανῷ θεασάμενος, καὶ ὡς ὁ Παῦλος τὴν κλῆσιν οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δεξάμενος, ὁ ἐν βασιλεῦσιν, Ἀπόστολός σου Κύριε, Βασιλεύουσαν πόλιν τῇ χειρὶ σου παρέθετο, ἣν περισώζε διάπαντός ἐν εἰρήνῃ, πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου, καὶ ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς.⁶

Beholding the image of your cross in the sky, and like Paul receiving a call not from men, your apostle among kings placed the Imperial City in your hands, O Lord. Preserve it ever in peace, through the supplications of the Mother of God, and have mercy on us.

The patriarch of Constantinople, clothed in elaborate vestments, presides over the matins service. He is joined at the ceremony by the emperor, his retinue, and members of the senate.⁷ Together they prepare to lead a liturgical procession of thousands across the city.

One last litany is said, and the holy parade begins. The patriarch and the emperor descend the steps of the Great Church and proceed towards the

³ On the figure of Saint Vladimir in medieval and modern Russian culture, see F. Butler, *Enlightener of Rus': The Image of Vladimir Sviatoslavovich across the Centuries* (Bloomington, 2002).

⁴ *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, ed. J. Mateos (Rome, 1962–63), vol. I, p. XXIV.

⁵ B. V. Pentcheva, 'Liturgy and Music at Hagia Sophia', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, www.religion.oxfordre.com. On the relationship between music and architecture in the Great Church, see B. V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, 2017).

⁶ *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, p. 296.

⁷ J. F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Rome, 1987), p. 225.

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Church of the Holy Apostles, the final resting place of Constantine and Helena.⁸ Along the route, they visit various shrines and monuments. Cantors chant psalms and sing hymns, and the clergy recite prayers.⁹ The sacred story that began at vespers the night before, and continued at matins, is now proclaimed on the city streets. At each station, amidst the incense and icons, the clergy ritually retell the story of the conversion of the Roman Empire. They sing of Constantine's miraculous conversion and military triumph, of his victory over paganism and unique election into the ranks of the apostles. They praise Helena's wisdom and commemorate her miraculous finding of the 'true cross'. Finally, arriving at the doors of *Agiói Apostoloi*, the patriarch enters the church and celebrates the divine mysteries. The hymns for the imperial pair are chanted once more, this time at the site of their imperial tomb. The thrice-holy refrain of the Trisagion is sung, and the Eucharist distributed.¹⁰ Several hours after departing from Hagia Sophia, the patriarch at last delivers the benediction. The annual imperial commemoration of Constantine the Great and his mother Helena draws to an end, to be repeated again the next year, just as it had been every year, since possibly as early as the fifth century.¹¹

The *asmatike akolouthia*, or sung office, of the Great Church was not the only form of liturgy celebrated in Constantinople on this day.¹² Throughout the city, a number of less lavish monastic rites were also served, even as the emperor and patriarch paraded through the streets.¹³ In earlier eras, the *akolouthia ton akoimeton*, or office of the sleepless monks, had held sway in the Byzantine capital, but by the tenth century this tradition had largely given way to a revised set of practices associated with the Monastery of Stoudios. In the year 799 a charismatic abbot named Theodore led his monks out of Bithynia, on account of the Arab invasions, and settled in this dying monastic establishment near the Sea of Marmara.¹⁴ He subsequently summoned a group of monks from the Lavra of Saint Sabbas, in the Judean desert between Jerusalem and the

⁸ *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, p. 296. See also N. Teteriatnikov, 'The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena: A Study in the Light of Post-Iconoclastic Re-Evaluation of the Cross', *Deltion XAE*, 18 (1995), pp. 169–88.

⁹ Baldwin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship*, pp. 205–25. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹¹ The canonization of Constantine is surrounded by uncertainty. It may have occurred as early as the fifth century or as late as the ninth. See G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 143–44.

¹² On the existence of multiple rites in a single city, see D. Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 5–7.

¹³ J. C. Anderson and S. Parenti, *A Byzantine Monastic Office, AD 1105* (Washington DC, 2016) pp. 257–58.

¹⁴ On the Monastery of Stoudios and its saintly founder, see R. Cholij, *Theodore the Stoudite: The Ordering of Holiness* (Oxford, 2002).

The Great Church and Stoudite Reform

Dead Sea, and together they revitalized the monastery and initiated a series of ground-breaking liturgical reforms.¹⁵

For centuries, the church services in Jerusalem and Constantinople had exercised a complex, mutual influence on one another.¹⁶ The imperial cathedral rite was distinguished by its ritual grandeur and choral sophistication; the Palestinian rite by its sombre prayer, ascetic rigour, and extensive psalmody.¹⁷ In the ninth century, partly in an effort to combat iconoclasm, Theodore and his followers gradually fused these two traditions together.¹⁸ They grafted the twenty-four-hour cycle of desert monastic worship, with its numerous psalms, canons, and hymns, onto the skeleton of litanies and prayers said within the altar of the Great Church. The result was a new hybrid rite, the so-called Stoudite synthesis, which was to define eastern Christian worship for the next half millennium.¹⁹

A tenth-century spectator, accustomed to the cathedral office, might have been struck by the number of books involved in the monastic ceremonies. Churchmen at Hagia Sophia prayed from long and unwieldy scrolls, measuring up to sixteen metres in length.²⁰ Clerics of the Stoudite federation, on the other hand, chanted from a variety of more recent liturgical anthologies, such as the Menaion, Triodion, and Octoechos.²¹ These books contained thousands of original hymns, composed over the course of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries by Palestinian hymnodists, such as Saint Cosmos and Saint John of Damascus, and their

¹⁵ R. Taft, *A Short History of the Byzantine Rite* (Collegeville, 1992), pp. 52–53. T. Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform: A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition* (Crestwood, 2010), pp. 135–60.

¹⁶ See Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization*, pp. 1–73.

¹⁷ See G. M. Hanke, *Vesper und Orthros des Kathedralritus der Hagia Sophia zu Konstantinopel: Eine strukturanalytische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Psalmodie und der Formulare in den Euchologien*, Inauguraldissertation zu Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Doktors der Theologie (Frankfurt am Main, 2002); S. Parenti, 'The Cathedral Rite of Constantinople: Evolution of a Local Tradition', *OCP*, 77 (2011), pp. 449–69.

¹⁸ M. Zheltov, 'Chiny vecherni i utreni v drevnerusskikh sluzhebnykh studiiiskoi epokhi', *BT*, 43/44 (2012), pp. 443–44. Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform*, p. 153. On the history of iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, see L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850* (Cambridge, 2012) and L. Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London, 2012). On the western response to the crisis, see T. F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2012).

¹⁹ Taft, *A Short History*, pp. 55–67.

²⁰ M. Arranz, *Eukhologii Konstantinopolia v nachale XI veka* (Rome/Moscow, 2003), p. 13. See also S. Gerstel, 'Liturgical Scrolls in the Byzantine Sanctuary', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 35 (1994), pp. 195–204.

²¹ On the historical development of these books, see A. Iu. Nikiforovna, *Iz istorii Minei v Vizantii: Gimnograficheskie pamiatniki VIII–XII vv. iz sobraniia Monastyria Sviatoi Ekateriny na Sinae* (Moscow, 2013); O. A. Krashennnikova, *Drevneslavianskii Oktoikh sv. Klimenta arkhiepiskopa Okhridskogo* (Moscow, 2006); I. A. Karabinov, *Postnaia Triod': Istoricheskii obzor ee plana, sostava, redaktsii i slavianskikh perevodov* (St Petersburg, 1910).

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Stoudite epigones, such as Saint Joseph.²² The newer materials did not necessarily contradict or eliminate the contents of earlier rites, so much as they built and expanded upon them. The Stoudites continued to celebrate the feast of Saints Constantine and Helena, for instance, and the sacred story grew only more elaborate under their management, as additional genres of hymnody, such as stichera and canons, were added to the office.

SLAVONIC CHURCH BOOKS

The monastic rites were not simply more extensive. They also had the advantage of being highly portable. When the Byzantine faith spread to new lands, it was therefore these more austere services, and not the sumptuous pageant of the Great Church, which came to be celebrated in both monasteries and cathedrals alike.²³ The services imported into early Rus are a good case study in this regard. Since the mid-nineteenth century, historians of eastern Christian worship have put forward a number of competing theories about the origins of Slavonic liturgy in Kiev.²⁴ Some have suggested that purely Constantinopolitan practices prevailed there, while others have argued for the influence of a different regional tradition, which they have variously attributed to locales as far-ranging as Mount Sinai, Mount Athos, eastern and western Bulgaria, and southern Italy.²⁵

Perhaps the most persuasive research has been carried out only recently, within the last decade, at the Moscow Theological Academy. In a series of independent and highly technical studies, two Russian liturgists, Aleksei Pentkovskii and Mikhail Zheltov, have substantially rewritten the history of how Byzantine church books arrived

²² Nikiforovna, *Iz istorii Minei v Vizantii*, pp. 192–93. A. M. Pentkovskii, ‘Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie i slavianskaia gimnografiia vizantiiskogo obriada v X veke’, in H. Rothe and D. Christians (eds.), *Liturgische Hymnen nach byzantinischem Ritus bei den Slaven in ältester Zeit. Beiträge einer internationalen Tagung Bonn, 7.10. Juni 2005*, (Paderborn, 2007), p. 17.

²³ Pentkovskii, ‘Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie i slavianskaia gimnografiia’, p. 18.

²⁴ For a summary of the discussion, see T. I. Afanas’eva, *Liturgii Ioanna Zlatousta i Vasiliia Velikogo v slavianskoi traditsii (po sluzhebnykh XI–XV vv.)* (Moscow, 2015), pp. 8–22.

²⁵ A. A. Dmitrievskii, *Bogoslužhenie v Russkoi Tserkvi za pervye piat’ vekov* (Kazan, 1883). M. A. Lisitsyn, *Pervonachal’nyi slaviano-russkii Tipikon* (St Petersburg, 1911). M. Arranz, ‘Les grandes etapes de la liturgie byzantine: Palestine-Byzance-Russie – Essai d’aperçu historique’, in *Liturgie de l’Eglise particuliere, liturgie de l’Eglise universelle* (Rome, 1976), vol. VII, pp. 43–72. M. A. Momina, ‘Problema pravki slavianskikh bogoslužhebnykh gimnograficheskikh knig na Rusi v XI stoletii’, *TODRL*, 45 (1992), pp. 200–19. A. S. Slutskii, ‘Vizantiiskie liturgicheskie chiny “Soedineniia Darov” i “Teploty”’. Rannie slavianskie versii’, *IV*, 65 (Moscow, 2006), pp. 126–45. T. I. Afanas’eva, ‘Osobennosti posledovaniia liturgii Ioanna Zlatousta i Vasiliia Velikogo v drevnerusskikh Sluzhebnykh XIII–XIV vv.’, *Ruthenica*, 6 (2007), pp. 207–42.

Slavonic Church Books

in Rus.²⁶ Previously, it was thought that the main complex of early Rus church books had been translated in Kiev, at one time and in one place, from Stoudite originals brought directly from Constantinople.²⁷ Upon closer examination, however, it turns out that the earliest Rus manuscripts do not precisely conform to the monastic practices then prevalent in the Imperial City.²⁸ On the contrary, the services performed in eleventh-century Kiev appear to have been based on a different and now-lost Greek liturgical tradition: one that was built upon the hybrid Stoudite system, but which also retained a variety of minor regional differences.²⁹ Pentkovskii and Zheltov locate this little-studied Byzantine tradition to the west of Constantinople, in the northern provinces of the Greek mainland, between the Thermaic Gulf and Adriatic Sea. They conclude that the earliest Rus liturgical books therefore preserved the unique, local practices of the archdiocese of Thessalonica, or a diocese still farther to the north, in Epirus or southern Albania.³⁰

Yet one should not imagine that Greek-language service books were driven straight from north-western Byzantium through the gates of Kiev. A crucial link connected the two regions: that of the lakeside city of Ohrid, in the far western reaches of the First Bulgarian Empire.³¹ It was there, in the final decade of the ninth century, that two ‘bishops of the Slavonic tongue’, Saint Klement and Naum of Ohrid, oversaw the first

²⁶ See Pentkovskii, ‘Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie i slavianskaia gimnografia’, pp. 16–26; A. M. Pentkovskii, ‘K istorii Slavianskogo bogoslužheniia vizantiiskogo obriada v nachal’nyi period (kon. IX–nach. X v.): Dva drevnikh slavianskikh kanona arkhangelu Mikhailu’, *BT*, 43–44 (2012), pp. 401–42; A. M. Pentkovskii, ‘Okhrid na Rusi’: Drevnerusskie bogoslužebnye knigi kak istochnik dlia rekonstruktsii liturgicheskoi traditsii Okhridsko-Prespanskogo regiona v X–XI stoletiiakh’, *Zbornik na trudovi od Megunarodniot nauchen sober* (Skopje, 2014), pp. 43–65; A. M. Pentkovskii, ‘Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužebnykh knig v kontse IX–pervoi polovine X vekov’, *Slowěne*, 2 (2016), pp. 54–120; M. Zheltov, ‘Chin Bozhestvennoi liturgii v drevneishikh (XI–XIV vv.) slavianskikh Sluzhebnykh knig’, *BT*, 41 (2007), pp. 272–359; M. Zheltov, ‘Molitvy vo vremia prichashcheniia sviashchennosluzhitelei v drevnerusskikh Sluzhebnykh knig XIII–XIV vv.’, *DR*, 35 (2009), pp. 75–92; M. Zheltov, ‘Chiny obruchenii i venchaniia v drevneishikh slavianskikh rukopisiakh’, *Palaeobulgarica*, 1 (2010), pp. 25–43; M. Zheltov, ‘Chiny vecherni i utreni’, pp. 443–70; M. Zheltov, ‘Liturgicheskaia traditsiia zapada Vizantii v drevneishikh russkikh sluzhebnykh knig’, in I. Velev (ed.), *Zbornik na trudovi od Megunarodniot nauchen sober* (Skopje, 2014), pp. 249–54.

²⁷ Momina, ‘Problema pravki’, pp. 217–19. E. M. Vereshchagin and V. B. Krys’ko, ‘Nabludeniia nad iazikom i tekstem arkhainogo istochnika – Il’inoi knigi’, *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 2–3 (1999), pp. 3–26, 38–59. *TAS*, ed. A. M. Pentkovskii (Moscow, 2001), pp. 158–59. M. Zheltov, ‘Bogoslužhenie Russkoi Tserkvi X–XX vv.’, in *PE* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 495–517.

²⁸ Pentkovskii, ‘Okhrid na Rusi’, pp. 48–99. Zheltov, ‘Liturgicheskaia traditsiia zapada Vizantii’, pp. 249–50.

²⁹ Zheltov, ‘Chiny vecherni i utreni’, p. 444.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 468–70. Pentkovskii, ‘Okhrid na Rusi’, pp. 58–59.

³¹ Pentkovskii, ‘Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužebnykh knig’, pp. 63–77.

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translations of the Byzantine rite into their native language.³² These former disciples of Saints Methodius and Cyril were not content merely to translate east Roman hymnody, however. They were also keen to write sacred songs of their own.³³ Thus, it was from their pens that the earliest Slavonic-language compositions emerged: canons in honour of the Virgin Mary, Saint Clement of Rome, and Saint Dmitrii of Thessalonica, stichera for Christmas and Epiphany, generic services for a general Menaion, and many others.³⁴

The impact of Klement and Naum's missionary labours was eventually felt beyond the rocky slopes of the southern Balkans. At the close of the tenth century, Prince Vladimir accepted baptism from the eastern church, and it was their translations of the church books that were transported directly from Ohrid into Kiev.³⁵ The Slavonic-language services that first rang out in the monasteries of south-western Bulgaria were therefore also the first liturgical rites to be celebrated in the land of Rus. Although additional redactions of the services were later made in Kiev, apparently in an effort to bring native books into conformity with then-current Stoudite practices, an entirely new translation from the Greek was never carried out.³⁶ As a result, for roughly the next 300 years, whenever the clergy and people of Kiev gathered together and worshipped their God, they sang the ancient songs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, according to the slightly modified customs of north-western Byzantium, using translations made by south Slavic hierarchs in Macedonia.

The history of eastern Christian liturgy was truly a 'global' or 'transnational' event, and yet the purpose of these rituals within the broader medieval Mediterranean remains critically understudied outside the rather specialized discipline of oriental liturgiology. One of the aims of this book, therefore, is to acquaint readers with the solemn, mysterious, and sometimes bizarre religious rituals of the middle Byzantine Empire and its ecclesiastical satellites on the northern periphery. With that end in mind, I have chosen to engage with early medieval liturgical manuscripts

³² Pentkovskii, 'Okhrid na Rusi', pp. 51–55, and 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie i slavianskaia gimnografiia', p. 24.

³³ On the role of Methodius and Cyril in the translation of Latin and Byzantine church books, see A. M. Pentkovskii, 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie v arkhiepiskopii sviatitelia Mefodiia', in J. Radich and V. Savich (eds.), *Sancti Cyrillus et Methodius et hereditas Slavic litteraria DCCCLXIII–MMXII* (Belgrade, 2014) pp. 25–102.

³⁴ Pentkovskii, 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužhebnykh knig', pp. 64–70, 84–90. See also Krasheninnikova, *Drevneslavianskii Oktoikh*, pp. 39–225.

³⁵ Pentkovskii, 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie i slavianskaia gimnografiia', p. 25, and 'Okhrid na Rusi', pp. 56–59.

³⁶ Pentkovskii, 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužhebnykh knig', pp. 97–99.

The Roman Past in Early Rus

in a perhaps novel way: not as the source material for purely linguistic or liturgical debate, but as the instruction manuals, the guidebooks, for reconstructing a long-overlooked dimension of pre-modern society. These reconstructions are not undertaken for their own sake, however, because this is not principally a book about ritual qua ritual. My primary concern is with the power that liturgy retained outside the walls of the church, when early medieval clerics returned from the services and began to think about the past. I shall therefore resist the temptation to treat church books solely as objects of textual inquiry, sealed off from the rest of the world, like a hermit in his cell. For in my view, it is not only the historical trajectory of these books that is deserving of attention, nor the technical minutiae of differing regional practices. I am convinced that one should also take into account the very special kind of stories that these sacred books contained within them, and which came to life each and every day, whenever the officiating clergy entered the altar, prepared the incense, and performed the sacred rites.³⁷

THE ROMAN PAST IN EARLY RUS

Let us consider the services that were celebrated in Kiev every year on 21 May. The priests and monks of the city awoke and assembled for morning worship, just as they did any other day of the year.³⁸ At that moment, while they venerated icons and assumed their places in church, the great walls of Constantinople stood nearly a thousand miles to the south. There was no emperor or patriarch at hand, no grand processions being prepared along porticoed streets, no ornate Roman banners or imperial tombs. Yet once the opening blessing was intoned, the clergy and the choir began to chant many of the same hymns that were sung that day at the Monastery of Stoudios and in thousands of other churches across the empire. These songs were being chanted hundreds of miles beyond the northernmost Byzantine frontier, and yet they were devoted to the founders of new Rome, Saints Constantine and Helena:

Свѣтъ свѣтлыи • звѣзда невечернѣа • отъ невѣрна въ разумъ •
 божествѣнии пришѣдъ • приведенъ бысть осватити люди и градъ • и
 образъ крѣста • на небеси оузрѣвъ • оуслыша отътоудоу • симъ побѣжай
 врагы твою • тѣмъ приимъ • разумъ доуховѣнии чиститель бысть и
 цсарь • милостию оутвѣрдивъ • църквѣ хрѣстовоу • правовѣрѣннихъ

³⁷ On the narrative aspects of Byzantine liturgy, see D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia, 2014).

³⁸ For evidence that liturgical services were indeed performed every day, see Pentkovskii, 'Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužhebnykh knig', pp. 71–72.

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цѣсарь отьць • егоже рака • ицѣленик точить • костантине равнье
 апостоломъ • съ матерю богомоудрою • молиса о доушахъ нашихъ.³⁹

The all-radiant light and never-waning star, passing from unbelief to divine understanding, was led to sanctify his people and city. And beholding the image of the cross in the sky, he heard therefrom: ‘By this conquer your enemies!’ And so, having received spiritual understanding as a priest and king, you have mercifully established the church of Christ, O father of all right-believing kings, whose relics pour forth healing. O Constantine, equal of the apostles, with your divinely wise mother, pray for our souls.

Thus, like their counterparts in Constantinople, Thessalonica, and Ohrid, every year on this feast day, the clergymen in Rus went to church and ritually retold the story of Christian origins of the Roman Empire. They too sang of the weapon of the cross and the triumph of a saintly emperor and equal-of-the-apostles. They too chanted hymns about a miraculous conversion and a devout imperial mother. As time passed, and the services were celebrated over and over again, these songs began to shape the clergy’s conception of more than the imperial Roman past. They began to shape their ideas about the native past and the Christian beginnings of their own people.

While standing in the sanctuary and praying, or singing with the choir on the kliros, the clerics learned about the saintly deeds of Constantine and Helena, and we can surmise that their thoughts drifted to the deeds of their own baptiser, Vladimir, and his grandmother Olga.⁴⁰ Indeed, by the time these clerics set about writing the first native history, the liturgical rites had already taught them what a local myth of Christian origins should look like. They had spent thousands of hours praying and singing about the conversion of the Romans, and they naturally drew on this experience when describing the conversion of the Rus.

We can envisage the chroniclers serving the rites in church, removing their vestments in the sacristy, walking back to their writing stations, and preparing their pens and inkpots.⁴¹ Perhaps they were working on the original story of the baptism of Rus, or perhaps they were editing and adding to an earlier version. The precise details of what transpired are unknown and unknowable. We can only speculate about the chroniclers’

³⁹ Mineia sluzhebnaia na mai, notirovannaia, Sin. 166, 124.1, ed. A. S. Alenchenkovaia, D. S. Kornilovaia, E. P. Galeevaia, and B. A. Baranovi, www.manuscripts.ru/mns/main?p_text=26361893 (accessed December 2017).

⁴⁰ On the early images of Constantine and Helena, see A. Kazhdan, ‘Constantin Imaginaire: Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great’, *Byzantion*, 57 (1987), pp. 196–250; A. Harbus, *Helena of Brittany in Medieval Legend* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 9–27.

⁴¹ On the mechanics of writing in early Rus, see D. Likhachev, *Tekstologiia: Na material russkoi literatury X–XVII vekov* (Leningrad, 1983), p. 60