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PART I

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THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

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The Byzantine Commonwealth
1000–1550

JONATHAN SHEPARD

Introduction

That the rites and remains of the east Roman Empire made an impression on most of the peoples surrounding or settled among them is hardly surprising. Constantinople was purpose-built, a landmark not even the mightiest 'barbarian' warlord could hope to efface. With its numerous market places, massive walls and monuments such as the Golden Gate proclaiming a New Jerusalem and Christian triumph, the 'God-protected city' was a showcase for displays of wealth, social cohesion and military force. These material blessings were attributed by the palace ceremonies, art and orators to the piety of the emperors and their subjects – often termed simply 'the Christians' in the ceremonial acclamations – and to the empire's central role in God's plan for mankind. Constantinople itself was under the special protection of the Mother of God. In the medieval era Mary was venerated ever more dramatically in return for safeguarding her city, wonder-working icons such as the Hodegetria being paraded regularly through the streets in her honour.

Even furthest-flung outsiders could make the connection between Byzantine prosperity, striking-power and religious devotions. From his Orkney vantage point, Arnor the Earl's Poet viewed God as 'ready patron of the Greeks and Garð-folk'.[1] These 'Garð-folk' – Rus – had collectively come under the care of the patriarch of Constantinople, when in or around 988 their ruler, Vladimir, received a Byzantine religious mission and was himself baptised. A prime reason for Vladimir's choice of the Orthodox form of Christianity was probably the divine 'patronage' – in terms of material wealth and social order – which their religion seemed to have secured. Vladimir flagged his personal associations with the senior emperor, by adopting his Christian name, Basil, and by marrying his sister, Anna. By around 1000 the ruling houses of several

1 *Þorfinnz-drápa*, in *Corpus poeticum boreale*, ed. and trans. G. Vigfusson and F. York Powell, II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 197.

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Map 1 The Byzantine Commonwealth

other northern neighbours of Byzantium, such as the Alans, had been baptised by its priests. They were following a pattern already created in the mid-ninth century with the conversion of the Bulgarians. The credit for these conversions was claimed first and foremost for the emperor and in official correspondence rulers whose forebears had been baptised at Byzantine hands were termed 'spiritual child' of the emperor. In the mid-tenth century, Bulgarian, Alan and – more tendentiously – Armenian leaders were being addressed in this way.[2]

2 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. I. I. Reiske (Bonn: Ed. Weber, 1829), II.48: 1, 687–8, 690.

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The enamel plaques most probably sent by Michael VII Doukas (1071–78) to the Hungarian ruler Géza make a clear visual statement of the Byzantine version of the correct order of things: Michael and his son are portrayed with nimbuses round their heads; Géza's garb is plainer and he lacks a nimbus. But he wears a crown of sorts, and the object which the plaques adorned was probably itself a crown, perhaps designed for Géza's noble Byzantine-born bride and sent to her in the mid-1070s. Bride, crown and enamelled portraits jointly declared Géza's place among established leaders, and the Greek inscription beside Géza calls him king (κράλης).[3] Such marks of imperial favour also suggested the patronage, which Géza might now be able to dispense to deserving magnates of his own.

These enamels offer a snapshot of Byzantine diplomacy at work. It seems that enamels were only used on crowns designed for external potentates, standing reminders of the superlative craftsmanship of the Byzantines. Yet the fate of Michael Doukas's gift to Géza demonstrates the diversity of uses to which potentates put their associations with the *basileus*: before long, the enamels were forming the lower part of what became known as 'the crown of St Stephen'. What had been intended by Michael as a demonstration of hegemony ended up as the quintessential symbol of an autonomous Hungarian realm. For many potentates, receipt of titles, gifts and emblems from the emperor was compatible with aspirations to control their own dominions; more confident regimes would adapt, if not mimic, symbols, which the *basileus* considered his sole prerogative. Through acts of appropriation and overt references to the imperial court, such potentates were primarily concerned to consolidate their rule over heterogeneous, often inchoate populations. Such unmistakable marks of authority could help transcend local differences and rivalries, providing a visual vocabulary of power that all subjects could understand.

Like Géza, most early medieval potentates sought to demonstrate their right to the throne, whether it was inherited, usurped or still being fashioned. They sought respect, if not obedience, from their kinsmen and other figures of substance in the region, and from those living within their nominal dominions and beyond. The bestowing of offices and concomitant determination of status tended to be viewed as a measure of a ruler's authority. Here, too, Byzantium had much to offer. The notion of the emperor as God's viceroy on earth and

3 The doubts of J. Deér as to whether the plaques originally decorated a crown, rather than some other diplomatic gift, are well put, but do not rule out the a priori likelihood that a crown was the enamels' original holder: J. Deér, *Die heilige Krone Ungarns* (ÖAW: Philosoph.-hist. Klasse, Denkschriften 91) (Vienna: Böhlau, 1966), 72–80.

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answerable to Him alone flourished, for all the efforts of Byzantine churchmen and monks to qualify it by means of canon law, ritual and denunciations. A commanding role in religious affairs as well as earthly ones appealed to many external potentates, especially those impatient with their senior churchmen. Byzantium offered a working model, dignified yet also efficient, to would-be monarchs without close cultural affinities or traditions of allegiance towards the empire. Some drew unilaterally on Byzantium's stock of visual symbols, seeking neither their bestowal from the emperor nor to efface the old imperial centre. They aimed, rather, at overawing and outshining powerful interest groups in their own realm through borrowed ways of presenting their rule as God-given. For example, Queen Tamara of Georgia reshuffled motifs of Byzantine imagery of monarchy to bolster her unprecedented position as a woman ruling in her own right. Byzantine-derived imagery had long been the means of expressing Georgian kingly power. Tamara modified it in various ways to represent her piety and legitimacy in church portraits of herself, while also highlighting specifically Georgian themes and figures worthy of veneration.[4]

Dimitri Obolensky believed that such borrowings from Byzantium's political culture, religious rites and visual media formed a pattern. In his magisterial work *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, he envisaged constellations of potentates and their subjects acknowledging imperial hegemony – whole societies as well as elites. They were, he maintained, joined together in Orthodox faith, in regard for the laws, which church and emperor jointly upheld, and in respect for the emperor. The centre of their Christian universe was Constantinople, for most of these units had initially received Byzantine missions and came under the patriarch's authority. Obolensky postulated that these peripheral rulers usually accepted the emperor's overlordship of all Orthodox Christians as much from pragmatic desire to unify their own realms as from idealistic devotion to the *basileus*.[5]

Obolensky recognised that motives were mixed: self-interest could impel Orthodox rulers into hostilities against the emperor, and the commonwealth's composition varied over time. He regarded the adherence to Byzantine normative values of most of eastern Europe's Slavonic-speaking regimes at one

4 A. Eastmond, *Royal imagery in medieval Georgia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 39, 94, 149–53, 119–23, 181–4; Eastmond, '"Local" saints, art, and regional identity in the Orthodox world after the fourth crusade', *Sp* 78 (2003), 717–24.

5 D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: eastern Europe 500–1453* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 2–3, 203, 206–8, 272–7, 289–90; Obolensky, 'Nationalism in eastern Europe in the middle ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. v, 22 (1972), 11–12.

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time or another as amounting to membership of an institution, for all their mutability and multiple cultural affinities. Obolensky's theory incurred criticism from some reviewers, who highlighted the difference in circumstances between polities located on the edge of the territorial empire and others further afield. They also questioned why cognate cultures in southern Italy and Caucasia did not qualify for consideration and suggested that the commonwealth was no more than a culturo-religious sphere, lacking any institutional basis or political connotations.[6] In the case of Rus, avowals of allegiance to the tsar, or awareness of Byzantium's claim to be Rome's heir, are singularly sparse.[7] The texts ultimately of Greek origin circulating in pre-Mongol Rus were mostly of religious content, and many had been translated or refashioned among the South Slavs. Several had been translated in the early tenth century at the Bulgarian court, with the aim of furnishing its rulers with guidelines for Orthodox Christian governance. In the process they helped to create a kind of textual community for Slavonic-readers.[8] One might conclude from the study of such texts alone that the Byzantine imperial order provided these rulers with little more than an assembly kit, from which to take what they pleased and set up structures to suit their own preconceptions.

Yet for all the local variations between societies owing their Christianity mainly to Byzantium, certain themes and motifs in their political culture recur. Leaders aspiring to create their own nodes of material patronage, sacral largesse and orderly governance took as a model the offices and honours which Byzantine emperors could confer and retract. This is clearest with thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Bulgarian rulers: most of the names of their senior officials and dignities were translations, or slavicised forms, of Byzantine ones. Serbian leaders, too, borrowed heavily from Byzantine terminology to create court hierarchy. Offices bestowed in sacral settings and determining rank

6 A. Kazhdan in *Vizantiiskii Vremennik* 35 (1973), 261–2; G. G. Litavrin in *Voprosy Istorii* no. 5 (1972), 180–5; R. Browning in *English Historical Review* 87 (1972), 812–15.

7 S. Franklin, 'The empire of the *Rhomaioi* as viewed from Kievan Russia: aspects of Byzantino-Russian cultural relations', *B* 53 (1983), 507–37.

8 The issue of which texts were translated by whom, and when, is highly controversial: see F. J. Thomson, 'The Bulgarian contribution of the reception of Byzantine culture in Kievan Rus': the myths and the enigma', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12–13 (1988–89), 239–43; A. A. Turilov and B. N. Floria, 'Khristianskaia literatura u slavian v seredine X-seredine XI v. i mezhslavianskie kul'turnye sviazi', in *Khristianstvo v stranakh vostochnoi, iugo-vostochnoi i tsentral'noi Evropy na poroge vtorogo tysiacheletiia*, ed. B. N. Floria (Moscow: Jazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 431–3; S. Franklin, *Writing, society and culture in early Rus, c. 950–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101–3, 136–45; A. Nikolov, 'Tsariat bogopodrazhatel. Edin prenebregnat aspekt ot politicheskata kontseptsiia na Simeon I', *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia 'St Kliment Ohridski'. Centre de Recherches Slavo-Byzantines 'Ivan Dujčev'* 91.10 (2002), 113–17.

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appealed to dispenser and recipient alike and texts of Byzantine ceremonies for conferring on individuals such titles as *patrikios* were translated into Slavic. Judging by the quantity of manuscripts found, they seem to have formed the basis for South Slav court practice. There was local adaptation, however: *kouropalates* and *patrikios* were rendered by the more general *kniaz* ('prince' or 'notable').[9] Such allusions to the palace on the Bosporus did not occur in an intellectual vacuum. Stefan Dušan's law-code of 1349 drew heavily on the treatise synthesising secular and church law that Matthew Blastares had composed in Thessalonike some years earlier. Dušan's law-code also adapted novels of fairly recent *basileis*, such as Manuel I Komnenos, as well as *The Farmer's Law* in shortened form. The 'charter' accompanying his code avowed his 'desire to enact certain virtues and truest laws of the Orthodox faith to be adhered to', thus subsuming civil regulation within faith. This scheme of imperial order was supposed to apply to Dušan's Slav and more or less recently acquired Greek subjects alike. The code was intended for practical use: an updated version incorporating Dušan's recent edicts was promulgated in 1354. The divinely inspired nature of the ruler's law making and enforcement was simultaneously propounded through visual media. For example, a prominent theme of the wall paintings in Dušan's church at Lesnovo is the 'holy wisdom' that enlightens the ruler, mystically informing his guidance of his people.[10] Such depictions of Byzantine imperial attributes dovetail with the predilection of Dušan and his predecessors for terms of rank redolent of the imperial court. The distinction between functional and honorific title was not clear-cut, and bestowal of the more senior offices and titles by fourteenth-century Bulgarian and Serb rulers was akin to a religious ordination, as in Byzantium itself.

Neither Byzantine secular law-codes nor the concept of office transforming an individual's status counted for very much among the Rus, for all Prince Semen of Moscow's flattering avowal in 1347 that the empire was 'the fount of all piety and the teacher of law-giving and sanctification'.[11] Yet the Byzantine imperial order, however hazily conceived among the Rus, held out a comprehensive 'package' of concepts, rites and authority-symbols, sealed with the church's blessing. And eventually their leaders took advantage of it. Ivan III of Muscovy had particular reason for making his power-centre redolent of the

9 I. Biliarsky, 'Le rite du couronnement des tsars dans les pays slaves et promotion d'autres *axiai*', *OCP* 59 (1993), 94–7, 106–9 (text), 120–2 (trans.); Biliarsky, 'Some observations on the administrative terminology of the second Bulgarian empire (13th–14th centuries)', *BMGS* 25 (2001), 79–80, 83.

10 Z. Gavrilović, 'Divine wisdom as part of Byzantine imperial ideology', in *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian medieval art* (London: Pindar, 2001), 51–3.

11 *RPK* II, no. 168, 478–9.

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ancient imperial court, a generation or so after Constantinople fell to the Turks. His build-up of earthly power coincided with eschatological expectations no less intense for being variegated: to churchmen such as Ivan's metropolitan, Zosima, the fall of New Rome in 1453 might herald the present world's end but also God's glorification of 'the new emperor Constantine for the new city of Constantine, Moscow, the sovereign of the whole Rus land and many other lands'.[12] Ivan adopted some of the trappings and ritual of the Byzantine court, laying out the Kremlin as the exemplary centre of newly gathered lands and a new society, poised between this world and the next.[13] The ruler as guardian of souls could be of practical help to whoever believed that a God-willed new age was at hand. What might seem narrowly religious concerns coloured general expectations of a prince's worth, which Ivan built on – in bricks and mortar, and with symbols of Jerusalem such as the liturgical arks donated to one of the Kremlin's churches.[14] The sense of being a New Israel was more clearly articulated and fervently believed among the late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Rus elite than that of being the New Rome. Yet it was the imperial city on the Bosporus that provided the most recent model of, and familiar pathway towards, the New Jerusalem.

This was not simply a matter of evoking a vanished empire. Ivan's political ambitions gained definition from beliefs about the future that emanated from Orthodox thinking. And, for all their diversity, the eschatological theories took for granted that Byzantium was God's most favoured kingdom on earth: any other Orthodox ruler could only hope to succeed in his own domain by God's will, observing the codes of conduct set out by pious tsars. The ruler's role as overseer of the church, defender of his subjects and caretaker of their souls received fullest articulation in Rus with the coronation of Ivan IV as emperor in 1547. Ivan and his counsellors expressly invoked historical associations with Byzantium. They elaborated upon the tale of the 'crown' sent to one of Ivan's distant forebears by Constantine IX Monomachos and adapted Byzantine rites and texts for the coronation ceremony itself. On murals of the Kremlin's Golden Hall were depicted scenes from the history of Israel and Rus (the New Israel); the God-given quality of the ruler's power was a prominent theme, his 'divine wisdom' being highlighted in the manner of Dušan's at Lesnovo.[15] The

12 'Mitropolita Zosimy izveshchenie', *RIB* VI, cols. 798–9.
13 M. S. Flier, 'Till the end of time. The apocalypse in Russian historical experience before 1500', in *Orthodox Russia: belief and practice under the tsars*, ed. V. A. Kivelson and R. H. Greene (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 135–6.
14 Ibid., 156–8.
15 D. Rowland, 'Two cultures, one throne room. Secular courtiers and orthodox culture in the Golden Hall of the Moscow Kremlin', in *Orthodox Russia*, 41–3, 47–51, 54–5.

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symbolism may have been interpreted with varying degrees of subtlety by the courtiers and churchmen who viewed these pictures, but their message was inescapable.

Recourse to Byzantine ideology for this purpose was, in a sense, *faute de mieux*, in default of alternative formulations of imperial dominance consistent with Orthodox doctrine. For justification and demonstration of Moscow's pre-eminent power and piety, the churchmen appropriated Byzantine ideas and motifs about the imperial centre and made express allusions to the old hub of Christian leadership. The sense that Moscow was actually superseding it was conveyed by dubbing the city the 'Third Rome', in succession to the 'Second Rome' on the Bosporus. Describing a new centre of political and religious authority as a 'new Rome', a 'new Tsargrad', had long been a claim made for polities aspiring to create their own self-sufficient centres, especially if adjoining Byzantine territory. From the later thirteenth century, Bulgarian writers were hailing Veliko T'rnovo as a 'new Tsargrad'. More striking is the delay in elaborating upon this claim for Moscow, after somewhat halting experimentation with the epithet in the late fifteenth century. In couching claims for a new centre within the conceptual framework of the old, claiming for their own prince the divine sanction long attributed to the *basileus* in Tsargrad, Muscovite writers could not casually flout his longstanding pre-eminence. They were, for the most part, churchmen themselves and therefore belonged to an organisation whose headquarters remained in his city. There were additional reasons for Moscow's self-restraint from overtly imperial posturing. Tatar khans of the Great Horde, who were, as descendants of Genghis Khan, termed tsars, still collected tribute from north-east Rus until the late fifteenth century and Muscovite princes remained vulnerable to the Crimean Tatars and other Tatar groupings, to whom they paid heavy tribute throughout the sixteenth century.

But a standing caveat to the aspirations of Rus and other rulers was the ecumenical patriarchate's commitment to the idea that Christendom's unity was underpinned by the persistence of a 'Roman' empire in Constantinople. This was given currency by, for example, images woven on the *sakkos* (ceremonial tunic) belonging to Photios, the Moscow-based metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus in the early fifteenth century. Prince Vasilii of Moscow and his wife are depicted facing Emperor John VIII Palaiologos and his bride, who was Vasilii's own daughter. Emperor and Rus-born empress are haloed, unlike the prince of Moscow. The locus of holy rulership and primary authority could scarcely be made plainer.[16] At church services conducted by his head churchman wearing

16 D. Obolensky, 'Some notes concerning a Byzantine portrait of John VIII Palaeologus', *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972), 141–6.

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the *sakkos*, Vasilii bore witness to the visual message of this gift from Constantinople. He thereby gained status vicariously: his daughter, at least, was now in the nimbus-league. Assent to union with Rome at the council of Florence in 1439 did not inflict lasting damage on the standing among the Slavs of the ecumenical patriarchate. Its reservations about alternative emperors had therefore to be taken into account by any would-be emperor of a New Rome even after Constantinople had fallen to the Turks. Hence the organisers of the coronation of Ivan IV took the precaution of seeking the patriarch's consent, which was eventually given. Even so, at the moment of anointing, the officiating metropolitan, Makarii, pronounced a different form of words from those used in late Byzantine inauguration-rituals. Seemingly, his self-restraint registered awareness that he was no more patriarch of Constantinople than Ivan was emperor of the Romans.[17]

Byzantium was long gone as a territorial empire by the time Makarii performed the coronation in 1547, and paintings in the Golden Hall portrayed Ivan being crowned by angels. Very few other rulers within the Byzantine ambit are shown being crowned, whether by Christ or by heavenly beings. Those few were generally intent on hegemonial status comparable to that of the *basileus*, rather than on his uniquely 'Roman' title. In 1344–45, for example, the Bulgarian Ivan Alexander was depicted in a miniature being crowned by an angel before Christ: Christ is termed 'tsar of tsars and eternal tsar' while Ivan is 'tsar and autocrat of all the Bulgarians and Greeks'.[18] Such outright visual claims to sovereign authority divinely bestowed were rarer even than appropriation of an imperial title.

Such hesitations on the part of potentates suggest awareness of the special status on earth claimed by the *basileus*, whether or not they regarded his polity as the empire of the Romans or merely the land of the Greeks. As a working model of political order underpinned by law, the Byzantine state was of value for leaders seeking to gather the reins of power into their own hands and secure them exclusively for their offspring. With the help of God and His law the *basileus* presided over a hierarchy, which held out a moral for one's own troublesome domestic rivals and subjects in general. There is much to be said for regarding Byzantium as an exemplary centre, conveying in ritualised form the norms of hegemonial leadership. Such rites provided more or less

17 M. Arranz, 'L'aspect rituel de l'onction des empereurs de Constantinople et de Moscou', in *Roma, Costantinopoli, Mosca* [Da Roma alla terza Roma, documenti e studi 1] (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1983), 414–15.

18 C. Walter, 'The iconographical sources for the coronation of Milutin and Simonida at Gračanica', in *Vizantijska umetnost početkom XIV veka*, ed. S. Petković (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet – Odeljenje za istoriju umetnosti, 1978), 199 and plate 16a.

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