Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)
Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia
Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)
Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art
and Culture
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Edited by
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Foreword

For more than a thousand years, Byzantium, the empire ruled from Constantinople (now Istanbul), was a major artistic, cultural, religious, economic, and political power whose influence extended over time from Great Britain to China, Russia to Egypt. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has explored the history of Byzantine art and culture in three landmark exhibitions, each accompanied by a scholarly symposium. This volume represents the outstanding papers presented at the symposium conducted in association with the third of the Museum’s exhibitions, “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557).”

In 1977 the “Age of Spirituality” demonstrated the multiple forces at work between the fourth and seventh centuries as the New Rome—Constantinople—was established and Christianity emerged as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. “The Glory of Byzantium,” in 1997, explored the subsequent resurgence of the empire between 843 and 1261, including the state’s interaction with neighboring Christian peoples, the Latin West, and Islam.

“Byzantium: Faith and Power,” held in 2004, examined important artistic, cultural, and religious developments in the empire during the Late Byzantine era and their impact on the century following the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks. The exhibition opened with the restoration of Byzantine rule in Constantinople in 1261, following the Fourth Crusade’s establishment of a Latin Empire in the city in 1204. It concluded in 1557, the year the German scholar Hieronymus Wolf (1516–1580) first referred to the empire, long known by the Greek term basileia ton Rhomaion (Empire of the Romans), as “Byzantium.”

The catalogue of “Byzantium: Faith and Power” contained seventeen essays and three hundred and fifty catalogue entries by more than one hundred scholars. Its opening chapters centered on the cultural and political history of the region, the monumental art and architecture of the Late Byzantine Orthodox churches, their sculpture and liturgical furnishings, icons in all media, manuscripts, and textiles. Further essays and entries explored critical points of contact between Byzantium and neighboring traditions. Highlighted were Byzantium’s artistic and cultural relations with Islam in the East, the Mendicant Catholic Orders, and the Renaissance in the West, especially in Italy and northern Europe. Of special note was the powerful introductory essay on the meaning of icons by His Eminence Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, Pharan, and Raitho, accompanying the forty generous loans from one of the oldest continuously active monasteries in the world, the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, Egypt.

The many catalogue authors represented the varied approaches to Byzantine studies found in the scholarly communities of the twenty-seven countries that lent important works, often national treasures, to “Byzantium: Faith and Power.” The exhibition was named one of the major cultural events of 2004 by the New York Times, and its catalogue won both the College Art Association’s Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Award and the George Wittenborn Award from the American Research Librarians Association (North America) for being the best of the year.

With the encouragement of the Museum’s Director, Philippe de Montebello,
the exhibition brought together a number of prominent scholars in a symposium that considered aspects of Late and Post-Byzantine civilization related to the themes of the exhibition. The symposium was organized in conjunction with the Museum’s Education Department and coordinated in the Medieval Art Department by Sarah Brooks. The papers presented made a significant contribution to the exhibition’s efforts to understand the last centuries of the empire and its influence beyond its borders during that period.

The “Byzantium: Faith and Power” exhibition was made possible by Alpha Bank. Sponsorship was also provided by the J. E. Costopoulos Foundation, the A. G. Leventis Foundation, and the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation. Additional support was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, and an indemnity was granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. In addition, The Prospect Hill Foundation has provided continuing support for Byzantine-related work in the Department of Medieval Art, including Dr. Brooks’s work as Research Associate for the exhibition and as editor of this volume.

For the symposium and this publication of its papers, the Museum offers special appreciation to The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, which has long supported the Museum’s efforts to present and make accessible to the scholarly and general public the historical breadth of the art and culture of the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. The Museum also extends its sincere thanks to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its support of this publication.

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Preface

The genesis for this collection of essays on Late Byzantine art and culture was the major loan exhibition, “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557),” held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art from March 23 through July 5, 2004. In order to broaden our perspective on the artworks gathered for this unprecedented show, the Museum organized an academic symposium in coordination with the exhibition. This meeting of the scholarly and general public took place at the Metropolitan on April 16–18, 2004, and recorded the greatest attendance ever in the Museum’s history for a symposium on any topic. These twelve insightful papers are the result. Ranging over a diverse group of subjects, they shed light on the shaping and reception of Byzantine culture, and especially the visual arts, from medieval times to the present day.

The volume opens with an analysis of the use and reception of icons in Byzantium over the empire’s long history, a topic of central importance to appreciating the relationship between sacred imagery and devotional practice. Written by Thomas F Mathews, John Langeloth Loeb Professor of the History of Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and a renowned expert on Byzantine art and architecture, this paper offers new perspectives on a number of the earliest Byzantine icons, as well as on the rich development of sacred images during the Late Byzantine centuries. Sacred images adorning manuscript covers, reliquaries, icon screens (iconostases), and liturgical textiles serve as case studies for Mathews’s examination of this seminal topic in Byzantine art.

For a more comprehensive view of the world in which Late Byzantine art was created and viewed, leading scholars were asked to reflect on those developments in economics, politics, religious life, and learning that profoundly affected the visual arts. In his essay David Jacoby, Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, takes up the central issue of trade, placing Byzantine mercantile centers, including Constantinople, Trebizond, and Mistra, within a broader system of exchange that reached from western Europe (most notably, from Italy) eastward across the Asian continent and northward through the Black Sea. Jacoby’s model thus challenges the perception that Late Byzantine cities traded primarily with other Mediterranean centers, which had been the central focus of commerce in the Early and Middle Byzantine periods, as in the Roman Empire. The manufacture and trade in luxury textiles are the specific areas the author examines to illustrate this development, which was due largely to the rise of the vast Mongol empire in the east and to the expansion of Venice and Genoa as major mercantile powers.

Angeliki E. Laiou, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Byzantine History at Harvard University and Member of the Academy of Athens, considers in her essay the political and economic system in which Byzantine and neighboring powers evolved during the period in question. Laiou, a foremost economic and political historian of Byzantium, argues that the fragmentation of political power and the development of smaller, interdependent states led to a new political and economic system, equally distinct from that prevalent in the Middle Byzantine period, which was marked by fewer, large-scale powers, and from that established by the Ottoman empire in the fifteenth century. In the Late Byzantine era, smaller states both
benefited from and fostered the international system of trade that had such a profound impact on contemporary visual arts.

A preeminent authority on the Byzantine liturgy and church history, Robert F. Taft, S.J., Professor Emeritus at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, considers Late Byzantine developments in liturgical exegesis and church ritual, placing the art and architecture of the Late Byzantine church within its rich and evolving spiritual context. Taft explores several important issues such as the changing form of the Byzantine liturgy over the centuries, its final synthesis in the Late Byzantine period, and the shift of emphasis in liturgical symbolism. These trends are especially evident in the theological works of Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, who Taft suggests offers a more imaginative, popular interpretation of liturgical theology.

Maria Mavroudi next investigates the place of philosophical and scientific learning in cultural exchanges between Late Byzantium and its Islamic neighbors. Mavroudi, Associate Professor of Ancient and Byzantine History at the University of California, Berkeley, and a MacArthur Fellow (2004–9), is one of the few scholars to deal with this important point of contact. Her research illuminates the continuous process of intellectual exchange heralded by the great translation movement of the ninth and tenth centuries, which continued into the Late Byzantine period and even after the empire's fall. Mavroudi highlights new Arabic-to-Greek translations made from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century, an underexplored body of material, along with the scholarly training of Byzantine intellectuals, including Gregory Chioniades, in such centers in the Islamic East as Mongol Tabriz. The importance of these interactions with Arabic learning is reflected in the lasting impact that such intellectuals had on Byzantine scholarship upon their return to Constantinople and other Byzantine centers.

Several essays follow that treat pivotal issues in Late Byzantine art and architecture, expanding on Thomas Mathew's study of Late Byzantine icons. The first is the discussion of patronage and artistic production by Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, Professor of Byzantine Art History and Archaeology at the University of Athens. Kalopissi-Verti, an expert on Late Byzantine art and architecture, and particularly the monuments of Byzantine Greece, here turns her attention to broader issues related to artistic patronage throughout the Late Byzantine territories. Examining the identity and social status of donors as attested by visual or literary evidence, she analyzes the impact of various classes of patrons—the imperial, aristocratic, ecclesiastic, and nonelite—on artistic production. What emerges is a picture of significant patronage despite the political and economic vicissitudes of the period, with the aristocracy playing a major role in artistic commissioning.

The next essay, by Vassilios Kidonopoulos, Lector of Byzantine History at the Democritus University of Thrace, focuses on patronage in Constantinople, the imperial capital and the author's special area of interest. Kidonopoulos's recent work on the city's history during the Latin Occupation and Palaiologan period has greatly expanded our understanding of changes during these critical centuries. Drawing on a wide range of historical sources, his essay traces Constantinople's decline after 1203/4 due to the effects of fire, pillaging, neglect, and several devastating earthquakes. It details the major efforts of restoration and new building after the Byzantine reconquest in 1261, as well as the preservation and building activities that continued until 1453. Previously underestimated was the trend in new construction from 1261 to about 1350 promoted by Late Byzantine patrons, among whom were the early Palaiologan emperors and the aristocracy.

Byzantine artistic traditions had a broad impact beyond imperial borders. The final five essays address questions of Byzantine artistic influence on cultures from western Europe to the Caucasus and the states of Russia. The unique place of the Byzantine monastery at Sinai, enduring in lands long under Islamic control, its dedication to Saint Catherine of
Alexandria, and Western pilgrimage to the site are the focus of the essay by Nancy Patterson Ševčenko. Based in Woodstock, Vermont, Ševčenko has written widely on the lives of the saints and their portrayals in icons, illuminated manuscripts, and monumental painting. Here she examines the cult of the martyr Catherine in the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, including the differences in how the saint was depicted in the Byzantine tradition and in the art of western Europe. Catherine’s international appeal is reflected in the sophisticated imagery developed during these Late Byzantine and Post-Byzantine centuries.

Venice’s relationship with Byzantium and with its imperial traditions is one of immense complexity and longevity. Hans Belting, Professor Emeritus of Art History and Media Studies, HFG Karlsruhe, and Honorary Professor, University of Heidelberg, explores the form and meaning of Byzantine traditions in Venice in the mid-fourteenth century. Three commissions by the doge Andrea Dandolo (r. 1343–54) serve as case studies: the Pala d’Oro and baptistery mosaics in the basilica of San Marco, and Paolo Veneziano’s Pala Feriale. Belting argues that these works evidence the Venetians’ borrowing of Byzantine styles, compositions, and iconography—a borrowing that served to confirm the national and cultural singularity of their city-state vis-à-vis neighboring and competitor republics such as Genoa, Florence, and Siena. He also points out that because the audiences for such works were highly sensitive to differences between local powers and traditions, they would have recognized and appreciated the foreign, Byzantine elements employed in Dandolo’s Venetian commissions.

Cultural interaction in the Caucasus is the focus of the essay by Antony Eastmond, Reader in the History of Byzantine Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, who has written widely on the art and architecture of this region and its ties both to Byzantine and to neighboring Islamic traditions. Eastmond centers his study here around artworks associated with and commissioned by the thirteenth-century Georgian princess T’amar (also known as Gurji Khatun). This powerful female patron was linked through marriage and family ties with all the leading powers of the region, including the Byzantine emperors of Trebizond, the Armenians, the Seljuks, and the Mongols. The icons, textiles, and buildings associated with T’amar and her extended social and political network reflect the importance of art in shaping frontiers between the peoples of this region.

The final two essays consider Byzantium’s enduring relationship with the kingdoms of medieval Russia and the traditions that tied Byzantium with Russia in the early modern age. Donald Ostrowski, Research Advisor in the Social Sciences at Harvard University, and an expert on the history and literature of Rus’, challenges the medieval origin of the concept “Moscow the Third Rome.” Central to this concept is the idea that Moscow inherited the imperial and spiritual mantle from Byzantium upon the fall of Constantinople (“the New Rome”) to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Ostrowski’s insightful analysis of the medieval texts at the heart of this controversy provides a clearer understanding of the early modern and contemporary history of Russia and its perceptions of the medieval, Byzantine past.

The essay contributed by Yuri Pyatnitsky, Curator of Byzantine Icons at the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, returns us to the Late Byzantine centuries and contact between Russian and Byzantine artists. Pyatnitsky is a distinguished scholar of Byzantine icon painting, and it is with this subject, introduced in our volume by Thomas Mathews, that we close. Tracing the development of Russian icon painting from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century, Pyatnitsky identifies its major inspiration as the Byzantine painting styles popular under the Palaiologan emperors in late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Constantinople. Of special interest is the author’s attribution to the painter Andrei Rublev of a set of sanctuary doors featuring the Annunciation in the Vatopedi Monastery, Mount Athos.
There are many individuals who deserve my profound thanks for their contributions to the success of this project. Helen Evans, as the curator of "Byzantium: Faith and Power," has been the driving force and intellectual inspiration for this and so many other aspects of the exhibition's scholarly and academic programs. I wish to thank her, as well as Professor Judith Herrin, for assisting me in the introduction of sessions throughout the symposium. The planning and execution of this event were greatly facilitated by the generous help of the exhibition team, including Charlotte Appleyard, Annie Labatt, Vasileios Marinis, Brandie Ratliff, Edmund Ryder, and Emma Wegner. Georgi Parpulov of the Walters Art Museum is to be especially thanked for his expert and timely translation of the essay by Dr. Kidonopoulos.

Numerous staff members of the Department of Education under Kent Lydecker, Associate Director for Education, must be acknowledged for their extraordinary efforts toward the success of the symposium. Liz Hammer deserves special appreciation for her intellect and thorough planning, as do Tomlyn Barns and Tara Diamond. Mikel Frank and the staff of the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, including Felix Cotto, Stephen Rotker, and JoAnn Fynke, also merit thanks for their professional orchestration of the presentations.

In the Museum's Editorial Department, I am grateful to the Editor in Chief, John P. O'Neill, for his long support of the project and for the outstanding work of his staff members, foremost among them Margaret Donovan, editor for this project. Guiding the expert production of this volume were Assistant Managing Editor Robert Weisberg, with Kathryn Ansite, Desktop Publishing Specialist, and Peter Antony, Chief Production Manager, with Matthew Thurber and Douglas Malicki. Jo Ellen Ackerman was instrumental in implementing the book's design, and Anandaroop Roy developed the volume's maps. Penny Jones served as the able bibliographer. Valuable help with transliterations was provided by four individuals: for the Greek, Angela Hero, Professor Emerita of Byzantine History at the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queens College, CUNY, and Vasileios Marinis; for the Russian, Jane Bobko and Elena Izbitser.

In closing, I extend my profound thanks to The Hagop Kevorkian Fund for its crucial support of both the symposium and this publication, and to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for providing additional funds for this publication.

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Byzantium and its Neighbors, 1261–1557
Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)
Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture
Icons and the Religious Experience

The Late Byzantine era is the age of icons. Enamels and ivories, so lavishly represented in The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 1997 exhibition “The Glory of Byzantium,” disappeared from production in this period, and reliquaries had a reduced role. Annemarie Weyl Carr has recently traced how icons came to replace relics as pilgrimage destinations.¹ Painters of icons rather than illuminators were increasingly called upon to execute images on single sheets for insertion into manuscripts. But the dominance of icons is seen most dramatically in the church setting. There, they usurped the attention formerly given mural paintings and mosaics until eventually the iconostasis, a veritable wall of icons, separated the sanctuary from the congregation.² The placing of icons between the congregation and the liturgical performance is a critical development both for the liturgy and for the icon, but it remains troublesome for the art historian. Christopher Walter concluded his history of the iconostasis by boldly recommending its removal from Orthodox worship on the grounds that it “bars the way toward the intelligible mystery.”³ The question for the scholar is whether the Byzantines themselves saw it as a barrier, or whether it evolved as a kind of popular alternative to the esoteric cult of the priests behind the screen. Taking a different approach, I have previously proposed that icons, rather than competing with the liturgy, worked in parallel to it, the ultimate goal of both being the transformation of the participants into Christ.⁴ That thesis is expanded in another direction in this essay.

In the mosaic over the entrance to Hagia Sophia, the emperor is shown prostrating himself before Christ, a pose called proskynēsis (fig. 1). By some miracle of art, he is present in the same space-time frame as Christ, which allows him to offer the Savior his full, direct adoration (latria). Nevertheless, the Second Council of Nicaea (787) advised the faithful when offering prostrations and kisses to icons to reserve their adoration, which was to be offered to the divine nature alone. In support of the council’s recommendation, a treatise by Nikephoros the patriarch (806–14) theorized that the sacred being represented in the icon is not truly present. Charles Barber has recently made this hypothesis the key to his understanding of the icon, arguing that such absence allowed the devout to venerate the icon “as a site of desire,”⁵ an abstract sign of an absent “holy.” This terminology, developed by Norman Bryson to analyze French Romantic painting, does not seem really suitable for Byzantine icons.⁶

An overreliance on Nikephoros’s treatise can lead to an excessively cerebral theology of icons. How do worshipers fall down to venerate an icon while reminding themselves that the icon is really empty? Instead of starting from metaphysical puzzles of divine presence or absence, I propose to construct a theory of icons based on how they were actually experienced and venerated. Theologians have an old adage, in circulation since the mid-fifth century, “Ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi” (Let faith follow the norm of prayer),⁷ which implies that dogmatic formulations follow, and can be tested against, the prayer practices of the church. Extending the maxim to the present case implies that any theory of icons ought to coincide somehow with the practice of their veneration,
Fig. 1. Emperor in Proskynesis before the Enthroned Christ, ca. 900. Mosaic, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople

which, according to historical evidence, involved a strong belief in a sacred presence embodied in the icon. For this purpose, I would like to examine four significant situations in which icons were venerated and then look at some inscriptions that document viewer reactions to them.

ICONS IN FOUR RITUAL SITUATIONS

Gospel Book covers

The use of icons to physically contain the presence of the Word of God is a notable and fairly common phenomenon. One of the earliest examples of this function is a pair of panels with the Four Evangelists that served as covers for a Coptic Gospel book, written about 400 (figs. 2, 3). While Charles Rufus Morey dated the covers between the sixth and the eighth century and characterized the paintings as utterly lacking in artistic merit, subsequent examination of the binding has opened the possibility that the panels, now separated from the text, were in fact integral to the original construction of the book. If confirmed, this would identify them as the earliest dated icons.

Because its text embodied Christ in a special way, the Gospel was accorded the place of honor at the head of processions, where a deacon swung a brazier of incense before it. The mosaics of San Vitale in Ravenna bear dramatic witness to this practice (fig. 4). Maximianus the bishop, Emperor Justinian I, and members of the court are represented following the Gospel into church in the First Entrance of the Divine Liturgy. Later in the ceremony, during the Liturgy of the Catechumens, when the book was brought out for the readings, it was accompanied by candles, according to Saint Jerome (406). When the sacred book was carried back along the passage (solea) from the pulpit (ambo) to the sanctuary, Paul the Silentiary (563)
reports that “waves of people” in the nave eagerly swarmed around to touch and kiss it. The decision to place icons on the Gospel book therefore put them at the center of liturgical action. These images are not “decoration” but containers of the presence of Christ within the book, and they were worshiped along with him. The faithful could not vener- ate the book without venerating the icons, and vice versa. The images are, in other words, a site of the powerful, immediate presence of Christ rather than a mere “site of desire.”

There are numerous sixth-century examples of icons affixed to Gospel books, contemporary with Paul the Silentary’s description. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a precious silver one, again with the evangelists, but the most striking are made of ivory. The earliest mention of ivory book covers is by the Armenian theologian Vertanes Kertor in the years 604–7. The Ejmiacin Gospel book cover in Erevan, possibly made in Constantinople, was reused in 989 to bind a precious illuminated manuscript (figs. 5, 6). Since ivory tusks did not yield panels large enough to match the page size of the manuscripts, the covers were constructed of five carefully interlocking pieces. Scenes related to the Incarnation and Nativity appear on the front, and to Christ’s teaching mission and miracles on the back. Venerating the images was immediately associated with venerating the Gospel that narrated the history of these events. Although there are many of
Fig. 4. Gospel Book Carried in the First Entrance Procession, Led by Bishop Maximianus and Attended by Emperor Justinian I, 548. Mosaic, San Vitale, Ravenna
these five-part ivories, or fragments thereof, this is the only example that remains attached to a manuscript.

Icons on book covers, which were mentioned by the Second Council of Nicaea, occur frequently in Middle and Late Byzantine art. But two extraordinary Late Byzantine examples appeared in the Metropolitan Museum’s 2004 exhibition entitled “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557).” The Armenian Bardzrberd Gospel of 1254 offers an unusual instance of a Gospel manuscript still intact within its original icon-clad covers (figs. 7, 8). The earthly Christ suffering and dying is represented on the front cover, which has at its corners images of the Four Evangelists, who described the work of redemption. On the reverse, however, we see the heavenly Christ enthroned in glory as the evangelists surround him in their symbolic forms. In this case, the viewer could tell the book by its covers and acknowledged its sanctity by kissing them. Since the images are backed up by the truth of the Gospels within, venerating them meant venerating the entire mystery of Christ’s redemptive work. A similar argument could be made concerning the book covers now in the Treasury of San Marco, Venice, which, according to Janice Durand, probably came from Thessalonike about 1400.
Figs. 7, 8. The Bardzrberd Gospels, front cover (above), back cover (right).
Armenian (probably Cilicia), 1254. Gilded-silver sheet, repoussé and chased, pierced bosses, and gemstones. Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon
Reliquaries

I do not subscribe to the theory, embraced by many, that the original use of icons was in reliquaries, but a very important class of icons did serve as reliquary lids, literally wrapping and packaging the sacred presences that their images signified. A touching Crucifixion icon in the Vatican is the lid for a precious reliquary of the True Cross (staurotheke) sent from Constantinople to Rome about 930 (figs. 9, 10). It shows John in a standard gesture of amazement, but Mary’s embrace of both the cross and the feet of Christ is unusual. In effect she offers the viewer an example of how to behave toward the icon and toward the relic it contained. The presence embodied in the icon is identified with the presence behind the icon, namely, the sacred wood stained with the blood of Christ, the only surviving relic of his body. Middle Byzantine art has many such reliquaries, which virtually “double up” the power of the image by making it the container for what is figured in its lid. The Treasury of San Marco, for instance, contains a gilded-and-enamelled example dating to about 1000 in which the representation of the cross was similarly backed up by the real presence of the cross within.

While reliquaries were less common in the last period of Byzantium, the “Faith and Power” exhibition had two splendid examples connected to Trebizond. One is demonstrably associated with Cardinal Johannes Bessarion, a native of that city and a key figure in the transmission of Byzantine culture to the West. Shortly before 1472, Cardinal Bessarion donated it to the Scuola di Santa Maria dei Battuti della Carità in Venice. Like the Vatican example previously discussed, this icon of the Crucifixion, painted a century earlier than the cardinal’s donation, covers a relic of the True Cross (figs. 11, 12). In this instance the painting stresses narrative details, including how Christ’s blood flowed down the wood of the cross to reach the cave underneath Calvary, where Adam was buried, thus redeeming human nature in the form of its first ancestor.
Fig. 11. Icon of the Crucifixion, cover for the Staurotheke of Cardinal Bessarion. Byzantine, second half of the 14th century. Paint, enamel, silver, and precious stones on wood. Galleria dell’Accademia, Venice (S19)

Fig. 12. Staurotheke of Cardinal Bessarion (fig. 11), with the cover removed
The event in the image is really present within the icon and was so venerated.

A gilded-silver box, the second example, may also be connected with Bessarion (fig. 13). Its images of the favorite saints of Trebizond, Aquila, Eugenios, Canidius, and Valerianus, indicate that their relics were enclosed within, as does a verse inscription in which the donor asks for their intercession. Although a box of dry human bones may seem somewhat macabre to modern viewers, to the Byzantine Christian these fragments were physical links to heaven. Still hypostatically (that is, personally) connected to the living souls of the saints in paradise, they were destined to be reunited with them in their bodily resurrection on Judgment Day. The images on the box therefore contained the real presence of the saints represented; venerating one involved veneration of the other.

**Iconostases**

The iconostasis may be considered a third such situation of icons as containers of the sacred—a suggestion that perhaps offers a helpful alternative to the problematic “barrier” terminology. The history of the icon screen is long and complex, full of advances and reversals, but at the beginning of the fifteenth century there developed a new multityped screen, sometimes called the “high iconostasis,” that virtually shut the sanctuary off from the nave. The oldest preserved example is in the Trinity Cathedral of the Trinity–Saint Sergios Lavra, Zagorsk (fig. 14), painted in its original form in 1422–23 by Andrei Rublev and Daniil Chernyi. However, some icons survive from an older screen painted by the same artists at the Dormition Cathedral, Vladimir (ca. 1408), among them a pair of figures from the Deesis tier, each more than 3 meters (approximately 10 feet) high, that give an impression of the new scale of the icon screen in Russia (figs. 15, 16). Composed of at least three tiers, the high iconostasis typically had a row of prosphory icons located on the lowest tier, accessible to the faithful; surmounting this were a Great Deesis tier of interceding saints on either side of Christ and a Festival tier of subjects from the Life of Christ.

Though complex, the entire high iconostasis can be described as a grand, multipart icon of Christ. He is the single
subject, depicted in many manifestations. In the lowest row, to the left of the door, Christ usually appears as an infant on the Virgin’s knee in an image of the Incarnation. The mystery of the Theotokos, or Mother of God, guarantees Christ’s full humanity, as promulgated by the Council of Ephesus in 431. To the right of the door, Christ the teacher is shown holding the book of his doctrine in his left hand, while with his blessing right hand he explains the most profound mysteries of faith in the symbolism of his two upheld and three folded fingers—his two natures and the three persons of the Trinity.

The Great Deesis tier is the most durable and ancient element in the evolution of the screen, going back to the sixth century in Constantinople. Typically Christ appears in glory in a mandorla at the center, flanked by his mother and Saint John the Baptist. Arranged on both sides of this central group are angels, apostles, and other saints, all of whom turn and gently bow toward Christ, directing the prayers and attention of the viewer to him, so that the entire register becomes a communal prayer of the church to Christ. Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonike (1416–29), exactly contemporary with the first high iconostases, comments expressly on this register of the program: “Above the epistle, in the middle of the sacred icons, is the Savior with his Mother and the Baptist on either side, and angels and archangels, the apostles and other saints, all signifying that Christ who is thus with his saints is also with us now; and will come again.” Thus the icons refer emphatically to Christ now present inside the screen.

The register of Festival icons is similarly Christocentric. The story starts with Christ’s conception in the womb of the Virgin at the Annunciation and ends with his taking her into heaven at the Dormition. In between are narratives of Christ’s infancy and private life, his public ministry, his Passion, death, and resurrection, his ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit. The later addition, above this...
his presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the high iconostasis the worshiper is invited to venerate images whose “real presence” is verified in the performance of the liturgy behind the icons. This enclosure of the sacrament in icons effectively erases the theological distinction so cautiously drawn by the Second Council of Nicaea, for the believer must worship the Christ of the sacrament with unreserved adoration, with latria. This is the ultimate activation of the icon: Christ himself is sacramentally present and engaged in repeating his saving work for humanity behind his icon.

Epitaphii
Late Byzantine art proceeds to an even more intimate association of icon with sacred presence in the epitaphios, a liturgical textile that actually encloses the chalice containing the Eucharist (fig. 17). This veil embroidered with an image of the recumbent dead Christ was used to cover the Body of Christ in the chalice when it was transported to the altar for the Liturgy of the Presanctified on Good Friday. Thus, a textile icon representing the body of Christ after its removal from the cross was wrapped around the sacramental Body of Christ. The epitaphios was given a second function when, at the conclusion of the liturgy, it was carried in solemn procession and spread out to cover a table that imitated the tomb of Christ (hence, its name, which means “tomb covering”). This textile icon was and still is venerated by all the faithful with every possible token of worship: they surround it with candles, flowers, and incense, and approach in single file to venerate it with prostration (proskynesis) and kissing (aspasmos).

An especially significant aspect of the veneration of the epitaphios is its placement in church between rhipidia (or exapteriga). Originating as feather, parchment, or fabric fans, rhipidia are one of the most ancient and consistent honors accompanying the Eucharist, having been first mentioned in the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions.27

Figs. 15, 16. Andrei Rublev and Daniil Chernyi. Icons of Saint John Chrysostom (left) and Saint Gregory the Theologian (right) from an iconostasis. Russian (Vladimir), ca. 1408. Tempera and gold on wood. State Treťiakov Gallery, Moscow (19727, 19725)
Fig. 17. Epitaphios. Byzantine, last quarter of 14th century. Silk, with silver and gold threads. The Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration, Meteora (Kalambaka), Greece

By the sixth century, the practice of waving them over the bread and wine on the altar had come to symbolize the hovering of the seraphim over the Ark of the Covenant and a sign of the real presence of the Lord on the altar. A passage in Job the Monk’s *Oikonomike Pragmateia* is relevant for its comments on true adoration and the symbols that attend it:

> When the body of the Lord is placed on the holy table, those [deacons] who stand on either side of the officiants act as a symbol of the six-winged angels shaking fans made of feathers over the awesome offerings, so that the initiate should not stop at the visible but, carried by the mind’s eye above all that is bound to matter, should ascend through what they see to the contemplation of what is invisible and to its ineffable beauty. Since at that time [at the Ark of Moses] the Lord was physically present, the seraphim attended him with fear and trembling; so the trembling of the feathers by the deacons is a hidden sign of this fear and trembling. If then seraphim in fact are said to minister to the Word incarnate, to show that, descended to servitude on earth, he is no less than he was in heaven, it is clear that another rank of incorporeal spirits make *proskynesis* to him with *latria.*

The adoration of the seraphim is the sign that God is present, and this presence is felt with “fear and trembling.”
INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE
In each of these situations, therefore, icons were used to literally contain the divine presence. Through their proximity to the Word of God, to sacred relics, or to the sacrament of the Eucharist, they entered directly into the Byzantines’ most intense experience of the divine. But these were not the only situations in which icons were used. Many stood alone, whether in church or at home, in situations where their efficacy was not directly associated with church rituals. Did the Orthodox find a divine presence as well in the icons that did not cover books, relics, or the Eucharist? The medieval *homo byzantinus* can no longer be consulted as to his state of mind during prayer, but there is a body of inscriptive evidence that testifies to the Byzantines’ vivid sense of a divine presence in icons. The language is full of the “fear and trembling” noted in Job the Monk’s description of eucharistic worship.

The Byzantines particularly liked to associate poetry with painting, and icons were no exception. In the sixth century the poet Agathias wrote a set of epigrams that were inscribed on the frame of a now-lost icon of Archangel Michael. The inscription conveys a riveting sense of divine presence. The poet expects the viewer to enter a reciprocal relationship with the icon. One communicates one’s prayers to the angel by gazing into Michael’s eyes; at the same time, one discovers that through contemplation of the painting in an intense, focused way, the angel’s image enters into oneself and is inscribed in one’s own soul. At that point the viewer “trembles at the presence.”

The verb is important. *Tremai* (he shivers or shakes) from ancient times down to Søren Kierkegaard is the technical, classical expression for religious awe, experienced in the presence of the god or some striking divine portent. It occurs, for example, in Julian the Apostate’s description (ca. 360) of his own religious experience, pagan though it was. (In fact, the Iconoclast-Iconodule debate in Christianity repeats, often in the same terms...
and with the same outcome, an earlier pagan, Neoplatonist debate on the same subject.) Julian the Apostate did not want his critics to think he was worshiping a block of stone when he venerated the statue of his god: “When we look at the images of the gods, let us not indeed think that they are stones or wood, but neither let us think they are the gods themselves.” Although he did not wish to identify the god with matter, this did not prevent his experiencing the presence of the god, who he thought was gazing at him from the statue: “He who loves the gods delights to gaze on the images of the gods and their likenesses and feels reverence and shudders [tremei] with awe of the gods who look at him from the unseen world.” This is the same reciprocal relationship that Agathias experienced in the icon of Michael the Archangel.

The language of awe frequently accompanies icons. On a large icon of the Incarnation in Rome, Mary holds the divine Child on her lap while to the right and left a pair of archangels shrink back from the revelation with gestures of awe (fig. 19). The Latin inscription on the frame, “Astant stupentes angelorum principes gestare natum . . . Deus quod ipse factum est,” should be translated as “The chiefs of the angels stand astonished at the birth of the child . . . for God himself has become [man].” Both the icon and its inscription invite the beholder to share this experience of trembling at the divine presence.

An icon did not have to be grand in size to contain such a fearful presence. The inscription that surrounds a small tenth-century representation of the Crucifixion at Mount Sinai again uses the Greek term tremei. Kathleen Corrigan has astutely inferred that the owner was a monk and that the inscription documents his personal reactions to the icon. “Who would not quake, fear, and tremble seeing you hang on the wood of the cross, tearing apart the garments of death yet covered with the robe of incorruption?”

Since the naked Christ was novel iconography in the tenth century, the monk’s quaking was also a shocked reaction to confronting his Savior depicted in that way.

Painted church decoration sometimes uses the same terminology. At the tenth-century basilica of Saint Achilleios on the Macedonian island of Prespa and in the Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessalonike (1028), the same set of verses enframes the sanctuary: “Tremble where you stand, mere man, as you behold the sanctuary of the Lord’s table; for within, Christ is sacrificed daily and the powers of incorpo-real ministering angels circle round the altar in fear” (fig. 20). The proper attitude of the

Fig. 19. Icon of the Enthroned Virgin and Child Flanked by Archangels, known as the “Madonna della Clemenza,” 705–7. Tempera on wood. Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome
expression can be found in the same place in
the Latin liturgy.

An interesting Late Byzantine example
of the same terminology is offered by the
inscription on the epitaphios from the Holy
Monastery of the Transfiguration at Meteora
(see fig. 17). The donor, unidentified, con-
fesses to astonishment and trembling at the
thought that the recumbent dead Christ rep-
resented on the cloth will return in his fear-
ful Second Coming to judge him or her.
Further examples would certainly come to
light if a much-needed study were under-
taken of the inscriptive evidence offered
by the poet Manuel Philes (ca. 1275–1345),
but this remains to be done.

An embroidery made in Moscow in 1498
offers a final case in point (fig. 21). This
textile belongs to a class of evidence that
Nancy Patterson Ševčenko has profitably
mined in her study of representations of icon
veneration. The precise historical event is
not secure, but the textile represents a great
crowd of people—rulers, clergy, and lay
worshipers—distinguished by the variety of
their costumes, accompanying a great icon
of the Hodegetria type that a man carries on
a pole strapped around his chest. The icon
stands alone, that is, it does not cover a book,
relic, or the sacrament. Yet on either side of
the icon two men dressed as members of a
confraternity hold great rhomboid rhipidia.
The fact that people accompany the
Hodegetria procession with these deeply
symbolic objects means that in practice the
faithful found Christ present in the icon as
truly and forcibly as they did in the Eucharist.
They adored the icon with the fear and
trembling that the seraphim experienced in
heaven, and the icon within the icon actually
includes representations of the adoring angels,
Michael and Gabriel, the only labeled figures
in the textile.

The evidence presented here suggests that
the Orthodox attitude toward icons was much
richer than the cautious priestly theology of
icons that was formulated in deference to
Iconoclast objections. While warning of the

Fig. 20. The Virgin Flanked by Angels, 1028.
Fresco, sanctuary of Church of the Panagia
ton Chalkeon, Thessalonike

viewer should be the reverential fear felt by
the angels. In this case the experience of the
divine presence is linked to the sacramental
presence of Christ on the altar, which, as we
have seen, is the ultimate locus of the divine
presence in Christian worship. But, as part of
the painted decoration, the inscription must
be read as referring to the paintings as well
as to the sacrament. The sight of the whole
sanctuary thrilled the devout and left them
shaking before the divine. Significantly, the
warning to stand in fear is taken from the
Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, where it
functions as a frame for the Anaphora, the
most sacred part of the liturgy; a similar
Fig. 21. Embroidery with a church procession. Russian (Moscow, Grand Prince’s workshops), 1498. Taffeta and damask, with gold and silver threads. State Historical Museum, Moscow, Department of Textiles and Costume (15455shch/R.B.-5)
dangers in the cult of images, the clergy promoted in practice a very bold theology of icons, placing them in an elaborate system that included Gospel books, relics, and the Eucharist. This sacramental, deeply incarnational approach is the stronger Byzantine tradition, in evidence both before and after the crisis of Iconoclasm. The Orthodox believed that by virtue of the Incarnation God had entered personally into the world of matter to which they belonged and that they could find him present under many different material symbols. None of this worked automatically or magically. All these encounters with the divine were seen as dependent both on God's energy extending to the faithful and on the faithful's disposition to receive it, a disposition of belief, repentance, and devotion.


2. This screen was the subject of an exhaustive symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, the papers of which appear in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).


7. In private correspondence, Robert F Taft, S.J., proposed Prosper of Aquitaine as the probable author of the adage. Taft stated that it is first recorded in the *Capitula Celestini, Mansi*, 4, 461, and recommended the discussion in Karl Federer, *Liturgie und Glaube: Eine theologisch-geschichtliche Untersuchung*, Paradosis, 4 (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1950).

8. The panels have gone unstudied since Morey's curious article, which ended up dismissing them as "devoid at once of that interest in things human which inspires the rudest works of Western Europe, and the sense of abstract beauty which relieves the most formal phases of the Byzantine." *East Christian Paintings in the Freer Collection* (New York, 1914), pp. 63–81. The construction of the binding has been recently examined by John L. Sharpe, "The Earliest Bindings with Wooden Board Covers: The Coptic Contribution to Binding Construction," in *International Conference on Conservation and Restoration of Archival and Library Materials, Érice, 22nd–24th April 1996*, ed. Carlo Federici and Paola M. Munafò ([Palermo], 1999), pp. 455–78.


10. Ibid., pp. 148–49.


16. Ibid., pp. 271–72.


18. Ibid., p. 79, no. 37.


22. I am indebted to George Majeska for a summary of current scholarship on this subject, and for the following references, most of which unfortunately lie beyond my linguistic competence: E. S. Smirnova, *Moscow Icons: 14–17th Century* (Oxford, 1989).


28. This sixth-century treatise is contained in Photios, Bibliotheca, PG, vol. 103, col. 769; my translation.


31. Neither in his article (see note 5 above) nor in his more expansive Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm (Princeton, N.J., 2002) does Barber refer to Norman H. Baynes’s important “Idolatry and the Early Church,” Byzantine Studies and Other Essays (London, 1955), pp. 116–43.

32. Quoted by Baynes, with inadequate citation, “Idolatry and the Early Church,” p. 130; see preceding note.

33. Pietro Amato, De vera effigie Mariæ: Antica icona romana (Milan and Rome, 1988), pp. 25–32; my translation. Barber mistranslates the latter part of the text as “referring to the divinity as made by itself” Barber, Figure and Likeness, p. 27.


Late Byzantium between the Mediterranean and Asia: Trade and Material Culture

Around the mid-thirteenth century the Persian poet Sa‘di was entertained for a whole night by a rich merchant established in the island of Qeyis, situated in the Persian Gulf close to the Iranian shore.1 The merchant boasted about his wealth, his property in Turkistan, and his goods in Hindustan. In addition, he described his business plans, as Sa‘di reports in Gulistan (Rose Garden), a work completed in 1258: “At times he would say, ‘I have an inclination to go to Alexandria, the air of which is very pleasant’; then again: ‘No, I shall not go, because the Mediterranean Sea is stormy.’”2 He then mentioned other journeys that he contemplated, after which he would live in retirement: “I am going to carry sulphur from Fars [a province of southern Persia] to China, for I have heard that it fetches a high price [there], and from there I shall bring Chinese bowls [or porcelain] to Rûm [Byzantium],3 and Rûm dîba [a figured and glossy silk cloth] to India,4 and Indian steel to Aleppo, and Aleppo glassware [or mirrors] to Yemen,5 and Yemenite striped cloth to Fars.”

The story told by Sa‘di strikingly illustrates a continental Asian perspective of trade. The merchant shunned the Mediterranean, while contemplating long journeys throughout the vast expanses of Asia (fig. 22). For each region from China to Byzantium he singled out the goods most likely to yield profit elsewhere.6 With respect to Byzantium he mentioned the import of Chinese bowls, or porcelain, and the export of high-grade Byzantine silks.7 In fact, at the time he wrote, Constantinople was under Latin or Western rule, after having been conquered in 1204 by Crusader and Venetian forces. What the merchant had in mind, then, was the Byzantine state of Nicaea in western Asia Minor, which did indeed manufacture silk fabrics and import foreign luxury wares both from Islamic lands and the Christian or Latin West.8 Around 1243 Emperor John III Vatatzes imposed in his territory a ban on the production of clothing made of Italian and Islamic silk textiles, the latter described as from “Syria, Babylonia and Assyria,” and supported the use of indigenous silks for that purpose.9 Somewhat later, during the reign of Theodore II Laskaris (1254–58), precious commodities “from Egypt, India and elsewhere” were reaching the market of Magnesia via the port of Smyrna.10

A perspective of space entirely different from the one offered by the Gulistan is conveyed by an Italian nautical manual, the so-called Compasso da navigare, the first version of which was composed about 1250–65, thus around the same time. This manual provides information and advice about ports, anchorages, and waterways from the coast of Portugal in the west to Constantinople, Asia Minor, the Crusader states of the Levant, and Egypt in the east.11 The same basically Mediterranean perspective is reflected by two trading manuals, one compiled in Crusader Acre around 1270 and the other in Pisa in 1278, that deal with commodities, weights, measures, taxes, and monies. However, it was the nature of nautical
and trading manuals that they always lagged behind actual developments, in spite of being updated from time to time.\textsuperscript{12}

And, indeed, these works did not reflect the fact that, in the preceding half century, the Mongols had created a transcontinental empire of unprecedented size extending from Mongolia and Korea in the east to Russia, Ukraine, and Asia Minor in the west. The Mongol rulers practiced on a large scale the transfer and relocation of qualified craftsmen, administrators, and scholars across Asia from one cultural zone to another. This policy was initiated under Genghis Khan in the 1220s, when Muslim artisans from the western regions of his empire were transferred to China. It was pursued in the second half of the thirteenth century and also set in motion a spontaneous mobility of these cultural experts. Combined with the imposition of Mongol rule over extensive territories, these developments substantially enhanced the circulation of commodities, both in volume and in geographical range, to an unprecedented extent. As a result, there was a dramatic intensification of cross-cultural contacts, exchanges, and interaction.\textsuperscript{13}

Sa’di’s story already illustrates some of the benefits enjoyed by trade throughout Asia by the mid-thirteenth century as a result of the Mongol expansion. Yet, in addition, the consolidation of Mongol rule to the north of the Black Sea, achieved by 1240, generated an increase in Italian commerce in that maritime region and a growing penetration of Italians from its northern shore into Mongol territories. In 1260, for instance, Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, respectively father and uncle of the famous Marco, passed through Constantinople on their way to the Crimea, from where they engaged in their long journey to China.\textsuperscript{14} Direct trade and shipping links between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean across the Bosporus appear to have already been established before the Byzantine recovery of Constantinople in 1261. They led somewhat later to the integration of the previously separate, though interacting, commercial networks of the two maritime regions, in the framework of which the Genoese and the Venetians substantially expanded their activity.\textsuperscript{15} This integration is reflected by the second version of the Italian nautical manual previously mentioned, which contains a new section covering the Black Sea, as illustrated by the extant copy of 1296.\textsuperscript{16} All these thirteenth-century political, territorial, and commercial developments would directly affect Byzantine lands in the long run.

The Mongol rulers actively encouraged trade along the intercontinental routes they controlled.\textsuperscript{17} To be sure, the penetration of Italian merchants into Asia promoted the intensification of trade between the continent, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, contrary to the impression created by the Eurocentric treatment of their activity by modern historians, these merchants were not a decisive factor in Asian trade. Even after disturbances and military confrontations in central Asia put an end to Western voyages across the continent in the 1340s, long-distance trade through that region continued, though along alternative routes when required.\textsuperscript{19} As before, this trade was primarily conducted by Asian merchants in stages, through a series of interconnected regional networks. However, these merchants did not venture deep into the Mediterranean region.

Numerous commodities traveled across Asia, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean as well as among these regions from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century. While there was an increase in the volume of all traded goods, the growing and ever more rapid circulation of textiles warrants special attention, since it generated changes in various aspects of the material culture of the Late Middle Ages. In the Islamic world there was a pervasive use of textiles beyond clothing, particularly in the furnishings of the home, since wooden furniture was very limited.\textsuperscript{20} This feature accounts for the extensive production of textiles in Islamic countries. The use of cloth was more limited
in Byzantium and the Latin West, regions in which it nevertheless fulfilled important functions on several levels, in both private and public life. Thus, for instance, curtains and hangings decorated secular dwellings and churches but also served as partitions with a liturgical role in the latter.²¹

Beyond their practical aspect, there were also political, symbolic, and social dimensions to the secular uses of textiles and clothing during this period. The political and diplomatic utilization of luxury cloth and garments was common to Byzantine, Turkish, Mongol, and other Islamic princely courts. Their ostentatious display projected power, majesty, and wealth. They were granted by princes to their own subjects and acted as markers of social status and social hierarchy. In addition, they were often included among the precious gifts exchanged between princely courts and offered as an expression of honor to foreign princes, to their ambassadors, and occasionally to visitors.²² Both Venice and Genoa adopted this practice in their dealings with Eastern rulers.²³

It is obvious that the exchange of diplomatic and other gifts, the appearance of foreign envoys and individuals in private capacities, and marital alliances with foreign courts, as well as booty, promoted the circulation and display of precious textiles and pieces of clothing. A case in point warrants
some attention. In 1332, according to the Arab traveler Ibn Battūta, a daughter of the Byzantine emperor who was the third wife of Özbek, Mongol ruler of the Golden Horde (r. 1314–41), went to visit her father in Constantinople. She was wearing a mantle made of nakh, "also called nasīj, embroidered with jewels," and "her horse was covered with a saddle-cloth of silk embroidered in gold." Accompanying her were "mamluks [guards], slave girls, pages and attendants, about five hundred, wearing robes of silk embroidered with gold and jewels."

Clearly, the interaction with foreigners in and outside princely courts, both locally and abroad, and in particular the import of goods, also acquainted social elites with foreign textiles and clothing. Yet even within the restricted milieus of these elites in Byzantine lands, as in Islamic states, the individual demand for precious textiles was primarily fueled by indigenous social and economic factors, namely, social status or a rise in social standing, the accumulation of wealth, and the urge to display such goods in public, stimulated by the general social climate of emulation. Only trade, whether domestic or across political and cultural boundaries, could satisfy the expectations of potential customers. Indigenous and especially foreign merchants, entrepreneurs, and
manufacturers not only responded to existing
demand. By using aggressive supply tactics,
they also created and stimulated new
demand, which affected the shaping of taste
and resulted in the emergence of new
fashion trends in clothing.26

These political, economic, and social
processes had a deep impact on Byzantine
lands from the mid-thirteenth to the
mid-fifteenth century. They are reflected
within the social elites of three Byzantine
cities that served as seats of princely courts:
Trebizond in northeastern Asia Minor, the
capital of an independent Greek state from
1204 to 1461; Constantinople, recovered by
Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261,
after fifty-seven years of Latin domination,
and the capital of the Byzantine Empire
until its fall to the Ottomans in 1453; and
Mistra, the administrative center of the
Byzantine Peloponnese from 1349 to 1460.
However, political circumstances, geometrical
location, and specific trade connections
account for variety in textile culture among
the three.

The port of Trebizond, integrated
within both the Black Sea and the Asian
trading networks, acted as one of the major
maritime outlets for commodities brought
from inner Asia. The Mongol conquests
enhanced its links with Tabriz, a major
inland crossroad and market that became
the capital of the Ilkhanids, the Mongol rulers
of Persia, between 1265 and 1282 and served
in that capacity until 1304.27 In 1295, on
their return from China, Marco Polo and
his uncle Maffeo passed through Tabriz on
their way to Trebizond, and from thence
to Constantinople and Venice. There is no
evidence that the empire of Trebizond pro-
duced silks. Its textile culture, therefore, must
have been strongly affected by its territorial
location, as well as by its political and com-
mercial relations with the Mongol hinterland.
An unpublished anonymous trading manual
compiled in Florence about 1320 reports
that “from Trebizond are exported all the
commodities exported from Tabriz,” which
obviously included silk textiles. This trade
partly accounted for the presence of “textiles
and velvets of all kinds” in Constantinople
and in its Genoese suburb of Pera.28

The Byzantine writer Theodore
Hyrrakenos, who lived in Constantinople
around that time, requested from a high
official at the court of Trebizond a cloth
called kamkha “in the language of the
Persians.”29 This type of silk fabric, called
camoa in Italian, was thus well known and
used among the social elite of Trebizond. A
costly figured velvet, either monochrome or
colour and sometimes brocaded with
designs in gold thread, it was produced in
China, several cities of Persia, among them
Tabriz, and Baghdad.30 In the 1330s the
Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci
Pegolotti listed the same textile, along with
cloths of gold or gold interwoven silks and
nachdhi and nachetti “of whatever kind,”
among the various precious textiles available
in Constantinople.31 In fact, the latter two
were similarly cloths of gold, produced in
China, Persia, and Baghdad, with one also
made in Asia Minor.32 In addition, Pegolotti
recorded the freight charge for the transport-
ing of cloths of gold from Trebizond to Pera.33

The textiles just mentioned appear
among the new, previously unrecorded types
of oriental silks produced in the thirteenth
century in central Asia and the Middle East
in the wake of the Mongol resettle-
ment policy. Despite their diverse technical features,
these silks shared a rich ornamental reper-
tory combining Chinese, central Asian, and
Islamic motifs and designs (fig. 23). Their
properties distinguished them both from Far
Eastern and from Western fabrics.34 They are
first attested in written sources of the 1260s
as “Tartar cloths” and later appear as such as
well as under other names, some of which
have been previously mentioned. Simone
Martini (ca. 1284–1344) provided the earliest
representation of such silks in Italian painting
(fig. 24).35 The Venetian treaties of 1319 and
1364 with the emperors of Trebizond refer
to trade in several types of silks, including
Fig. 23. Textile with birds and floral designs. Central Asian or Middle Eastern, 13th or 14th century. Lampas weave, silk and gold thread. Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Brussels (Tx. 397)

Fig. 24. Simone Martini (ca. 1284–1344). *Saint Louis of Toulouse Crowning Robert of Anjou King of Naples* (detail). Italian, ca. 1317. Tempera on wood. Museo di Capodimonte, Naples

*camœa.* The Greek version of the treaty of 1364 includes a term recently identified as the transliteration of a Mongol name applied to a high-quality silk cloth adorned with floral or other designs.⁹⁶

There was also an oriental influence upon dress in Trebizond. In 1404 Ruy González de Clavijo, envoy of the king of Castile to the court of the Turkish ruler Timur (Tamerlane), recorded that the emperor of Trebizond, Manuel III Komnenos (r. 1390–1412), as well as his sons wore “tall hats surmounted with golden cords, on top
of which were crane’s feathers; and the hats were bound with the skins of martens.” It is likely that additional pieces of oriental clothing had been imported to Trebizond, integrated within its courtly dress, and adopted by members of its social elite.

Trebizond also imported Italian silks in the first half of the fifteenth century. In the 1430s and 1440s these included Venetian gold brocades, figured velvets, and camocati (imitations of the oriental cloth mentioned earlier), as well as Venetian and other Italian veils. Some of these fabrics were reexported to Tabriz. Both Venice and Lucca, the major silk manufacturers in the West at that time, had been producing imitations of oriental silks for more than a century (fig. 25). It follows that Venetian camocati were competing with oriental ones in Trebizond. Also imported by the Venetians were fine Florentine woolens, which must have found a ready market in that city. In addition, woolen cloth from Flanders and low-grade English and Italian woolens passed through Constantinople on their way to Trebizond beginning in the 1430s.

Textiles and clothing are better documented in Constantinople between 1261 and 1453. Silk manufacturing collapsed in the city after the Latin conquest of 1204 and was not revived later. Nicaea was the city’s main supplier of Byzantine silks from 1261 until its loss to the Ottomans in 1330, but there is no information regarding the nature or quality of these goods. Afterward, Thessalonike remained the only major silk-manufacturing center in the shrinking empire.

It would seem that in the Palaiologan period figured and gold interwoven silks were gradually superseded in Byzantine silk workshops by plain silks onto which gold, silver, or silk embroidery was applied. This type of decoration clearly required less labor and expense. Starting in the 1320s, Constantinople imported gold thread from Venice, Genoa, Lucca, and Provence for local consumption. Embroidery was particularly appropriate for the representation of distinctive imperial or family symbols and for the display of religious iconography, as shown by the cover of a manuscript containing works by Emperor Manuel II (r. 1391–1425), executed sometime between 1425 and 1438 (fig. 26). Made of pale turquoise silk, it is decorated with double-headed eagles and Palaiologan monograms in silver-thread embroidery clearly executed in Constantinople.

Embroidery also made possible the addition of texts, even lengthy ones, on liturgical and other textiles. A short inscription appears on the richly embroidered epitaphios,
or liturgical cloth, used in the Burial of Christ Procession on Holy Saturday. Depicting the recumbent body of Christ, it was produced in 1313–28 and offered by the emperor Andronikos II (r. 1282–1328) to the cathedral church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid (see fig. 44). Manuel Palaiologos, half brother of Emperor Manuel II, ordered a standard depicting himself kneeling to the left of Saint Michael and displaying much longer inscriptions (fig. 27). The standard must have been embroidered shortly before the naval battle of 1411 in which he defeated the Turkish navy. Considering the advantages of embroidery, it is clearly no coincidence that the 2004 exhibition “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art did not feature any silks with woven decoration manufactured in the Late Byzantine period, but included many embroidered pieces, most of them preserved over the centuries because of their liturgical function.

The empire’s gradual loss of its silk centers in Asia Minor and the declining quality of its silks in the Palaiologan period generated a growing demand for foreign luxury
textiles in Constantinople. The import of such goods was furthered by the integration of the Mediterranean and Black Sea commercial networks and the intensification of trade between them, which reinforced Constantinople’s pivotal role as warehouse, market, transit port, and transshipment station. Richly figured and gold interwoven silks enjoyed particular prestige. The import of oriental camoua was first documented in the 1320s. Contemporary pictorial evidence also reveals new fashion trends, illustrated by the mosaic portrait of the statesman and scholar Theodore Metochites in the inner narthex of the church of the Chora Monastery, now known as Kariye Camii (fig. 28). Metochites, who restored the church between 1316 and 1321, wears a caftan, a garment adopted in Byzantium by the thirteenth century; the origin of its figured cloth cannot be determined. His impressive oriental headdress covered with silk is unrecorded earlier.49

Metochites’ attire was not as exceptional as it would seem at first glance. Despite the weight of tradition, the import of foreign silks to Constantinople and the integration of oriental clothing items into Byzantine ceremonial and aristocratic dress had been an ongoing process for centuries.50 Moreover, both pictorial depictions and written sources record new fashion trends among the members of the social elite in the first half of the fourteenth century. The Byzantine historian Nikephoros Gregoras was dismayed by the behavior of various members of the Byzantine elite at the imperial court during the reign of Emperor Andronicus III (1328–41). He relates how they disregarded the courtly dress code and displayed—obviously elsewhere, too—Latin, “Gothic,” Turkish, Serbian, Bulgarian, or Hungarian pieces of clothing and even a mixture of these. Gregoras was particularly appalled by young men who one day wore a Latin headdress and a Turkish robe and the opposite combination on the following one. Oriental costumes were especially favored over traditional garbs.51

The garments and headgear were either foreign-made items or locally made pieces inspired by them. In any event, they signaled a striking departure from Byzantine clothing tradition.

High-quality Western woolens reaching Constantinople during the period may have also contributed to this trend. In 1338, while
passing through the Byzantine capital on his way to Delhi, the Venetian Giovanni Loredan sold a large number of pieces manufactured in Florence and Malines (Belgium) but acquired in his native city. Their range of colors—blue, vermilion red, green, yellow, and violet—provides some insight into the taste of Loredan’s customers. His successful sales imply the existence of a ready market for these woolens in the Byzantine capital. Some lower-grade Florentine woolens were also marketed in the city.

About a century later, the import of Western silks and prevailing fashion trends in Constantinople are again reflected in the decoration of the Chora Church. A partly preserved funerary wall painting in the outer narthex depicts a man, a woman, and a child wearing clothes made of embroidered plain silk fabrics of unknown origin. The man’s mantle is adorned with a repeat pattern representing double-headed eagles and gold-embroidered medallions enclosing monograms of the Palaiologos family (fig. 29). It is highly significant that the vermilion red undergarment worn by this member of the upper rank in Byzantine society was made of what appears to be an Italian velvet cloth of gold. Indeed, the lobate palmettes of the garment contain a “pomegranate” motif, an Italian design appearing in both paintings and extant silks, which is datable to the second quarter of the fifteenth century (fig. 30).

The account book of the Venetian trader Giacomo Badoer, who resided in Constantinople from 1436 to 1440, thus precisely in the same period, duly documents the import of Venetian silks. Badoer handled costly crimson velvet, several types of monochrome or two-colored satin, some embroidered with gold thread, and monochrome
and two-colored damasks, as well as veils of silk. In 1437 Loukas Notaras, who as mesazon exercised the function of prime minister of the empire, bought from Badoer approximately four meters (more than four yards) of white Venetian damask for his personal use. Badoer also mentions two pieces of zetanin, gold-brocaded satin manufactured in Cologne.

Oriental camocati and other Asian silks not only were shipped from Trebizond to Constantinople but also reached the city along another important route crossing central Asia. The goods passed through Urgench in Uzbekistan, then north of the Caspian Sea to Saray on the Volga, and reached either Tana in the delta of the Don River or Caffa in the Crimea. An extremely well documented illustration of trade along this route is provided by the accounts of a Persian merchant, who in 1438 traveled from his base in Shiraz to Urgench and Saray, then returned home.
During his journey, which lasted more than two years, he handled spices and dyestuffs from the shores of the Indian Ocean, Chinese silk and silk textiles, and European woolens, all of which had been conveyed through regional networks to the markets at which he purchased them. The Latin merchants venturing into Mongol territory until the 1340s did not all reach China or India. It is likely that most of them traveled from Tana no farther than Saray or Urgench to purchase incoming goods, as was still the case in 1363. Some of the pieces of Chinese camoca (kamkha) and satin (atlas) that were available in Saray in 1439, according to the merchant from Shiraz, must have been on their way to the Black Sea. Indeed, oriental camocai were shipped by Genoese merchants from Caffa to Constantinople in 1452.

A large volume and variety of Western woolens also continued to reach Constantinople in the late fourteenth century and in the first half of the fifteenth. These included luxury cloth from Florence, Mantua, Padua, and Venice, as well as other Italian, French, Flemish, and English woolens in various colors and of differing qualities. Like silks, many of these woolens were clearly intended for the local market, while others were reexported, such as those reaching Saray in 1439. Two years earlier, the Spanish traveler Pero Tafur had observed in Adrianople, the capital of the Ottoman sultan Murad II, that men were wearing long cloaks made of fine Italian woolens, silks, and brocades. Tafur was obviously surprised to find so many Italian textiles being used in Ottoman territory. There is good reason to believe that such use was also quite common in Byzantine Constantinople by that time.

Further evidence for the import of precious silks to Constantinople is provided by an agreement concluded in 1454 by John Palaiologos, a former resident of the city. In Ragusa (Dubrovnik, Croatia) he obtained a loan of fifty Venetian ducats, for which he gave as security a cloak of crimson velvet lined with a vermilion cloth; a cloak of black velvet and another black cloak, both lined with black Florentine cloth; and a Greek headdress of black velvet. Palaiologos had clearly owned these pieces before escaping in the previous year from Constantinople, around the time of the Ottoman conquest. The origin of the velvets is not stated, yet they were clearly foreign. It is noteworthy that, while made of imported velvet, the headdress conformed to Greek fashion. If the items were not redeemed within six months, the agreement stipulated that the first cloak would be sold, presumably because it would cover the reimbursement of the loan, which, in any event, clearly amounted to less than the value of the four costly items.

The oriental imprint on clothing fashion in Constantinople in the first half of the fifteenth century is illustrated by the appearance of Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (r. 1425–48), who headed the Byzantine delegation to the Church Council of Ferrara-Florence. The Italian painter Pisanello (ca. 1395–ca. 1455) made several sketches of the emperor, his garments, and headgear, either in 1438 or in 1439. A page preserved at the Musée du Louvre shows John VIII on horseback, wearing an oriental hat with a high rounded and ribbed dome and a brim projecting over the face, which shielded the eyes from the sun. Pisanello also observed the same hat closer up and reproduced it more faithfully in two other portraits of the emperor: an illumination pasted onto a page of a psalter, now in the library of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai (fig. 31), and a drawing preserved at the Louvre. In both cases, as well as on the bronze medal of the emperor designed by the same artist, the brim of the hat is divided into a front and a back section that could be independently folded up or down. A similar hat appears in a contemporary painting in Mistra, discussed below, and is also depicted in a late-fourteenth-century Persian manuscript.

The page with John VIII on horseback preserved at the Louvre also contains a
full-length figure identified with the emperor. The wide border at the bottom of his robe is similar to a tiraz band and must have contained the woven or embroidered Arabic inscription reproduced by Pisanello at the top of the page. Since the inscription records the name of the Egyptian sultan al-Mu'ayyad Abū al-Nāṣir Shaykh (r. 1412–21), the cloth was most likely commissioned by his court and produced in a tiraz workshop. It has been suggested that the garment was sent as a gift by the sultan's successor to John VIII, shortly before the Church Council of 1438. Whatever the case, the garment raises the possibility that Mamluk silks also reached Constantinople by commercial channels. Both Italian and Byzantine merchants were conducting trade between the Byzantine capital and Alexandria around that time, an activity completely overlooked until recently.

Mistra is the third city to be considered. Byzantine rule was renewed in the southeastern Peloponnese by Michael VIII in 1262 and gradually extended over the peninsula. In 1348 Emperor John VI made the Byzantine Peloponnese an autonomous province and in the following year sent his son Manuel Kantakouzenos to govern it. Mistra subsequently served as the seat of the despotate and the administrative capital of the so-called despotate of the Morea until its fall to the Ottomans in 1460. All its rulers were either sons or brothers of reigning emperors, which accounts for the obvious impact upon Mistra of the imperial court in Constantinople. Many members of the province's elite gathered around the despot's court, and the numerous churches in Mistra with rich frescoes illustrate their wealth. The city was thus clearly a consumption center of luxury products.

Monemvasia, on the southeastern coast of the Peloponnese, was the main maritime outlet of the despotate until it was superseded by Patras, which was occupied by Byzantine forces in 1429. The trade of this Byzantine province was largely reoriented toward Italy during the thirteenth century and, by the end of that period, was firmly integrated within a regional Mediterranean commercial network dominated by Venice. Although the merchants and ships of Monemvasia continued to sail widely into the mid-fourteenth century, the city was not a port of call for vessels engaging in trans-Mediterranean trade. The products of the despotate were increasingly concentrated in the Venetian ports of Coron (Corone) and Modon (Methone) in the southwestern Peloponnese and were conveyed from there to their respective destinations. Venetians, the most active Latins in Monemvasia's trade, and Greek subjects of Venice, financed their purchases in the despotate with cash, iron, weapons, plows, other finished products, and especially textiles.

The Byzantine philosopher George Gemistos Plethon, who lived in Mistra beginning about 1410, was fiercely opposed to the import of luxury textiles into the despotate. Shortly before 1418, he wrote an address to the despot Theodore II and another to Emperor Manuel II, both of which deal with the affairs of the Peloponnese. In the first he states that it is better to be ready for war and be inexpensively dressed than to wear golden robes and live in dread of the enemy. In the second he stresses that it is unnecessary, absurd, and harmful to the state to import Italian woolens, since the Peloponnese produces sufficient quantities of wool, as well as flax, silk, and cotton for the manufacture of textiles. Plethon therefore advocated self-sufficiency and the exclusive use of locally made cloth, although implicitly recognizing that foreign textiles were of superior quality. This superiority was also acknowledged around 1444 by Cardinal Bessarion, who advocated the dispatch of young men to the West to learn advanced technologies in the weaving of silk and wool, as well as in cloth dyeing.

Plethon's advice regarding the import of luxury textiles was disregarded. In 1429
the despot of Morea and future emperor, Constantine XI, offered several pieces of clothing to George Sphrantzes, a member of his entourage freed from a short imprisonment in Patras. They included a Thessalonian cap, a tamarion, a type of cloak worn only by the highest officials at the Byzantine imperial court, made of precious green camoca manufactured in Lucca, a city renowned for its luxury silks; a kabbadion, or caftan, made of crimson camoca; and what appear to be short trousers, made of green camoca apparently embroidered with gold thread. Although the origin of the textiles used for the last two pieces is not stated, they, too, must have been foreign. There is no evidence that camoca was ever produced in the Peloponnese or in neighboring territories, and, as implied by Bessarion, the silk workshops of Greece lacked the innovative weaving technologies developed in Italy. Two aspects of the items granted to Sphrantzes deserve particular attention. First, they were ready by the time he left Patras and rejoined the despot, a circumstance that suggests pieces made of the same or similar imported silk textiles were not exceptional at Constantine’s court. This implication is further strengthened by the fact that, although made of foreign textiles, the first two pieces of clothing were in line with Byzantine courtly fashion, whereas the third was clearly inspired by Italian style.

The clothing pieces discovered in tomb 5 of the church of Saint Sophia at Mistra reveal additional aspects of the textile and clothing culture of the city in the first half of the fifteenth century. The tomb contained the remains of a young woman dressed in an
undergarment of taffeta (a light silk adorned with lozenges) and a sleeveless outer garment of damask decorated with lobate palmettes containing a "pomegranate" motif and lined in taffeta. The monochrome textiles of both garments are most likely of Venetian origin, an identification reinforced for the outer garment by its decoration (fig. 32), which appears on contemporary Venetian velvets (fig. 33). Venice was indeed producing damask and taffeta at that time, but Venetian merchants also shipped overseas taffetas manufactured in other Italian cities.92 The excavated silks offer invaluable material evidence for the import of Italian silks into the despotate. It is noteworthy that they are contemporary with the imported Lucchese silk mentioned above.

The outer garment of the lady is of additional interest. From its reconstruction it appears to have been tightly fitted to the bust and to have displayed a V-shaped
décolleté, typical of French female fashion in the first half of the fifteenth century, as illustrated by various paintings (figs. 34, 35). The cloth was thus Italian, and the style of the dress French. The dress of another lady of Mistra, depicted in the Aphendiko Church, has a low yet square neckline. Neither neckline conformed with traditional Byzantine dress designs. The lady of tomb 5 has been tentatively identified as Cleopatra, adopted daughter of Carlo Malatesta, head of the younger branch of the lords of Rimini; she wedded the despot Theodore II in Mistra in 1421 and died there in 1433. Theodore II had promised his future wife that she would be allowed to retain her religious allegiance and Italian lifestyle. However, a letter addressed by a lady of Cleopatra’s retinue to Pope Martin V refers to a fierce struggle at the despot’s court, clearly between Cleopatra and her Italian ladies-in-waiting, on the one hand, and the proponents of Byzantine tradition, on the other. The pope warned Cleopatra of severe ecclesiastical punishment, should she abandon her Roman faith. Under pressure, she pretended to embrace the Orthodox creed. After her death Plethon asserted that she had converted to Orthodoxy and had adopted the more stringent and modest way of life common to Greek women. In these circumstances, the remains of the lady wearing Italian textiles and a dress in French style could not be those of Cleopatra.

The implications of the garment are disputed. It has been suggested that its style reflects the adoption of Western fashion among the Greek elite of the Byzantine Peloponnese in the first half of the fifteenth century. Conversely, the painted portraits in the churches of the province seem to point to the conservative nature of the clothing, similar to that displayed in the funerary portraits of the Chora in Constantinople. According to this line of argument, the clothes excavated at Mistra illustrate at best a Western presence at the court of the despotate, rather than a general fashion trend. The clothes suggest that several attitudes coexisted among the members of the elite in Mistra. Some of them, including a despot, obviously bought and used Italian luxury textiles without hesitation, while others even adopted foreign fashion. This is not to deny that there were also Greeks with a conservative inclination, especially among members of the clergy. Another consideration, however, is the extent to which donor or funerary portraits in the churches of the Peloponnese truly reflect clothing habits among the local Greek elite. Many of the latter clearly wished to be portrayed in churches in traditional clothes displaying their social rank, in line with fashion at the imperial court. This does not necessarily imply that they rejected imported luxury textiles or foreign fashion in daily life. Manuel Laskaris Chatzikes, a member of a prominent family of the despotate who died in Mistra in 1445, apparently chose a middle course. In the Panagia Church he is depicted as wearing the same oriental headdress as Emperor John VIII in 1438, but his mantle appears to conform to Western rather than to Byzantine or oriental fashion. It is possible, therefore, that the dress of the lady found in tomb 5 did not belong to one of Cleopatra’s ladies-in-waiting, as has been suggested. If some men of the Peloponnese elite wore pieces of clothing conforming with Western fashion, so, too, could women. The sale of Venetian textiles to the despotate is well documented in 1430, precisely in the period to which the excavated silks belong, as well as in the following decades. The strong commercial connections and continuous social contacts between the despotate and Italy also furthered the dissemination of Italian fashions. The adoption of features of French female fashion is more difficult to explain. Contacts between the Byzantine elite of Mistra and the nobility of the neighboring principality of Morea offer a possible solution. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the values, attitudes, and lifestyle of those nobles were largely molded by their continuous interaction with France.
This may still have been the case to some extent in the first half of the fifteenth century, although by then this group had been largely infiltrated by Italians and Greeks.104

Three factors, then, amplified and accelerated the circulation, diffusion, and exchange of luxury textiles from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century in Byzantine cities: Mongol rule over vast territories, which promoted long-distance trade; the commercial expansion of Venice and Genoa; and the growing volume and variety of high-grade cloth produced both in Asia and in the Latin West. Written, pictorial, and material sources all underscore the major contribution of trade to the evolution of textile culture among the Late Byzantine elite. Merchants were the primary agents of material transfers and, as such, had a clear impact on taste and fashion. A distinction should be made, however, between cloth and cut. Obviously, foreign luxury textiles could be incorporated within traditional dress. The adoption of imported foreign clothing signaled a more striking departure from custom, especially if followed by the production of local imitations for the supply of a growing indigenous market and, ultimately, by changes in fashion. Young people, clearly more inclined than their elders to innovate, must have often been the forerunners in that respect. As for women, they were less constrained than men by ceremonial dress codes and thus more open to novelty.

Yet these factors affected Late Byzantine cities in different ways. Among the three considered here, Constantinople was the one that performed the most important function as transit station for diplomats and travelers and, above all, for merchants and goods. It is there that the convergence of oriental and Western textiles and clothing pieces was the strongest and most sustained. And it is there, undoubtedly, that the dynamic absorption and integration of foreign fashions in dress was the fastest and most diversified.


2. Abū ‘Abdallah Musharrif al-Din Sa’di, Gulistan, ed. Muhammad ‘Ali Furūghī (Tehran, A.H. 1316 [1898]), p. 100. Published translations differ one from the other. I wish to thank my colleague Professor Shaul Shaked at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, for his translation, on which I rely here, and for his help with the terms abgine and kase-ye chint, mentioned in note 5 below.


5. The term abgine has the meaning of “glassware” or “mirror,” while kase-ye chint may be translated as “Chinese bowls.” However, kase also stands for “porcelain.” The word chint by itself, literally “Chinese,” also has the meaning of “porcelain,” in the same way that “china” does in English.

6. Interestingly, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the superintendent of taxes of a Mongol ruler conducted an extensive trading operation across Asia from his base on the island of Qeyis, precisely the one on which Sa’di’s merchant resided: see Thomas T. Allsen, Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia (Cambridge, 2001), p. 42.

7. To date there is no written or material evidence for thirteenth-century imports of Chinese ceramics into Byzantium, yet this does not undermine the plausibility of the merchant’s plans. He may well have believed that the offer of these ceramics, especially if unknown to Byzantine customers, would be a profitable trading venture.


19. Allsen, Culture and Conquest, p. 41.


24. The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325—1354, trans. H[amilton] A. R. Gibb (Cambridge, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 498, 503. On that visit, see Ursula Victoria Bosch, Andronikos III. Palaiologos: Versuch einer Darstellung der byzantinisichen Geschichte in den Jahren 1321—1341 (Amsterdam, 1965), pp. 67—68. According to Bosch, based on Ibn Battuta’s testimony, the princess was the daughter of Andronikos III and came on a diplomatic mission. Since Andronikos married in 1318 (ibid., p. 10), his daughter could not have been more than thirteen years old and thus incapable of conducting diplomatic talks, although the advisers of the Mongol ruler accompanying her could have done so.

25. On this type of silk, see below.


33. See note 31 above.

34. See Wardwell, “Panni Tartari,” pp. 95–173, esp. pp. 115–17 (summary), to date the most authoritative study on these textiles. See also the studies by Watt and Komaroff mentioned in note 13 above. For some problems regarding gold threads as a criterion of provenance, see Jacoby, “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction,” pp. 316–38.


43. See note 8 above.

44. Alfredo Stussi, ed., Zibaldone da Canal: Manoscritto mercantile del sec. XIV, Firenze per la storia di Venezia, Sez. V, Fondi vari (Venice, 1967), p. 70, and Pegolotti, La pratica, p. 36, respectively, for the 1320s and 1330s.

45. Grottaferrata, Biblioteca della Badia Greca, cod. Crypt. z. d. I. The book was presumably removed from the imperial library by John VIII, who before his departure for the Church Council of Ferrara in 1438 offered it to Cardinal Bessarion: Bessarione e


50. See Parani, Reconstructing the Reality of Images, pp. 55, 60–61, 231.


52. Roberto S. Lopez, “Da Venezia a Delhi nel Trecento,” in Roberto S. Lopez, Su e giù per la storia di Genova, Collana storica di fonti e studi, ed. Geo Pistorino, 20 (Genoa, 1975), pp. 139–40; for testimonies concerning the origin and colors of the woolens he carried with him, sixteen to twenty pieces of which he still had in Astrakhan; see ibid., pp. 155–56. On the high quality of the woolens from Malines, see Ashtor, “L’exportation de textiles occidentaux,” p. 340.


Vermilion was obtained from Kermes vermilio, known in the medieval West as granu, and crimson or purplish red from various species labeled Porphyrophora and known as chermsi, or cochineal; see Dominique Cardon, Le monde des teintures naturelles (Paris, 2003), pp. 459–83. These were costly dyestuffs.


72. See Joyce Kulicki, "Orientalizing Costume in Early Fifteenth-Century French Manuscript Painting (Cité des Dames Master, Limbourg Brothers, Boucicaut Master, and Bedford Master)," Gesta 40, no. 2 (2001), pp. 163 and 167, fig. 5e.

73. See note 68 above.

74. A careful survey of pictorial material may well yield evidence in that respect.

75. See David Jacoby, "Byzantine Traders in Mamluk Egypt," in Byzantium, State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides, ed. Anna Avramea, Angeliki Laiou, Evangelos Chrysos (Athens, 2003), pp. 257–65; for shipments in 1437 and 1439 partly through Candia in Crete: Badoer, pp. 39, 104, 106, 112, 113, 125, 638, 678, 690. Lack of space here precludes discussion of how accurately the exotic clothing of characters depicted later by painters such as Piero della Francesca and Benozzo Gozzoli reflects the actual garments worn by the members of the Byzantine delegation to the Church Council. The problem has been raised anew by Ronchey, "Il 'salvataggio occidentale' di Bisanzio," pp. 125–34.


77. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 211–16.


86. The name did not necessarily point to the origin of the cap and may well have indicated its style: see Klaus-Peter Matschke, "Tuchproduktion und Tuchproduzenten in Thessalonike und in anderen Städten und Regionen des späten Byzanz," Vyzantiaka 9 (1989), pp. 69–70.

87. On the tamarion, see Parani, Reconstructing the Reality of Images, p. 64.

88. On the kabbadon, see ibid., pp. 60–61.

89. The term kourotzoubakia seems to be a somewhat erroneous Greek rendering of the Italian corte brache (short trousers).

90. On the types of silks manufactured in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Jacoby, "The Production of Silk Textiles," pp. 26–30, and for evidence regarding Patras in 1430, ibid., p. 28.


92. On damask, see Moli, La comunità dei Lauchesi, pp. 169, 250; on taffeta, see ibid., pp. 224–26.


94. Parani, Reconstructing the Reality of Images, p. 76.

95. Giuseppe Müller, ed., Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coli Turchi fino all'anno MDXXI (Florence, 1879), p. 150, no. CII.
99. The funerary portraits in Constantinople should not be taken into account, since the cultural context in the capital was to some extent different from the one existing in the despotate.
Byzantium and the Neighboring Powers: Small-State Policies and Complexities

The region of and around the Byzantine Empire in the Palaiologan period was a world of small powers, with all the complexities and instabilities inherent in such systems (fig. 36). The dynamics of the relations between various political powers is the topic of this essay.

Maps help to remind us of the first basic and well-known point: the progressive fragmentation of the geographic space of the twelfth-century Byzantine Empire. Until 1340 there was a Byzantine state with more or less discernible boundaries, and so it is with Serbia and even Bulgaria. There were efforts, both before and after 1340, by several powers, whether Byzantium, Bulgaria, or Serbia, to unify large segments of this space. But by the end of the fourteenth century, the fragmentation was so advanced, so many lords and “kings” or “emperors” ruled—if that is not a euphemism—tiny areas with ever-shifting borders, that it would be virtually impossible to construct a political map of the area.

The fragmentation of the Byzantine space had begun in the late twelfth century and had certainly been accelerated by the Fourth Crusade (1202–4). After the Byzantine restoration in 1261 there were about eighty years during which a certain amount of reconcentration occurred, primarily as a result of the first three Palaiologan emperors. But under the surface, or even on it, the breakup of relatively large units progressed, in ways that augured the future. Some examples will illuminate the process.

In 1299 Andronikos II accepted the annexation of part of Byzantine western Macedonia by Stefan Uroš II Milutin of Serbia (figs. 37, 38), although the recognition was disguised as the granting of a dowry. The event is significant in view of future developments regarding the acceptance of rights established by conquest. In other Balkan states, the disaggregating effects of hostilities and conquests are apparent. In 1330 the battle of Velbuzd (Küstendil) between the Serbs and the Bulgarians brought about the fragmentation of the Bulgarian state, which proceeded despite the efforts of Ivan Alexander (r. 1331–71) (fig. 39). The brigand Momčilo established a tiny and short-lived principality in the Merope region of Thrace from 1343 to 1345; a little later, Dobrotitsa, the best known of a number of semi-independent rulers, governed the Dobrudja, the region between the lower Danube and the Black Sea. In Serbia, the battle of Velbuzd resulted in the accession of Stefan Dušan (r. 1331–55), who was to undertake his own efforts at restructuring the territories and becoming “Emperor of the Romans.” In 1334 Stefan Dušan and Andronikos III made an agreement that firmly and formally recognized Dušan’s rights to some of the Macedonian lands he had conquered. This was an important step in the process of establishing the rights of conquest de jure, and not simply de facto.

Need one say more? Need one perhaps mention that even the conquest of territories in the process of consolidation no longer had the same meaning as in the Middle Byzantine period? As witness one example will
Fig. 36. Cities and Regions of the Balkans, Italy, and Asia Minor in the Palaiologan Period
suffice, although more could be produced. That is the surrender of the city of Ioannina to Andronikos II in 1319. Its inhabitants gave up the city only upon receipt of extensive privileges, forming with the emperor a relationship that was certainly bilateral and synallagmatic, very different from the Middle Byzantine concept of sovereignty.⁵

These few examples from the period before midcentury serve as reminders that both the principles and the forms of fragmentation that became common after it were present earlier. With the midcentury, the process of disaggregation became rapid: Serbia after the death of Dušan, Byzantium after the second civil war, the end of which may be placed in 1354 but which continued to have repercussions until the end of the empire, Bulgaria after the death of Ivan Alexander, all dissolved into small or smaller states or rulerships.⁶ Noteworthy, and typical of the
sort of disaggregation that occurred, is the existence of multiple capitals during a considerable part of the Palaiologan period. Constantinople was, by its history, location, and ideological weight, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, but Thessalonike served as almost an alternative capital under the Byzantine Empress Yolanda/Irene, who resided there between 1303 and 1317 and carried out her own foreign policy: an indirect and unintended consequence of the marriage of her daughter Simonis to Stefan Uroš II. Thessalonike performed the same function during the second civil war and later still under Manuel II (fig. 40), while Didymoteichon was the capital of John VI Kantakouzenos for a few years after his investiture as emperor in October 1341. In 1382 there were three Byzantine capitals: Selymbria (modern Silivri), ruled by Andronikos IV Palaiologos and his son John VII; Thessalonike, ruled by Manuel; and Constantinople, where the emperor John V held court. In Bulgaria, Târnovo and Vidin alternated as capitals. During the reign of Dušan, Prilep was a second capital. After Dušan’s death in 1355, Serres became another Serbian capital. Trebizon, of course, remained a capital city. Mistra may perhaps not be considered a capital in the same sense, but it was certainly a center of power alternative to Constantinople.

Similarly, one could point to the proliferation of people bearing the title basileus, once jealously held and guarded by the basileus ton Romaion, the Orthodox, Greek-speaking
emperor ruling in Constantinople, who recognized it with the greatest difficulty in a few other monarchs. In the early thirteenth century, the participle basileusas was used by Niketas Choniates to describe the rule of Henry of Flanders. The narrative of Laonikos Chalkokondyles, written in the 1480s, is peppered with basileis, including the basileus βασιλέως βασιλείας (basileus Byzantion).

What is exhibited here is multipolarity, which increases the areas of instability in the system and makes it more prone to warfare. The question then arises whether and how these states functioned and, subsequently, what were the dynamics of their relations. The early fragmentary states, formed just before or just after the fall of Constantinople in 1204, gave evidence of viability. Some, like Serbia and Bulgaria, had a certain coherence already before 1204. The states of Epiros and Nicaea, although certainly smaller than the Komnenian Empire, were economically viable, having both the essentials of self-sufficiency and enough of a surplus to trade. Given the secular trend for trade to increase, a large tax base was no longer as essential as before and, in any case, small-scale politics are sufficiently served by small-scale resources—except, of course, when other factors, or the logic of the system, intervene and destroy the proportionality, as will be shown below. Thus, in the thirteenth century, Bulgaria, Serbia, Epiros, and Nicaea were able to sustain economic growth (where evidence exists, it is clear) and to provide for defense, while Epiros and Nicaea, far from Constantinople, were able to create viable political institutions. The reconquest of Constantinople in 1261 brought with it the impetus for the reconsolidation of territories.

These early fragmentary states, however, operated under various impediments. Or, to put it differently, there were factors that, unless checked, would make the existence of these states problematic. For one thing, the creation of several political units in what had been the Byzantine Empire necessarily increased the possibility (and the reality) of warfare, at the same time increasing the cost

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Fig. 40. Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, from the Funeral Oration of Manuel II Palaiologos for His Brother Theodore. Constantinople, 1409–11. Tempera, gold, and ink on vellum. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département des Manuscrits (Supplément grec. 309, fol. 6r)
of government. It is true that government was not nearly as ostentatious or as expensive in the successor states as it had been in the Komnenian Empire. On the other hand, the tax base was not changed much overall, so that the same resources had to support a number of smaller governments and smaller armies. The spectacular rise in the importance of Serbia in the fourteenth century must be partly ascribed to the fact that it commanded new resources, unavailable to others in the area, that is, the silver mines at Novo Brdo (fig. 41) and elsewhere.

Multipolarity and increased conflict create interesting dynamics. With small states, warfare was also small-scale, not only in the size of the armies involved but also in its aims. Michael VIII and to some extent Andronikos II had before them the large task of recovering imperial territories. Soon
enough, however, even during the reign of Andronikos II, the conflicts were over small areas, towns, and forts, as, for instance, those along the Serbian frontier. In these circumstances, border lords or warlords flourished and added to the instability of the system. Any number of examples could be cited of these people, who had typically participated in warfare between states and who then tried to become independent rulers. One could mention the Serbian warlord Hrelja, one of the lieutenants of Stefan Dečanski and Stefan Dušan, who, in the 1330s, built his own independent statelet in the region around the Strymon River and sought to assert his overlordship of the fort town of Melnik. Hrelja’s loyalties were transferred from Dušan to Andronikos III and John Kantakouzenos and back to Dušan, as occasion warranted. 

Another example is Momčilo, the Bulgarian who served the rivals John VI and John V successively and built his own statelet. In the 1350s two brothers, the grand stratopedarches Alexios and the grand primikerios John fought against the Serbs of Serres and, as a reward, were granted by Emperor John V the coastal area of eastern Macedonia as well as Thasos to rule as hereditary possessions—in other words, exercising full powers, including state power. How any of these possessions might be represented on a map showing political frontiers beggars the imagination.

One result of the shattered power structure is the fact that small events, or events that seem peripheral to the area, could lead to major upheavals: a situation that has been termed “crisis instability.” Such was the case with the Catalan mercenaries, released from their obligations in Sicily after the Peace of Caltabelotta (1302), who offered their services to the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II. They were engaged to fight, as mercenaries, for the Byzantines and against the Turks in Asia Minor. But this band of perhaps sixty-five hundred men, of whom fifteen hundred were cavalry, brought considerable changes to several parts of the Balkans that were certainly disproportionate to both their strength and the role they had initially been meant to play. Not only did they engage in the plunder type of warfare that was becoming a structural element of war in the Balkans in this period. They also threatened Constantinople itself, and eventually Thessalonike; as they moved south, they ended up establishing the Catalan duchy of Athens in 1311. Fearsome pirates, they became one more element of instability, especially at sea. Their presence and the threat they posed had moved Byzantium and the Genoese much closer in their alliance. In 1305, as part of this alliance, Benedetto Zaccaria took over and subsequently received from the emperor the rich island of Chios.

Meanwhile, another upheaval had occurred. The Catalans had had with them a group of Turks, possibly Ottomans, under a leader named Chalil. This group, numbering perhaps twenty-one hundred men, left the Catalans in the spring of 1309 and subsequently captured a fort in Gallipoli, received reinforcements from Asia Minor, and looted the surrounding area in Thrace. It took the help of the Serbians to root them out; as a result, Stefan Uroš II received, for the monastery of Chiland, certain possessions in the Strymon Valley. In the History of Chalkokondyles, written in the late fifteenth century, this incident is given surprising prominence, perhaps because it was, after all, the first settlement of Turks in Europe and involved the peninsula of Gallipoli, the launching pad of Ottoman invasions after 1352.

In sum, the activities of a small band of mercenaries had broad consequences for the relations of the Byzantine Empire with its neighbors as well as with outside powers such as Genoa and Aragon. Furthermore, they hastened the fragmentation of power and authority: as the central government was seen to be incapable of resisting the Catalans, other actors, such as the Zaccaria in Chios, the Knights Hospitaller in Rhodes, and the inhabitants of the Byzantine walled towns, took matters into their own hands. While not quite the Butterfly Effect, it does very
much characterize a complex system in which small inputs can have very considerable outputs. This is, of course, the very definition of chaos, and to observe such outcomes is virtually to state that the politics of the period follow the rules of chaos theory. Equally predictable by chaos theory is the fact that some major events may have disproportionately small consequences. Thus, in 1402 the battle of Ankyra, which one might consider a major event, neither reversed the disunity of Balkan Christians nor stopped the eventual unification of the area under the Ottomans.

After the second half of the fourteenth century, the system became atomized as disintegration followed its own dynamic. Theoretically, the high costs of increased warfare and government, with a decreasing revenue base—the result, among other things, of constant warfare and the Black Death—should have led to efforts to create larger states, more capable of providing for defense. In fact, it took a long time for such a process to begin. Perhaps this was because of the nature of warfare. Border warfare as practiced by the Byzantines, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, and others in the first half of the century usually consisted of looting wars: wars for the redistribution of income, which was the reward of the warrior. Although frequently involving fairly low-level violence, looting wars arise from and contribute to fragmentation of power and authority. Conflict becomes a way of life and gives rise to smaller and smaller political units.

From time to time, the wars became larger, more extensive, and meant to redistribute resources rather than income: thus the Byzantine civil wars, the wars of Michael Śiśman, and eventually the expansion of Serbia under Stefan Dušan. However, these larger wars, which may be seen as centripetal efforts, did not create long-lived large states and were not repeated after Dušan's death. There was, therefore, a downward spiral that may be considered irrational except in terms of the redistribution of income among many suitors. Eventually, the system became too burdened with small-scale units of power, fighting small-scale wars, to be sustainable. The imperative to centralize was then carried out by the Ottomans.

Part of the dynamic characterizing the relationship between the numerous actors in the political scene during the Palaiologan period is the effort not so much to centralize but rather to form networks that would provide for their members a modicum of security and more power than each one alone could command. Perhaps the most common form this dynamic assumed was the formation of marriage alliances among the various actors, large or small and growing smaller as disintegration advanced. A glance at the genealogical tables of the ruling and/or powerful Balkan families easily makes the point. There were “royal” alliances: for example, the marriage of the five-year-old Simonis, daughter of Andronikos II, to Stefan Uroš II Milutin, kral of Serbia, then about forty years old. Its purpose was to stop Serbian incursions into Macedonia as a quid pro quo for the quasi-recognition of Milutin's conquests in the form of Simonis's dowry. The end result was mixed, as has already been mentioned.

Other royal alliances include the marriage of Constantine Tich Asen of Bulgaria to a niece of Michael VIII in 1270 or 1272 and that of Irene, Michael's daughter, to John Asen III in 1278, both not particularly effective efforts to cement alliances with Bulgaria. Following in his father's footsteps, Andronikos II married off his granddaughter Theodora to Theodore Svetoslav, king of Bulgaria, in a marriage alliance that did further its purpose in a peculiar and unanticipated way: after the death of Theodore Svetoslav, Michael Śiśman, who became king in 1323, was hostile toward the Byzantine state until he married the widow Theodora, the sister of Andronikos III, who was in full rebellion against his grandfather.

All these alliances eventually created complex and murky situations as competing
and conflicting political groupings formed around them. At the time of the first civil war between Andronikos II and Andronikos III in the 1320s, Michael Šišman asked for a part of the Byzantine Empire in the form of a dowry because of his marriage to the Byzantine princess.²⁸ Šišman’s request was made in order to legitimize his attacks on that area.²⁹ During the same war, the Serbs were more or less allied to the old emperor and the Bulgarians to the young one, following the lines of the existing marriage alliances, which, in the case of Serbia, were reinforced by yet another marriage, that between Stefan III Dečanski and an imperial princess. However, after the destruction of Bulgarian power in 1330, Stefan Dušan, the son of Stefan Dečanski, married the sister of Ivan Alexander, nephew and successor of Michael Šišman. This alliance in effect replaced an earlier “lost” alliance, which had united Michael Šišman to Anna-Neda, sister of Stefan Dečanski, before Šišman repudiated the marriage and contracted a Byzantine one.³⁰

“Royal” marriage alliances could be discussed at great length and tedium. There is no reason to do so. Suffice it to say that by the late fourteenth century the royal houses (of every persuasion) of the Byzantine state, the Serbs, the Bulgarians, and Trebizond, of course, were connected among themselves in intricate matrimonial patterns. These did not impede the fragmentation but simply furnished a palliative in the form of temporary and shifting alliances.

The nonroyal marriage alliances would be more interesting to trace, although the task is so complex that the rewards would not perhaps repay the effort expended. As the fragmentation of power turned into the pulverization thereof, political marriage alliances took place among various small-time powermongers. Thus, Dobrotitsa married off his daughter to a son of the Byzantine emperor John V Palaiologos. The grand primikerios John married Anna Asenina, cousin of John V’s wife, Helena, who was the daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos and Irene Asenina. Albanian and Serbian local rulers intermarried. And the last Byzantine ruler, Constantine XI, was the son of Manuel II and Helena, daughter of a lateral descendant of Dušan, who was a local ruler in eastern Macedonia (fig. 42).³¹

Marriage alliances created a nexus of relationships but did not provide a counterweight either to fragmentation or to local warfare. Did any other mechanism or institution function centripetally? It might be thought that Constantinople, with all the burden of imperial tradition behind it, could exercise a centripetal pull. In fact, this was hardly the case, at least after the first three Palaiologoi, although even earlier its monopoly on imperial authority had been lost. The fact of the existence of alternative capitals for much of the Palaiologan period undermined the role the city might have played. What remained was that the city still, and for a long time, was considered to convey legitimacy to a ruler who wanted to be seen as the heir to the Byzantine past.

It is for this reason that the reconquest of Constantinople by Michael VIII in 1261 had both a real significance and a profoundly symbolic one. For the same reason, John Kantakouzenos could not be content with his holdings in Macedonia and Thrace; he wanted to be crowned emperor in Constantinople. Similarly, Stefan Dušan, who used the title Emperor of Serbia and Romania after being crowned emperor in the spring of 1346 did not consider his ascendency complete until he had conquered Constantinople—which, of course, he never did. It is just as important to note, however, that the claims Dušan considered to have on the Byzantine imperial throne originated with the act of conquest of Byzantine lands, which he wanted to solidify further through the conquest of Constantinople. This is made crystal clear in his letter to Venice in 1346, in which he announced that he, the emperor, already held “ten parts of the Roman Constantinopolitan Empire,” with the exception of the city of
Constantinople. Ruling in Constantinople, therefore, did not by itself serve to unite fractured rulership; it was only meant to give additional legitimation to the victor of war or civil war. Eventually, it did that for Mehmed II the Conqueror as well.

Aside from the legitimation given by conquest, there were other legitimizing authorities or mechanisms in the Palaiologan period. Most of them were located outside of the area. In the early thirteenth century, the pope had legitimized the rule of both Bulgarian (1204) and Serbian (1217) rulers by crowning them kings. Stefan Dušan twice sought the aid of Venice in his quest to conquer Constantinople and become emperor not only of the Romania but also of the Romans: once just after his coronation in 1346, and a second time in 1350. The fact that Venice did not accede to this request does not negate the perception, on the part of Dušan, that the city could act as a legitimizing factor. It is notable in this context that in its reply to the Serbian ambassador Venice called Dušan “serenissimus dominus Imperator Grecorum et Raxie.” Finally, in the petty Byzantine civil wars of the 1370s, the Venetians and the Genoese shared that function, which was soon to be taken over by the Ottomans. None of these agencies of legitimation worked against fragmentation—quite the opposite, in fact.

There was perhaps another legitimizing mechanism indigenous to the area, the one celebrated in the exhibition “Byzantium: Faith and Power.” Art in the Byzantine style undoubtedly contributed to the self-image and self-esteem of the various rulers, great and small, who shared among them the diminishing political power left to the Christian populations of the area (see fig. 39). Here, at least, the regional or local rulers substituted their own patronage for that of Constantinople. Similarly, and equally obviously, dress similar to the Byzantine imperial one was a symbol of legitimacy, as the historian Nikephoros Gregoras realized. After Dušan conquered Serres, Gregoras wrote, he had himself proclaimed Emperor of the Romans and changed his barbarous ways into Roman ones, disporting all the ceremonial clothing appropriate to the imperial office. In the cultural sphere there were, indeed, some unifying elements.

The developments briefly presented here did not take place in a vacuum, but within a larger, correspondingly more complex and unstable system of political and economic relations in which Western powers and, increasingly, the Ottomans also participated. I have argued elsewhere that the political decline of the Byzantine Empire and the atomization of power in its former territories coincided with the economic integration of
the area, which functioned as an international market—at least insofar as this was possible in medieval conditions—organized by and for the benefit of Western economic powers, primarily Venice and Genoa. It is possible that the coincidence was more than chronological. Without necessarily positing a cause-and-effect relationship, one may nevertheless suggest that the system of small political units was able to survive partly because the international market had no use for large, internally self-sufficient political units. Indeed, to the extent that such units tended to be protectionist, their interests would be opposed to those of the major economic players. Thus, as far as the surrounding economic circumstances were concerned, there was nothing to impose, elicit, or create favorable conditions for consolidation as opposed to fragmentation of political power. A case in point is Venice’s refusal to help Stefan Dušan take Constantinople, perhaps precisely in order to inhibit the creation of a large state. Similarly, when the Ottomans united the political space and conquered Constantinople, they established a protectionist state much like that of the Byzantine Empire in its middle period and destroyed the already fractured international market that had existed since the mid-thirteenth century.

The fact that there was a dialectic relationship between political fragmentation and economic unification poses with some urgency a final question. Small states are not necessarily unviable. There are benefits to these more cohesive entities, which are perhaps easier to govern. The question is, when are the benefits overwhelmed by the costs, political and/or economic? When does disaggregation reach a fatal point, after which the units are too small to function at all effectively? The nodal points, which are different from area to area and from unit to unit, can be traced chronologically. Analyzing the process is more difficult. Perhaps the point of nonfunctionality comes when statelets no longer have the resources or the institutions to provide elementary public services, such as the defense of their subjects, let alone the preservation of infrastructures or the assurance of provisioning. At that point also the rivalry for fragments of power and resources becomes so ubiquitous that it negates the possibility of acting in a larger common interest—in putting up a common defense, for example. It is then that the need for political reconcentration becomes overwhelming. But it was the Ottomans, an outside power with a very considerable reservoir of human resources, and increasingly of economic resources, who carried out that imperative and fused the fragments of political power floating adrift in the geographic space of the former Byzantine Empire.


6. On Ivan Alexander, see Ivan Bozhilov, Familiata na Asemvetii (1288–1468) (Sofia, 1985), no. 33; on Michael Šišman, see ibid., no. 30.

7. See above, p. 43, and below, p. 49; Laiou, Andronicus II, pp. 93ff., 228–33.


12. Ibid., passim. For a general and theoretical discussion from a different viewpoint, see Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, *The Size of Nations* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), pp. 93ff. The authors point out that as states proliferate so do the frontiers that have to be defended, and the likelihood of conflict increases. This interesting book was brought to my attention by my student Ashlan Aksis.


17. On the Catalans, see Laiou, *Andronicus II*, pp. 130ff.


19. Chalkokondyles, *Historianum libri decem*, pp. 16–17, says that the Turks numbered eight thousand and that they were defeated not by the Serbs but by the Tatars.


21. This is the idea that a butterfly stirring the air in Beijing can have a profound effect on the weather in New York a month down the line: James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York, 1987), p. 8.


23. It should perhaps be noted that similar chaotic conditions prevailed in Asia Minor after the dissolution of the Seljuk Empire. Throughout this essay the Ottomans are mentioned only in connection with the Balkans, that is, after they had achieved a certain consolidation of power in Asia Minor.


31. Ibid., pp. 189ff.


36. This argument is almost the reverse of that made by Alesina and Spolaore, *The Size of Nations*, pp. 81ff.

37. John Cantakouzenos seems to have realized, in 1341, that the point had been reached. He had a vision of reuniting to Byzantium the Latin parts of the Peloponnesos as well as the duchy of Athens, so that the power of the empire would be restored to what “it used to be in the old days.” After that, he thought, it would be easy to defeat the Serbs and “the other neighboring barbarians.” Cantakouzenos, vol. 2, p. 80. For a theoretical view of nonequilibrium conditions leading a system to cross a critical threshold, see Kenyon B. De Greene, “Field Theoretic Framework for the Interpretation of the Evolution, Instability, Structural Change, and Management of Complex Systems,” in Kiel and Elliott, *Chaos Theory*, p. 276.
The Living Icon: Touching the Transcendent in Palaiologan Iconography and Liturgy

Although a beleaguered civilization, Palaiologan Byzantium experienced a remarkable cultural revival, reflected also in the monastic renewal, church iconography, and theology of the Hesychast ascendency, the final stage in the formation of what Alexander Schmemann called “the Byzantine synthesis.” This renaissance, tangible proof that Byzantine Orthodox culture had remained vibrantly alive, was apparent in church ritual and iconography as well as in the theology that explains them both.

THE BYZANTINE VISION: ITS THEOLOGICAL BASIS
The Byzantines saw their highly ritualized society as something less than an image of the divine world. This was especially true of their churches and liturgy. As Patriarch Saint Germanos I of Constantinople (r. 715–30) famously wrote on the eve of Iconoclasm, “The church is heaven on earth, where the God of heaven dwells and moves.” This lapidary definition, endlessly repeated down through the ages, set the parameters for all future discussions of Byzantine worship and its setting. This vision achieves its final synthesis in liturgical art and theology during the Palaiologan period (1261–1453).

The Byzantine worldview is based ultimately on the mystery of Christ announced in the Scriptures and explicated in the texts of the Orthodox liturgy. The Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians 2:5–11 captures the entire kerygma:

... Christ Jesus, ... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.
Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This lyrical creed summarizes the doctrinal basis for Orthodox liturgical theology in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, from the kenosis, or self-emptying, of his Incarnation, Passion, and Crucifixion to his exaltation via the Resurrection, Ascension, and Session at the right hand of the Father to his ultimate glorification in the celestial Liturgy of the Lamb, with the angels and saints before the throne of God. These interdependent doctrines, seminal to the Byzantine worldview, are like successive interlocking links in a chain,
the whole pendent from the Incarnation of the God-man Jesus. This Incarnation not only bridged the gulf between the divinity and humankind. It also made God's saving dispensation a permanent reality that the faithful could represent in iconography and make actual again in ritual.

How can such extravagant claims be justified? The fundamental problem of Christian soteriology is how to explain theologically that what Jesus did and underwent on earth is salvific for Christians of every age—in other words, how to ground the reality of Jesus' ongoing saving activity in the rites of the Church. In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, a liturgy rooted in the mystery of the Risen Christ is believed not only to symbolize the heavenly reality but also to render permanently active on earth whatever the Incarnate One was and did. Because the Risen Jesus is humanity glorified, he is present through his Spirit to every place and age both as Savior and as saving, both as Lord and as priest, sacrifice, and victim. This is because nothing in his being or action is ever past, except the historical mode of its manifestation. Hence, Jesus is not extraneous to the heavenly-earthly liturgy of the Church: he is its first protagonist, as the Byzantine liturgy prays, "You are the one who offers and is offered, who receives the offering and is given back to us."

For Orthodox Christians then, what Christ was and did, he still is and does for all eternity. It is he who preaches his Word, he who calls humankind to himself, he who binds the wounds of sin and washes them in the waters of salvation, he who feeds the spiritually hungry with his own life, he who is the pillar of fire leading his own across the horizon of their personal salvation history. He does this in Word and Sacrament—not only there, but certainly there.

In this theology, church ritual constitutes not only a representation but also a re-presentation, that is, a rendering present again, of the earthly saving work of Christ. Saint Symeon of Thessalonike (d. 1429), last of the classic Byzantine commentators of the Palaiologan era, puts this teaching in theological dress in chapter 31 of his Dialogue against All Heresies:

There is only one Church above and below, since God came down among us and was seen in our form and accomplished what he did for us. And the Lord's priestly activity and communion and contemplation constitute one single work, which is carried out at the same time both above and here below, but with this difference: above it is done without veils and symbols, but here it is accomplished through symbols.4

The Letter to the Hebrews proclaims repeatedly that Christ is a High Priest who offers for and with us, having "entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb. 9:24).5 That is why Christians claim that Christ can be said to celebrate with the "Communion of Saints" a liturgy both heavenly and earthly, as adumbrated in the Letter to the Hebrews and in the Revelation to John.6 Thus, the Church's earthly song of praise is but the icon, the reflection—in the Pauline sense of mysterion, a visible appearance that is bearer of the reality it represents—of the heavenly liturgy of the Risen Lord before the throne of God. As such, it is an ever-present, vibrant participation in the heavenly worship of God's Son. All this the Byzantines sought to express in their iconography, liturgy, and theology.

LITURGY IN PALAIOLOGAN BYZANTIUM: SPIRIT AND SHAPE

First there is the liturgy, every page of which expresses the imagery of this heavenly cult.7 The Introit Prayer implores God that the angels may enter and concelebrate with the worshiping congregation; the entire Trisagion Prayer moves back and forth from
the heavenly liturgy to the earthly; at the Great Entrance the Cherubic Hymn says that the worshipers mystically represent the Cherubim and sing with the Seraphim the Thrice-Holy Hymn of Isaiah 6:3; the prayer recited during this chant proclaims Jesus as the true offerer and offerer of the liturgy; the Proskomide Prayer asks that the faithful’s offering may find favor in God’s sight in heaven above; the Sanctus has the people join their voices to those of the angelic chorus; at the Epiclesis they pray that the Holy Spirit be sent down upon their oblation for communion in this heavenly Spirit and for the fulfillment of the present and future kingdom, a descent symbolized again in the Zeon (the addition of hot water to the chalice before Holy Communion); in the Anaphoral commemorations and intercessions the offering is associated with the whole Communion of Saints, living and dead; in the Precommunion the worshipers pray that their oblation be accepted on the heavenly altar, that divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit be sent down upon them in return so that they might receive the heavenly gift of “communion in the Holy Spirit,” and, finally, that the Lord look down upon them from heaven and make them worthy to receive Holy Communion. Then, in the Postcommunion chant and prayers the congregation gives thanks for having received in communion the “Heavenly Spirit” and the “heavenly . . . mysteries of Christ.”

What was the resulting shape of the liturgy that sought to realize this vision? By this time, within the ever-shrinking remnant of the Byzantine Empire, liturgical life also had been scaled down. The monumental architecture of the Justinianic period had given way to churches miniature by comparison. The monastic victory over Iconoclasm in 843 and the resultant monasticization of the liturgy had compressed the former splendors of the urban station and basilical rites into increasingly smaller, centrally planned, and mostly monastic churches. The secular clergy, unable to restore the complex rite of the Great Church in the aftermath of the Latin conquest (1204–61), had to acquiesce in the monasticization of its church services. The end result was a diminished, although still-impressive, liturgy. The ritual was henceforth largely confined within the church building, and the once-imposing entrance processions were reduced to a series of appearances of the sacred ministers from behind the sanctuary chancel screen.

SYMBOLIZATION
This compression of liturgical life to within the walls of smaller churches entailed not only a change of scale but also a shift toward greater symbolization. Rites once of practical import lost their original purpose and perjured in reduced form, acquiring in the process symbolic interpretations often far removed from their roots. A classic example is the Enarxis, which opens the liturgy. Its three antiphons, once part of the Constantinopolitan prayer service celebrated at a station during the procession to the basilica for the liturgy, became prefixed to the liturgy as a permanent element, their psalms interpreted as symbolizing the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the coming of the Messiah.8 The first entrance, which opens the Liturgy of the Word, was originally the solemn introit into the church. Now reduced to a truncated remnant of that original solemn procession, it became the Little Entrance, an epiphany of Christ symbolized in the Gospel Book the celebrant bore out from the altar, through the nave, then back to the altar again. It is said to symbolize Christ’s coming into the world as God’s Word.9 The second introit, or Great Entrance, which opens the eucharistic part of the service was originally also an entrance into church, bearing the gifts of bread and wine to the altar from the outside skete or skete, or sacristy. This was similarly reduced to a ritual turn within the church that ends in the sanctuary, where it began. It is said to show Christ being led to his sacrifice and to prefigure his coming to the faithful in the sacrament of his Body and
These “ritual prophecies” are fulfilled in two later appearances: the procession of the deacon with the Gospel lectionary to the ambo for the reading and the procession of the celebrant exiting the sanctuary to distribute the consecrated gifts in Holy Communion.

ICONOGRAPHY
This ritual was enclosed in an ambience of iconographic programs explicitly designed to portray and heighten a multitiered Neoplatonic vision of mystery. By obliterating the distinction between architecture and decoration, the interior of the Middle and Late Byzantine church building becomes a mystical image of the Christian vision. For iconography does not mean simply images painted on separate wooden panels, it also includes the entire mosaic- or fresco-covered walls of churches. Accustomed to visiting Constantinopolitan churches in which nothing but a guided tour has happened since 1453, visitors forget that these buildings with their decorative iconographic programs were made to be used by a community celebrating its liturgy. Without the liturgy, they are like empty seashells—pretty but devoid of the life they were created to house.

Several attempts have been made to categorize the elements of these iconographic programs.10 Whatever the legitimacy of these taxonomies, I prefer to give the programs a strictly liturgical interpretation, allowing the liturgy celebrated within this “symbolic cocoon” to interpret the milieu, which was after all designed for it. For the church and its iconography come alive only during the actual liturgical celebration; only then does the mirror of the mysteries being celebrated reflect its true dynamic, at once earthly and heavenly, in the liturgy of the Communion of Saints. That teaching, declared in the Apostles’ Creed, states that there is but one Church—as Symeon said—above and below, and all its members are the saints. That is why the ancient call to communion summons the faithful to the banquet with the cry, “The holy things for the saints!”11

The several dimensions of the iconographic programs all belong to the same liturgical dynamic, bringing alive in the celebration the earthly-heavenly liturgy that continues the saving work of Jesus in salvation history. But the historically older “heavenly-earthly liturgy cycle” clearly takes precedence over other schemes, not only chronologically but liturgically. The church building and the ritual it enfolds are designed to image forth the heavenly-earthly dynamic of this mystical Jacob’s Ladder. In the present age of the Church, the divine grace is mediated out to those in the world (nave) from the divine abode (sanctuary) and its worship, itself a living icon of the heavenly liturgy. And the worship of the faithful rises to the throne of God from the earthly altar, only to be returned to the faithful as the heavenly gift of the Spirit.12

The sanctuary and its altar are at once the Holy of Holies, the Cenacle of the Last Supper, Golgotha, and the Holy Sepulcher of the Resurrection, from which the sacred gifts of the Risen Lord, his Word and his Body and Blood, issue forth to illumine the sin-darkened world (nave). Germanos unveils this twofold perspective as follows:

The church is heaven on earth, where the God of heaven dwells and moves. . . . The holy altar stands for the place where Christ was laid in the grave, on which the true and heavenly Bread, the mystical and bloodless sacrifice, lies. . . . It is also the throne of God on which the incarnate God reposes . . . and like the table he was at in the midst of his disciples at his Mystical Supper.13

The surfaces of the church interior are so enveloped in this imagery that building and icon become one in evoking that vision of the Christian cosmos around which the
Byzantine liturgy revolved. From the central dome the image of the Pantokrator dominates the whole scheme, giving unity to the heavenly-earthly liturgy and the salvation history themes. The movement of the former is vertical, uniting the present, worshiping community assembled in the nave with the rest of the Communion of Saints depicted in the ranks of confessors, martyrs, prophets, patriarchs, and apostles, who ascend to the Lord in the heavens attended by the angelic choirs.

The liturgical theme, extending upward and outward from the sanctuary, is united both artistically and theologically with the Communion of Saints theme. In the dynamics of this theme, the enclosed sanctuary wherein the mysteries of the covenant are renewed is conceived as the divine abode. Its templon enclosure is the link between heaven and earth, and through its central doors grace irradiates from heaven to earth. Before these Holy Doors the deacon, link between the various orders in the Church and leader of the people in their intercessions, stands at the head of the congregation “knocking at the gates of heaven through prayer,” in the lively image of Saint John Climax.

Behind the altar, on the wall of the sanctuary apse, are depicted the great Fathers, especially the “liturgical Fathers,” Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom, to whom the Orthodox eucharistic liturgies are attributed. They gather around the altar bowed in the traditional Byzantine posture of liturgical prayer. The scrolls they hold bear the text of the liturgy as if they are concelebrating—as indeed they are—in the one liturgy of the Communion of Saints in heaven and on earth. Another concelebration scene may also be found above this in the sanctuary apse: the Communion of the Apostles, with Christ the High Priest, surrounded by the angels, serving communion to the Twelve.

Higher still, in the conch of the bema apse, the Mother of God, arms extended in the orant position, sends up to the heavenly altar the worship from the altar before her in the sanctuary below, as in the words of the liturgy:

For the precious gifts offered and consecrated, let us pray . . . that our God, the lover of humankind, having received them on his heavenly and spiritual altar as a pleasing spiritual fragrance, may send down upon us in return the divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit.16

A medallion in Mary’s bosom or the Mandylion above her may depict the Christ, figure of the Incarnation, which made this sacrificial intercession possible. At the very summit of the arch may be the hetaimosia (Throne of Divine Judgment), where the sacrificial mediation intercedes on the congregation’s behalf, in the words of the liturgy, “for a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ.”17

Outside the sanctuary, the salvation history cycle, historically the last series of frescoes to be added as well as the last level of mystagogy to appear in the liturgical commentaries, presents to the worshipers the Gospel mysteries of Christ’s life that are also represented in the liturgical rites. Depicted clockwise in a lateral band, these fresco panels extending around the walls of the church bind past salvation history into its ongoing salvific continuation in the liturgy.18

Within this setting, the liturgical community commemorated the mystery of its redemption in union with the worship of the Heavenly Church, offering the mystery of Christ’s covenant through the outstretched hands of his mother—all made present in the imagery of the iconographic scheme. This liturgy of the Heavenly Church, depicted as the angelic Great Entrance, symbolic climax of the Divine Liturgy, made even more unmistakably explicit the symbolism proclaimed in
the liturgical chants and texts, as in the Cherubic Hymn:

We who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us now lay aside all worldly care to receive the King of All escorted unseen by the angelic corps, alleluia!

Even the unlettered Christian, chanting these phrases as clouds of earthly incense mingled with the smoking thuribles of the Heavenly Liturgy being imaged on earth, must have grasped something of what Symeon meant in this passage from the Dialogue:

The church, as the house of God, is an image of the whole world, for God is everywhere and above everything. . . . The sanctuary is a symbol of the higher and supra-heavenly spheres, where the throne of God and his dwelling place are said to be. It is this throne that the altar represents. The heavenly hierarchies are found in many places, but here they are accompanied by priests who take their place. The bishop represents Christ, the church [building] represents this visible world. The upper regions of the church represent the visible heavens, its lower parts what is on earth and [the earthly] paradise itself. Outside it are the lower regions and the world of beings that live not according to reason and have no higher life. The sanctuary receives within itself the bishop, who represents the God-man Jesus, whose almighty powers he shares. The other sacred ministers represent the apostles and especially the angels and archangels, each according to his order. I mention the apostles with the angels, bishops, and priests because there is only one Church above and below, since God came down among us and was seen in our form and accomplished what he did for us. And the Lord’s priestly activity and communion and contemplation constitute one single work, which is carried out at the same time both above and here below, but with this difference: above it is done without veils and symbols, but here it is accomplished through symbols.19

A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE MASSES
During the Palaiologan renaissance this synthesis achieved its highest expression in Saint Nicholas Cabasilas (ca. 1322/23–d. after 1391), mystic and humanist, who led Byzantine liturgical theology back to its interior center, away from the arbitrary forays into extrinsicism and allegorism seen in earlier commentaries. Written about 1350, Cabasilas’s brilliant treatises20 combine the best in humanism and Hesychast spirituality to make him the classic exponent of Byzantine liturgical theology during the Palaiologan Hesychast revival. Cabasilas’s interpretation is in no way extrinsic to the structure and meaning of the rites, nor is his contemplation a substitute for sacramental participation, but only its prelude.

The Divine Liturgy, Cabasilas teaches, is ordered toward “the sanctification of the faithful who through these mysteries receive the remission of their sins and the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom.” All else—the antiphons, lessons, prayers, chants—is meant to dispose one to this central sacramental communion. They “turn us towards God” and “make us fit for the reception and preservation of the holy mysteries, which is the aim of the liturgy.”

But—Cabasilas continues—there is another level of liturgical signification . . . another way in which these forms . . . sanctify us. It consists in this: that in them Christ and
the deeds he accomplished and the sufferings he endured for our sakes are represented. Indeed, it is the whole scheme of the work of redemption which is signified in the psalms and readings, as in all the actions of the priest throughout the liturgy. ... The whole celebration of the mystery is like a unique portrayal of a single body, which is the work of the Saviour.

But this representational aspect of the ritual ceremonies is not an empty show. The ceremonies are meant to stimulate a personal response of faith:

Their purpose—Cabanillas specifies—is to set before us the Divine plan, that by looking upon it our souls may be sanctified, and thus we may be made fit to receive these sacred gifts. ... Contemplated with ardour by those who already have faith, ... [the work of redemption] preserves, renews, and increases what already exists; it makes the believers stronger in faith and more generous in devotion and love.

For Cabanas, this liturgical symbolism does not depend on some abstruse symbol system. On the contrary, nothing could be more concretely realistic:

In beholding the unutterable freshness of the work of salvation, amazed by the abundance of God's mercy, we are brought to venerate him who had such compassion for us, who saved us at so great a price: to entrust our souls to him, to dedicate our lives to him, to enkindle in our hearts the flame of his love. Thus prepared, we can enter into contact with the fire of the solemn mysteries with confidence and trust.

This is no lofty Gnosticism for a spiritual elite, but a profoundly imaginative popular piety.

THE FINAL SYMBOLIC FORM

More than forty years ago, in 1964, one of the most successful books ever written on Byzantine liturgy first appeared in German, Hans-Joachim Schulz's *Die byzantinische Liturgie: Vom Werden ihrer Symbolgestalt (The Byzantine Liturgy: On the Development of Its Symbolic Form).* Few books have had so long a shelf life: the third revised edition appeared in 2000 and is still going strong. The symposium for which this essay was originally prepared was entitled *Faith and Power.* The book by my old friend demonstrated that symbol is faith's power, the power to evoke the ineffable, and that it is still at work in the Orthodox culture of Byzance après Byzance.

9. Ibid., sec. 24, pp. 72–75.
10. Ibid.
15. On the iconography discussed here and below, see the basic work on the topic: Sharon E. J. Gerstel, Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary, College Art Association Monograph on the Fine Arts, 56 (Seattle, 1999), passim, including the illustrations, pp. 144–213. Iconographic programs differ, of course, from church to church. For reasons of brevity, my summary description obviously homogenizes things, creating an idealized picture.
17. Ibid., p. 55.
18. As Mathews, “The Sequel to Nicaea II,” pp. 14–15, notes, the common practice of referring to this series of panels as a festal cycle is inaccurate, since the series follows the chronology of Jesus’ life in the Gospels, which begins with the Annunciation, and not the festive cycle of the Church year, which begins on September 1.
21. This and the following passages of Cabasillas, Commentary I, 1, are cited from Hussey and McNulty, Commentary, pp. 20–29.
Exchanges with Arabic Writers during the Late Byzantine Period

It is impossible to adequately address the interaction between Byzantine and Arabic authors in the Late Byzantine period without discussing it as part of a continuous cultural interaction, begun in antiquity, between the Hellenic world and the great civilizations that flourished among its eastern and southeastern neighbors. Such a wide-ranging context is necessitated by the fact that authors and readers of philosophical and scientific works in the Palaiologan period were clearly aware of this continuous interaction. A few examples will suffice. The work of the first-century A.D. herbalist Dioscorides, which, judging from its manuscript tradition, was read and used in Palaiologan pharmacological practice, makes extensive mention of the properties of plants found in both the East and the West. The majority of plants, however, come from the East, not just the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, such as Egypt, Syria, and northern Arabia, but also from more remote places such as Persia and India. Moreover, astronomers and astrologers of the Early, Middle, and Late Byzantine periods had to know the names of the Egyptian months in order to make their calculations and were also aware of the Babylonian and Chaldean origins of their science, which were frequently mentioned in medieval texts in their fields. The Hermaic corpus, another collection of texts intensively studied during the last centuries of the Byzantine Empire, as its manuscript tradition indicates, includes a letter from “Asclepius to king Ammon” stating that true Hermaic science is oriental and has been distorted and weakened by its translation into Greek.

But if the Byzantines of the Palaiologan era were aware of the cultural achievements of the ancient Near East, did they connect the wisdom of the ancients with that of their contemporary Near East? In other words, did they think that their contemporary Egyptians, Persians, and other inhabitants of the Muslim lands were the intellectual descendants of the ancient Egyptians, Persians, and Chaldeans in the same way that at least some Palaiologan intellectuals felt themselves to be the heirs of ancient Greece? The answer to this question is, of course, complicated and cannot be adequately articulated without taking into consideration some additional factors, discussed below.

Every single one of the previously mentioned texts—Dioscorides, ancient astronomy and astrology, the Hermaic corpus—and a good deal more existed in Arabic translations prepared between the ninth and the tenth century. Palaiologan intellectuals, such as Nikephoros Gregoras and George Chrysokokkes, were clearly aware of and expressly mentioned the transmission of Greek learning into Arabic. Between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, several Arabic translations of Greek originals, as well as Arabic originals inspired by translations from the Greek, were further translated from Arabic into Latin. Palaiologan intellectuals, including Nicholas of Otranto in his treatise on geomancy and the anonymous translator of pseudo-Aristotle’s De plantis from Latin into Greek, were also aware of the movement toward translating and adapting Greek texts into Arabic and then into Latin. They made clear references
to the movement and occasionally used or translated into Greek the texts that it generated. From these titles and authors, it becomes evident what kinds of texts were translated back and forth, into and from, Greek, Arabic, and Latin: they belong to what in the Middle Ages, both in the East and the West, counted as philosophy and science, which included astronomy, astrology, medicine, alchemy, magic, and various forms of divination.

The translation movement from Greek into Arabic in the ninth and tenth centuries is presumably an event in cultural history that both scholars and educated laymen are aware of. Translations in the opposite direction, of Arabic texts into Greek, are less known, though they began to be made at about the same time. There can be no doubt that the Greek-into-Arabic and Arabic-into-Greek translations are the result, at least in part, of the Greco-Muslim military antagonism during the ninth and tenth centuries (a phenomenon perfectly analogous to the intensive study of Slavic languages, history, and culture by universities in the United States during the cold war). But Arabic-into-Greek translations, even if never as numerous as the Greek-into-Arabic, continued to be made until the end of the Byzantine period and evidently into the Ottoman period, though modern researchers have hardly pursued this line of research.

One question immediately arises. If both Byzantine and Arabic intellectual achievement relied heavily on the ancient heritage and if the Greek classics were available to the Byzantines in Greek, why translate from the Arabic? Different considerations were at work at different times, but at least two reasons seem to be valid throughout the Byzantine period.

First, the Byzantines were aware of scientific problems that were new and specific to their own time and that had not been discussed by the ancients. So they turned to Arabic texts in an effort to better address these problems. For example, the eleventh-century translator of al-Râzi’s work on measles excuses his decision to translate from the Arabic instead of relying on Galen’s Hellenic wisdom by explaining that Galen had never discussed measles because the disease was unknown to him. Islamic astronomical tables were translated and adapted into Greek, starting in the eleventh century and continuing into the fifteenth, in an effort to obtain better results than those offered by the tables compiled by Ptolemy in the second century A.D. Palaiologan intellectuals disagreed on whether Ptolemy or the Muslims were preferable, and with good reason: each set of tables gave better or worse results, depending on the specific problem to which they were applied.

Second, the ancient heritage was expressed in a register of Greek that was sometimes difficult to understand and that included references to ancient religious and civic concepts and institutions that were obsolete and therefore unintelligible (at least without the help of an encyclopedic dictionary, such as the tenth-century Suda Lexicon and other works in the same tradition). By comparison, the Greek translations from the Arabic were couched in a linguistic register closer to the Byzantine vernacular, and their frame of reference was much more familiar to readers living in medieval monotheistic societies. An example is provided by the Byzantine fortunes of Artemidoros, a pagan author of the second century A.D., who wrote the earliest treatise on dream interpretation surviving in Greek. That his work was known and read in Byzantium is evident from its manuscript tradition and from references by Byzantine authors. At the same time, a Byzantine emperor of the tenth century patronized the composition of another dream book, known as the Oneirocriticon of Achmet, that is essentially a translation and Christian adaptation of Islamic Arabic material. Several interpretations found in the Oneirocriticon coincide with those in Artemidoros, but not because the Byzantine author had direct recourse to the ancient Greek
text. Artemidoros had been translated into Arabic in the ninth century and was quoted extensively in subsequent Arabic dream books. The Oneinocratikon picked up Artemidoros’s interpretations from the Islamic Arabic sources on which it relied and therefore repeated lore that was already familiar to the Byzantines. But it discusses dreaming of angels, paradise, hell, and the tzykanisterion (the court for playing a Persian, Arabic, and Byzantine polo game) instead of Zeus, Aphrodite, Kybele, and the ancient gymnasia. Furthermore, it does so in a linguistic register that, compared with Artemidoros’s Greek, was accessible to many more tenth-century readers.\footnote{These two translations evidently reflect a greater preoccupation with governance during the second half of the eleventh century, which is perfectly reasonable, given the dynastic instability and rapid succession of emperors between 1055 and 1081. Two more authors of Mirrors of Princes writing in Greek at about the same time, Theophylact of Ohrid and Kekaumenos, are also known.}

After the tenth century, Byzantium and the Muslim world ceased to be the only two important powers competing with each other for dominion in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Western Crusaders, Turks, and Mongols forcefully entered the international political arena. Since cultural activity is inextricably linked with contemporary politics and economics, developments in these fields affected which Arabic materials were chosen for Greek translation, as well as the reasons adduced for translating them (at least when they are adduced). It is no accident, for example, that two Mirrors of Princes—works that were much more than mere collections of edifying or entertaining oriental tales—were selected for translation from Arabic into Greek in the second half of the eleventh century. \textit{Kalila wa-Dimna} (Gr. \textit{Stephanites and Ichnelates}) was translated by Symeon Seth upon the order of Emperor Alexios Komnenos;\footnote{Syntipas (the Book of Sindbad, a resurrection of the ancient tale of Alhakar), was translated from Arabic (not Syriac, as many modern scholars think) into Greek by Michael Andreopoulos upon the order of Gabriel, Byzantine \textit{doux} (military commander) of a city that contemporary researchers identified as Melitene (modern Malatya, Turkey).\footnote{Michael Andreopoulos states that the translation was made because the text does not exist in Roman (that is, Byzantine) books.} Upon the advice of the philosopher, astronomer, and astrologer Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Hülegü brought to Marāgha manuscripts spared from the sack of Baghdad and other Mesopotamian cities and established an observatory. Its activities, and those of its successor observatories at Tabriz and Damascus, established}
the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the “golden age” of Islamic astronomy, best
known to modern historians of science for producing a new theory explaining planetary
motion that revised Ptolemy and was taken into account by Copernicus in developing
his system. Copernicus seems to have studied the Marāgha school of planetary theories in
a Greek manuscript. The transfer of the Marāghan astronomical theories into Greek
was accomplished as follows. In 1265 (six
years after the foundation of the Marāgha
observatory) Maria, illegitimate daughter of
emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, was sent
to marry Hülegü. By the time of her arrival
in the East, Hülegü had died, so Maria mar-
mied his son and successor, Abaqa (r. 1265–
82), who moved the Ilkhanid capital from
Marāgha to Tabriz. Upon Abaqa’s death in
1282, Maria returned to Constantinople. It
is only reasonable to assume that news of
the scientific activity in the realm of the
Mongols must have reached Constantinople,
if not through any other channel of com-
mercial and diplomatic contact, at least
through Maria’s entourage.

In 1295 a new observatory, copying
the one in Marāgha, was built in Tabriz. At
exactly the same time, Gregory Chioniades,
a native of Constantinople, arrived in that
city to study medicine and astronomy. The
chronicle of Chioniades’ studies in Persia
was written by George Chrysokokkes, a student
of a student of Chioniades. Chrysokokkes
reports that Chioniades had studied all the
sciences (πάντων ἑν καταλήψει τῶν μαθη-
μάτων γενόμενος) in Constantinople, but
wanted to gain an even more profound level
of knowledge. Chioniades heard from “some
people” (παρά τοὺς) in Constantinople that
he would not be able to attain this goal
unless he went to Persia. He reached Tabriz
via Trebizond and managed to obtain per-
mission there to study astronomy (this
“security clearance” was needed because
astronomy had the status of a state secret). Armed with a royal decree, Chioniades
met with the teachers of astronomy (τοὺς
διδασκάλους συναγωγῶν) and soon gained
general respect and admiration, royal favor,
wealth, and numerous hypokoi (πολλῶν
ὑπηκόων κτησίμων), a word that can be
understood either as “servants,” which would
simply reflect the magnitude of the wealth
that he acquired in Persia, or as “apren-
tices,” in other words “students.” The latter
meaning would imply a fusion and diffusion
of Persian and Byzantine learning across lin-
guistic and political borders more rapid
and extensive than if Chioniades had remained a
lone figure without followers. When Chio-
niades left Tabriz for Trebizond, in 1299
or 1300, he took with him numerous
books that he later translated into Greek.
He returned to Constantinople sometime
between September 1301 and April 1302 but
in 1305 went back to Tabriz as the local
bishop appointed by the Constantinopolitan
patriarchate. By about 1315 Chioniades was
again resident in Trebizond.

Between 1304 and 1307 another imperial
marriage was negotiated with the
Mongols of Tabriz. The Byzantine emperor
Andronikos II offered one of his illegitimate
daughters to Ghāzān and, after his death
(1304), to his successor, Öljeytü. Astronomy
and science must have been part of the
diplomatic exchanges, as witnessed by the
Greek version of a treatise on the astrolabe
addressed by Shams al-Din al-Bukhari
(an astronomer who was Chioniades’ teacher
at Tabriz) to Andronikos II. It is clearly
not by chance that the same emperor
encouraged his prime minister, Theodore
Metochites, to take up the study of astron-
omy, which Metochites did, at the ripe
old age of forty-three (therefore some time
about 1313), becoming the student of
Manuel Vryennios, himself a student of
someone who had come from Persia. Besides
works on astronomy, a collection of
medical recipes and a treatise on prognosti-
cation by pulsation were translated from
Persian into Greek at about the same time.
One can only speculate whether the Persian
originals of these Greek versions reached

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Byzantium in the batch of manuscripts brought by Chioniades from his first trip to Tabriz (practicing medicine more effectively by studying the mathematical sciences was one of Chioniades' explicit goals in visiting Persia, at least according to Chrysokokkes' narrative) or in the baggage of other itinerant scholars who came from Persia to Byzantium.31

It is important to note that Chioniades and his students, in the first decades of the fourteenth century, translated and adapted Islamic sources written in both Arabic and Persian as far back as approximately 112032 and 1150,33 texts that must have attained, at least within certain scientific circles, the status of minor "classics" a century and a half later. In addition, they translated works by contemporary astronomers, such as Shāms al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, who was born in 1254.34 The works chosen by Chioniades and his followers for translation into Greek are evidently the textbooks and reference manuals used by the astronomers and astrologers of Marāgha at about the time that Chioniades was active there. These were clearly perceived by the Byzantines as the latest and most up-to-date scientific news from Persia, the forefront of Islamic astronomical research in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Major but older astronomical authorities of the Islamic world, such as al-Battānī (d. 929), receive in the Greek translations an honorable mention.35 In spite of al-Battānī's continued popularity in the Christian West (his tables were twice translated into Latin in the course of the twelfth century, and a third translation, this time into Spanish, was made in the thirteenth), he elicited little interest in the Christian East of the Palaiologan period and, at least according to the present state of research, no effort was ever made to translate his work into Greek. Though the Byzantines were aware of his importance, because of his corrections to Ptolemy, they viewed him as superseded by the Marāghans and showed no interest in receiving his antiquated knowledge.

Along with new geographic (Caucasus) and linguistic (Persian) points of contact between Byzantine and Islamic science in the Palaiologan period, the translators and transmitters of Islamic material into Greek encountered at least two situations that were, as far as one can tell, unprecedented.

First, Byzantine engagement with the West led to an awareness of the twelfth- to fourteenth-century translations from Arabic into Latin. In the Palaiologan period, the Latin versions of this actual or purported Arabic material were subsequently translated into Greek. For example, a Latin treatise on the astrolabe attributed to Mashallah survives in a manuscript from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Several works by Mashallah, a Jew from Basra who served as court astrologer in eighth-century Baghdad, were rendered into Latin in the twelfth century by Gerard of Cremona and John of Seville. However, this particular text on the astrolabe is not a genuine work of his, although it was extremely popular in Western Europe and became the source of Chaucer's treatise on the astrolabe, the earliest known scientific text written in English. Since the techniques it describes are not particularly sophisticated, the reason for translating it into Greek must have been its ease of use and popularity in the Latin-speaking world.38

Second, Palaiologan translators of Islamic material into Greek were aware that, although the originals of ancient Greek texts had been lost in Greek, they survived in Arabic and in Latin translations from the Arabic. For example, Alexios of Constantinople, who in 1245 translated a text on celestial omens from Arabic into Greek, prefaced his work with a history of the text's transmission into various languages. Presumably originally written in Hebrew by the prophet Daniel, it was then translated into Greek under Ptolemy Philadelphos (309–246 B.C.) and into Arabic by order of Caliph Muʿāwiya, who had discovered it in the seventh century while sacking the environs of Constantinople.
Alexios emphasizes that he retranslated this work from Arabic into Greek because he was not aware of it in his native language and wanted to restore to the Greeks something that they no longer possessed. The anonymous late-thirteenth-century translator who rendered pseudo-Aristotle's De plantis from Latin into Greek also comments on the fact that his translation is repatriating into Greek an Aristotelian text that was once known only to the Arabs until it was received by the Italians and became accessible to him.

There can be no doubt that cultural goods are accompanied by political baggage. The linguistic, geographic, and religious contexts in which they are produced—as well as the local and international political fortunes of the corresponding language, geographic region, and religion—are undeniably factors in their reception and discussion within the receiving culture. One fundamental thing must be remembered in order to honestly assess the cultural situation in the Palaiologan period and truly understand the reasons for and implications of the Eastern or Western orientation of its intellectuals and political players: western Europe had not yet emerged as the clear, indisputable victor in the political arena of the then-known world. Therefore, its culture was still far from being enshrined in the collective consciousness as unarguably and inherently superior. If Arabic-speaking Muslims represented an increasingly fragmented world of progressively weaker international consequence, Turkish-speaking Muslims (whose theological, philosophical, and scientific languages were still Arabic and Persian) were an ascending power that would, in 1683, reach even the walls of Vienna. Muslim culture, at that point, had not yet been branded with the stigma of intrinsic backwardness bestowed upon it by modern colonialism.

True, a great many of the Byzantine intellectual elite in the Palaiologan period were attracted by the West and chose to cast their lot with it, also frequently by converting to Catholicism. But as a consequence of studying and translating into Greek Western theological and philosophical works (such as those of Thomas Aquinas), Palaiologan intellectuals also became acquainted with Islamic philosophy, and especially with Avicenna and Averroes, whose writings the West had translated into Latin, discussed, and absorbed. One of many possible examples was Georgios Scholarios, later Gennadios II, first patriarch of Constantinople under Ottoman rule (r. 1454–56, 1463, 1464–65), who was handpicked for this position by Mehmed the Conqueror on account of his anti-Unionist (and therefore anti-Western) views. Yet it would be useful to remember that Palaiologan attitudes toward the West and union with Rome were neither clear-cut nor consistent and were frequently dictated by political expedience. Politically, Scholarios was a pro-Unionist in the Council of Ferrara–Florence (1438–39) but a leader of the anti-Unionist party by 1444. Intellectually, in his commentary on the works of Aristotle (ca. 1432–35), he expressed a greater adoration for Greek and Arabic, than for Latin, philosophy. He emphasized that, for the purposes of his own composition, he had consulted not only Greek works (which, he says, the Latin authors ignored) but also, through his expert knowledge of the Latin language, Latin and Islamic philosophical treatises, since, as he put it, “all the works of Averroes and Avicenna and several other Arabs and Persians” had been translated into Latin. Among the philosophers, Scholarios reserved his highest praise for Averroes: “I believe that everybody knows Averroes, who is the best interpreter of Aristotle, and not just an interpreter, but also composer [ποιητής] of several books worthy of mention and study.”

By the fifteenth century, then, the “East” had not yet become a second-class political and intellectual alternative, and the “West,” down to the Renaissance and beyond, was eager to receive Greek and Arabic wisdom (of course, by recasting and adapting it to its own purposes, as is always the case with cultural reception).
To return to our original question: did Palaiologan intellectuals see continuity or discontinuity between the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and their own contemporaneous neighbors in the Middle East? A convincing answer can be found through closely examining one particular section from Gregoras’s *Roman History*, an example arbitrarily chosen among a number of other possibilities. This work of monumental proportions comprises thirty-seven books written over several years without undergoing final revision; the pages relevant for the present discussion are from books 24 and 25, written, in all likelihood, during the summer of 1352. Gregoras tells us that in November 1351, while under house arrest for his anti-Palamite position in the Hesychast controversy, he received a visit by Agathangelos, a former student and dear friend who had left Constantinople for several years in order to visit Rhodes, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus, and Crete, and who had then returned to Constantinople via the Cycladic Islands, Salamis, and Venetian Euboia.

Modern scholarship has established that Agathangelos is not a real figure but the product of literary fiction, at best inspired by one of Gregoras’s actual friends. Even so, Agathangelos’s detailed, first-person account of his journey, related in more than fifty pages of printed text, is clearly a deliberate device employed by Gregoras to make a number of points regarding the state of the political, religious, and intellectual affairs about which he is writing. As such, the narrative conveys a certain intellectual perspective that pertains to our question. At a time past the mid-fourteenth century, when Arabic texts had been translated into Greek for four centuries or more, what did Gregoras think that someone embarking on a multi-year grand tour of the Middle East was looking for? And what would such a traveler find there?

Agathangelos explains to Gregoras that he left his homeland in order to systematically and scientifically observe all kinds of things (λιτορίας ἑνεκα παγματῶν παντοδαπῶν), and especially the position of cities and ports relative to each other and to the earth as a whole, because such knowledge is important for the pursuit of astronomy. The poor state of the church and its negative impact on political life, he says, caused him to depart even sooner. This opening statement suggests to the reader that Agathangelos’s narrative ought to be understood as commenting on the study of the mathematical sciences by Byzantine intellectuals of the period, as well as on the Hesychast controversy, which had caused Gregoras’s house arrest and had reached the monasteries of Mount Athos from Mount Sinai, a center of Orthodox Christian monasticism in Islamic lands. Modern scholars have already noted that Agathangelos’s references to the lands visited can be found in ancient Greek and patristic authors and are clearly not derived from firsthand observation. Yet the narrator is remarkably alert to certain aspects of the Muslim world that are immediately relevant to his astronomical interests. For example, he says that while in Egypt, after visiting Alexandria, he departed from the city, seeking to behold those celebrated pyramids, as well as if there was any city in Egypt called Hundred-Gated Thebes, and at the same time very much wishing to associate with the priest-secretaries (εἰρρηγματεῖς); because, as you know, old books have referred them to us, in order [for them] to become enthusiastic followers of great wisdom. But these things were indeed the dreams of men who are awake, surviving only in words that, by being incessantly tossed from mouth to mouth, continue to generate love for narrow-minded thinking, sowed through the ears.
This passage indicates that, as previously mentioned, Gregoras was aware of the Greek-to-Arabic translations of scientific texts and the Hellenic background of Islamic science, on which he proudly insists. As for the “priest-secretaries” with whom he wishes to discuss the Greek origins of their knowledge, he clearly did not expect to be greeted at the pyramids by the ancient Egyptian priests; rather, the word ἵππον γαματεῖς reflects an awareness that his contemporary Egyptian ulema (much like their ancient Egyptian predecessors) included scholars versed in both secular and religious wisdom.³⁹ How could Gregoras have knowledge concerning the educational curriculum of contemporary Muslim scholars and the ancient Greek contribution to Islamic science if he had never visited the Middle East? An answer is provided further in the text. In discussing Agathangelos’s visit to Cyprus, Gregoras mentions the traveler’s host, George Lapithes, who in real life corresponded with Gregoras.⁴⁴ In the Roman History, Lapithes is represented as a wealthy, politically influential, and learned individual, as well as a participant in the philosophical discussions that regularly took place at the Lusignan court when Egyptian Arabs visited Cyprus. Gregoras doubtless obtained reliable information about contemporary Arabic philosophy and science, if not through any other source, at least through his communication with Lapithes.

But while Gregoras was undoubtedly conversant with Islamic philosophy and science, Agathangelos’s narrative twice claims that ancient oriental wisdom was dead, not only in Egypt (according to 24.7), but also in the parts of the Middle East controlled by the Mamluks and by the Mongols. As Agathangelos’s narrative continues with the beginning of book 25, the same point is made:

I wanted to travel further for two reasons; in order to find out how far in that foreign land and to how many of those foreign nations the race of Christians reached intact, and how in the midst of the impious it still maintained its ancestral doctrines of piety according to its own more simple and truthful manner; and at the same time in order to see if any traces of that ancient wisdom remained somewhere among the Chaldeans and the Persians. But the most honest among the citizens of Hierapolis dissuaded me (because I had indeed reached them, though they are approximately some one thousand two hundred stadia from the sea). They professed that my traveling further would not be easy because of the different language of the inhabitants; and that even if it were easy to travel further, the traces and hallmarks of that wisdom were overall minimally preserved in the Chaldean and Persian land. Because, since the Scythian race [the Mongols] streamed onward and poured forth from arctic sources somewhere north like the water of an immense sea and subjugated the Persians and Medes and the whole of this Asia, so to speak, up to the Indians to the east and these Arabs to the south, not only were most indigenous customs erased and died out, but even the local distinctions and the very borders among those nations have become confused and are now undoubtedly hard to make out.⁵⁵

In both passages quoted, Agathangelos/Gregoras insists that—contrary to what is often claimed and, because of its frequent repetition, even believed—ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern wisdom is dead in the lands of its birth. In other words, contrary to what the Persian-trained Chioniades and his students would have one believe, no
science was possible under the Mongols. Yet Gregoras ought to have known better, because he himself was the intellectual great-grandson of a Persian-trained astronomer, having received his astronomical instruction from none other than Theodore Metochites. But if Gregoras knew firsthand about the state of contemporary Islamic science, why did he claim that ancient oriental wisdom was dead in the Middle East?

Gregoras was not only a historian, rhetorician, theologian, and hagiographer. He was also a brilliant court astronomer who in 1324 proposed to Emperor Andronikos II a calendrical reform for calculating the date of Easter along the same lines as the Gregorian reform of 1582. In addition, he had gained renown at court as an astrologer: he predicted the death of Andronikos II by precalculating the occurrence of a solar and lunar eclipse followed by an earthquake. He also was invited to the deathbed of Andronikos III in order to opine whether medical and astrological predictions agreed with each other. Gregoras’s brilliant career as a professional intellectual was threatened, however, by the success of Barlaam of Calabria, a Greek from southern Italy versed in Latin and Latino-Arabic philosophy and science. Moreover, in the epistolography of Gregoras it is possible to discern that he and his circle were bothered by the popularity not only of the Arabo-Latin methods of astronomy brought to Constantinople from Italy but also of the Persian methods that had arrived from Tabriz. As there was room for only one star intellectual to shine brilliantly at the imperial court (and to be financially supported by it), these polemics against Italo-Arabic and Persianate learning in Constantinople do not reflect a simple theoretical disagreement; rather, they are the expression of fierce professional antagonism with immediate practical repercussions. Gregoras’s denial of any continuity between ancient oriental and contemporary Muslim philosophy and science was triggered by the desire, indeed necessity, to survive professionally by showcasing himself as the bearer of Hellenic wisdom, which was superior to foreign wisdom because it had been preserved intact since antiquity.

Continuity with the Hellenic past is established by the ability of Agathangelos and local populations to identify ancient ruins, even in places no longer under Byzantine political control. Though no scrap of the Colossus survives in Rhodes, its inhabitants (who are Greek-speaking and “of our own race and religion,” as Agathangelos observes) could point the traveler to splendid ancient ruins, and he could recognize “from certain indications” (ἐκ σημειών τινῶν) Lindos, Ialysos, and Kameiros, the cities mentioned by Homer. Later in the course of his journey, Agathangelos managed to visit Minos’s Labyrinth on Crete, apparently an established sightseeing destination shown by the Greek inhabitants of the Venetian-occupied island, as well as ancient Troy. By comparison, no sign of ancient Thebes (referred to in the text in good Homeric fashion as “Hundred-Gated Thebes”) remained in Egypt. And not even the borders of the ancient peoples of the Near East, let alone their monuments, had survived.

If Gregoras insists on portraying his contemporary Egypt and the Levant in light of ancient Greek and patristic sources, it is not because he is a bookworm who cannot see beyond the confines of the page he is devouring, but rather because he wants to emphasize the ancient Hellenic and Orthodox Christian presence in lands then overwhelmed by Islam. Writing at the dawn of the European Renaissance, itself preoccupied with the restoration of the ancient past, and reflecting a Byzantine preoccupation with restoring older monuments in Constantinople during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Gregoras implies that continuity of intellectual tradition (and therefore cultural superiority) is established through the preservation of historic memory, for which the ability to identify the physical remnants of the past is paramount.
Even if there is an agenda behind Gregoras’s discussion of oriental wisdom, there is also a certain amount of intellectual honesty. As his case demonstrates, when asking whether there exists continuity or discontinuity between a contemporary civilization and its ancient past, it is possible to find arguments to support both a negative and a positive response. But the only evidence that can securely guide anyone’s quest into the past is the monuments themselves. While thankfully some are lovingly protected and proudly showcased, others, in several parts of the world, are being tragically destroyed, not only as the result of war but also simply by the ravages of time.

1. Max Wellmann, ed., Pedanii Dioscoridis Anazarbei De materia medica libri V, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1907). Of the nine manuscripts used by Wellmann for his edition, four were copied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Wellmann’s enumeration of codices, however, is not exhaustive. H. A. Diels, Die Handschriften der antiken Ärzte, vol. 2, Die übrigen griechischen Ärzte ausser Hippokrates und Galenos (1906; repr., Leipzig and Amsterdam, 1970), pp. 29–30, enumerates fifty-one manuscripts of the De materia medica, twenty of which were copied between the thirteenth and the fifteenth century.

2. The “oriental, or orientalist, light” in which astrology appeared in Greek sources from Late Antiquity until the Palaiologan period is briefly sketched by Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Reception of Classical Astrology,” in Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond, ed. Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring (Leiden, 2002), pp. 39–45. See also the discussion of this question in Paul Magdalino, L’Orthodoxie des astrologues: La Science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VIIe–XVe siècle) (forthcoming from Lethielleux, Paris).

3. Nine of the eighteen manuscripts containing the writings of Hermes were copied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For the manuscript tradition of the Hermaic corpus, see the edition and translation into English by Walter Scott, Hermesia: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which Contain Religious or Philosophical Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus (Boston, 1993). The Greek manuscripts are listed on pages 20–22. The text in question is Book 16, ibid., pp. 262–72. I am grateful to Polymnia Athanassiadi for bringing this passage to my attention.

4. In Roman History, Gregoras has his fictional traveler Agathangelos exclaim, “Because, as you know, old books have referred them [the Egyptians] to us, in order for them to become enthusiastic followers of great wisdom” (μεγάλης γνώσεως ὦ ἀλήθεια, αὐτοῖς ἀγάπητος ἔμειναι σοφίας καὶ βίβλων παράκτυμαν παλαίαν). See Nicephorus Gregoras, Nicophorou Gregorou Byzantinou historiae, ed. Ludwig Schopen and Immanuel Bekker, 3 vols., Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae (Bonn, 1829–55), vol. 3, p. 14, ll. 5–6. All translations are my own.

5. In discussing Chioniades’ study of astronomy/astrology at Tabriz, Chrysokokes reports that Chioniades had to obtain special permission to pursue his goal because the “Persians” (Mongols) were afraid that “their kingdom will be destroyed by the Romans through using the art of astronomy [astrology], since they [the Persians] had earlier received its basic principles from them [the Romans]” (καὶ ἀρχηγοὶ ἡμῶν τὴν ἐκείνην βασιλείαν ὑπὸ Ρωμαίων τῇ γένεσιν τῆς ἀστρονομίας χρυσόμενον, παρὰ ἐκείνην πρῶτον πώς ἡ λαβόντες τὸς ἀρχηγοῦ). See Hermann Usener, “Ad historiam astronomiae symbola,” Kleine Schriften, vol. 3 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1914), p. 357, ll. 15–17.

6. For a brief discussion and further references, see Maria Mavroudi, “Some Considerations for Future Research on the Occult Sciences and the Social Profile of the Occult Scientist in Byzantium,” in The Occult Sciences in Byzantium, ed. Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi (Geneva, forthcoming).


8. Lotte Labowsky, “Aristoteles De plantis et Bes- sairion: Bessarion Studies II,” Medieval and Renaissance Studies 5 (1961), pp. 132–54. I would like to thank Elizabeth Fisher for bringing this text to my attention. See also the discussion of this text below.

9. The most recent comprehensive discussion can be found in Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture (London and New York, 1998).


11. For example, during the Ottoman period the seventeenth-century Greek scholar Bessarion

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12. Text published in Alexandri Tzalliani Medici Lib. XII, Rhaze de Pestilenta libellus ex Syronum lingua in Graecam translatus, Jacob Couypyi in eodem castigationes (Paris, 1548); brief discussion in Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation, p. 421.


14. Anne Tihon, "L’astronomie byzantine a l’aube de la Renaissance (de 1352 à la fin du XVe siècle)," Byzantion 66 (1996), pp. 244–80; in particular, concerning the calculation of eclipses, Ptolemy’s old tables gave better results than the imported Islamic ones (ibid., p. 246).


16. See Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation, for further discussion of the reasons for translating from Arabic into Greek (pp. 421–29) and a study of the sources used for the Oneirocriton of Achmet.


18. Victor Jernstedt, ed., Michaelis Andreoupoli Liber Syniptae, Mémoires de l’académie impériale des sciences de St.-Pétersbourg, 8th series, 11 (Saint Petersburg, 1912), p. 2, ll. 10–13: "ἀγαθὰ δὲ τών πατρών ταῦτα μεταστάτικα κλέας, δοκουσὶ σεβαστοὶ πόλεως σωματοφύλακοι" (this work, ordered by Gabriel, the glory of nobles, respectable dux of a city with a mellifluous resounding name). For further bibliography, see Beck, Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur, transl. Eidenieier, pp. 92–96 (propagating the opinion that Syniptai is a translation from the Syriac).


20. Theophylakt of Ohrid (ca. 1050–1126) wrote a Mirror of Princes for his student Constantine Doukas, son of Michael VII, in about 1085–86; ed. with introduction, trans., and commentary by Paul Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Opera, Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae, 161 (Thessalonike, 1980), pp. 178–211. Approximately three years later, the same author wrote a panegyric for Alexios I (ibid., pp. 214–43). For an edition of the text by Kekaumenos, see G. G. Litavrin, ed. and trans., Soveti i raskazy Kekaumenha: Sochinienia vizantiiskago polkovodtsa XI v (Moscow, 1972); a new edition is being prepared in the series of the Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae by Charlotte Roueché (ibid., Charlotte Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," in Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission, ed. Holmes and Waring, pp. 111–38. Syniptai and the text of Kekaumenos are found together in the manuscript Mosquensis 298 (Vladimir 436), dating to the fourteenth–fifteenth century, which indicates that in the mind of readers at the time both works belonged to the same intellectual category.


22. For a recent summary of the research since 1957 establishing the link between Copernican and Maragha astronomy, see George Saliba, Whose Science Is Arabic Science in Renaissance Europe?, Section 2, http://www.columbia.edu/~gas1/project/visions/case/1/sci.1.html (accessed March 16, 2006).


25. See the text quoted in note 5 above.

26. In the manuscripts that preserve the Greek translations of Persian astronomical texts, David Pingree sees essentially the work of one man, Chioniadès; see David Pingree, The Astronomical Works of Gregory Chioniadès, vol. 1, The Zij al-alāî, part 1, "Text, translation, commentary" (Amsterdam, 1985), pp. 18ff. Anne Tihon believes that more than one person worked on the translation and adaptation of Persian tables, citing such factors as the variety of hands in the manuscripts, the inconsistencies in the transliteration of Arabic and Persian terms, and the different ways of writing zero. See Tihon, "Tables islamiques à Byzance," pp. 416–17; Anne Tihon, "Les tables astronomiques persanes à Constantinople dans la première moitié du XVe siècle," Byzantion 57 (1987), pp. 474–75; reprinted in Anne Tihon, Études d’astronomie byzantine, no. V.

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 239.
30. For the marriage negotiations, see Angeliki Laïou, Constantinople and the Latin: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II (1282-1328) (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 175-76.
33. On the Persian medical text, see references and comments in Westerink, "La profession de foi de Grégoire Chioniasdès," p. 237. For references and comments on the treatise on pulsation, see Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation, p. 410.
34. 'Abd al-Raïmân al-Khazini, Zîj al-Sanjârî (ca. 1120); see Westerink, "La profession de foi de Grégoire Chioniasdès," p. 234.
35. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shirwânî al-Fahhîd, Zîj al-’Alâ’î (ca. 1150); see Westerink, "La profession de foi de Grégoire Chioniasdès," p. 234.
36. Shâms al-Dîn al-Bukhârî’s date of birth is known because his horoscope survives. Westerink, "La profession de foi de Grégoire Chioniasdès," p. 234.
40. This work, in reality by Nicholas of Damascus, was attributed to Aristotle in its Arabic and Latin tradition. Text published by Labowsky, "Aristoteles De plantis and Besarion," For the date and localization of the translation discussed, see ibid., p. 138.
42. See ODB, vol. 2, p. 830, s.v. "Gennadios II Scholarios."
44. Ibid., p. 3, ll. 10-22.
45. See Saliba, Whose Science Is Arabic Science in Renaissance Europe?
49. Ibid., pp. 9, 1, 20-10, 1, 7: "οδηγεῖ τὸν τοιούτους, δς’ δοθῇ έγνω τῆς έφεσος ἄριν τοιούτων τινα πάλαι χρόνων ταυτητι τῆς ἑμίθης ἴδημας γεγενηθήσαι. Πατρίδος, ιστορίας τε ένενα πραγμάτων παντοκράτων καί άμα πόλεως καί ημέρας, καί οίον έκαστα τοιούτων έχει τήν θέουν πρός το άλληλα καί διόλου το σχῆμα τῆς γής, άτη τής οδοντωμοκις ἐπιστήμης χρέια μεγάλην παρεχόμενα τήν συντέλειαν. δ δὲ με πάντων μέλισσα ἐπεπείκε οίνους ἐπιταχύνει τά τε τῆς έκκλησίας νικάμα ἄριν καί όσα τοῖς πολιτικοῖς ἐπεφθέντ’ κτημακία νοστήματο πράγματα ποιεῖν τοιούτων γε ένενας." (Because you know better than anyone else for how much time and how long since I had harbored the desire to travel from this homeland of mine for the sake of inquiring into all kinds of things, including cities and ports and what the position of every one among them is in relation to each other and to the configuration of the earth, seeing that [this information] bestows consummate knowledge for practicing the science of astronomy. What above all else persuaded me to sail even sooner was the disaster of the church and the political problems generated [because of it] at that time).
50. In his commentary to the translation of the journey of Agathangelos, van Dieten (Rhomaiische Geschichte, vol. 5, pp. 201ff.) makes a concerted effort to identify factual errors in the archaeological information conveyed by Gregoras in connection with Agathangelos’s journey. Inaccuracies indeed exist (especially when we compare fourteenth- with twenty-first-century archaeological knowledge), but by exclusively concentrating on them it is possible to lose sight.

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of the message Gregoras wants to convey through Agathangelos's narrative.

51. Van Dieten (Romatische Geschichte, vol. 5, p. 47) translates this passage otherwise: "Zudem wollte ich auch Gespräche führen mit den Priestern der Ägypter, die deren heilige Schriften kennen und erklären. Du weißt ja, wie alte Bücher uns überliefern, daß sie eingeweihte Jünger der Weisheit seien." (I also wanted to converse with the priests of the Egyptians who know and explain their holy scriptures. You are aware, of course, how old books hand down to us that they [the Egyptians] are adept disciples of wisdom).

52. Niephori Gregorae Byzantina historia, vol. 3, pp. 13, l. 20–14, l. 9: "καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ Ἀλεξανδρεία ὄψις ἔχει, καὶ τῶν ἔξωλογοτέρων καταποθήσας αὐτή θεαμάτων ὡς, ἢ μὲν γε ἔχρη, ἢ πλέον ἥν, ἢ καὶ τὸς ἔξωλογος τινές οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ τὸς δικοῦς παρακελεύει, καὶ τὸς καὶ τὸς ἄρτι δικός, εἰς τούτο πάλιν κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴδε πόλεως κατ' Ἀλεξανδρείαν ἕξατοντι πάλιν, λογομορφίᾳ καὶ ἀκροατικῷ ἔχει, εἰς τὸν εἴ
(Some of the ancient cities among which the most beautiful was the [city of] Rhodes, which had the same name as the island, have been wiped out and sunk because of earthquakes. The local inhabitants showed us evidence of this. The cities that still survive continue to exist and are splendid, since they were made to stand splendidly. Based on certain indications, I count among the [surviving] cities ‘Lindos, Ialiysos, and Kameiros, white with chalk’ [Iliad 2.656], commemorated by Kallioppe, [the muse] of Homer, son of [the river god] Meles. For the most part, the inhabitants of the island were of the same race as we and of the Orthodox faith, speaking the same Greek language as we do). On Gregorios’s references to Homer, see van Dieteren, Rhomäische Geschichte, vol. 5, p. 205 n. 16.


64. Ancient Thebes is modern-day Luxor. Contrary to Gregorios’s suggestion, the pharaonic ruins of Thebes were known and visited by travelers in the Middle Ages, though not as frequently as those of the temple of Ikhmim (ancient Panopolis) farther north, which had the advantage of being situated directly on the much-frequented pilgrim route from Cairo to Mecca through the Red Sea port of ‘Aydhâb. From the mid-thirteenth century on, tourists from every direction swarmed to Luxor to visit the tomb of a Muslim saintly figure, Sidi Abûl Hajjâj (d. a.d. 1244), erected by his son inside the pharaonic temple (in a region of Egypt that then, and to this day, is largely dominated by Coptic Christianity). See Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, vol. 10, pp. 795–96, s.v. “al-Ujsur.”

Patronage and Artistic Production in Byzantium during the Palaiologan Period

When Michael VIII Palaiologos recaptured Constantinople and restored Byzantine rule in the year 1261, the reconstituted empire was confined to parts of Asia Minor, Thrace, Macedonia, and the Peloponnese. Large tracts of formerly imperial lands remained under Latin, mainly Venetian, rule. The Palaiologoi thus reigned over a relatively small territory. This essay, based primarily on extant material, is geographically confined to the lands recovered by the Byzantines and is chronologically bound by the rule of the Palaiologoi, that is, from 1261 to 1453. Although Byzantium was plagued by political and financial troubles during this period, artistic production of every type flourished: mosaics, wall and icon painting, book illumination, and the minor arts. The purpose of the following discussion is, on the one hand, to investigate the identity and social position of these art patrons and, on the other, to evaluate the patrons’ impact on art production.

Dedicated inscriptions and donor portraits, in addition to written sources, indicate that patronage in the Palaiologan period may be roughly classified into four categories: the imperial, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical (including monastic) classes as well as the nonelite population.

Imperial Patronage
The founder of the dynasty, Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259–82), was very active in bestowing imperial commissions. After he recovered Constantinople, he faced a desolate capital whose monuments had suffered extensive damage because of the Latin occupation. The historian Pachymeres relates that Michael restored those parts of Hagia Sophia altered by the Latins and that he presented the Great Church with sacred gifts, including liturgical textiles and vessels. It is generally accepted, moreover, that Michael VIII commissioned the panel of the Deesis in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia in gratitude for the recovery of Constantinople. In the plasticity of its figures and fine modeling of its faces, this exquisite mosaic reflects a desire to revive classical models that is in accordance with the ideology of Michael VIII concerning the restoration of the empire. In addition, his renovation program in the capital included the repair of churches and monasteries that are no longer standing.

Michael VIII pursued the same policy of restoring religious foundations in the newly recovered Byzantine provinces. His effigy, depicted on the south façade of the church of Panagia Makriotissa near Kastoria, together with that of Alexios I Komnenos, testifies to his support of this monastery. The juxtaposition of the first emperor of the Palaiologoi with the founder of the Komnenian dynasty aimed at underlining Michael’s descent from the Komnenoi, as well as establishing and legitimizing his authority in the recently restored province. Moreover, the family portrait of Michael in the exonarthex of the monastery church of the Virgin in Apollonia, near the Adriatic coast, and an imperial portrait (recently identified as Michael) painted in the rock-cut church of Saint Erasmus near Ohrid bear witness to imperial
renovation of religious foundations in the newly recovered northwestern provinces after the expulsion of the Latins. All these donations seem to reflect Michael VIII's belief in the importance of restoring the ecumenical character of the Byzantine Empire.

Andronikos II (r. 1282–1328) continued his father’s building and reconstruction program. Gradually, however, the increasing financial problems of the state limited imperial patronage, which was mostly confined to serving concrete needs. Characteristic of the reduced goals of imperial sponsorship is the donation of Michael IX, co-emperor with Andronikos II, who offered to pay the expenses for restoring the dilapidated roof of the basilica of Saint Demetrios in Thessalonike, according to an inscription written on a pier of the church in 1319–20. The difficulties confronting the imperial budget after the mid-fourteenth century are reflected in the public subscription organized by Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (r. 1347–54) in order to raise funds for reconstructing sections of the dome and the eastern semidome of Hagia Sophia, which had collapsed in 1346. The mosaics in the eastern arch were later completed by John V Palaiologos (r. 1341–91).

The financial shortcomings of the state in Palaiologan times are also apparent in the output of luxuriously illuminated manuscripts. It has been argued that Palaiologan emperors commissioned only a few manuscripts, often with a specific purpose in mind. The codex of Dionysios Areopagites in the Louvre is a characteristic example. A manuscript of the 1330s, it was reused and upgraded by Manuel II (r. 1391–1425) for presentation to the abbey of Saint Denis, near Paris, on the occasion of a diplomatic mission in 1408 (see fig. 42).

A different policy was followed by John VI Kantakouzenos, who commissioned a large number of manuscripts. Aside from the luxurious codex, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (ca. 1370–75), containing the theological works he wrote after his retirement (fig. 43), twenty-six sumptuous codices commissioned by the same emperor were presented to and are still in the possession of the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos. One of the most precious among these is the codex Skeuophylakion 16, a Gospel Book written in the Hodegon Monastery in Constantinople in 1340–41.
which includes superb portraits of the Four Evangelists. It is evident, however, that Kantakouzenos's precious gifts to the Vatopedi Monastery did not reflect state policy but rather the private needs of the emperor, who desired to retire to the monastery.

Certain precious portable objects that have survived from the period also reveal that the early Palaiologan emperors commissioned works as gifts in the service of imperial policy. These include the altar cloth offered by Michael VIII to the Genoese on the occasion of the treaty signed at Nymphaion in 1261 and the epitaphios now in the National History Museum in Sofia (fig. 44), a valuable example of Byzantine court embroidery, which was offered by Andronikos II as a gift to the cathedral church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid. A group of luxurious late-thirteenth-century biblical and liturgical manuscripts, earlier assigned to the scriptorium of the princess Theodora Palaiologina Raoulaina (d. 1300), a niece of Michael VIII, on the basis of monograms on one of them (Vat. gr. 1158), has recently been attributed to the dowager empress Theodora. In addition, an elegant psalter in the Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos, executed in 1346 in the scriptorium of the Hodegon Monastery, was commissioned by Anna of Savoy, second wife of Andronikos III. The manuscript was written and decorated after Andronikos's death in 1341 and before Anna was compelled to recognize Kantakouzenos as co-emperor with her son John V in

Fig. 44. Epitaphios given by Emperor Andronikos II to the archbishop of Ohrid. Constantinople, ca. 1313–28. Red silk, linen lining, and bullion. National History Museum, Sofia (29231)
A further example of female imperial patronage is offered by a silver-relief cross, now in the Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos, commissioned in the first half of the fifteenth century by the empress Helena Palaiologina, wife of Manuel II and mother of the last Byzantine emperor. 33

In sum, it seems that after the reconstruction program of the first two Palaiologan emperors, imperial patronage diminished as a result of the financial difficulties experienced by the state. Furthermore, two distinct motivations appear to have prompted imperial donations. Most, including restorations and diplomatic gifts, served the requirements of the state, whereas others reflect private needs and thus are closer to aristocratic intentions for commissioning works of art.

ARISTOCRATIC PATRONAGE
As Angeliki Laïou has pointed out, it was part of the ideology of the Palaiologan aristocracy that its members actively participated in intellectual and artistic life as patrons, commissioners, and recipients. 34 The following examines select works of art commissioned by the high, middle, and minor provincial aristocracy.

Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes, a rich landowner and patron of literature and art, became before 1300 protoschatarioi, one of the highest offices in the Late Byzantine military hierarchy. 35 Two significant monuments sponsored by Glabas and his wife, Maria, have survived. In 1303 Glabas and his wife renovated the small tenth-century chapel of Saint Euthymios, attached to the great basilica of Saint Demetrios in Thessaloniki. 36 The dedication to Saint Euthymios, founder of Palestinian monasticism, is thought to reflect the ecclesiastical policy of Emperor Andronicus II, who was attempting to reconcile with monastic leaders after the controversy caused by the Unionist policy of his father, Michael VIII. The monastic context of the chapel’s program and function has been especially stressed in current scholarship. 37 The three-dimensional perception of space and figures and the emphasis on the volume and plastic rendering of the faces place these wall paintings among the best representatives of the so-called Heavy Style. Reaching its peak about 1300, this style emphasized the stereometric rendering of figures and architectural complexes. One of the two painters who worked on the frescoes in the chapel has been identified with the legendary Manuel Panselinos, who according to a later tradition painted the church of the Protaton on Mount Athos. 38

The second instance of Michael Glabas’s patronage was the renovation of the monastery of Saint Mary Pammakaristos in Constantinople. 39 Between 1315 and 1320, after Glabas’s death, his widow commissioned a funerary chapel in memory of her husband. Four inscriptions, located inside the parekklesion and on its façade, commemorate the patrons. The mosaics of the chapel embody the finest qualities of the so-called Second Palaiologan Style, which flourished in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Their compositions are characterized by a restrained classicism, and their figures by a sense of moderation and elegance. The sumptuous mosaic decoration, the ostentatious dedicatory inscriptions, and the pompous epigrams that accompanied the now-lost funeral portraits of Glabas and members of his family give an idea, as Cyril Mango has observed, of the “aggressively aristocratic tone” of a typical monastery patronized by an aristocrat in the Palaiologan period. 40

Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) was another prominent patron belonging to the high aristocracy. Entrusted by Andronikos II with the important office of logothetes tou genikon, he renovated the katholikon, or main church, of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople from about 1316 to 1321 and commissioned the capital’s best workshops to decorate the church and narthexes with mosaics and to adorn his funerary chapel with wall paintings. 41 Dressed in a sumptuous garment, he is depicted in the esonarthex above the Royal Door kneeling in front of
the enthroned Christ and offering him a model of the church (fig. 45). The entire decoration displays an accomplished technique as well as a close familiarity with both the classical heritage and the ecclesiastical tradition. Metochites' personal intervention is particularly evident in the development of the iconographic program for his funerary chapel, an area in which patrons did not feel confined by dogmatic schemes. The sophisticated iconography and style, the extravagance of the materials used, and the exquisite decoration are characteristic of the refined tastes of a fourteenth-century aristocrat in the capital.

Aside from the previously mentioned extant examples, written sources attest to a great number of donations by the high aristocracy in Constantinople around the end of the thirteenth century and in the first decades of the fourteenth. George Akropolites and his son, Constantine, who both held the office of megas logothetes (the highest rank in the civil administration), restored the monastery of the Anastasis in the 1260s or 1270s. Nikephoros Choumnos renovated the monastery of the Virgin Gorgoepekoos between 1294 and 1308, and his daughter, Eirene Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina, restored the monastery of Christ Philanthropos after 1307. Numerous and noteworthy are the donations of members of the ruling Palaiologan family. Maria-Martha, sister of the emperor Michael VIII, founded in the 1260s the monastery of Kyra Martha. In the 1280s Theodora Palaiologina Raoulaina renovated the monastery of Saint Andrew in Krisei. Another niece of the same emperor, Theodora Palaiologina Synadene, founded the nunnery of Our Lady of Certain Hope about 1300.32

The numerous aristocratic religious foundations mentioned in the sources and the exquisite quality and sumptuousness of the monuments preserved testify to the great prominence and extent of aristocratic patronage in the early decades of Palaiologan rule. It was apparently regarded as very
prestigious for the high aristocracy, including members of the ruling family, to found new churches (mainly monasteries) or renovate earlier foundations. Significantly, these activities were mainly confined to Constantinople. After the mid-fourteenth century, however, high aristocratic patronage diminished in frequency and wealth owing to the adverse effects of the second civil war, the conquests of the Serbs, and the military advance of the Ottoman Turks.33

As a consequence a shift may be observed: members of the powerful aristocratic families redirected their patronage from Constantinople to the despotate of Morea and principally to its capital, Mistra.34 According to his monograms Manuel Kantakouzenos, son of the emperor John VI and first despot of Mistra (r. 1349–80), built a church, known today as Saint Sophia, close to the palace. This church has been identified with that of Christ Zoodotes (Life-giving), which sources indicate was founded by Manuel.35 Stylistically the mural decoration of Saint Sophia and its chapels bears a close resemblance to the frescoes of the church of the Virgin Peribleptos, founded most probably between 1365 and 1374 by Isabelle de Lusignan, wife of the despot Manuel.36 The wall paintings of both churches—Christ Zoodotes and the Virgin Peribleptos—are attributed to the same workshop, and their style reflects a classicizing, idealizing tendency, which is in accordance with aristocratic taste during the period.

The last prominent dated example of high aristocratic patronage before the fall of Constantinople is the church of the Panagia Pantanassa at Mistra, founded in the year 1428 by John Phrangopoulos, who held the high offices of protostrator and katholikos mesazon. The Pantanassa’s patron, who stood at the pinnacle of the despotate’s military and administrative echelons, propagated his name and titles in several painted or engraved monograms and inscriptions.37 In the frescoes of the Pantanassa, the antique heritage and the older Byzantine tradition mingle with new principles regarding the rendering of space and its relationship to the figures, as well as the treatment of color and light in modeling both flesh and drapery. A tendency to look back to models of the golden period of aristocratic patronage—the beginning of the fourteenth century—is evident. The imposing size of the monument

Fig. 46. The Grand Duke Alexios Apokaukos, from the Works of Hippocrates. Constantinople, 1341–45. Tempera and gold on vellum. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (Ms. gr. 2144, fol. 11r)
and its accomplished decoration bespeak the "semi-imperial aspirations" of the donor, as Doula Mouriki has observed. A highly ambitious work, the Pantanassa represents the last brilliant example, before the fall of Constantinople, of the splendid art cultivated by the high aristocracy during the final phase of Byzantium.

An examination of illuminated manuscripts leads to similar conclusions regarding the role of the high aristocrat as patron. In fact, most of the sumptuous illuminated manuscripts in the Late Byzantine period were commissioned by such persons. Among the examples are the codex containing the works of Hippocrates in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (gr. 2144), which includes the portrait of its patron, the megas doux, or commander of the fleet, Alexios Apokaukos (text, ca. 1338; illuminations, 1341–45) (fig. 46), and the famous typikon of the monastery of Our Lady of Certain Hope, now at Lincoln College in Oxford (gr. 35). The latter was written about 1300 by the first patroness of the monastery, Theodora Synadene, and was completed by her daughter Euphrosyne. Its rich gallery of historical portraits contains likenesses of the noble founder, her husband, her parents and other family members, and members of the monastic community (fig. 47).

The Palaiologan icons that have survived present a similar pattern of patronage by the high aristocracy. An icon of the Virgin in the State Tret'jakov Gallery, Moscow, from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, includes portraits of the donors,
Constantine Akropolites (d. 1324) and his wife, Maria, on its silver revetment (fig. 48). Another example is the icon of Christ Pantokrator in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, that was a donation, according to the inscriptions, of two brothers, both of whom were depicted on the margin of the icon (fig. 49). These high-ranking officials—the *megas stratopedarches* Alexios and the *megas primikeros* John—founded the Pantokrator Monastery on Mount Athos in 1363. The gilded-silver revetment of an icon of the Virgin Artokosta, today in the church of San Samuele in Venice, was donated by the despot John Kantakouzenos (r. 1380–83), whose portrait is included in the revetment, which was restored about 1425. The icon comes from a monastery of the same name in Kynouria, in the Peloponnese. A final example, an icon of Saints Peter and Paul in the treasury of the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, was commissioned in 1417, according to an inscription on the revetment, by the despot of Thessalonike, Andronikos Palaiologos, son of the emperor Manuel II.

Additionally, in the field of the portable arts, the precious gilded-silver and jasper chalice of Manuel Kantakouzenos Palaiologos, despot of Morea, now in the treasury of the Vatopedi Monastery, is typical of the superb quality and refined taste of high aristocratic commissions.

The donations of the high aristocracy clearly occupy a dominating position in the Palaiologan period and represent the avant-garde in artistic developments, particularly in the dissemination of new stylistic trends to the provinces. Members of the middle aristocracy, who disposed of sufficient financial means and held offices ranking in the middle of the administrative and military echelons, also dispensed patronage, as exemplified by three monuments. The church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Ohrid, later dedicated to Saint Kliment, was founded in 1294–95 by the *megas hetairiarches* Progonos Sgouros (fig. 50). Its wall paintings, among the most
representative examples of the Heavy Style, are the work of two famous painters from Thessalonike, Michael Astrapas and Eutychios, who signed their names on several inconspicuous parts of the frescoes. Both were later hired by the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin to serve in his court and paint the churches he founded.

The church of Christ at Veroia in Macedonia, consecrated in the year 1314–15, was sponsored by Xenos Psalidas and his wife, Euphrosyne. Although they did not belong to the great aristocratic families of Byzantium, the sponsors had the financial means and sophisticated taste to choose Kallierges, "the best painter in all of Thessaly," according to the dedicatory inscription.

The last example of a monumental donation by the middle aristocracy is the church of Saint Nicholas at Platsa in the Mani, in the Peloponnese, which was renovated in 1337–38 by Konstantinos Spanes, tzaousios (military commander) of the mountainous area of Mount Taygetos in Laconia. The donation of Spanes surpasses in quality all the contemporary monuments of the Mani owing to the selection of an excellent workshop, probably summoned from Mistra. The dynamic figures, dramatic expressions, and audacious white highlights applied to the uniform ochre flesh tones with bold, rapid strokes reflect the influence of a progressive, expressionistic style that probably originated in Constantinople and
radiated out to the provinces. The quality of the frescoes harmonizes with the sophisticated content of the dedicatory inscription, its eminent placement, and its scholarly, metrical language.

In certain respects, these three monuments, which in my opinion represent donations of the middle aristocracy in the provinces, seem to copy works sponsored by the high aristocracy, but they differ in using the technique of fresco rather than that of the more expensive mosaic. They are distinguished by the selection of excellent painters who came from great artistic centers and who were familiar with the newest stylistic developments.

With regard to the portable arts, similar conclusions can be drawn from the few extant objects that may be assigned to the middle aristocracy. One of these is the epitaphios of Nikolaos Eudaimonoioannes, a member of a mighty aristocratic family in the Morea (fig. 51), a fine embroidery probably executed in a Peloponnesian workshop in 1406–7. An example of a donation that can be attributed to the minor provincial aristocracy is the church of the Virgin Chrysaphitissa at Chrysapha in Laconia on the Peloponnese, which was renovated in 1288–89 by a certain sevastos Michael and his wife, Zoe. The scholarly text of the inscription, written in metrical verse, and the effigies of the donors in the narthex indicate the aspirations of the patrons. Nevertheless, the linearity of the frescoes, the flat rendering of the figures, and a somewhat naïve approach reveal the provincial taste of the donor.

Of analogous quality is the church of Saint Kyriake, near Marathos in the Mani, which on stylistic evidence can be dated to about 1300 (fig. 52). Although the donor couple is depicted in a prominent place (the apse on both sides of the Virgin Blachernitissa), the humble dimensions of the church and the mediocre quality of its decoration indicate the limited financial means of the minor provincial aristocracy as well as the meager artistic resources available to them.

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Fig. 51. Epitaphios donated by Nikolaos Eudaimonoioannes. Greek (Morea?), 1406–7. Silk. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (8278–1863)
donations of the high aristocracy in its quality, sumptuousness, and taste.

Among the most important ecclesiastical foundations of the period was the church of the Metropolis (Saint Demetrios) in Mistra, founded soon after the Frankish surrender of the city’s castle to the Byzantines in 1261, during the first years of Michael VIII’s reign. The Metropolis’s wall paintings were executed gradually between 1270 and 1320 on the initiative of several successive metropolitanans of Lacedaemonia and thus represent different styles. An early phase of the Heavy Style is attested in the wall paintings of the funerary chapel of Metropolitan Eugenios (fig. 53), in the diakonikon, with its unique eschatological composition, and in certain frescoes in the nave. The same style, at its peak, is reflected in the nave paintings assigned to Metropolitan Nikephoros Moschopoulos, whose patronage is attested in inscriptions engraved in the church.57

**Fig. 52. Portrait of an anonymous foundress, ca. 1300. Fresco, apse of Church of Saint Kyriake, Marathos (Mani), Greece**

**Fig. 53. The Metropolitan Bishop Eugenios (detail), ca. 1270–80. Fresco, diakonikon of the Metropolis Church (Saint Demetrios), Mistra, Greece**

**ECCLESIASTICAL AND MONASTIC PATRONAGE**

Ecclesiastical patronage was of great importance during the Palaiologan period, especially in Thessalonike and more broadly in Macedonia. The church of the Holy Apostles in Thessalonike is a typical example. Monograms and inscriptions, carved in marble or made of brick, provide the name and rank of the patron, Patriarch Niphon of Constantinople (r. 1310/11–14), who had the church built and decorated with mosaics. The ambulatory and narthex wall paintings were sponsored after 1328 by the second ktitor (donor) of the church, the abbot Paul, who is depicted in the narthex, kneeling in front of the Virgin. The impressive building, the prominent placement of the patron’s inscription and monograms on the facades, and the close stylistic affinities with the decoration of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople (ca. 1316–21) indicate that the patriarchal foundation in Thessalonike was in every way the equal of the lavish
Of Constantinopolitan quality and taste is the church of the Aphendiko in Mistra, dedicated to the Virgin Hodegetria and founded about 1310 by the abbot Pachomios. Pachomios had a close relationship with the emperor Andronikos II, who issued a series of chrysobulls granting privileges in favor of the monastery. The texts of four of the chrysobulls, issued between 1314/15 and 1322, are painted on the walls of the church’s southwestern chapel. For his funerary chapel, at the northwestern corner of the narthex, Pachomios ordered a unique composition that is thought to be the pictorial expression of a prayer (nekrosimon theotokion) said during the funeral service. Accordingly,
Fig. 55. The Nun Theotime in Proskynesis before the Enthroned Virgin and Child, from a Greek psalter. Byzantine, ca. 1274. Tempera and gold on vellum. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (Gr. 61, fol. 256v)
groups of apostles, prophets, the righteous, and saints join their prayers with the supplications of the Virgin and John the Baptist, addressing them toward Christ for the salvation of the patron, who is also depicted in the chapel. The accomplished frescoes reveal affinities with Constantinopolitan painting.

When compared with the churches sponsored by donors ranking high in the ecclesiastical echelons, the donations of simple monks or priests, scattered throughout the Byzantine provinces, are much more modest and usually do not surpass the level of provincial art. One example is the church of the Virgin Zoodochos Pego Eleousa in Geraki, in the Peloponnese, commissioned by two priests in 1430–31 (fig. 54). Ecclesiastical and monastic donors are furthermore attested for manuscripts, such as a Greek psalter (ca. 1274) in the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, sponsored by the nun Theotimo, who is depicted prostrated before the enthroned Virgin (fig. 55).

**PATRONAGE OF THE NONELITE POPULATION**

Although, according to epigraphic evidence, those who were not among the elite did act as donors individually, with their families, or in collaboration with two or three others, the usual patronage pattern for this group during the period is collective sponsorship. The main evidence for this pattern comes from dedicatory inscriptions in humble churches of the Mani. A representative example occurs in the church of Saint John the Baptist at Megale Kastania, which probably dates to the mid-thirteenth century. Without listing individual names, the dedicatory inscription mentions that the church was built and decorated at the expense of both the notable inhabitants (prokrites) of the village and the common people (koinos loas).

Further evidence is offered by the church of the Holy Anargyroi at Kepoula, dated to 1265. Of the twelve donors and their families mentioned in the inscription, all residents of Kepoula, three are priests and one is a lector (anagnostes) of the church and a notary (nomikos), both low offices in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The humble offerings of these donors, ranging from a quarter of a gold coin to one gold coin—with the exception of the lector and notary, who donated eight gold coins—provide insight into the poor means at the disposal of the populace in a Byzantine province during the period.

Another inscription of similar context is again located in the Mani, in the church of the Archangel Michael at Polemitas, and is dated to the year 1278. It contains a long list of the names of the sponsors, more than thirty persons with their families, including three priests, a lector, and a nun, all inhabitants of the village. Their donations consisted mainly of arable land (chonaphia) of a very modest extent and olive trees, offered in common by relatives. Interestingly, the dedicatory inscriptions at Kepoula and Polemitas name the fresco painters, who were villagers themselves originating from neighboring communities.

Artistically, the mural paintings of these churches are mediocre (figs. 56, 57). They belong to a conservative provincial stylistic trend that was very widespread in the Greek provinces, whether under Byzantine or Latin rule, during the second half of the thirteenth century. Linearity, simplification, and Komnenian references mingled with echoes of contemporary progressive tendencies are the main features of this trend.

In sum, the monuments erected by the rural populations of the Byzantine provinces, whose patronage pattern is based mostly on the collaboration of large numbers of lay and clerical members of the same community, are humble buildings erected with modest materials and decorated with wall paintings of a rather poor, provincial quality.

The following general conclusions can be drawn regarding patronage in the Late Byzantine period and its effect on artistic production. The financial means and social
Fig. 56. Saint Kyriake (detail), 1265. Fresco, Church of the Holy Anargyroi, Kepoula (Mani), Greece

Fig. 57. Saint Therapon (detail), 1278. Fresco, Church of the Archangel Michael, Polemitas (Mani), Greece
position of patrons had a direct impact on the size of the monument sponsored, the lavishness of its materials, the selection of the workshops, and the display of the patron’s name and titles with monograms, inscriptions, and portraits. The education of the donor is reflected in the iconographic program and its theological implications, as well as in the metrical, sometimes pompous, inscriptions.

Imperial patronage during the reigns of the first two Palaiologan emperors, Michael VIII and Andronikos II, expressed the rulers’ policy of restoring the state and its heritage; thereafter, as patronage was reduced owing to financial difficulties, it primarily served state diplomacy. Members of the high aristocracy took the lead in sponsoring artistic production from the very beginning of the period. The foundation of churches and monasteries, aiming at the salvation of the souls of their commissioners, is in harmony with the ideology of the donors and their desire to display their wealth and social standing. The foundations of the high aristocracy, distinguished by their size, quality, and sumptuous materials, were of primary importance in propagating the leading stylistic trends. Sponsorship by high officials of the clergy competes in quality with that of the high aristocracy. The middle aristocracy cannot rival the donations of the great magnates in regard to the cost of materials. Patrons at this level had sufficient means, however, to serve their ambitions by selecting excellent painters trained in the empire’s urban centers and were therefore familiar with the most up-to-date artistic trends. In this way, the middle aristocracy had its share in shaping artistic developments.

The donations of the local minor aristocracy share the same cultural context and artistic taste as those of the nonelite. The difference seems to be only financial and lies in the fact that local aristocrats could afford to sponsor a church individually, while the others usually raised collective funds for the construction of a church. The foundations of the minor clergy and the nonelite do not seem to take any part in the evolution of art. They are of provincial character, humble means, and mediocre quality. Retrospective and simplified features in their mural decoration intermingle with echoes of the official monumental art.

Finally, patterns of patronage similar to those in Byzantium were adopted in neighboring countries, including Serbia and Bulgaria, as well as in the Greek independent states that emerged after the Latin conquest of 1204. Imperial portraits, such as that of the Bulgarian ruler Ivan Alexander and his family receiving God’s blessing in a sumptuous Gospel Book of 1355–56 (see fig. 39), and the portraits of the Serbian kings, tsars, and patriarchs repeatedly depicted in their significant foundations clearly reveal an adaptation and further development of Byzantine patterns. These works thus reflect the prestige of Byzantium and the impact of its culture and ideology on the neighboring rival countries that prospered during the empire’s last phase.


Another obvious example of Manuel’s policy of reusing precious works in order to serve his diplomatic policy is the icon of the Virgin in the Diözesanmuseum, Freising. Originally commissioned by the deacon Manuel Dishypatos, who was later metropolitan of Thessalonike, from 1258 to 1261, it was overpainted in order to be presented by Manuel to Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan sometime about 1399–1402; see Maria Vassilaki, "Praying for the Salvation of the Empire?! in Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2005), pp. 263–74.


25. On Glabas, see Cyril Mango, The Monument and Its History, in Hans Belting, Cyril Mango, and Doulou Mouri,ki, The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Panmunarakis (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 13 (Washington, D.C., 1979), pp. 11ff. Glabas is also known to have founded the monastery.


28. Euthymios Tsigaridas, "Erga apodidomega en ton Manouel Panselino kai to ergastério tou," in Manuel Panselinos: Ek tou hierou nauou tou Protatou [Works attributed to Manuel Panselinos and his atelier, in Manuel Panselinos: From the Holy Church of the Protaton], pp. 51–56. Recently restored frescoes in the Vatopedi Monastery (1132) have also been attributed to the same master; Euthymios Tsigaridas, "Ta psëphidota kai hoi byzantines toichographies [The mosaics and the Byzantine frescoes]," in Hien Megistē Monē Vatopaidiou, vol. 1, pp. 259–79.

29. Belting, Mango, and Mouriki, The Mosaics. See also Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 80–86.


33. Laiou, "Sto Byzantin tò Palaigōlōn" (as in note 1 above), pp. 285–86.


47. The most recent work on the subject is Bransilav Todić, “‘Signatures’ des peintres Michel Astrapas et Eutychios: Fonction et signification,” Apoheria stè mnēmon tou Sôtērē Kissa [A tribute to the memory of Sotiris Kissas] (Thessaloniki, 2001), pp. 643–62 (with complete previous bibliography).


49. Doula Mouriki, Hoi toichographies tou Hagia Nikolaou ston Platas tēs Manēs [The frescoes of Hagia


53. A similar example of patronage is represented by the mid-thirteenth-century church of Saint Demetrios at Kampianika on the island of Kythera, where an anonymous couple is depicted in the apse kneeling on both sides of the figure of Saint Demetrios. Their precious garments identify them as members of the local aristocracy, while the naive artistic approach of the wall paintings indicates the provincial character of both patrons and artists. Manolis Chatzidakis and Ioanna Bitha, Corpus of the Byzantine Wall-Paintings of Greece: The Island of Kythera (Athens, 2003), pp. 147–48, figs. 6–8.


Robert Nelson in a recent study has argued that stylistic differences in the Early Palaeologan art of the two major Byzantine cities may, to some extent, be explained by reference to different commissions—aristocratic in Constantinople and clerical in Thessaloniké; see “Tales of Two Cities: The Patronage of Early Palaeologan Art and Architecture in Constantinople and Thessaloniké,” in Manuel Panselinos and His Age, pp. 127–45.


61. Georgios Démetrokalles, Geraki: *Hoi toichographies ton naoun tou kastrou* [Geraki: The frescoes of the churches of the castle] (Athens, 2001), pp. 100–138. See also the church of the Phaneromene at Phrangoulianika in the Mani, the wall decoration of which, in its second phase, was sponsored by a group of priests in 1122–23; Chara Konsstantinidé, *Ho naos tês Phaneromenês sta Phrangoulianika tês Mesa Manês* [The Church of Phaneromene at Phrangoulianika in the Inner Mani] (Athens, 1998).
63. On communal and cooperative patronage, see Cutler, “Art in Byzantine Society” (as in note 2 above), pp. 760–63.
64. Phané Drosyanné, *Scholia stis toichographies tês ekleistias tou Hagion Ioannou tou Prodromou stê Megalê Kastania Manês* [Remarks on the frescoes of the church of Saint John Prodromos at Megale Kastania in the Mani], Bibliothèke tês en Athénais Archiaiologikês Hetaireias, 98 (Athens, 1982); on the inscription, see also Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedatory Inscriptions*, pp. 65–66 (with previous bibliography).
66. The total cost for the construction and decoration of the barrel-vaulted, single-nave church, which measures 3.95 by 2.43 meters (13 x 8 feet), amounted to fourteen and a half gold coins.
The Urban Physiognomy of Constantinople from the Latin Conquest through the Palaiologan Era

The reign of the Angelos dynasty, from 1185 to 1204, had a negative effect on the urban history of the Byzantine capital; even more so did the Crusader siege of the city in 1203–4 (figs. 58, 59). For more than five decades afterward, the city under Latin rule was constantly plagued by shortages of money, and many monasteries, churches, palaces, residences (both of the wealthy and of the ordinary citizen), and public squares fell into disrepair or were deliberately stripped down to their very masonry. At the same time, a large number of artworks, including the decoration of entire buildings, were sold or carried off to the West.

In a groundbreaking monograph published in 1943, the geographer Robert Mayer attempted to trace and explain, among other things, the changes in Constantinople’s city plan, urban fabric, and population through the centuries. Mayer failed, however, to utilize a number of sources that provide significant information regarding the city’s history. Moreover, some especially relevant material for the period under discussion was unavailable to him at the time. Mayer correctly pointed out that the demolition or abandonment of many Constantinopolitan monuments was not exclusively due to the Ottoman conquest of the city in 1453 and that great devastation had already been caused by the Fourth Crusade. He also noted that the destruction of numerous buildings through frequent fires and earthquakes markedly altered the city’s appearance and eventually decimated its population.

It was because of such frequent disasters, Mayer assumed, that the inhabitants of Constantinople gradually lost the desire to build. The houses of the nonelite were increasingly constructed of wood rather than stone or brick. The population became concentrated upon the slopes of the city’s hills, in the commercially and economically important region of the Golden Horn, and on the approaches to the other urban harbors.

It remains to be seen whether Mayer’s hypothesis holds true for the period from 1204 to 1453. His statement that the widespread neglect of Constantinopolitan buildings had already begun in the twelfth century and continued in the Palaiologan period is, at any rate, to be approached with caution.

By 1949 Alfons-Maria Schneider was already offering the contrary opinion that “the city had by no means gone into decline… during the Comnenian period. . . . Not until the Latin conquest did it sustain wounds from which it would no longer recover, for in 1203–4 huge fires destroyed large parts of it and many Greek citizens emigrated, unable to bear the Latin yoke.”

Regarding the twelfth-century destruction of buildings, the contemporary historiographer Niketas Choniates does relate that Emperor Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–95) ordered the demolition of several dilapidated churches and certain secular buildings so that the material from them could be reused for repairs or new construction. Some building
Fig. 58. Map of Constantinople, from *Liber insularum archipelagi* by Cristoforo Buondelmonti (ca. 1380/90–post-1430). Italian (Florence?), ca. 1420–30. Ink and colors on vellum. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (Ms. cod. Marc. lat. xiv, 25=4595)
activity under Isaac II is indeed recorded, including a bath in the Great Palace, living quarters at the Blachernai Palace, and renovations of the Sea Walls. However, the churches or monasteries that Choniates ascribes to Isaac II may not actually have been his foundations.

The abandonment and destruction of buildings that markedly changed Constantinople’s urban physiognomy between 1203–4 and 1261 were primarily caused by fires, neglect, earthquakes, and reuse of building materials. Sources do not provide information as to the exact number of destroyed edifices. Between July 1 and July 17, 1203, the besieging Crusaders’ catapults heavily damaged the Blachernai Palace. In retaliation, between July 1 and August 17 of the same year, the urban mob set afire the Latin merchants’ dwellings and warehouses, which were concentrated along the Golden Horn. Numerous buildings fell victim to the fires that broke out during the Crusaders’ siege and conquest of the city. Choniates rhetorically compares Constantinople’s destruction by flames to that of ancient Troy. The first fire set by the Crusaders broke out on July 17, 1203, and devastated a large region stretching from the Christ Evergetes Monastery to the Blachernai Palace, as well as parts of the city to the west, as far as the Second Region.

Especially catastrophic was the second fire, that of August 19–20, 1203, which
contemporary sources relate was far greater than any the city had ever before seen. It destroyed a large number of private, commercial, and public buildings; numerous monasteries, nunneries, and churches were also affected. Choniates, whose own sumptuous house fell victim to the flames, gives a melancholy account of the disaster. In his words, most of Constantinople’s inhabitants lost their property. Schneider believes that this second fire devastated more than half the city. It also destroyed the exonarthex of the church of Hagia Sophia and the west side of the Hippodrome. Finally, on the evening of April 12, 1204, the Crusaders started a third fire east of the Christ Evergetes Monastery that ravaged the regions along the Sea Walls, up to the Droungariou quarter. The historian Gunther of Pairs reports that this fire destroyed almost one-third of the city. Altogether, the three fires caused heavy damage to the densely populated central and eastern parts of Constantinople, including the Forum of Constantine and the Central Street (Mese).

Upon taking the city on April 12, 1204, the Crusaders proceeded to sack its churches, monasteries, public buildings, and houses. Some statues and other works of art were melted down for specie, others carried off to the West, along with looted Christian relics. Sources seldom identify the buildings destroyed in 1203–4, although Choniates and Nicholas Mesarites recorded that their own private residences were destroyed in August 1203. One can certainly assume that much more than just these two rich houses perished, especially in the fire of August 19–20, 1203.

The period of Latin occupation witnessed two great earthquakes, on March 11, 1231, and September 16, 1237. The first of these destroyed several unspecified churches and parts of the city walls. The records do not mention what damage the second fire caused, but they do testify to the general neglect and disrepair of many Constantinopolitan churches, monasteries, and private and public buildings at the time. Although the Nicene emperor John III Vatatzes (r. ca. 1221–54) paid the Latins large sums for the maintenance of the capital’s churches and monasteries, Emperor Baldwin II (r. 1228–61) ordered the removal of the lead roofs from several churches and of wooden parts from monasteries and palaces to raise money for his empty state treasury. Raymond Janin writes that thirteen Constantinopolitan monasteries were deserted between 1203 and 1261, five of them never to be revived. My study of the sources indicates that at least nineteen convents were destroyed to some degree during this period, either by fire and earthquakes or through neglect. This number certainly reflects only part of the actual damage. Janin mentions the destruction of three churches between 1203 and 1261, but here as well the actual number must have been greater. The sources note that eight churches crumbled; seven of these were rebuilt after 1261. Clearly, the exact number of ecclesiastical and charitable buildings that perished during the period of the Latin Empire cannot be determined.

Although it is known that after conquering the city in 1204 the Latins assumed control of about fourteen monasteries and twenty-four churches, both within and outside the city walls, the sources mention very few Latin renovations of Constantinopolitan ecclesiastical buildings. To restore the altar of Hagia Sophia, which the Crusader army had destroyed, Patriarch Thomas Morosini ordered the removal of columns from the Anastasis Monastery. The monastery was occupied at the time by Latin monks, who protested to Pope Innocent III. It was probably Franciscan friars who commissioned a cycle of wall paintings for the side chapel of the Virgin Kyriotissi Monastery (Kalenderhane Camii).

John III Vatatzes gave the Latins a significant amount of money for renovating the church of the Holy Apostles, which had been heavily damaged by an earthquake and was on the verge of collapse. He also purchased at great price the Church of the Virgin at Blachernai and the monasteries of Roufiniani.
and the Archangel Michael en to Anaplo (both outside the city walls), so as to save them from neglect or demolition. The Orthodox hieromonk (ordained monk) Matthew Perdikares sponsored the renovation of the Holy Trinity Monastery, which had probably been destroyed by the fire of August 19–20, 1203.43

This last fire, as well as the other two that broke out during the Latin conquest, destroyed many warehouses, commercial quarters, and marketplaces, most notably, the Forum of Constantine. Byzantine texts of the period record this damage in general terms only and mention no subsequent restoration of commercial structures. One can assume, however, that after the city fell, the Italian merchants rebuilt their colonies along the Golden Horn, which had been destroyed in the previous year by the riots of July 1–August 18 and the great fire of August 19–20.46 David Jacoby observes, on the basis of Venetian notarial records, that certain commercial buildings, warehouses, and taverns in Constantinople’s Venetian quarter were repaired or erected over the period of Latin rule.47

The Latins’ limited range of construction in the city between 1204 and 1261 is explained by the fact that after taking over the ecclesiastical and secular buildings spared by the three fires of 1203–4, the Westerners did not need to erect new structures. At any rate, the weak finances of the Latin Empire would not have allowed extensive building activity.48

The sources present a tragic picture of Constantinople’s population, markets, and public and private buildings upon the city’s reconquest by the Byzantine forces of Nicaea on July 25, 1261.49 The first and foremost concern of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos after his triumphal entry (August 15, 1261) was, according to Nikephoros Gregoras, “to clean [the city] and turn, inasmuch as possible, that great disorder into order, to repair [those] churches which had not completely collapsed, and to fill the empty houses with people.”50 Even before arriving in the capital, Michael ordered his general Alexios Strategopoulos to have its palaces repaired, since under Latin rule they had fallen into neglect and partially collapsed.51 Part of the Great Palace was renovated during Michael’s reign, while the Blachernai Palace was thoroughly rebuilt, decorated with mural paintings, and enlarged. The patriarchal palace was also restored, with the patriarchs Arsenios I Autoreianos and Joseph I Galesiotes also making additions to it.52 Byzantine aristocrats sent special envoys to Constantinople to claim from Strategopoulos the residences that had formerly belonged to them or their parents and ancestors.53 As they reverted to their former owners, a number of private palaces and houses must have been rebuilt or renovated.

Michael VIII promptly took steps to repopulate the capital.54 Immigrants were to receive plots of land on which, after paying property tax, they could build.55 In this manner, the emperor settled in Constantinople the Tsakones families from the southeastern Peloponnese, who provided recruits for the navy.56 Merchants from Genoa, Venice, and Pisa were reconfirmed in possession of their quarters, houses, and churches at the Golden Horn.57 Michael VIII also granted the aristocrats and magnates who had followed him from Nicaea to Constantinople land and money to build new residences.58

The city walls were repaired and reinforced, the Kontokalian Harbor, at the Sea of Marmara, deepened and fortified.59 The Sea Walls received wooden superstructures and were doubled, in imitation of the land walls.60 These fortification works were a precaution against possible attack by Charles I of Anjou.61

The sources also credit Michael VIII with establishing or renovating a number of charitable institutions.62 Several old-age homes, hospices, and public hospitals, including the hospice at the monastery of Mangana, were restored during his reign.63 Many other public edifices, such as baths, courthouses, a school, the Hippodrome, and the theater, were also erected or repaired at the emperor’s initiative.64 The resultant great expenditures for rebuilding the city caused a
devaluation of the hyperpyron, the Byzantine gold currency.65

Michael VIII commemorated his numerous renovation activities with a monument erected between the churches of the Holy Apostles and All Saints.66 Set upon a column were bronze statues showing the emperor as the second founder of the city (a New Constantine) kneeling before the Archangel Michael, presenting him with a model of Constantinople, and imploring him to protect the city.67 Constantine the Great was, of course, renowned for making the city on the Bosporus the imperial capital and served as model for all subsequent Byzantine emperors. Michael VIII was named a “new Constantine” upon a mosaic portrait (now destroyed) and on some of his lead seals.68 The same epithet is also applied to him in literary sources, Latin as well as Greek.69

Michael’s son and successor, Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328), continued to rebuild the capital’s secular and religious edifices (fig. 60). According to Gregoras, he had the walls, churches, and houses of Constantinople repaired to such an extent that the city’s former glory was restored.70 Among other churches, the emperor renovated those of the Holy Apostles, Hagia Sophia, the Virgin of Blachernai, and the Apostles Peter and Paul, near the Eugenios Gate.71 Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos mentions in his eulogy of Andronikos that he also erected a new palace that surpassed all the previous ones in size, beauty, elegance, and solidity.72 Literary sources celebrate Andronikos as a “new Constantine” mostly because of his dissolution of the church union with Rome rather than because of his building activities.73 Xanthopoulos, however, does praise him as a second founder (oikestes) of Constantinople.74

Two imperial palaces erected in the city between 1261 and 1328 have thus far received little scholarly attention. Sponsored by Empress Theodora Palaiologina and by her son Andronikos II, they probably lay in the Blachernai quarter.75 The scant sources also mention the building of five private palaces, of which two were constructed during the reign of Michael VIII and three in the time of Andronikos II.76 It is, however, very likely that the actual number was far greater, since many members of the imperial family and other aristocrats possessed residences of this kind, the construction cost of which is unknown. Three private palaces can be localized on the basis of textual sources. That of the despot Constantine Palaiologos, portions of which survive under the name Tekfur Saray, was in the Blachernai.77 Opposite the Chora Monastery stood the palace of the grand logothete Theodore Metochites.78 The location of the residence of the despot Demetrios Palaiologos, previously considered unknown, was southeast of the church of Hagia Sophia.79

Sources concerning the building of new houses (oikemata, hospitia) between 1261 and 1328 usually provide only very general information.80 Although the exact number of new structures is not specified, it must have been significant. Most of the rebuilding probably took place under Emperor Michael VIII in the wake of the city’s reconquest. Only in six cases do the texts cite specific numbers of renovated or newly erected dwellings.81 According to this incomplete data, sixty new tenant houses and four new family houses were built between 1261 and 1328.82 Most of their owners are unknown by name, but they certainly belonged to all strata of society. Sources inform us that settlers from the Peloponnese and other regions, refugees from Asia Minor and the Aegean islands, traders and magnates, ordinary citizens, Latin merchants, and a cleric named Niphon all built houses in the capital.83 Empress Theodora Palaiologina is also recorded on one occasion as having built small houses that she presented to the hospice (xenon) of the Lips Monastery.84

Most aristocrats and wealthy merchants would have built their residences in the Blachernai, Kynegoi, or Petra quarters,85 which became in Palaiologan times the favored neighborhoods of the rich and noble. Some of them, however, preferred to dwell in the quarters of Phanari, Mangana, or Mesomphalon.86 Numerous secular buildings,
Fig. 60. Constantinople during the Palaiologan Era: Secular Buildings

1. Palace of Andronikos II Palaiologos  
2. Blachernai Palace  
3. Palace of the Despoina  
4. Great Palace  
5. Palace of Niketas Choniates  
6. Palace of the Despot Demetrios  
7. Palace of the Mesaritai  
8. Palace of Theodore Metochites  
9. Palace of Constantine Porphyrogennetos  
10. Patriarchal Palace  
11. Houses of George Akropolites (?)  
12. Houses of Isaac Asanes  
13. Houses of the Choumnoi  
14. Residences associated with the Lips-Xenon  
15. Houses of the sons of Theodora Synadene  
16. Houses rented by the Panagiotissa Monastery  
17. Residences of the Panagiotissa Monastery  
18. Residences associated with the Panteleemon-Xenon  
19. Houses of Manuel Rentakenos  
20. Residence of Romanos and Kaloger  
21. Grammateion associated with the Church of Saint Paul the Apostle  
22. Hippodrome  
23. Triclinium of Justinian  
24. Bakeries of the Panagiotissa Monastery  
25. Tanneries of the Jews in the Blanga quarter  
26. Mills of the Lips Monastery  
27. House of Melitto  
28. Myrepsikon of the Hieromonk Niphon  
29. Mitaton of the Sarakenoi  
30. Wine presses of Asanios  
31. Houses of Eudokimos Straboskeles  
32. Hospital of Isaac II Angelos  
33. Hostel of Isaac II Angelos  
34. Xenon of the John Prodromos Monastery  
35. Lips Xenon  
36. Xenon of the Manganen Monastery  
37. Xenon of Niphon  
38. Xenon of the Pammakaristos Monastery
including houses, were also erected around the Forum of Constantine, along the Golden Horn, and in the Kynegoi and Blanga regions. Some small houses were even built in the very center of the city. Newcomers settled in unknown numbers along the Sea Walls, especially near the two harbors of Blanga and Kontoskalion at the Sea of Marmara. Texts mention almost nothing about the costs of house building and renovation.

The commercial buildings and workshops constructed in Constantinople under the first two Palaiologan emperors are also not fully recorded, but rich merchants probably erected a number of these in the time of Michael VIII. Some sources do contain concrete information about individual structures; two bakeries were opened close to the Forum of Constantine, and a tannery was built by Jews in the Blanga district. Empress Theodora Palaiologina had six mills constructed close to the Pantepoptes Monastery and presented them to the convent of Lips. During the reign of Andronikos II, the hieromonk Niphon had several houses in the Kynegoi quarter, in the southwest corner of the city, converted into workshops producing aromatic oils and spices. An aristocrat by the name of Asanios built a wine tavern in the quarter of Mangana. Workshops and stores predominated in the Kynegoi quarter and in the region between the Kynegon Gate and the Petra. This last quarter formed, together with the Perama, Constantinople's key commercial district during the Palaiologan period. Other economically important areas were the Blanga region, the quarter near the Pantepoptes Monastery, and the vicinity of the Forum of Constantine.

After the reconquest of Constantinople, many churches and monasteries were founded or rebuilt by members of the imperial family and the aristocracy (fig. 61). Altogether, twenty-seven convents were restored between 1261 and 1328, nine of which were extended with new structures. Twenty of the donors who sponsored such renovations were men, and twelve were women. Four belonged to the imperial family, eleven to the nobility, four to the clergy. A single donor by the name of Gyraios Mikrokephalos came perhaps from the middle class. Three others are anonymous. Characteristically, almost all the aristocrats who endowed monasteries spent their old age as monks or nuns there. Men and women from the Choumnoi family, for example, lived in the twin convents of Christ Philanthropos. Especially notable as donors were the two emperors Michael VIII and Andronikos II, Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople, and the aristocrats Michael Doukas Glbas Tarchaneiotes, Nikephoros Choummos, and Theodore Metochites. All of the twelve known female donors were of noble blood, almost all were related to the ruling Palaiologan dynasty, and one, Theodora Palaiologina, was an empress. She; Maria (Melane) Palalologina, the illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII; the protobestiarissa Theodora Raoulina; and Maria-Marta Glbaine Palaiologina Tarchaneiotissa restored at least two convents each.

Fourteen further monasteries attested between 1261 and 1328 were entirely new foundations, two dating to the reign of Michael VIII and ten to that of Andronikos II. Six of these were inhabited by male monks and six were nunneries, while the status of the other two is uncertain. Of the new foundations whose names are known, five were dedicated to the Virgin, one to Christ, one to John the Baptist, and one to Saint Nicholas of Myra. Their donors include seven men, four women, a group of Western monks, and two unspecified individuals. One of the men came from the imperial family, three were nobles, and one was a hieromonk. The social rank of the two remaining men is unclear. One of the women was of imperial birth, and the other three were aristocrats.

In general, pride of place among monastery donors belonged to nobles and members of the imperial family, followed by the clergy. Especially prominent were the ruling
Fig. 61. Constantinople during the Palaiologan Era: Monasteries

1. Holy Anargyroi
2. Anastasis
3. Saint Andrew in Kriesei
4. Monastery of the Hieromonk Nikandros
5. Monastery of Kyr Antonios
6. Monastery of Aristine
7. Monastery of Patriarch Athanasios
8. Chora Monastery
9. Christ Evergetes
10. Christ Pantepoptes
11. Christ Pantokrator
12. Christ Philanthropos
13. Christ Soter
14. Saint Demetrios
15. Saint George ton Manganon
16. Monastery of Glabaina
17. John Prodromos en te Petra
18. Stoudios Monastery
19. Monastery of Kyra Martha
20. Myrelaion
21. Nea Mone
22. Saint Nicholas tes Opaines
23. Saint Nicholas Thaumaturgos
24. Saint Stephen the Protomartyr
25. Monastery of the Domestikos Phokas Marules
26. Barangiotissa
27. Bebaia Elpis (Our Lady of Certain Hope)
28. Gorgoepekoos
29. Hodegetria
30. Kyriotissa
31. Pammakaristos
32. Lips Monastery
33. Panagiotissa
34. Peribleptos
35. Holy Trinity of Matthew Perdikaires
36. Theotokos tes Agoras

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Palaiologoi, the Tarchaneiotai, the Choumnoi, the Synadenoi, the Raoul, the Akropolitai, the Philanthropenoi, and the Sarantenoi. Notable churchmen include the patriarchs of Constantinople Athanasios I, Germanos III, and John XIII Glyks, and four hieromonks. 108

Only three sources report anything concerning the costs of building and renovating monasteries. 109 None of the fourteen new foundations survives even in ruins, but seven can be approximately located. 110 My analysis of the sources has, furthermore, yielded new information about the donors, plans, chronology, or location of twenty-five Constantinopolitan convents. 111 Monasteries tended to concentrate in what had once been the city’s Tenth Region, that is, to the north of the Akropolis and in the quarters of Mangana, Blanga, Xerolophos, Krisis, and Perama.

Ten churches were restored between 1261 and 1328, two of them during the reign of Michael VIII and eight during that of Andronikos II. 112 One of them, the present-day Kilise Camii, received under Andronikos II an annex with wall mosaics. 113 Known donors of church buildings include the two emperors Michael VIII and Andronikos II, Patriarch Joseph I of Constantinople, and the noble spouses Alexios Kabalarios and Simonis Palaiologina. 114 Andronikos II was particularly active as a patron and was responsible for the restoration of four churches. 115 Only in the instance of repairs to Hagia Sophia do sources specify the costs, which amounted to several thousand hyperpyra, or gold coins. 116

Apart from such renovations, twenty-seven entirely new churches and one chapel were built between 1261 and 1328, four of them probably under Michael VIII and seventeen probably under Andronikos II. 117 Two more churches, begun in Michael’s reign, were completed only under Andronikos, perhaps because of financial difficulties. 118 Shortly after reconquering the city in 1261, Michael VIII also ordered the building of a mosque for the local Arabs. 119 At approximately the same time, the Jews of Constantinople built a synagogue in the Blanga quarter. 120 Among the new churches, nine were dedicated to the Virgin, four to Saint Nicholas, two to Christ, two to John the Baptist, and one each to Saint George, Saint Onouphrios, Saint Demetrios, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and the Holy Trinity. The names of the remaining eight churches and chapels are not known. As for donors, fifteen out of the twenty-one who are identifiable belonged to the aristocracy, 121 three were churchmen, 122 one came from the middle class, 123 one was the emperor himself, and one was a king of Serbia. 124 Armenian refugees who had fled the Turks in Asia Minor also built a church. 125 A particularly notable donor is Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople, who erected five churches, including two in the twin monastery he founded in the Xerolophos quarter. The protostrator Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes also built or renewed numerous sacred buildings in and around Constantinople.

In sum, at least ten churches were restored and at least twenty-eight new ones were built between 1261 and 1328, indicating that new foundations outnumbered repairs of existing structures (fig. 62). Most of the new churches were located in the quarters of Xerolophos, Blachernai, Kynego, Blanga, Mesomphalon, and Petra.

Two hospices ( xenones) were restored under Andronikos II, 126 and three more were newly built. 127 Their donors originated from the imperial family, the nobility, the royal house of Serbia, and the clergy. Empress Theodora Palaiologina subsidized the restoration of the Lips hospice, and the hieromonk Niphon that of the Panteleimon. The aristocratic spouses protostrator Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes and Maria-Martha Doukaina Glabaina Tarchaneiottisa added a hospice to the Pammakaristos Monastery, which they had restored. 128 The hospice of Saint John Prodromos in Petra was built by the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin. 129 The noble logothetes tou genikou Theodore Metochites endowed a hospice and a public dining hall close to the Chora Monastery. 130
Fig. 62. Constantinople during the Palaiologan Era: Churches

1. Ascension
2. Holy Apostles
3. Saint Demetrios tou Kanabe
4. Saint Irene at Perama
5. Saint Euphemia in the Hippodrome
6. John Prodromos in the Blanga
7. Saint Nicholas by Mesomphalon
8. Saint Onouphrios
9. All Saints
10. Saint Paul the Apostle
11. Hagia Sophia
12. Archangels Michael and Gabriel
13. Panagnos Parthenos
14. Blachernai
15. Chalkoprateia
16. Theotokos Nikopoios
17. Theotokos Panachrantos
18. Zoopoios Trias
19. Jewish Synagogue in the Blanga Quarter
20. Boğdan Sarayı
21. Ese Kapı Mescidi
22. Kilise Camii
23. Manastır Mescidi
24. Odalar Camii
25. Sinan Paşa Mescidi
26. Toklu Dede Mescidi
Why did the Byzantines erect or renovate sacred and charitable buildings? This question is quite satisfactorily answered by the sources. The donors hoped to save their souls through pious works131 and were also motivated by compassion for the poor.132 It is remarkable how many patrons were aristocratic women, especially widows. There are also isolated representatives of the middle class. Almost all the patriarchs of Constantinople, Athanasios I in particular, supported the restoration of the capital’s churches and convents. Monks and nuns are also known among the donors.

The traditional view that the first Palaiologan emperors were less active builders than the aristocracy lacks substance. It is also not true that, as previously assumed, Constantinople was properly rebuilt only from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Recent research has shown that the reigns of emperors Michael VIII and Andronikos II were periods of significant construction in the capital.133

A few years after the end of the First Civil War (1321–28), Constantinople was struck by an earthquake (January 17, 1332) and a hurricane (February 12, 1332). The violent waves caused by the latter broke through the city’s water gates, destroying large sections of the eastern Sea Walls and some houses.134 The sources report little renovation or construction of sacred and secular buildings after the end of the First Civil War and during the Second Civil War (1341–47).135 On the contrary, they relate that rich houses in the city were looted and destroyed.136 Angeliki Laiou has observed that in the first half of the fourteenth century the capital still possessed an aristocracy economically capable of building private residences and of renovating or founding religious institutions.137 The destruction of the nobility’s palatial houses—symbols of their power—was carried out by members of their own class who belonged to opposing political factions.138

Nikephoros Gregoras writes that in 1341 the buildings of the Great Palace and of the Patriarchate, adjacent to the church of Hagia Sophia, were in a state of extreme disrepair, about which no one showed concern.139 In the same year the Constantinopolitan houses of John VI Kantakouzenos and his aristocratic allies were looted.140 A great earthquake on October 18, 1343, destroyed numerous houses and part of the city walls.141 Gregoras also mentions the poor state of many Constantinopolitan churches.142

Another telling example of the Byzantine Empire’s economic plight at the time is the fate of Hagia Sophia. The earthquake of 1343 had left cracks in the edifice, and on May 19, 1346, its east arches, about a third of the central dome, and parts of the eastern vault collapsed.143 Empress Anna Palaiologina paid for restoring the east vault, but as John VI Kantakouzenos took power in 1347, the main dome remained unrebuilt because of lack of funds. The Grand Prince of Muscovy did send money for rebuilding the church, but Kantakouzenos used this to pay his military ally, the Turkish chief Orhan.144 Only when Philotheus Kokkinos became patriarch, in November 1353, did Kantakouzenos decide to undertake the most urgent repairs of the main dome. Money was collected from all citizens, rich and poor alike. The master builders were the stratopedarch Astra and the Italian Giovanni Peralta.145 The mosaics of the east arch, the Christ Pantokrator in the dome, and the cherubim (or seraphim?) in the pendentives were executed under the emperors John V Palaiologos and John VI Palaiologos.146 In 1403 the traveler Ruy González de Clavijo saw Hagia Sophia surrounded by various buildings, the majority of which were damaged and would receive only the most-needed repairs.147

The fact that, after the middle of the fourteenth century, many rich Byzantines lost interest in building sumptuous residences or in founding churches and monasteries can perhaps be attributed to a change in mentality, as the nobility became increasingly engaged in trade and banking.148 While it is untrue that no construction whatsoever took place in Constantinople after the 1350s, the few
documented instances cannot compare with the numerous buildings from the time of the first two Palaiologan emperors. Between 1341 and 1347, the grand dox (admiral of the fleet) Alexios Apokaukos erected close to the city walls a rich house that lay on both dry land and water. He also built at several different locations fortified residences where he could take refuge in times of danger. A certain Elaphros founded a monastery dedicated to Saint Demetrios near the Plateia Gate at the Golden Horn, probably in the second or third quarter of the fourteenth century, and no later than February 1367. In 1392 the nun Xene Philanthropene restored at her own expense the Constantinopolitan monastery of Our Lady of Certain Hope, many parts of which were threatened with collapse. A few years later, her daughter the nun Eugenia Kantakouzena Philanthropene renovated, with the help of the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, the church and belfry of the monastery. The cost of materials and labor amounted in the latter case to two hundred hyperpyra.

In spite of the sad state of the empire at the time, an extremely wealthy noble by the name of Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos was able, before 1410, to build a sumptuous palace in Constantinople. On January 19, 1434, pigeon-hunting children caused a fire that burnt the Blachernai church to the ground. To the extent possible and with the help of the rich nobility, the later Palaiologan emperors continued maintaining Constantinople's city walls as a protection against the Turks and reinforced them with towers and small subsidiary fortresses.

2. Ibid., pp. 19, 128.
4. Ibid., p. 102.
5. Ibid., pp. 102–3.
7. Ibid., pp. 19, 103, 221.
10. Ibid., pp. 206–6, 332–34.
29. These earthquakes probably destroyed part of the church of the Holy Apostles; see also Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 100–102, 228; Kidonopoulos, “Tyche,” p. 120.
33. These were the convenes of the Holy Anargyroi, the Resurrection of Christ, Saint Andrew in Krieth, Kyr Antonios (or the Virgin tes mones tou Kalilou), Chora, Christ Evergetes, Christ Pantokrator, Saint Demetrios of the Palaiologoi, Saint John Prodromos at Petra, Saint John at Studiou, the Myrelaion, Saint Nicholas tes Opaines, Our Lady of Certain Hope, the Virgin Goregepekos, the Virgin Pammakaristos, the Virgin Panagiotissa (the Virgin tou Mouchliou or Panagia ton Manguilion), the Virgin Peribleptos, Trapeza, and the Holy Trinity of Matthew Perdikares. Seventeen of these nineteen convenes were restored between July 25, 1261, and May 24, 1288 (the end of Andronikos II’s reign). See also Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 1–10, 13–14, 19–28, 30–33, 37–39, 45–51, 55–56, 59–60, 69–76, 80–86, 88–90, 91–96, 237–39.
34. Many churches and monasteries visited by pilgrims from the eleventh to the early thirteenth century or mentioned in textual sources on other occasions are no longer attested after 1204. This could indicate that they were destroyed or abandoned, but the sources do not specify the circumstances of their disappearance. Such nunneries are therefore not included in note 33 above, except for the Trapeza conven, which is not mentioned in Janin,
The ruined churches were those of the Holy Apostles, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Irene at Perama, Saint Euphemia by the Hippodrome, Saint Prokopios, Saint Sophia, the Virgin at Chalkoprateia, and the present-day Odalar Camii; see also Kidonopoulos, *Bauten*, pp. 99–104, 105–8, 120–25, 131–33, 146–47; cf. ibid., pp. 240–41.


49. Patriarch Gregory II the Cypriot notes in his eulogy for Michael VIII that after the end of Latin rule only ruins and rubble remained of the buildings of Constantinople (*Patrologiae cursus complectens. Series graeca* [hereafter PG], ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–66), vol. 142, col. 376). In his history, Nikephoros Gregoras describes the state of the capital upon Michael VIII’s entry as follows: “One saw the Queen of Cities like a plain of desolation, full of ruins and debris, with houses razed to the ground, and a few buildings that had survived the great fire. For raging fire had blackened her beauty and ornamentation on several occasions when the Latins were first trying to enslave her. Later, enslaved already, she received from them no care whatsoever but rather [suffered] manifold destruction by day and night, as if the Latins did not believe that they would inhabit her permanently. . . . The city had also suffered no mean damage through the latest fire, which three days earlier the Romans had set to the houses in order to scare the Latins” (Gregoras, *Historia*, vol. 1, pp. 87–88 [IV, 6]; cf. Talbot, “Restoration,” p. 249). All translations are my own.

In his speech (cited by Gregoras) against the adversaries of church union, Michael VIII himself refers to the capital’s state after the reconquest, so as to justify the union as a protective measure against attack by Charles I of Anjou: “Constantinople . . . is in many places still ruined, barely being rebuilt, and, as it were, reviving from the recent deaths” (Gregoras, *Historia*, vol. 1, pp. 126–27 [IV, 3]). See also Deno John Geanakoplos, *Empperor Michael*

83. Ibid., pp. 179–81.
85. Ibid., pp. 188, 208–10, 191–93, 206–8, 193–95, 204.
86. Ibid., pp. 186–87, 190–91.
87. The cost of erecting small houses is mentioned on one occasion only: Emperor Michael VIII gave to a certain noble, perhaps George Akropolites, two hundred hyperpyra for such expenses; see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 181–82.
88. Ibid., pp. 204–5.
89. Ibid., pp. 203–4.
90. Ibid., pp. 206.
91. Ibid., pp. 206–8, 212–13.
92. Ibid., pp. 211–12.
93. Ibid., pp. 204–10, 212–13.
94. Ibid., pp. 203–7.
95. The restored convents were those of the Holy Anargyroi; the Anastasis; Saint Andrew in Krise (Koca Mustafa Paşa Camii); Kyr Antonios; Aristine; that of the megas logiastes (Mone tou Xerolophou, identical with the monastery of Patriarch Athanasios); Chora (Kariye Camii); Christ Evergetes; Christ Pantepoptes; Christ Philanthropos; Saint Demetrius (Hagios Demetrios ton Palaiologon); Saint George ton Manganon; Petra; Studiou; that of the grand domestikissa Eugenia Kомнene Palaiologina; the Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii); The New Monastery (Nea Mone or tes Neas Ekkliesias); Saint Nicholas tes Opaines; Saint Stephen the Promartary; the Virgin Varangiotissa; Our Lady of Certain Hope (Bebaii Elpis); the Virgin Gerokepokos; the Virgin Kyriotissa (Kalenderhane Camii); the Virgin Panmakkaristos (Fethiye Camii); the Virgin Panachrantos tou Libos (Lips, now Fenari Is Camii); the Virgin Panagiotissa (Virgin Michlhiotissa, now Kanli Kilise); and the Virgin Peribleptos (Sulu Manastir); see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 1–5, 5–8, 9–10, 13–14, 14–16, 16–19, 19–25, 25–28, 28–30, 33–36, 37–39, 39–41, 44–49, 49–51, 52–53, 55–56, 56–59, 59–60, 62–65, 68–69, 69–74, 74–76, 76–80, 80–86, 86–87, 88–90, 91–93. Contrary to my previous assumption (see ibid., pp. 77–78), the monastery of the Virgin Hodegetria was not restored: see Failer, "Pachymeriana novissima" (as in note 75 above), pp. 227–28. New structures were added to the monasteries of the megas logiastes, Chora, Evergetes, Petra, the New Monastery, Our Lady of Certain Hope, Panmakkaristos, Panachrantos tou Libos, and Panagiotissa (Muchliotissa); see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 16–18, 19–25, 25–28, 45–49, 56–59, 69–74, 80–86, 86–87, 88–90.
96. The imperial family is represented by Michael VIII, his two sons Andronikos II and Constantine Palaiologos Porphyrogenetos, and Bartholomew/Attemes Palaiologos (see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 25–28, 37–39, 39–41, 91–93, 49–51, 56–59); the nobility, by George Akropolites, his son Constantine Akropolites, John Komnenos Doukas Synadenos, his son Theodore Komnenos Doukas Synadenos,


102. The known female monastery donors are Theodora Palaiologina; Maria Doukaina Akropolitissa; Theodora Raoulaina; Maria (Melane) Palaiologina, the Lady of the Mongols; Maria-Martha Doukaina Komnene Branaina Glabaina Palaiologina Tarchanieteis; the grand domestika Eugenia Komnene Palaiologina; Theodora Komnene Palaiologina Synade (wife of the grand strato-pedarch John Komnenos Doukas Sarantenos); Eudokia Doukaina Komnene Synade Palaiologina (wife of the protosotator Theodore Komnenos Doukas Synadenos); the wife of Nikephoros Choumnos; his daughter Irene Choumnainia Palaiologina; the wife of Angelos Doukas Sarantenos; and a further anonymous lady, probably of noble blood: see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 1–4, 9–10, 14–16, 19–25, 33–36, 45–49, 52–53, 55–56, 69–74, 80–86, 88–90, 238–39; Talbot, “Restoration,” pp. 255–57; Talbot, “Building Activity,” pp. 332–42.

103. Two of these monasteries are not assigned to a particular reign. Under Michael VIII were built the monastery of Lady Martha and the small convent of Saint Nicholas the Miracle-Worker by the Barbara Gate on the northeast side of the Akropolis (Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 51–52, 60–61); under Andronikos II, those of the hieromonk Nikandros, Christ Krataios, Glabaina, John Kanabures, John Prodromos of the despot John Palaiologos, the Virgin of the domestika Phokas Marules, the Virgin Atheniotissa, the Virgin of Peribleptenos, the Virgin Hyperagons tou Plynnariou, and the Virgin tes Agoras ton Phreion (this last, probably Franciscan) (Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 11–13, 36–37, 41–44, 65–68, 90–91, 93, 118–40; Talbot, “Building Activity,” pp. 330–43).

104. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 239; Talbot, “Building Activity,” pp. 332, 338–43. Talbot correctly notes on page 339 that the monastery of Our Lady of Certain Hope was simply renovated, but in the table on page 343 she includes it among the new foundations; cf. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 69–74.

105. These are the monasteries of John Prodromos of the despot John Palaiologos and of the Virgin Atheniotissa. Both were endowed by men, which makes it likely that they were inhabited by monks.

106. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 239.
108. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 239.

110. The seven are the monasteries of the hieromonk Nikandros (immediately adjacent to the Anastasis Monastery), Christ Krataios, Glabaina, the Lady Martha, Saint Nicholas the Miracle-Worker by the Barbara Gate, the Virgin of the domestika Phokas Marules, and the Virgin tes Agoras: Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 11–13, 36–37, 41–42, 51–52, 60–61, 65–67, 118–40, nos. 1.1.4, 1.1.13, 1.1.16, 1.1.21, 1.1.27, 1.1.30, 1.3.1. The last-mentioned monastery, probably identical with Santa Maria in Foro, was converted into a public building sometime between 1282 and 1309.

111. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 240.
112. Under Michael VIII were restored the church of Hagia Sophia (where the emperor commissioned the monk Ruchas to rebuild the pulpit, the sola, and other parts of the church) and the chapel of Saint Theophylaktos in the patriarchal palace; see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 121–25, 164–67; Talbot, “Restoration,” pp. 251–52; Martsche, “Builders and Building,” pp. 318–19. Under Andronikos II were restored the churches of the Holy Apostles, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Euphemia by the Hippodrome, Saint Paul the Great by the Eugenios Gate (next to the Old Orphanages), Saint Prokopios, Saint Sophia, the Virgin at Blachernai, and the Virgin at Chalkoprateia: Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 99–103, 103–4, 106–8, 118–20, 120–21, 121–25, 129–31, 131–33; Talbot, “Building Activity,” pp. 330–31.

114. Ibid., pp. 103–4, 106–8, 131–33, 148, nos. 1.2.5, 1.2.9, 1.2.28, 1.4.7.
117. The new foundations are as follows: that of Isaakios Asan (dedication unknown); by the houses of the sebât Theodore Patrikioi (dedication unknown); Ascension of Christ; Christ tou Radenou; Saint Demetrios tou Kanabe; Saint George of the tamias George Pegagomenos; John Prodromos of the sebât Basil Sebasteianos; John Prodromos in the Blanga district; Saint Nicholas of [Michael Doukas Tarchanieteis] Glabas; Saint Nicholas by Mesomphalon; Saint Nicholas of the bestiaros Manuel Boulgaros; Saint Nicholas of the sebât Klithaneas; Saint Onuphrius; Archangels Michael and Gabriel of the Patriarch Athenasios I; Dormition of the Virgin of Demetrios Komnenos Doukas Trykydylia; Theotokos Panagios Parthenos of The Urban Physiognomy of Constantinople 115
Patriarch Athanasios I; Virgin Akatamachetos of the sebast Goulites; Virgin Hyperagia of the domestikos Michael Atzymes; Virgin of Georgios Magistros; Virgin of the eparch Michael Monomachos Senachereim; Virgin Nikopoios at Blachernai; Virgin Panachrantos of Patriarch Athanasios I; Virgin of Theodore Doukas Libadarios Komnenos; Life-Giving Holy Trinity of Patriarch Athanasios I; an Armenian church; Saint Nicholas (Boğdan Saray), and what are now Odalar Camii and Sinan Paşa Mescidi: see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 97–148.

Not included in this list are six churches, new built as parts of the palace of Theodore Metochites, the Kral’s Hospice in the Petra Monastery, and the monasteries of Pammakaristos, Chora, Lips, and Bebaia Elpis: see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 19–25, 69–74, 80–87, 162–64, 218–21; nos. 1.1.8, 1.1.33, 1.1.37, 1.1.38, 2.2.5, 2.2.6. Also not included are the churches of restored or newly built monasteries. The present-day Ese Kapi Mescidi (also known as Isa Kapi Mescidi, Manastur Mescidi, or Iramblum Paşa Mescidi) was a church during the Palaiologan period (Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 144, no. 1.4.2) and is quite possibly identical with a church of the monastery of the grand logiastis (or monastery of Athanasios) built by Patriarch Athanasios I in the Xerolophos quarter: see Th. Papazotos, “To Isa Kapi stin Konstantinopole, monon tou patriarchou Athanasinou,” Delton tes Christianikes Archeiologikes Hetairias 18 (1995), p. 40; Vassilios Kidonopoulos, “Hong oikoumenikos patriarches Athanasios I. H ai he monte tou Megalou Logiastou stin Konstantinopole,” Byzantina 18 (1995–96), pp. 257–60.

120. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 141–42, no. 1.3.3; Matschke, “Buildings and Building,” p. 318.
121. Two anonymous members of the Radonai family; the sebast Theodore Patrikioi; the sebast Basil Sebastianios; the sebast Kilbanares; the sebast Guliotes; the protostroph Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes; the bestiaris Manuel Boulgoras; the domesticos Michael Atzymes; Demetrios Komnenos Doukas Trykandyles and his grandfather; George Magistros; the eparch Michael Monomachos Senachereim; Theodore Doukas Libadarios Komnenos; and Isakios Asan: see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, p. 241.
122. Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople, the great ekklesiasanthos George Pegamonos, and the monk John/Ilian Kanabes: see Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 104–5, 108–9, 125–26, 127–28, 136–37, 137–38; nos. 1.2.7, 1.2.10, 1.2.22, 1.2.24, 1.2.32, 1.2.34.
124. Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 135–36, no. 1.2.31) and King (Krali) Stefan Uroš II Mihail of Serbia (ibid., pp. 218–21, no. 2.6.6).

125. Ibid., pp. 140–41, no. 1.3.2.
127. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 19–25, 218–21, 225–26, nos. 1.1.8, 2.6.6, 2.6.10.
129. Kidonopoulos, Bauten, pp. 218–21, no. 2.6.6.
130. Ibid., pp. 19–25, no. 1.1.8.
153. Ibid.
154. Laiou (“Oikonomika phainomena,” p. 292) notes that this sum is relatively small in comparison to the five hundred hyperpyra that, some forty or fifty years earlier, relatives of the monastery’s founder, Theodora Synadene, spent on commemoration services for her and her family.
The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine

In 1214 Symeon, abbot of Sinai, drew up a new typikon to regulate the liturgical services at his monastery. Symeon is referred to in this document as panagiotatos (the most entirely holy) and ouananopolis (the citizen of heaven) as well as the archbishop: he was no doubt someone of considerable importance to the monastery. The timing of this document is interesting. The monastery must have been following some set of rules in the many centuries before this, between its founding in the sixth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. So why the revision at this particular moment?

The full text of Symeon’s typikon, which is based on the rules of the monastery of Saint Sabas outside Jerusalem, has never been published in its entirety, but some parts of it, those specific to Sinai, have been made available. One new ceremony described in the text is the celebration, or rather commemoration, of a recent event, the terrible day in May 1201, roughly thirteen years earlier, when an earthquake struck the monastery, toppling some of its outer fortification walls and destroying a number of the monastic cells. On the anniversary of this event, the monks were to process out of the monastery into the relative safety of the open air, as they had done on the day of the earthquake itself (and as residents of Constantinople always did on the anniversary of their earthquakes). Once there, they were to recite a number of prayers to the Virgin and to Moses, appealing to them to intervene with Christ to ensure that a disaster of this nature would never take place again. Another celebration outlined in some detail is that of Moses, for it was on the site where God spoke to the prophet from the Burning Bush that the Sinai monastery had been founded. Moses is regularly honored in the Orthodox church, but at Sinai his feast day is given particular prominence, and its specific texts and movements are outlined in the 1214 document.

But the most interesting part of this text, for us at least, is its reference to yet another celebration, this one in honor of Saint Catherine, held on November 25. On this day, the monks are to sing special hymns and say special prayers before her larnax, or coffin (fig. 63). As far as I can tell, this is the very first reference to the presence of Saint Catherine’s body in this ancient basilica. The pilgrim Thietmar, who arrived on Sinai in 1217, saw the body inside a marble sarcophagus, “next to the choir, in a prominent position, towards the east.” By the fourteenth century the monastery was often being referred to as the monastery of Saint Catherine rather than the monastery of the Virgin, its original dedication; the new appellation was adopted first by Westerners, then by the Sinai community itself. That designation remains in force today.

Before turning to the story of Saint Catherine herself, a few more words about abbot Symeon are in order. Other sources reveal just how important a figure he was in the history of the monastery. The year 1214, in which he was writing his typikon, was only two years after the Venetians had taken over the administration of Crete in one of the great partitions of the Byzantine Empire that resulted from the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204. The events on Crete were of crucial importance to Sinai.
The monastery owned a large number of properties there that were essential for its provisioning and financial well-being, as it could scarcely support itself solely from its lands in the relatively barren Sinai Peninsula. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Abbot Symeon immediately turned to the central authorities in Venice itself. He appealed to the doge to confirm Sinai’s ownership of these properties in order to prevent them from being expropriated by the Venetians. This the doge seemed perfectly content to do: given the prestige of the monastery on the island, it was a wise move. As early as March 1212 he issued an order guaranteeing Sinai’s rights over the considerable number of Cretan villages, vineyards, mills, and churches owned by the monastery and granting it immunity from various kinds of export duties.  

Having achieved this, Symeon then turned his attention to the lands and dependencies held by Sinai elsewhere in the Mediterranean and demanded comparable protection for those lands from the pope in Rome. The pope, Honorius III, obliged and in 1217 issued a papal decree guaranteeing not only Sinai’s lands in Crete but also all its
lands in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Cyprus, and even its small dependency in Constantinople, housed in the Church of the Mangana. These papal guarantees were to be reissued by many a new pope for at least the next two hundred years. And the popes were as good as their word, so to speak, intervening on numerous occasions to side with the monastery in its disputes with the local Venetian administration or even the local Latin church over the ownership and security of these properties.

Such strong support from the pope might at first seem odd. But for one thing, the Latins, not the Byzantines, were the ones in control of most of the areas in which Sinai held properties in this period, and the pope was the only figure in a position to guarantee their safety over such a wide geographic area. Furthermore, his backing was nothing new: popes had supported Sinai much earlier—Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) was particularly venerated in the monastery for centuries because of his charity—and the later papal documents assume that Sinai had never been out of communion with Rome. At the very least, it is clear that the schism that so affected the church of Constantinople in the mid-eleventh century did not really touch Sinai until much later, not until the mid-fifteenth century. In addition, after the Arab conquest of Egypt (640–642), Sinai depended for its very livelihood on the goodwill of the Muslims—it possessed a document of protection purported to have been signed by Muhammad himself that was respected and confirmed by all subsequent Muslim rulers—and on the goodwill of Rome. Byzantium seems to have offered little or no support in this period.

Now to the story of Saint Catherine herself. She was the daughter of a local ruler in Alexandria, Egypt, who died as a martyr for the faith at the beginning of the fourth century. The earliest surviving accounts of her life, written in Greek probably in the seventh and eighth centuries, provide the following narrative. Catherine, besides being a Christian, was well-born, beautiful, highly educated in ancient literature and medicine, and capable of speaking seventy-two languages. When the emperor Maxentius ordered animal sacrifices to the pagan gods to be performed in the arena in Alexandria, she protested to him, challenging him to abandon paganism and to adopt Christ, the true God. Unable himself to counter her sophisticated arguments, Maxentius rounded up fifty of the greatest philosophers of his realm and charged them with the task of dissuading Catherine from her self-destructive course. If they failed, he told them, they themselves would be executed. A public debate ensued, and arguments flew back and forth. The philosophers asked Catherine how she, given all her respect for ancient learning, could hesitate to venerate the ancient gods, while Catherine managed to prove that even such authors as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Galen; the gods Orpheus and Apollo; and the Sibyls as well had all had Christ in mind in their various statements.
Catherine so confounded the philosophers that, to the fury of the emperor, they converted to Christianity, then and there, en masse. Maxentius had no choice but to condemn them to the pyre, before trying to deal again with Catherine. Smitten with her beauty, he indicated to her that she could share his kingdom, even live in the palace with him, but she remained firm; in the face of this intransigence, he had her thrown into prison. His next recourse was a clever device involving four wheels studded with knives, on which she was to be rolled. The device failed, however, when an angel broke up the wheels and sent them spinning off to strike her tormentors. While in prison, Catherine was visited by the emperor’s wife, who was sympathetic to the young woman. She, too, converted and was summarily executed upon the order of her husband. When further tortures did not shake Catherine’s resolve, Maxentius had her beheaded. Then, say some of the texts, angels descended from heaven to take her body, which they laid on the summit of Mount Sinai, in the desert south of Alexandria.

Catherine’s life was rewritten in the tenth century, with most of these details intact, by the famous hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes, and her feast day—though shared with Peter of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, and Merkourios, and sometimes with...
Fig. 67. Icon of Saint Catherine, with Scenes of Her Passion and Martyrdom. Sinai (?), early 13th century. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.
Gregory of Agrigento—was celebrated throughout the empire. The earliest surviving images of the saint come from Cappadocia, in eastern Turkey, where she is depicted already in the tenth century as she was to be in all periods of Byzantine art: a royal figure in full imperial regalia wearing a crown and the loros, the heavy jeweled imperial stole (see, for example, the fourteenth-century fresco at Veroia [fig. 64]). Sometimes she carries a globe, a symbol of world dominion, as she does in the early-eleventh-century mosaics of Hosios Loukas, in the north lunette of the west wall of the narthex (fig. 65). She is often shown in the company of other female saints; at Hosios Loukas, for instance, she is flanked by Irene, also in imperial garb, and by Barbara. Catherine’s position in the center of the group corresponds to that occupied by the royal pair Constantine and Helen on the lunette to the south. This association with the first Christian emperor and his mother is to persist, suggesting that Catherine may have been venerated primarily, as they were, for being a royal protector of the faith and a model of right thinking and the Orthodox use of power.

What is interesting is that the events in Catherine’s life were almost never illustrated in Byzantium, except for one scene of her debating the philosophers in the Theodore Psalter of 1066 (fig. 66) and a narrative icon on Mount Sinai of the early thirteenth century (fig. 67). The famous Menologion of Basil II, a manuscript of about 1000 (fig. 68), has a very abbreviated version of her life that focuses entirely on the execution of Catherine and of the philosophers in the pyre. The portrait images attached to the much more extensive texts by Symeon Metaphrastes do not allude to any of the dramatic events and merely present her through her dress as a royal figure (fig. 69). There is nothing in any of these images, incidentally, that lays stress on the saint’s connection with Sinai.

So the kind of extended narrative found on the Sinai Vita icon (see fig. 67) is something quite unusual. Not without reason has it been associated with the Franciscan narrative panels that appear in the West at just about the same time. Neither the direction of the influence nor the precise function of this form of icon has been conclusively established. But as so many of the extant Byzantine examples have been found in the monastery of Sinai itself, and as there are so few elsewhere in Byzantium until considerably later, it is tempting to argue that the Vita icon first emerged on Sinai in the very period under discussion, the early thirteenth century. Saint Catherine came into new prominence at the monastery then, and Symeon rewrote its typikon, adding her special celebration.

Fig. 68. The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine, from the Menologion of Basil II. Byzantine (Constantinople), ca. 1000. Tempera and gold on vellum. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City (Vat. Gr. 1613, p. 207)
In addition, the Vita icon’s highly legible presentation of Catherine’s inexorable march to martyrdom and her ultimate transfiguration was possibly a response to the influx of Christian pilgrims of various languages and denominations converging on Sinai in this newly configured Mediterranean world.²⁹

The story of Saint Catherine in the West is a different matter entirely.³⁰ Contrary to the situation in Byzantium, her cult was early on associated with actual relics in France and elsewhere; the monastery at Sinai was assumed to be her place of burial; she was consistently depicted with attributes referring to her narrative; and scenes from her life were frequently illustrated, as in a famous panel in Pisa (fig. 70).³¹

Until fairly recently, the very first relics of Saint Catherine in western Europe were thought to have been brought by a monk from Sinai who arrived in Normandy in the early eleventh century to collect what seem to have been annual contributions to the monastery made by the dukes of Normandy. This monk, another Symeon, ended up in Trier, never returning to Sinai but settling instead into the gloomy but highly visible Porta Nigra, the Roman city-gate of Trier. There he lived as a hermit until his death in 1035. He was very quickly declared a saint; the very Eastern-looking cap and early-eleventh-century Greek prophetologion manuscript thought to have belonged to him are kept as relics in the cathedral treasury today.³²

The problem is that this Symeon, though he did come from Sinai, did not, it turns out, bring any relics of Saint Catherine with him to Normandy, and there is not a word about Catherine in the text of his life. It was a Norman church in Rouen that was to make the claim, nearer the middle of the eleventh century, that the bones in their possession had come directly from Sinai with the illustrious Symeon of Trier.³³ So it was that the relic cult of Saint Catherine in the West got its start at Rouen. It was to spread widely, from Normandy to England as early as the eleventh century, and to Germany and eastern Europe as well as Italy.³⁴ The written narratives, and very often the painted ones as well, included the story of Catherine’s body being taken to Sinai, with reference to the monastery itself. A fifteenth-century manuscript, for example, combines the lowering

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Fig. 69. Saint Catherine in Imperial Dress with Martyr’s Cross, from a manuscript of the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes. Byzantine, 11th century. Pigment and gold on vellum. Lavra Monastery, Mount Athos (Ms. Δ 71, fol. 169r)
of her body onto the mountain peak with an image of pilgrimage to the monastery (fig. 71).  

The veneration of Catherine's beauty and intellect led to some enchanting portraits of the saint (fig. 72), and her ability to sway even the cleverest philosophers of Egypt earned her particular favor with the Dominican Order, devoted as it was not only to preaching but to intellectual endeavor. She is depicted with the palm of martyrdom (in the East the small cross she carries indicates the same thing) and sometimes also with a scepter. Her clothes are exquisite, even royal, but not imperial in the Byzantine sense. The wheel was first introduced as an attribute
Fig. 71. Pol, Jean, and Herman de Limbourg. The Body of Saint Catherine Carried to Mount Sinai, from *The Belles Heures* of Jean, duc de Berry. French (Paris or Bourges), 1405–1408/9. Tempera, ink, and gold leaf on vellum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 1954 (54.1.1).

apparently in the thirteenth century, even though it was not the actual instrument of her death. Furthermore, a whole new episode—the story of her conversion—is added to the narrative of her life. As a young girl, Catherine visits a hermit and is greatly moved by an icon he has of the Virgin and Child. That night the Child from the icon appears to her, offering marriage if she will only be baptized. Catherine returns to the hermit, is baptized, and then is wed to Christ, who presents her with a ring. Lorenzo Veneziano (active 1356–72) painted this wedding scene on a panel of 1360 in the Accademia in Venice (fig. 73). 16

In Byzantium, then, Catherine was a revered, if somewhat remote saint, but her

Fig. 72. Paolo Veneziano (active 1333–58) and Giovannino di Paolo Veneziano (active 1345–58). Saint Catherine, detail of Coronation of the Virgin Altarpiece, from the Church of San Domenico, San Severino, Italian, ca. 1333–58. Tempera and gold on wood. Pinacoteca Comunale, San Severino Marche.
relics and their location were not a matter of great concern. She is presented as a martyr to be sure, as she holds a little cross, but above all as an imperial defender of Christianity and by extension of Orthodoxy. In the West, by contrast, she had become an enormously popular saint, whose relics were proliferating throughout Europe and, in some cases, as at Rouen, even exuding miracle-working oil. It is no surprise, therefore, that more and more Western pilgrims should wish to travel to Sinai in search of her body.

At Sinai itself, nothing is recorded concerning Catherine until the early thirteenth century, but according to local tradition, a hermit, seeing a strange light at the top of
the highest peak in the Sinai range, had gone up the mountain and come upon the saint’s remains at the spot where she had been laid by the angels. Learning of his discovery, the monks of the monastery ascended the mountain themselves in solemn procession and carried her body down into their church. When he came to Sinai in 1217, Thietmar was told this translation of her relics had happened three centuries earlier, but all we know for sure is that they were in the church by 1214, when Abbot Symeon rewrote the typikon, perhaps in part to accommodate this new focus of veneration. Pilgrims for centuries labored up the 7,900-foot mountain to visit the place in the rock that held the impression of her body, although most were satisfied to admire the relics in the basilica.

The arrival of Catherine’s remains must have changed life in the monastery, which had hitherto commemorated mainly holy places, not relics. And these relics, of which the monks were now custodians, were those of a saint known to Christians around the world. While Catherine had previously been celebrated only once a year at the monastery, on her feast day, the monks were now displaying the relics, performing offices at the tomb, and distributing phials of oil on a regular basis whenever a high-ranking prelate arrived. Popes granted indulgences for visits to her tomb (one received a year for going), pilgrimage increased, and Catherine eventually joined the two other main figures of Sinai, the Virgin and Moses, in depictions of its sacred landscape. The Latins continued to give gifts, introducing into the monastery their own view of Catherine, as, for example, in a charming panel commissioned in 1387 by a Catalan consul living in Damascus (fig. 74). This image is quintessentially Latin, stressing the saint’s beauty and grace, her noble birth (the precious garments), her trials (the wheel), her ultimate martyrdom (the palm). Only her wisdom is a bit short-changed. We must remember that in this period the Latins had their own chapel at Sinai dedicated to Saint Catherine, but that they were still free to hold services in the

Fig. 74. Martin de Vilanova. Saint Catherine. Catalan, 1387. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
the atmosphere in the monastery on Sinai itself began to change. While in the fourteenth century Latin visitors, many of them high-court officials and representatives of European kings, were welcomed there, in the fifteenth they were far less well received. Assigned their own liturgical space, they were no longer allowed to say mass at any of the Greek altars, including that of the Chapel of the Burning Bush. Felix Fabri, a priest from Ulm who visited Sinai in the 1480s, insisted on taking the circuitous route through parts of the basilica, column by column, which enabled him to acquire the full set of indulgences. But he was angry and frustrated that the monks kept him so at bay: he clearly imagined the monastery still just as much his as anyone’s. It is in this period that the first surviving Greek documents begin to appear in the monastery.

Sometime in the sixteenth century, and surely by the early seventeenth, a new image was developed for Catherine, one that was adopted with enthusiasm by many of the well-known artists working for Greek and Latin patrons on Crete. The earliest surviving version, today on the iconostasis of the Sinai basilica, is dated 1612 and signed by the painter Jeremias Palladas, a monk from Sinai who lived, as did so many artists in this period, on Crete (fig. 76). It is a complex image that expands upon the usual attributes of the saint in the West, the wheel and the palm of martyrdom. Catherine wears a Venetian silk cloak lined with ermine plus the obligatory Byzantine lornos over a gold-embroidered tunic. The cloak is decorated with double-headed eagles, a nostalgic evocation, a century and a half after the fall of Constantinople, of Byzantium’s grand imperial past. The saint embraces, so to speak, the wheel, but also holds a crucifix in the same hand, a detail not at all Byzantine. Catherine is surrounded by images of learning: the globe she once held in Byzantium has become a scientific instrument (an astrolabe or globe of the heavens); there is a compass; codices are spread around her on the floor; and the sides of her throne and of the lectern

Fig. 75. Saint Catherine. Fresco from Church of Saint Antony, Palaiochora, Kythera, Greece. Byzantine, 15th century. Byzantine Collection, Livadi, Kythera

Basilica itself. Traces of this gentle, gracious Catherine begin to be found in places where Greeks and Latins lived in proximity: still painted in the Byzantine style and in imperial dress, she nevertheless may carry a discreet palm, a book, or even her wheel (fig. 75).

Although Sinai’s prestigious metochion, or dependency, on Crete may have attracted donations and burials even from Venetian Cretans in the fourteenth century, after the Council of Florence in 1438/39 and the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453,
are painted with Sibyls and other figures of ancient prophecy and learning in grisaille. The book on the lectern, larger than the others and given pride of place, is presumably a Gospel Book. In the background are several references to Sinai: to the left, Moses removing his sandals at the Burning Bush and ascending the mountain to receive the tablets of the law; to the right, angels lowering Catherine’s body onto the mountain peak. This icon was very clearly meant for Sinai. In some early versions, Catherine’s words come streaming down toward the crucifix, as, for example, in a tiny icon of 1627 by Emmanuel Lampardos in the Benaki Museum (fig. 77). The saint expresses her desire to die with Christ, whom she addresses as her bridegroom. The story of her conversion and mystical marriage to Christ had by this time entered the artistic tradition, and it would eventually be included in her Greek biography. How are we to interpret this new image of Catherine? Is the message that she is rejecting ancient literature and science in favor of Christ, as has been proposed? I am not so sure and suggest we should look for a moment at the context in which this late image of the saint was produced.
Around the middle of the sixteenth century, a school was established in the Sinai metochion on Crete. What exactly constituted the curriculum has not been determined, but it does appear that both philosophy and theology were taught there. One personality associated with the school for some years in the second half of the sixteenth century—and representative of its remarkable achievements—was Maximos Margounios, who has been characterized as one of the great humanist theologians of the Orthodox church. Margounios's concern was to find ways at last to reconcile the two churches, and he composed a treatise on the Procession of the Holy Spirit that attempted to identify ways of bridging the division over this issue, which had lasted from the eleventh century. He rewrote a set of lives of the saints, compiled a collection of sacred poems, and at his death was involved in a project to edit all the works of John Chrysostom, in conjunction with an English theologian. Margounios also owned works of classical literature, both Greek and Latin, including an early-fourteenth-century Greek manuscript containing the works of Euripides, Aristotle, Pindar, Theocritus, and other ancient authors, which he gave to the

Fig. 77. Emmanuel Lampardos (active 1587–1647). Icon of Saint Catherine. Cretan, 1627. Tempera on wood. Benaki Museum, Athens
Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos. Two years before his death, that is, in 1600, he donated to Iveron all his Latin printed books; he had more than a hundred volumes. His library included Euclid and Pliny, Virgil, Seneca and Catullus, Latin translations of the Greek Fathers, and the works of a number of medieval theologians. Margounios died in Venice in 1602, but in his will he donated all his remaining books and manuscripts to the monastery of Saint Catherine in Candia, that is, to the metochion of Sinai in Herakleion, to benefit the members of the school in their studies.

The new icon type of Saint Catherine fits well into the intellectual context represented by Margounios, who was educated in the Greek and Latin classics, deeply involved in theology, multilingual, and able to move with ease between East and West. In the image, which itself smoothly blends Eastern and Western visual languages, Catherine is honored not primarily for her martyrdom (despite the palm and the wheel) but for her ability to reconcile her learning with her devotion to Christ. Catherine here does not reject these implements of learning, for there were certainly visual means available to an artist had he wanted to show that. Rather she transcribes them, placing the book of the Gospels on her lectern and fixing her gaze upon Christ. Conversant in ancient literature and fluent in languages, this Early Christian saint of the fourth century did not disparage or abandon her learning in favor of Christianity; instead, she found in it elements of her faith and made good use of its devices to counter the arguments of the pagans. Now that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in the fourth, the place of classical learning and humanism in Christian theology was again an issue in need of resolution, the story of Catherine became once again supremely relevant.

The icon reveals Sinai's high respect for learning in these final years before the fall of Crete to the Ottomans in 1669 and its recognition of the value of ancient philosophy and science in the pursuit of the Christian faith. This respect for learning and science is in evidence today as well, with the extraordinary work being done at Sinai for the preservation of its treasures and the willingness of its brotherhood, by lending to the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, to share them with the world.

Twice, once around the year 1200 and once around the year 1600, a new kind of image was forged at the monastery of Sinai in response to current circumstances. In the early thirteenth century we have Catherine's road to martyrdom and her ultimate transfiguration recounted step-by-step on the Vita icon for the benefit of the faithful visiting her tomb (see fig. 67), and in the seventeenth, the image of Catherine as Christian humanist (see figs. 76, 77). And the story is surely not over. The issues raised in her life will continue to resonate, and, as it always has, her image will surely continue to respond.


1. The manuscript, still on Mount Sinai, bears the call number 1097.
properties on Crete, including those owned by the monastery before the arrival of the Venetians ("quos Graecorum tempore habebatis"). The Greek versions of a number of Venetian documents relating to Sinai have been preserved in a manuscript, Sinai 2246, which will be edited by Chryssa Maltezou. On Sinai-Venetian relations, see Borsari, *Il dominio veneziano a Creta*, esp. pp. 116–21; Gjorgjio Fedalto, *La chiesa latina in Oriente*, vol. 1 (Verona, 1973), pp. 320–28.


15. The slim evidence has been collected by Ámamort, *Syntomos historia*, pp. 42–46. The earliest Greek
archival documents found on the monastery date from the fifteenth century: Sinait, Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, p. 360.


I have not been able to consult the article on Catherine texts by G. Metallinos in Panegyrikos tomos epi τε 1400 αmphieitôrâi τοι Hl. monês tou Sina (Athens, 1970), pp. 15–25. In the manuscript Paris, B.N. gr. 1590, dated 1063, Catherine is said to have had a Greek and Latin education comprising “Homer and Virgil the great poet of the Romans, Asklepios and Galen and Hippocrates the doctors, Aristotle and Plato, Philistinos and Eusebios the philosopher, Iambre and the magoi, Dionysios and Sibyll and all the rhetoric to be found in the world.” Hippane Delehaye, Propylaeum ad Acta sanctorum Novemberis: Synaxarium Eclesiæ Constantinopolitanae (Brussels, 1902), pp. 253–54 II, 35–45.


For Western images, see the Bibliotheca sanctorum, 13 vols. (Rome, 1961–70), vol. 3, II, 55–78, and the series of volumes by George Kafal, Iconography of the Saints in Central and South Italian Painting (Florence, 1969); Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting (Florence, 1952); Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of Northeast Italy (Florence, 1978); and Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of Northwest Italy (Florence, 1985), s.v. Catherine of Alexandria. For the fresco of Catherine from the Mount Penteli caves (now in the Ephorate in Athens), see Doula Mourni, “Hoi byzantinês toichographês tôn parekklesiôn tôs Spēlias tôs Penteles,” Delton tòs Christianikón Archaeologikó̂t Hetairias 7 (1973–74), pp. 99, pls. 28–29; Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art, exh. cat., Old University, Athens (Athens, 1985), no. 32; Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium,” DOP 52 (1998), pp. 93, fig. 5.

21. Nano Chatzidakis, Byzantine Mosaics (Athens, 1994), fig. 73. She holds a globe in a fresco in the Church of Saint John Chrysostom at Geraki (early fourteenth century): N. K. Moutsopoulos and G. Demetrikalles, Geraki: Hoi ekklesthes tou okismou (Thessaloniki, 1981), fig. 29, pl. 20; Gerstel, “Painted Sources for Female Piety,” p. 94, fig. 6.

22. Irene was thought to have been the daughter of the emperor Licinius, but may have been conflated over time with the Iconophile Empress Irene (r. 797–802). Catherine is also frequently paired with Saint Marina on Sinai icons: Kurt Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” DOP 20 (1966), pp. 73, fig. 30, reprinted in his Studies in the Arts at Sinai (Princeton, N. J., 1982), pp. 325–38; Galavaris, “Hagia Aikaterina,” pp. 4–5, 8, figs. 2, 9; Georgios and Maria Sotériou, Eikones tês Môntes Sina, 2 vols. (Athens, 1956–58), no. 50; Jaroslav Folda, “The Saint Marina Icon: Maniêna Cypria, Lingua Franca, or Crusader Art?” in Four Icons in the Menil Collection, ed. Bertrand Davelas (Houston, 1992), pp. 128–29 nn. 29, 36; p. 115, figs. 110–11.

23. Chatzidakis, Byzantine Mosaics, fig. 74.

24. Take, for example, the fine dipthy of the Virgin and Saint Prokopios from Mount Sinai; Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557), ed. Helen C. Evans, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2004), pp. 355–36, no. 214. On the wing that bears the image of the Virgin are depicted saints of various kinds associated with Sinai. At the top is the Virgin in the Burning Bush, a familiar Sinai theme, and at the bottom Catherine stands between Constantine and Helen, forcing each to hold a cross, a most unusual situation (they usually hold one jointly). The Virgin at the top is flanked by her parents, Joachim and Anna, perhaps implying by extension that Catherine should rank as the daughter of Constantine. And in some Greek texts Catherine is
said to be the daughter of a certain Kosmas (e.g., Delehaye, Synaxarium, p. 253), a figure who in Western literature was transformed into a half brother of Constantine: Katherine J. Lewis, The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 45–46. The imperial couple were honored on Sinai: Helen was thought to have endowed the monastery with a tower, Rabino, Le monastère de Sainte-Catherine, p. 1, and the bema altar was dedicated to them, according to Felix Fabri in 1484, The Wanderings of Felix Fabri, trans. Aubrey Stewart, Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 10 (London, 1893–97), vol. 2, part 2, p. 610. Constantine and Helen were of course primarily venerated for their role in the finding and translation of the relics of the True Cross.


26. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana gr. 1613, p. 207; Il Menologio di Basilio II. Cod. Vaticano grco 1613 (Turin, 1957), p. 207. For the text, see PG 117:180. In this text, the emperor is Maximian, not Maxentius. A face similar in style in the Menologion of Basil II is being prepared under the auspices of the Vatican Library.

27. Athos, Lavra Δ 71, fol. 169r; Copenhagen, Det kongelige Bibliothek, Gamle Kongelige Sammlung fol. 167r, fol. 78v; Athos, Dochariou 5, fol. 116v. See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion (Chicago and London, 1990), pp. 21, 38, 90, 102, fitches 1A12, 1F1, 2G7, 3C6.


29. Ševčenko, “Vita Icon.” This article includes a list of surviving Byzantine Vita icons (n. 3), to which should be added a thirteenth-century Cypriot Vita icon of Saint Philip in Arso: Kostas Kerasimos and Kyrillos Papaiokeim, Ho Hagios Philippos: Hē megálē eikona tou hagion eis to Arso (13ον aiōnā) (Larnaka, 1997).

30. On Saint Catherine in the West, see the important collection of essays in Jacqueline Jenkins and Kathrine J. Lewis, eds., St. Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe (Turnhout, 2003), and Lewis, Cult of St. Katherine. See also Ševčenko, “St. Catherine,” p. 132 n. 14.

31. Byzantium: Faith and Power, pp. 485–87, no. 296. For the iconography of Saint Catherine in the West, see note 20 above.

32. On Symeon, see the fundamental study by Tuomas Heikillä, Vita S. Symeonis Trierensis: Ein hochmittelalterlicher Heiligenkult im Kontext (Helsinki, 2002). On the manuscript (Trier, Domschatz 72), see Syse G. Engberg, “Trier and Sinai: Saint Symeon’s Book,” Scriptorium 59 (2005), pp. 122–46. I am very grateful to Dr. Engberg for joining me in Trier to look at the manuscript and to Dr. Karl Ronig for kindly making it available to us. On the Porta Nigra, see Erich Gose, ed., Die Porta Nigra in Trier (Berlin, 1969), esp. pp. 107–10, 130–35.


36. On the conversion tale, see William MacBain, “St. Catherine’s Mystic Marriage: The Genesis of a Hagiographic Cycle de Sainte–Catherine,” Romanic Languages Annual 2 (1990), pp. 135–40; Lewis, Cult of St. Catherine, pp. 107–10; Baltogiannes, “Eikonai,” pp. 77–83. For a selection of Italian representations of the scene, see Kaftal, Tuscian Painting, figs. 244, 248; Central and South Italian Painting, fig. 283; Northeast Italy, fig. 228; Northwest Italy, fig. 258. Christ is usually shown giving Catherine the ring while seated in his mother’s arms, but sometimes he is a grown man instead e.g., Kaftal, Tuscian Painting, fig. 247; Central and South Italian Painting, fig. 284; Northwest Italy, fig. 257. One of the mosaic icons in the Metropolitan exhibition (from the Weber collection) is identified by an inscription on the back as the very icon that was the instrument of Catherine’s conversion—an appropriate choice, as mosaic icons were indeed prized personal possessions in the fourteenth century, when the icon was made, if not exactly in the fourth: Byzantium: Faith and Power, pp. 217–18, no. 128.


38. The story is recounted at length in The Wanderings of Felix Fabri, pp. 604–6. There are variants in many Western sources.
39. Thietmar, Peregrinatio (see note 7 above), pp. 43–44.
40. Sister Joan Mary Braun, "St. Catherine's Monastery Church, Mount Sinai: Literary Sources from the Fourth through the Nineteenth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1973), pp. 24–45, 249.
41. Ševčenková, "St. Catherine," pp. 141–43. By the fifteenth century, the oil was coming not from the bones but from the lamps hanging near the tomb, into which bits of silk were dipped: The Wanderings of Felix Fabri, pp. 601–2.
43. Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, pp. 121–22, 200, fig. 73. It should be noted, however, that though the consul, Bernardo Maresa of Barcelona, and the painter, Martín de Vilanova, are both named in inscriptions on the panel, nothing states that the work was made expressly for Sinai.
46. The original dedication of the metochion, which was in Candia (modern Heraklion), is obscure, and it is therefore unclear whether the Venetian will referring to donations to and burials in a monastery of Saint Catherine in Candia were to this metochion at all. Sally McKee, ed., Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete, 1312–1420, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1998), passim; McKee, Uncommon Dominion, pp. 111–12, 121; Courcas, "The Orthodox Monastery of Mt. Sinai," p. 481; Molly Greene, A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean (Princeton, N.J., 2000), esp. pp. 174–91. Pope Honorius confirmed just one church in Candia in his bull of 1217, that of Saint Nicholas of Saint Barbara, along with three other churches on the island (Saint Savior, Saint George, and Saint Symeon), and one monastery, that of John Chrysostom: Tautu, Acta, p. 36 (see note 11 above). Except for the "obedientiam Sanctae Catharinae" in Acre, there is no mention of any Saint Catherine in the list of Sinai's possessions in this document. The doge's proclamation of 1212 mentions only Saint Savior (as a monastery), Saint Symeon (in the city of Candia), and undefined "metochi": Tafel and Thomas, Übersichten, vol. 2, p. 147. See also Z. N. Tsipras, "Ho Ioannes Plousiados kai he Sinaitikê ekklesia tou Christou Kephala sto Chandaka," Theaourismata 3 (1964), pp. 1–28, esp. p. 13. In the wills there are references to the "monasterio Sinaitorum" in Candia (no reference to Catherine), to the "monasterio" of Saint Catherine in Candia (no reference to Sinai), and to the "monialibus" of Saint Catherine in Candia (no reference to Sinai). It is not clear just how many institutions are involved here, and whether the Sinai metochion was actually dedicated to Saint Catherine in this period. The present metochion in Heraklion, indeed dedicated to Saint Catherine, was built only in 1555; the church now houses an icon gallery. See Georgopoulou, Venice's Mediterranean Colonies, pp. 176–77, fig. 17.

The problem of Sinai's Cretan dependencies has been addressed by Diana Newall, "Art, Artist, Patron, Community in Venetian Crete (1200–1450)" (Ph.D. diss., Courtauld Institute, University of London, 2006), esp. pp. 45–51. Newall argues, probably correctly, that the monastery of Saint Catherine in Candia mentioned in these wills was a Benedictine foundation. The notion of generous Venetian patronage of the Sinai metochion may therefore need to be treated with caution. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Newall for sharing her results with me.
47. The Wanderings of Felix Fabri, pp. 547, 549, 599, 612, 624 (Latin chapel), 608, 616 (no mass), 548, 609, 623 (indulgences), 600–604 (tomb). He speaks ruefully of the days when Sinai was under the pope (e.g., p. 623).
48. Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of St. Catherine, p. 160. I have not been able to consult S. D. Kontogiannies, To archeion tòs hères monís Sinai (Athens, 1982).
49. Evans, Saint Catherine's Monastery, pl. pp. 52–53; Manoles Chatzidakis, Ελληνικά ζωγραφικά μετά την Χαλκός (1450–1830), 2 vols. (Athens, 1987–97), vol. 2, pp. 267–71; Weitzmann, "Loa Sancta," p. 54, fig. 52. Other similar versions, some of them very small-scale, can be found in Heraklion (by Palladas) (early
seventeenth century): Manoles Bormpoudakis,
50. See previous note; other examples with her words include the icon by Palladas in Herakleion and the unidentified icon in Herakleion. Catherine’s words are these: Σε, γνωρίσα μου, παθώ και σε δίνω τὰ θανάτικα και συναρπασματα και ἐνθάδην σου (I yearn for you, my bridegroom, and seeking Thee I struggle, and by your baptism I am crucified and buried with you).
52. Acheimastou-Potamianou, Icons of the Byzantine Museum of Athens, no. 82; Balogiannes in Eikones tis Krétikes technês, no. 215.
57. A list of his books in the Iviron Monastery was compiled by Giaourkopoulos, Byzantine East and Latin West, pp. 183–90.
58. Ibid., pp. 132, 177–78.
Dandolo’s Dreams:  
Venetian State Art and Byzantium

One of the last great spectacles of Byzantine art in a Western context took place in Venice under Doge Andrea Dandolo, who reigned from 1343 through 1354. The period was, in the words of Frederic Lane, “the most disastrous decade Venetians had ever known, a decade ravaged by the plague as well as by war”—a reference to the third Genoese war, which also adversely affected Byzantium.¹

An ambitious man, Dandolo wanted to restore the position of the doge to its former power in relation to the nobility, but he proved a weak politician and died in his prime, at the worst possible moment in the conflict with Genoa. He is best remembered as the only doge to compile an extensive chronicle of his city and state, a chronicle that conjures up the glory of days past.² The three artworks on which this essay focuses—the new Pala d’Oro on the high altar of San Marco (fig. 78), the mosaics in the baptistery of the same church, and Paolo Veneziano’s Pala Feriale (fig. 79)—were all commissioned by Dandolo himself. The first two represent his effort to establish the doge’s presence in the ducal capella, which had come under his control as early as 1328. In that year, at the age of twenty-two, Dandolo had been elected one of the two procurators in charge of San Marco. The most conspicuous feature of these two commissions is their attempt to employ an idiom borrowed from contemporary Byzantine models, one no longer dependent on the older Byzantine styles ubiquitous in the rest of the basilica.

This observation prompts one to look farther afield than Venice, to fourteenth-century Byzantium as a whole. Even more than in Venice, the situation there was dire. When Dandolo became doge, Byzantium was suffering through a civil war fueled by a conflict between two emperors, only one of whom, the young John V Palaiologos (r. 1341–91)—or rather his mother, the former princess Anna of Savoy—was in command of the capital. The other emperor, the tragic figure John VI Kantakouzenos, who was coincidentally also the author of a chronicle, entered Constantinople only in 1347 and was forced to abdicate in 1354, the same year Dandolo died in Venice.

Donald M. Nicol’s outstanding biography of Kantakouzenos states that, even before his reign, the Byzantine Empire had reached the “status of a second rate power. The mercantile republics of Genoa and Venice were the beneficiaries and fought their sea battles in Byzantine waters while the emperor watched.”³ At most, Venice had adopted the role of “protector” of Romania Alta, the Venetians’ term for the northern part of the reduced empire. The civil war, to quote Nicol, “led to almost total destruction, reducing the great empire of the Romans to a feeble shadow of its former self.”⁴

One example may be sufficient to characterize this state of affairs. While Dandolo still carried the title of “lord of a quarter part and a half of the Empire of the Romans,” which the doges adopted after the disastrous conquest of Constantinople in 1204, the Byzantine empress herself was forced to pawn the crown jewels in Venice for a loan of thirty thousand ducats. The contract was concluded in August 1343, the first year of Dandolo’s reign. The jewels
Fig. 78. The Pala d’Oro (Golden Altarpiece), 1106–1345. Gold and enamel. High altar, Basilica di San Marco, Venice
arrived in Venice and remained there, as indicated in Tommaso Bertelè’s excellent study, which lists thirty-six documents attesting to the loan. Although it became due after three years, the loan was never repaid. The Venetian merchants residing in the precincts of Constantinople were rich enough, however, to advance this enormous sum before the Byzantine state could send it overseas at the risk of the Venetian lenders.

These circumstances must be kept in mind in order to ask the relevant questions. What did Byzantium mean in Dandolo’s days? And why did Dandolo favor the appropriation of contemporary Byzantine models for his artistic commissions, even though he had no reason to emulate them and had enough older models at hand for his artists? These questions become even more pressing in light of the overwhelming presence in Venice of Gothic, or French, art, especially architecture and sculpture. In addition, the latest trends in Tuscan painting, particularly the Florentine and Sienese, were deeply rooted in Dandolo’s Venice. One generation earlier, Giotto had already created his first masterpiece in neighboring Padua. His work obviously influenced that of Paolo Veneziano (d. before 1362), the first Venetian artist known by name, who regularly made use of Byzantine sources, perhaps most notably in his commission for San Marco’s high altar, the so-called Pala Ferial. Thus, one major factor characterizing the adoption of contemporary Byzantine art in Venice was that Byzantine models were immediately integrated into, and interpolated by, current Western trecento standards. That these models remained entirely in the hands of local artists led to the creation of hybrid forms, as they would be called today. The second major factor was that this hybridity was found mainly in the art of the state, as commissioned by Dandolo, and it was in much less demand for private commissions and for religious art in general, which was concentrated in...
the monasteries and favored Gothic or Giottesque idioms.7

The explanation for this phenomenon, then, must be found in Venice, and more specifically in the immediate circle of the doge, a personage who was extremely eager to recover the political and cultural prominence of the Venetian state. Art historical reasoning, which considers issues such as workshop practices and their dissemination, cannot adequately explain this deliberate embrace of Byzantine style without aiming to identify that choice as Byzantine art.

Otto Demus, who excluded the mosaics in Dandolo’s baptistry from his magnum opus on San Marco because they had “no connection with the main body of the mosaics”8 (which is true), was at pains, however, to describe in conventional terminology the hybrid nature of the baptistry’s marble icons. Demus speaks in an earlier book of “a Byzantinizing Gothic or Gothic Byzantinism” that represented “the last attempt to force a synthesis of two antithetic movements.”9 Were they really antithetic, though, and were they two equal movements? The icons on the altar wall of the baptistry, in their semantic singularity, remain a puzzle to be solved. Did contemporaries identify the new official style as a Byzantine style at all? Or, rather, did they recognize in it a national idiom more closely linked to San Marco than to Byzantium? Did they regard it as an idiom that distinguished Venice from her Italian neighbors as the legitimate heir of Byzantium and that, in its quasi-bilingual character, marked the city as an overseas power whose Greek tradition privileged it against the rival republic of Genoa?

The phenomenon is one that Fritz Saxl, in his study “Petrarch in Venice” (1935), certainly misunderstood when he described this style “as an expression of early humanist spirit.”10

In the recent catalogue of an exhibition on Paolo Veneziano, I examined the contemporary Byzantine character of Dandolo’s state commissions.11 Let me briefly summarize my findings here. Consider, for example, the Pala d’Oro, whose original layout was commissioned in Constantinople by Doge Ordelaffo Falier in 1105, according to Dandolo’s new dedicatory inscription. The doge Pietro Ziano “restored” (renovata) the panel in 1209. Dandolo proudly included his own restoration efforts, carried out with the assistance of the two procurators of San Marco, in the inscription’s history of the three doges involved in this work. His project involved the elevation of the Pala above the high altar, where it resembled an altarpiece of the new style and yet differed profoundly from such Italian parallels (see fig. 78). In 1343, only two months after his election, Dandolo had already ordered that the sum of four hundred pounds of piccoli be allocated for the precious framing that made the old panel look new, as the inscription states. The Pala Feriale (see fig. 79), the painted cover completed in 1345 in Paolo Veneziano’s workshop, displays the same ambiguity that marked Dandolo’s Pala d’Oro project. In fact, it so smoothly integrates an Italian altarpiece, or polyptych, with a Greek iconostasis that the hybrid character seems to have been its true aim.12

Paolo, together with his sons Luca and Giovanni, signed the completed work below two of the narrative panels depicting the life of Saint Mark. He installed the Pala Feriale, according to the inscription, on April 22, 1345, three days before the church celebrated the feast of its patron saint. The function of the altarpiece was conditioned by its form. It was not designed as a triptych, which would have permitted its golden surface to be opened and closed. Rather, the design selected by Paolo clearly reveals the dichotomy of the altarpiece’s function and appearance: the two alternative views of the altarpiece made a special installation and a complicated mechanism necessary.

The upper frieze with seven icons of single holy figures and the lower register with an equal number of scenes from the life of Saint Mark differ profoundly in their pictorial grammar. Along with the newest
Tuscan developments in composition, the narrative sequences exhibit a topographical realism that is almost premature for the period. The upper icon frieze, however, represents a unique blending of Byzantine aesthetics and theories of light, as applied to icons, with a contemporary Italian style for rendering the human body. The center of the altarpiece replaces the traditional protagonist of the Crucifixion icon with an image of Christ the Man of Sorrows, flanked by the Virgin and Saint John. That the evangelist appears as an older man, which was customary in Byzantine icon friezes, is an early indication of Dandolo’s desire to be buried near the altar of that saint in San Marco. In its dark flesh tone, bowing attitude, and gestures, the icon of Saint John successfully appropriates a contemporary Eastern prototype.

The same dualism of styles (both local and Byzantine) continues on a larger scale in the mosaic decoration of two adjacent spaces in San Marco decorated under Dandolo’s aegis. The chapel of Saint Isidore, the Greek military saint whom the doge solemnly transferred to a site newly designated as a funeral chapel, was completed only after Dandolo’s early death, while the baptistery’s mosaics were carried out during his short reign. Together these two sites comprise the largest body of mosaics executed after the interior of San Marco was completed. Stylistically, both chapel programs combine aspects of the pre-existing Byzantine-inspired mosaics at San Marco and the contemporary Byzantine style, which was also found in Veneziano’s altarpiece. The baptistery program is surprising in the artists’ paradoxical attempt to deconstruct
Fig. 81. Two Prophets. Venetian workshop, ca. 1345. Mosaic, Basilica di San Marco, Venice

Fig. 82. Prophet. Byzantine, 14th century. Mosaic, Church of the Holy Apostles, Thessalonike
a Byzantine cupola program and spread it over a barrel vault, wall lunette, and transverse arch. These local artists, trained in another manner, were obviously hesitant to adopt the style of their Greek models, which does not seem to have been their own choice.

In the barrel vault of the baptistery, the Ancient of Days, derived from a Byzantine model and enclosed within a medallion, spreads golden rays to the prophets who announced the Incarnation of Christ; instead of surrounding the central bust, the prophets are clumsily arranged across the vault in half-figures (fig. 80). They continue on the adjacent wall lunette with a pair of full figures (fig. 81) that are equally derived from Byzantine models, such as the prophets in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Thessalonike (fig. 82), but that also resemble the prophets in the vault in their lack of any logical or spatial connection with the central figure. And there are finally the evangelists, who once occupied the spandrels in a Byzantine cupola, but are organized here along a vertical axis on the transverse arch supporting the cupola in the next bay (fig. 83). It may well be that these figures are copied from a contemporary Byzantine model, such as Manuscript Dd. 9.69 in the University Library, Cambridge (fig. 84).

The large program of the baptistery mosaics is hybrid and surprising in every possible aspect. There are two cupola mosaics, which do not follow Byzantine programs, as might have been expected. The one represents the eternal Christ amid the hierarchies of the angels, while the other depicts Christ in command of the Mission of the Twelve Apostles. The neat juxtaposition of the heavenly and the earthly church (ecclesia caelestis and ecclesia militans), with its subtle Venetian overtones, must be seen with reference to the baptismal font, where new Christians are received into the church. The cupola spandrels with the four Greek and the four Latin Church Fathers, deliberately balanced between East and West, almost belies the fact that the two churches were no longer in union. The epic of the Life of the Baptist has an almost cinematic quality. Anecdotal renderings of contemporary festivities, featuring the latest fashions, alternate with romantic views of the desert life of an oriental saint, and in both instances backdrops from recent Byzantine art serve as stage settings.

Nothing is more Byzantine than the mosaic composition depicting the Baptism of Christ, which includes a strangely monocular profile of Saint John and an ultimately Hellenistic conception of the river landscape (fig. 85). Yet, at the same time, nothing is less Byzantine than the crude linear rendering of space or the decorative pattern used for the river. Art historians understandably could not identify the artists in charge, who were expressing themselves in a quasi-foreign language or in quotation. Among the models used for the baptistery mosaics, manuscript illuminations figured indiscriminately beside compositions for wall decoration, as is plainly evident from the Four Evangelists (see fig. 83), who do not fully inhabit the spandrels of a cupola but instead cover flat surfaces, as they would on the pages of a book.

Finally, there is among Dandolo’s art commissions the Madrid manuscript of Guido de Columnis’s Historia destructionis Troiae (History of the Destruction of Troy), which Hugo Buchthal rightly attributed to a scriptorium under Dandolo’s control. The illuminations, as Buchthal writes, have a “strong Byzantine bias” and are in “close touch with the living Byzantine tradition” despite the different source of the iconography and despite the Latin text, which “glorified the Trojans at the expense of the Greeks” and renewed the “tribal legend” of the foundation of Rome.13

What did Dandolo think of the story of Troy? It is most significant that Petrarch, in a letter directed to the doge (not mentioned by Buchthal), reminds him that “Trojan blood flows within you.” The letter also urges Dandolo to keep peace with Genoa and continues, “Be not convinced that Venice will be secure after Italy perishes.”14 Petrarch thus argues that Venetian patriotism should be given up in favor of Italian nationalism.
Fig. 83. Portraits of the Evangelists Mark and Luke. Venetian workshop, ca. 1345. Mosaic, Basilica di San Marco, Venice

Fig. 84. Portrait of the Evangelist Luke, from a Gospel Book. Byzantine, 14th century. Tempera and gold on vellum. Cambridge University Library, England (Ms. Dd. 9.69, fol. 139v)
Yet it was the same Petrarch who undermined the medieval dreams of Troy, taking the first steps toward humanism, when he asked the Byzantine dignitary Nikolaos Sygeros in 1348, again in Dandolo’s time, for a Greek manuscript of Homer, who had not been as yet translated into Latin. When Petrarch received the text of the *Iliad*, which he could not read, he effusively thanked Sygeros in a letter of 1354: “From Europe’s farthest corner you have sent me a gift” that represents “the very springs of Greek eloquence.”  

Returning to Paolo Veneziano and his work as Dandolo’s official panel painter, we encounter another possibly significant commission. After Paolo finished the *Pala Feriale*, he executed a lunette above the tomb of Francesco Dandolo in the Franciscan monastery beside the Frari Church. The former doge had arranged for the construction of the tomb, with its marble sculpture, a few days before his death on October 31, 1339. However, the panel, and not the expected mural, may have been completed only in the reign of the younger Dandolo. Paolo evolved a strikingly different pictorial design for this work, but not enough is known of his career to prove that this would indicate a new development or a change in taste. It is more likely that the result reflected a different aim,
for the private character of Franciscan piety is here beautifully matched by the intimate Gothic design. The brilliant colorism is, in the case of the powerful Christ Child, blended with the rounded body type invented by Giotto.

Another important commission sponsored by Dandolo was of a highly official nature. Paolo contracented in 1346 to paint the altarpiece for the chapel of Saint Nicholas, located in the ducale palace. Although the painting perished in a fire in 1483, Rodolfo Pallucchini has convincingly proposed that two panels from a life of the same saint, formerly in the Contini Bonacossi Collection and now in the Uffizi in Florence, belong to the lost altarpiece. These panels reveal yet another pictorial language developed in the same workshop. Unfortunately, the painting of Saint Nicholas is lost forever, and the narrative scenes do not compensate for this absence. Nevertheless, this commission clearly indicates that the full extent of Dandolo’s sponsorship by far surpasses the works that survive.

Dandolo certainly was impressed by Petrarch’s humanism, which was soon to grow roots even among the members of his own chancellery, but he was split between his roles as a politician and a man of letters. He did care enough for his friendship with Petrarch to engage in a correspondence with the poet over the pending war with Genoa. His own concerns were the fate of the republic and, linked to it, the status of the doge. Venice’s presence in the Mediterranean was justified, in Dandolo’s eyes, by the singularity of her tradition, in which Byzantium played a leading part. To uphold such claims required vanquishing Genoa, the mortal enemy that presented a threat from within. Dandolo was therefore furious when Petrarch urged him to keep peace with Genoa, writing of the “two bright lights of Italy which mother Nature had so strategically located” at the opposite ends of Italy’s shores. A few days before his sudden death on September 7, 1354, Dandolo replied in a letter, which never reached the poet, that he felt his Venetian patriotism threatened and did not want to sacrifice it to the Italian menace. The same sentiment dominates his chronicles, which celebrate the past glory of the city and plead for its restoration. The same spirit informs Dandolo’s artistic commissions: Byzantium in Venice means Venice’s unique history and also her claims to inherit Byzantium. The city’s war with Genoa served the same goals. And Dandolo, experienced as both lawyer and historian but less so as a military leader, Dandolo the expert on San Marco and its ducale history, surely felt the temptation to express his political aspirations as doge in his official art.

But the enemy was not only outside Venice. A group of some twenty noble Venetian families fettered the nearly powerless doge and threatened to take over the state. Dandolo’s chronicles aimed to solidify the position of the doges by emphasizing their glorious history. And his artistic commissions were meant to increase the visibility of the doge in San Marco, to introduce the “presence of a newly orchestrated ducale persona,” as Debra Pincus writes. The political situation in Venice during Dandolo’s time has been beautifully analyzed by Giorgio Cracco, who speaks of the silent “revolution” of the doge, who wanted to win over the people as his ally but was fighting an already lost battle. Dandolo’s successor, Marino Falier (r. 1354–55), completely misunderstood the political situation when he consented to an open revolt with the help of the citizenry. He was immediately caught and was decapitated a few months after his election.

Dandolo’s political strategy was twofold, the first expressed through the state activity of his chancellery, the second through his artistic program for San Marco. As Lane summarizes the case, the clerks in the ducale chancellery, notaries by training, represented “the top class of citizens by birth” and

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developed a sense of “class pride” in relation to the nobles, which was encouraged by the “grand chancellor, Benintendi dei Ravignani, twelve years younger (than the already young Dandolo).” Benintendi became a close friend of Petrarch, who in a letter of 1352 to the chancellor comments on the doge’s grand chronicle and praises Dandolo for “such a happy government that he was welcome to both nobility and people, a thing formerly unheard of.” This was an overly positive assessment, but one that Benintendi later endorsed, after his master’s death and after Falier’s failed conspiracy. In a letter of September 1355, he defended Dandolo against all suspicions, and as Lino Lazzarini has explained so well, he eagerly expressed his utmost loyalty. Another member of the chancellor was Raffain Careisini, who served as third in rank and eventually was elected Benintendi’s successor. When Careisini undertook to continue Dandolo’s chronicle, he ensured that the name of his beloved master appeared in the title. It is Careisini’s chronicle that speaks of Dandolo’s project “to decorate the baptismal chapel with a noble body of mosaics.”

Dandolo’s patronage at San Marco, the second major aspect of his political strategy, culminated in the project to establish the ducal tombs in the church, a strategy he had already put in place with respect to the tomb of Giovanni Soranzo (d. 1328) in the baptistery and that of his own predecessor, Bartolomeo Gradenigo (d. 1342), in the narthex. Dandolo’s plans for his own tomb were even more ambitious. The doge wanted to be buried in the very church interior, as he suggested to the procurators in his will, drawn up five days before his death. It was to be a “decent site worthy of the doge’s high office.” At first, he most likely considered a site in the transept of the church of Saint John the Evangelist; otherwise the choice of a scene of that apostle’s martyrdom on his sarcophagus (which must have been completed by then) would make little sense. If Dandolo’s will had been respected, he would have been the only doge interred in the church’s liturgical space, near the apostle’s tomb. His wishes were ignored, however, and the tomb was clumsily adapted to the southern wall of the baptistery, in the same baptistery space where Soranzo had already been buried (fig. 86). Of the novel Gothic type with gisant, Dandolo’s sarcophagus was to be the last ducal tomb at San Marco. Apparently, the Senate, alarmed by Falier’s conspiracy, forever excluded burial of the doges’ tombs in the church. There could have been no stronger rejection of Dandolo’s ideals than this repudiation of his program for San Marco. Benintendi ordered a funeral inscription for Dandolo’s tomb from Petrarch, but the text either came too late or was rejected when it arrived.

What does remind us of Dandolo’s presence at San Marco, besides the Pala d’Oro, is the large mosaic of the Crucifixion, situated at the apex of the decoration in the baptistery (figs. 87, 88). Unusual in every respect, it not only depicts a dedicatory image of the doge, the first and only one among San Marco’s mosaics, but is even more novel in adding two other portraits, which have not been definitively identified. The location of this mosaic, containing Dandolo’s portrait and close to his tomb, has led some to erroneously identify the baptistery as the doge’s funeral chapel, which it was never intended to be. The case, nevertheless, remains exceptional. Dandolo, who kneels at the foot of the crucified Christ, conforms to a pattern of devotional images that was current only in panel painting, in a more private setting, or was linked to a tomb, as in the case of Francesco Dandolo’s funeral portrait in the Frari Church. Indeed, it seems that young Dandolo commissioned a veiled or cryptoportrait long before, when the Pala Feriale (see fig. 79) was installed on the high altar in 1345. There, he impersonates an eleventh-century doge, accompanied by two dignitaries, and witnesses the miraculous discovery of Saint Mark’s relics. But the mosaic belongs to another genre and furthermore excludes
a narrative context. Its new message is highly official and at the same time quite personal: Dandolo appears at a site where he could not act privately, although he is engaged in personal prayer.

While the mosaic combines a state portrait with a private devotional image, its official character is strongly accentuated by the presence of the other dignitaries. Their identification with the two procurators of San Marco makes no sense, given their very different style of clothing and the absence of a cogent reason for their inclusion in a group image with the doge. More likely, these figures, whose presence is unparalleled in the iconographic tradition, were among Dandolo’s closest allies in the chancellery, with whom he acted in the common project of restoring the power of state and doge. Benintendi, his chancellor, has been proposed as one of the figures, perhaps the one who receives the protection of the state patron, Saint Mark, who points to him with his right hand. The other figure, if this hypothesis is accepted, should also belong to the same group of people. Caresini may be a candidate, for his chronicle is the only one to mention the decoration of the baptistery. The political message must have been clear: Dandolo is demonstrating his interaction with the common people.

Equally unusual as the political message of the altar wall is its pictorial composition. In sum, a central Late Byzantine Crucifixion icon with three figures is integrated within a polyptych with standing figures, a panel type common in contemporary Venetian practice. The city wall in the background, while borrowed from a Byzantine Crucifixion icon, is extended to the entire width of the arched surface. The hybrid nature of the resulting image is as striking as the novelty of the concept. One witnesses here one of the earliest perceptions that style could function through quotation. An icon in a mosaic, and a Greek idiom linked to a Western type of altarpiece: this intermedial structure addressed an audience that could enjoy such nuances.

Fig. 86. Tomb of Doge Andrea Dandolo (d. 1354). Venetian workshop, ca. 1350. Marble. South wall of baptistery, Basilica di San Marco, Venice
Byzantine art was identified as such only when it emerged in a foreign context. Paradoxical as it may seem, Late Byzantine art, based on imported models, favored a free stylistic choice in a Western context.

This sensibility, which accepted the coexistence of Greek and Western styles, must not be confused, however, with the traditional notion of the *maniera greca*, which had an altogether different meaning. This term was developed in Florentine literature on art to describe the “deplorable bad and old manner,” in Erwin Panofsky’s words, as contrasted with the good and “modern” manner of Early Renaissance art in Tuscany. A common notion by the time of Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Commentariori*, it was further developed by Giorgio Vasari in the *Lives of the Artists*. The “old” Greeks, distinguished from the “ancient” ones, were singled out as foreigners who had been beaten by the indigenous artists of “modern” times. The Greek borrowings in Venetian art, since they were intentional, could not have had such a derogatory connotation.

On the contrary, they seem to have corroborated the national and cultural singularity of the Venetian Republic, which was derived from its overseas reign and thus set it apart from most of the other Italian city-states. It is equally significant that the Western styles in Venetian art were deliberate borrowings from continental Italian art, above all from Florence and Siena. The people of Dandolo’s time were attentive to the differences between local powers and traditions. The Florentine Dante, in the *Divine Comedy*, singled out the Sienese as so vain (“gente si vana,” *Inferno* 29.122).
Fig. 88. The Baptistery, Basilica di San Marco, Venice
that they surpassed even the French in this respect. And, indeed, the Venetians seem to have emulated the Siene in their visual art and its emphasis on precious materials. In the same context, the poet clearly appreciated style as an element that allowed him to compare various literary "voices" and to speak of newness (novità) and otherness. It is entirely possible that the literary elite Dandolo attracted to his chancellery also enjoyed the semantic singularity of differing pictorial styles.


2. Pastorello, Andreas Dandul, Chronica, introduction.


20. Vittorio Lazzarini, Marino Faliero (Florence, 1953).

21. Lane, Venice, pp. 177ff.; Vincenzo Bellomo, "La vita e i tempi di Benistendi . . . ," Nuovo archivio veneto,


28. Ibid., pp. 105ff.

Art and Frontiers between Byzantium and the Caucasus

In May 1253 a Franciscan friar, William of Rubruck, set out from Constantinople on a two-year mission to the headquarters of the Mongol khan, Möngke, at Karakorum in Mongolia. Most of this journey was spent within the Mongol empire, but its start and finish took William across every political frontier in the fragmented ruins of the Byzantine world (fig. 89). On his way out, he traveled from the Latin empire of Constantinople across the Black Sea, passing the Greek empires of Nicaea and Trebizond. On his return, he journeyed by land through the divided kingdoms of Georgia, the principalities of Greater Armenia, northwestern Iran and Azerbaijan, the Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm, Cilician Armenia, and Lusignan Cyprus before ending his journey in the Crusader state of Tripoli in Syria. The report and memoir that he wrote of his journey for Louis IX of France paints a vivid picture of the mosaic of different political and ethnic factions that then constituted the regions of Anatolia and the Caucasus.¹

William of Rubruck’s journey also crossed a number of other frontiers. He traveled over the religious frontiers within Christianity (between the Latin, Orthodox, Monophysite, and Nestorian confessions), as well as those between Christianity and Islam; the farther reaches of his journey brought him into contact with the Eastern religions of the Mongol Shamans and Buddhists.

Overlaid on these political and religious frontiers, of course, were the great cultural frontiers between the Greco-Roman West, the Iranian Near East, and the Chinese Far East. What is most striking about this multiplicity of frontiers—political, religious, cultural—is the apparent ease with which William of Rubruck crossed them. However, the evidence of artistic production, reception, and dissemination in thirteenth-century Anatolia suggests that the porosity of these borders had limits.

The focus of this essay is a woman who lived and moved among all these cultures and religions. She was a Georgian princess named T’amar, who is almost universally known by her Turkish sobriquet, Gurji Khatun (the Georgian Lady). At different stages in her life, she resided among the Georgians, Byzantine Greeks, the Seljuks of Rûm, and the Mongols, and in each case evidence survives of her commissioning or using art. Yet, while threads of continuity are visible in her use of art in all these different contexts, the way the art was understood in each is different. Her activities show how important art was in defining and redefining the nature of the frontiers between all the peoples of the region.

Gurji Khatun was the daughter of Queen Rusudan (r. 1223–45) and granddaughter of Queen T’amar (r. 1184–1210), both rulers of Georgia at the peak of its power, and so came from a background of exceptional female strength. She was married first to the Seljuk sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw II (r. 1237–45) and after that to Mu’în al-Dîn Suleymân, the Parwâna, the Mongol-appointed administrator and effective ruler of the Sultanate of Rûm in the third quarter of the thirteenth century.² It is possible that, after the Parwâna’s execution by the Ilkhân Abâqa in 1277, she
Fig. 89. The Near East on the Eve of the Mongol Invasions
entered into a third marriage, this time to a Christian general, Basil Giagoupes, who held the court title of amirarzes (general) in the army of the Seljuk sultan Mas'ud II.3

Although her marriages confined her to Anatolia, Gurji Khatun had access to a formidable range of connections through her immediate family.4 She was related to every major power in the region from Constantinople to Cilicia, Tbilisi to Tabriz. Her brother, Davit' V Narin, the king of western Georgia (r. 1245–92), was married to an illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII Palaiologos, the Greek emperor in Constantinople. Her son by the Parwana was married to Isabelle, daughter of Het'um I, king of Armenian Cilicia. Her nephew Vaxtang II of Imereti was married to a daughter of the Ilkhan Abaqa (the man who, according to one Armenian chronicler, ate her second husband).5 Her cousin, Davit' VI Ulu, ruler of eastern Georgia, who had initially accompanied her to Konya upon her marriage to Kaykhusraw II, contracted four marriages, and his children were subsequently married into the houses of the Grand Komnenoi emperors of Trebizond, the Ilkhanate, and others.

At elite levels, then, the political and religious frontiers of the region were exceptionally porous. Indeed, for the coronation of the Mongol khan Güyük, in 1246, the rulers of all these territories and more had been forced to travel to the great meeting of his vassals (the kuriltai) as equals. The sultan of Rûm, the two kings of Georgia, the sultan of Erzurum, the emir of Aleppo, and the emperor of Trebizond all journeyed 5,000 kilometers (about 3,000 miles) to Karakorum to receive decrees (yarlıghs) confirming their status as junior kings in the new empire.6

This web of relationships is reflected in the ways these rulers chose to depict themselves. All were able to draw on a wide array of visual languages to present themselves and their power to the different audiences they had to address. Each selection says much about the nature of the self-identity of the states in the region.

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Fig. 90. King Davit' V Narin of Georgia, ca. 1290. Wall painting, southwest chapel of Gelati Monastery, near Kut'aisi, Georgia
Davit' V Narin, for example, had himself depicted twice in his burial chapel in the royal mausoleum church of Gelati, near K’ut’aïsi in western Georgia. The wall paintings showed the king’s virtues as both a youthful ruler before Christ (accompanied by his queen, whose image is now lost) and as an older monk. The dress of Davit’ the king (fig. 90) shows affinities to Byzantine imperial robes but with clear regional differences, notably the high Georgian crown rather than the domed crown and prependsoulia of Byzantium. This decision to highlight a byzantinizing image of power is even more apparent in eastern Georgia, where Davit’ Narin’s cousin Demetre II was portrayed at exactly the same time.

Demetre had been executed by the Mongols in 1288, the story being that he gave himself up to them, knowing he would be killed, in order to save his country from greater destruction. This earned him the epithet the Self-Sacrificer, and he became the focus of a small but significant cult, whose principal monument is a rock-cut chapel dedicated to the quasi-saint king in the monastery of Udabno, located in the Gareja desert in southeast Georgia. In a wall painting in the chapel, Demetre is promoted in explicitly Byzantine robes, including a bejeweled loros, whose purple now shines against all the other faded colors (fig. 91). It seems that Byzantine imperial robes, with their associations with the divine, were considered the most effective means of displaying the sanctity of the king.

These depictions of Georgian royalty can be contrasted with those of neighboring powers, most sharply with the choices made by Demetre’s father-in-law, Manuel I Grand Komnenos, emperor of Trebizond (r. 1237/38–63). In his foundation of the church of Hagia Sophia in the 1250s, Manuel gave himself the titles Emperor and Autocrat of the Romans but visually presented his power in a more alien form (fig. 92). His robes and attributes owe more to the Caucasus than to the empire he claimed to
represent. He abandoned the loris and crown in favor of a diadem and fur-lined robes decorated with eagles, which echo those employed by the Seljuks in a number of forms, notably on the walls of Konya. These look more to heraldry (or its equivalent) than to the traditional power evoked by Byzantine costume, still being used to convey power or spirituality in Georgia, and suggest that Manuel was consciously developing a different mode of display.

Armenian rulers applied yet other conventions. Hasan Jalal al-Dowla, the Armenian ruler of the province of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh), presents himself on the dome of his mausoleum church of Gandzasar (fig. 93) wearing a caftan and sitting cross-legged. This garb and pose owe everything to Seljuk concepts of royal presentation and power, as can be seen by comparing the sculpture with images of the Seljuk sultan from the Kubadabad Palace that date to about 1230 (fig. 94). Farther south, the Het'tumid rulers of Armenian Cilicia combined Armenian and Byzantine traditions with Western models that were inspired by their Crusader neighbors in Antioch (fig. 95).

These ruler images were effective because everyone, regardless of religious or political affiliation, recognized the expression of power they represented. It was a form of royal syncretism—the idea of the fellowship of rulers—that echoed both the dynastic links of Gurji Khatun’s extended family and the enforced community of rulers demanded by the Mongol khans. While the origins of each form of royal presentation can be discerned, deriving from Byzantine, Georgian, Seljuk, Armenian, or Western ideas, their use cuts across such boundaries.

A parallel cultural syncretism is visible in other aspects of artistic production in every one of these centers. The decoration of churches in Trebizond, Armenia, and Georgia all incorporated Seljuk motifs, appropriating either individual elements, such as geometric interlace motifs or muqarnas’ vaulting techniques (fig. 96), or even adopting the
Fig. 93. Hasan Jalal al-Dowla, Ruler of Artsakh Province. Armenian, ca. 1230. Carved stone, exterior drum of the Monastery of Gandzasar.

Fig. 94. Portrait of a Seljuk Ruler, ca. 1230. Tile from the Palace of Kubadabad. Müze Müdürlüğü, Konya (1075)

Fig. 95. King Levon II and Queen Keran with their Children. Armenian Cilician, 1272. Tempera and gold on vellum. Library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Ms. 2563, fol. 38or)
whole structure of the Seljuk portal, with its rectangular exterior with interlace around an arched doorway (fig. 97).

Equally, what little is known of Seljuk figurative art—primarily an illustrated treatise on demons and angels produced in Aksaray and Kayseri in 1272–73 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Persan 174) and the carvings of angels on the walls of Konya (fig. 98)—shows a clear debt to Christian iconography. To this one can add the influence of Christian art on the production of Ilkhanid manuscripts, as in the image of the birth of the prophet Muhammad in the

The mobility of artists was important in this transmission and interchange of art, and there is evidence of Greek artists working at the Seljuk court in Konya, of Armenian artists at the court of the Ilkhans at Tabriz and Marāgha in Persia, and of Muslim artists from Christian Tbilisi working for the Seljuks.

These examples document the appropriation of motifs and iconographies, which were then transferred into a new context. The new material could be adapted either because of the absence of specific meaning, as in the case of the movement of ornament, or through the complete transferral of meaning into another context, as in the way the birth of Christ was transformed into that of Muhammad in the *Jami‘ al-tawārīkh*. Although these circumstances suggest that the artistic frontiers between Byzantium and the Caucasus were indeed fluid during the period, this was not always the case. Some art retained its integrity as it crossed borders. Icons, most obviously, cannot so easily be reinterpreted.

Fig. 98. *Larinde Gate of Seljuk Konya, Turkey*. Engraving from Charles Texier, *Asie Mineure . . .* (Paris, 1862)

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Fig. 99. The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, from Rashid al-Din, *Jami‘ al-tawārīkh* (*Compendium of Chronicles*). Ilkhanid (Tabriz), 1314. Ink, colors, silver, and gold on paper. Edinburgh University Library (Ms. Arab 20, fol. 42r)
in a Muslim context; nor is the calligraphy of the Koran comprehensible in a Christian context. In such cases the process of understanding the art in new cultural and religious contexts is more complex. The art that retained its intrinsic integrity as it crossed frontiers thereby gained a level of ambiguity: its meaning and function were simultaneously maintained and transformed according to its audience.

Gurji Khatun is again significant here, as is one of her contemporaries, Maria Palaiologina, an illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII Palaiologos, to whom (perhaps inevitably) Gurji Khatun was related by marriage. It is no accident that these events center on women, the pawns in the great attempts to build dynastic alliances across Byzantium and the Near East, who had to travel and settle in new cultures and who brought images and ideas with them. Moreover, these two particular women, who were extremely independent, exerted a great deal of power and influence. Both were instrumental in the foundation and support of religious institutions at home and abroad, and were also enmeshed in the political fortunes of the states they joined.

The standard model here is exemplified by Maria Palaiologina. Like Gurji Khatun, she went from the Christian world to live in the Islamic one, before returning to the Christian community before her death. In 1265 her father contracted for her to be married to the Ilkhan Hülegü. As she set off across Anatolia to Persia, she was escorted by a hieromonk from the Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople and accompanied by images of her faith. The chronicler George Pachymeres describes a tent made of silken fabric embroidered with images of saints—in effect, a portable church with integral icons. By the time Maria had arrived in Tabriz, her future husband was dead, so she married his successor instead, the Ilkhan Abaqa. She retained her Christianity in Persia and was able to support other Christians there, even founding a church at Bā Agré in northern Iraq. In 1282, upon the death of her husband, she returned to Constantinople, where she became a patron of a nunnery, the Theotokos Panagiotissa, which thereafter became known as the Theotokos Panagia Mougliotissa (All-Holy Mother of God of the Mongols). To the monastery of Christ in Chora she donated golden textiles and an eleventh-century Gospel Book with a new deluxe binding and a poem by Manuel Philes dedicated to the Virgin of the Chora, who,
she said, had saved her from innumerable dangers. Thirty years later, in his decoration of the Kariye Camii, Theodore Metochites commemorated her with a portrait accompanied by the inscription “the Lady of the Mongols, Melane the nun” (fig. 100).

The picture this paints is of a woman who was unchanged by all she did. The saints embroidered on her church tent effectively exported Byzantium with her to the Mongols and acted as protectors and confirmers of her identity. They overrode the cultural and religious frontiers that Maria crossed. This model of Christian integrity is supported by another tale in Pachymeres, this time of a beautiful vessel that was introduced for use in the liturgy of the imperial court of Andronikos II, until on closer inspection it was noticed that it included a Kufic inscription exalting Muhammad, whom Pachymeres calls “the accursed.” After this, it had to be put aside, “for moral reasons,” as it had “the capacity of infecting others with the worst of impurities.”

These stories expose the high degree of contact between Byzantium and the Islamic East, of both people and objects traveling to and fro. But they do so in a way that conforms to a stereotype of stark divisions between the cultures: the image of real frontiers and mutual incomprehension. They promote a deliberate fiction of Christian continuity and purity that is at odds with the image of an integrated group of cultures outlined above.

The fiction of Maria Palaiologina’s apparent purity is further undermined by the picture that emerges from Gurji Khatun’s experiences. The condition set on her marriage to Kaykhusraw II was that she should retain her Christianity after her marriage, and the Christian chroniclers of her life record that she moved to Konya (Byzantine Ikonion) with a collection of icons and an entourage including priests and monks. This influx of Christians and art had an impact at the Seljuk court. One chronicler claims that Kaykhusraw was so enamored of Gurji Khatun that he wished to put her portrait on his coins but was advised to substitute only a cryptic reference, a sun over a lion (fig. 101). Although the story may be
apocryphal, it reveals a tension between the traditions of the new Christian resident in Konya and that of her Muslim husband and his court. More significantly, it shows that the presence of Christians encouraged Muslims to reinterpret the art produced by their rulers. This development must have been exacerbated by Gurji Khatun’s powerful influence on Seljuk politics, since other sources reveal that the sultan relied on her advice and that she was regarded as “the queen of the age, the lady of the hereafter.”

At some point, however, the situation was altered: Gurji Khatun was forcibly converted to Islam by her husband, who beat her and destroyed her icons. Whereas for Maria Palaiologina icons confirmed identity, here their destruction undermined it. Other evidence suggests that the conversion was sincere (but perhaps not very deep) and largely due to the influence of another man, the Islamic scholar and Sufi mystic Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî Mawlânâ (the founder of the whirling dervishes, who settled in Konya about 1228. According to his biography, the Menâkib al-arîfîn (The Feats of the Knowers of God) by Shams al-Dîn Ahmad-e Aflâkî (ca.1320), Gurji Khatun was one of the mystic’s most fervent supporters and constructed his tomb after his death in 1273.

Mawlânâ was at the heart of an extraordinary syncretistic culture in the center of Anatolia. At his death his funeral cortège was accompanied not just by Muslims but also by Christians and Jews, who would not leave even when beaten with sticks and swords, proclaiming that “this king of religion is our chief, imam, and guide . . . we recognize him to be the Moses of the era, and the Jesus of the age.” Mawlânâ even spent time at a Christian monastery near Konya, supposedly dedicated to Plato the philosopher. His deeds as holy man are in many ways comparable to those of the holy men of Byzantium, who were so scant in the thirteenth century. He sought escape from the world through his actions and trances, yet was deeply involved in it. He would sit for a week up to his waist in cold water, but he would also seek to influence the policies of the Parwana, haranguing him for his cooperation with the Mongols against his fellow Muslims (and ultimately leading to the Parwana’s failed coup against the Mongols, which led to his execution).

It is in Gurji Khatun’s involvement with Mawlânâ that the position of art can be seen at its most complex. Christian ideas about the way art functions in society and religion became intermingled with Islamic views in a way that shows both the ambiguity of images in the thirteenth century and the limits of the syncretism previously discussed.

At one stage, Gurji Khatun, forced to stay in Kayseri (Byzantine Caesarea) to advise her husband, commissioned an artist to paint a portrait of her favorite holy man. For this she employed a Greek Christian artist named ‘Eyn al-Dowlâ, instructing him to draw Mawlânâ in the “extreme of beauty,” so that the image could be her “consoler” during her absence from him. It is clear that this was done after Gurji Khatun’s conversion to Islam (she is described at this stage as already a sincere supporter and close disciple of Mawlânâ), but the act of commissioning such a portrait obviously has no Islamic sanction and betrays her Christian origins.

Portrait commissions of living holy men have a long tradition in the Byzantine world: Byzantine hagiographies include many instances of artists seeking to capture likenesses of saints for their followers to venerate. However, the Christian tales usually revolve around the artist’s inability to capture a true likeness, until divine intervention intercedes to produce the image. This then, of course, guarantees the veracity of the portrait and underpins the theological need for the exactitude of the likeness. For ‘Eyn al-Dowlâ, the problem was similar but the result, as Aflâkî relates, very different:

[‘Eyn al-Dowlâ] took a look [at Mawlânâ] and began to depict his appearance. He drew a very lovely
picture on a sheet of paper. The second time he looked, he saw what he had seen at first was not the same. On another sheet of paper he drew another drawing. When he was finished with the picture, Mawlânâ displayed a different form again.

In the end he sketched different pictures on twenty sheets of paper, and as often as he looked he beheld a different portrait of the figure. [33]

The moral of the tale is produced by Mawlânâ in a ghazal (poem): “How devoid of colour and sign I am! . . . / How will this soul of mine grow calm, / Being both fixed and in motion as I am?” [34] As one might expect, the image cannot work in Islam: the soul and true likeness of a person cannot be replicated. Despite this, however, Gurji Khatun was satisfied: she collected the twenty sheets, which then accompanied her wherever she traveled: “And in whatever situation [when] she felt overwhelmed by passionate longing for Mawlânâ, he immediately took on form and shape so that she would grow calm.” [35] These images thus seem to have a dual function: they are both moral exemplars of the impossibility of images for the Islamic audience of the tale, but still remain a potent force—dependent on a Christian understanding of the nature of the image—for their principal viewer, the former Christian queen of the Seljuk Turks.

The uncertain status of icons is demonstrated by another tale in Aflâkî’s history of Mawlânâ and his followers, once again featuring the artist ‘Eyn al-Dowla. In this story, a second Greek painter in Konya, called Kâlûyân–e Naqqâsh (Kaloioannes), tells ‘Eyn al-Dowla of a picture of Mary and Jesus in Constantinople that has no equal: “Painters have come from all over the world but are not able to fashion anything like this picture.” [36] The painting described immediately calls to mind the great miraculous icons of the Mother of God, such as the Blachernitissa or the Hodegetria, that resided in Constantinople. Infatuated by the idea of such an image, ‘Eyn al-Dowla travels to Constantinople, works in the monastery where it is kept, and after a year, when he has gained the trust of the monks, he steals the icon and takes it to Konya, where he shows it to Mawlânâ.

After looking at it a long time, Mawlânâ said: “These two beautiful images are complaining greatly about you, saying: ‘He is not honest in his love for us and he is a false lover.’” ‘Eyn al-Dowla said: “How is this?” Mawlânâ replied: “They say: ‘We never sleep and eat, and we continually stay awake at night and fast during the day. ‘Eyn al-Dowla leaves us at night and goes to sleep, and during the day he eats. He does not do as we do.’” ‘Eyn al-Dowla said: “Sleeping and eating are absolutely impossible for them, nor can they speak and say things. They are figures without a soul.” [37]

Mawlânâ then asks ‘Eyn al-Dowla why he should abandon God, whom Mawlânâ calls the painter of everything on the earth and in the sky, in favor of unaware images without soul or higher meaning. Seeing the error of his ways, ‘Eyn al-Dowla repents and converts to Islam. As far as I know, this is the only known instance of an icon working to convert a man to Islam.

What is interesting about the story, of course, is not only the way in which the icon functions in the tale but also the sharp disparity between ends and means. The end—a man converted to Islam—is no more than one would expect from an Islamic hagiography. The means, however, are quite extraordinary. In effect, the icon employs its Christian powers of communication and participation in order to deny its own powers. Mawlânâ uses the paradox inherent in Christian art and in the theology of icons—that they are base material (wood, gesso, and pigment) yet can interact as living things—in order to demonstrate their
Fig. 102. Basil Giagoupes and His Wife, T'amar, with Saint George, 1280s. Fresco, west wall, nave of Church of Saint George, Belisurma, Cappadocia, Turkey
folly. He turns Orthodox image theory against itself, but only by allowing the icon to proclaim its own powers itself. He has his cake and eats it, too.

In such a cultural milieu, images can be seen to act in a number of different ways, simultaneously supporting and transforming Christian ideas about the ways in which religious images can function. The final element in this narrative returns us once again to Gurji Khatun. It is probable that her final appearance, like that of Maria Palaiologina, is in a Christian context: she may well be identified with the T’amar who is depicted in the 1280s in a donor portrait in a small church dedicated to Saint George near the village of Belisirma in the Ilhara gorge in Cappadocia (fig. 102). If so, she is accompanied here by her third husband, Basil Giagoupes. The rock-cut structure was clearly commissioned as a funerary church for husband and wife, but the inscription makes clear that it was the work of Gurji Khatun / T’amar. She was still the driving force in any relationship.

In contrast to the use of art thus far described, the church is remarkably conservative: its style and iconography are rooted in the older traditions of Christian Cappadocia and show none of the developments of Palaiologan art in Constantinople, Thessalonike, or the Balkans. This was perhaps a conscious way of reestablishing the founder’s Christian identity after nearly forty years of being dominated by Islam. T’amar’s faith in the power of images has remained steady, but it is now expressed in a new context. Like Maria Palaiologina in the Kariye Camii, T’amar is presented in the church in an image of Christian identity untouched by Islam other than in the donor inscription, which pays homage both to Mas’ud II, Seljuk sultan, and to Andronikos II, Constantinopolitan emperor. However, the background of Gurji Khatun’s career suggests that the role of images here was rather more complex and that art is being used once more to refashion an identity. In this case, the ambiguity lies in the obvious tension between the orthodoxy of the art and the unconventional history of the donor’s life, her previous marriages, and previous religions. The church reasserts distinct frontiers, imposed on a life and a region in which frontiers were never what they seemed.

4. The details of the following come from the genealogies in Cyrille Toumanoff, Les dynasties de la Caucase chrétienne de l’antiquité jusqu’au XIXe siècle: Tables généalogiques et chronologiques (Rome, 1990), tables 22.8–10, and 98.1–3.
5. According to Het’um, Flos Historianum Terre Orientis, in Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens (Paris, 1906), vol. 2, pp. 308–9, the Parwana was cut in half and eaten, “as is the Mongol custom”; see also Abou I-Fedâ, Recueil des historiens des croisades: Historiens orientaux (Paris, 1872), vol. 1, p. 155.
8. For images, see Rusudan Mep’isa’vili and T’imati’in Virsalaze, Gelati: Arkitektura, mozaika, p’reskebi /
22. The identification of Melane the nun with Maria Palaiologina cannot be proven but is now generally accepted; the alternative possibilities are explored by Steven Runciman, “The Ladies of the Mongols,” in *Eis mnémén K. Amantou, 1874–1960* (Athens, 1960), pp. 46–53.
31. I was first alerted to this story by Vyronis, “Another Note,” pp. 21–22, but he does not discuss it.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 382.
37. Ibid.
38. This marriage is otherwise unattested, although Aflaki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, p. 298, reports that she sought a divorce from the Parwana.

“Moscow the Third Rome” as Historical Ghost

On September 16, 1984, the New York Times quoted Helmut Schmidt, the former chancellor of West Germany, as saying:

The political behavior of Russia hasn’t really changed much since Ivan III or Ivan IV. . . . I think it’s a mix of a never really satisfied drive for expansion and a strong and subconscious belief that Mother Russia will bring salvation to the world. This idea of salvation by Russia was in the minds of Russian intellectuals in the 19th century long before Communism—Moscow as the Third Rome, after Byzantium.¹

This quotation alludes to the fact that the phrase “Moscow the Third Rome” has become a trope characterizing the messianic motivation of Russian expansionism. This phrase had also evolved into a widely understood metaphor for a translatio imperii from Rome to Byzantium to Moscow after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Part of that translatio imperii is the notion that Moscow rejected the general standing and authority of the Byzantine church, because it had sought union with Rome (which previously had been punished for falling into heresy), and thus sought to replace Constantinople with itself. Yet, except in one instance, explained below, neither the Russian government nor the Russian church ever adopted the Third Rome formulation. Nor was Moscow specifically as Third Rome ever utilized in any of their respective decisions. Moreover, the popular understanding and use of the phrase are ill-informed. Although other early sources claim that Constantinople lapsed into heresy as the result of its fall, no official Russian church statement or policy reflects a rejection of the Byzantine church or the general authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople. On the contrary, Byzantine church authority remained paramount even when the Rus’ church was determining its own policies and practices. Evidence of this dominance can be found most clearly in the Rus’ prelates’ reversal of their council decisions whenever they found them in conflict with Byzantine canon and in Ivan IV’s seeking the approval of the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1557 for his adoption of the title tsar.

I

Those who study the history of Russia in a highly abstract and general way, such as textbook writers and politicians, and who are unfamiliar with the primary sources tend to rely more on the Moscow the Third Rome trope as an explanation for Russian historical behavior than do those scholars who are specialists in the period. The more abstract the discussion, the larger Moscow the Third Rome looms. Students approaching the study of Russia through textbooks are therefore predisposed to think that the concept is an important one in early Russian history. Even among scholars who study the sources more systematically, one often finds a tendency to equate “Third Rome” with Byzantine influence in general. Yet, in the early sources, Third Rome was a specific formulation with
a quite limited and circumscribed meaning, whereas New Rome (Constantinople) had a pervasive cultural influence, through the church, on both the early and later Rus’ principalities. Neither that formulation nor this influence had anything to do with a Russian “drive for expansion” or “subconscious belief” about salvation. Nonetheless, from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, Moscow the Third Rome has been increasingly used in both popular and scholarly literature as a synonym for Muscovy specifically and for Russia in general. The words of the historian Ia. S. Luré in regard to historiographic ghosts are relevant in this regard:

The introduction of unproven statements becomes a real danger in those cases when the lack of evidence is not made clear and when such statements become the basis for other deductions in a pragmatic construct...they pass from one work into another, and become “common knowledge.” In repeating them historians no longer think about their origin and about the degree to which these statements have been proven. As a result, rather idiosyncratic historiographic “ghosts” are born: opinions expressed by scholars in the form of a guess or even because of a misunderstanding begin to occupy a firm place in the historiography, gain the strength of an indisputable fact, and even become “commonplaces.”

Moscow the Third Rome is a formulation that has moved beyond the historiography into the conventional wisdom as an expression of Russian messianism—to such an extent that a former chancellor of West Germany can use it in an interview and expect the reporter to know what he means by it. From merely a historiographical ghost, it has grown into a historical ghost—that is, a factoid that everyone “knows” to be true and that therefore requires no further examination. This has occurred despite the warnings of a number of specialists that the phrase had a different meaning in the sixteenth through early nineteenth centuries from the one it has assumed since the late nineteenth century, and despite the general tendency to ignore formulations such as the “New Israel,” which did have official sanction and a more widespread acceptance before the nineteenth century.

II

One piece of evidence often cited for the assertion that Moscow saw itself as the Third Rome is a commentary of 1492 by Zosima, Metropolitan of Moscow, on the paschal canon. The first published version of the commentary states: “And by the will of God, he [Constantine] created a city in his own name that is Constantinople, which is Tsargrad, that is to say the New Rome (Novyi Rim).” Zosima’s commentary goes on to refer to Ivan III as “the new Emperor Constantine of the new Constantinople—Moscow and of all the Rus’ land and many other lands.” The words “that is to say the New Rome” led the editor A. S. Pavlov, among others, to conclude that the progression from Rome to Constantinople to Moscow of Zosima’s commentary was a basis for the formulation of Moscow the Third Rome.? But the reading “Rome” appears in only one manuscript, which, although early (1493), is countered by the reading “Jerusalem” in three other copies of the commentary, also from the 1490s. Since these three copies are more accurate overall in representing the archetype than the one copy that reads “Rome,” the reading “Jerusalem” must be considered primary and thus the word used in the author’s prologue. In addition, the unnamed town described at the beginning of the commentary as where “the apostles convened as one and testifying affirmed the faith” could only
Fig. 103. Archbishop Moisei of Novgorod and Pskov (r. 1324–29, 1352–59) Wearing the White Cowl and Offering a Model of the Uspenskii (Assumption) Church, 14th century. Fresco, Volotovo Monastery
be Jerusalem, not Rome.” Indeed, there is no reference or allusion to Rome elsewhere in the entire commentary. The copyist of the manuscript with the unique reading apparently telescoped “ierusalim” into “rim” either intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, in the correct sequence, Moscow could only be the “Third Jerusalem.”

Another source often cited to substantiate Moscow’s Third Rome orientation is The Tale of the White Cowl. This work, often dated to the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, describes the events surrounding the transfer from Rome to Constantinople and then to Novgorod of a white cowl that Constantine the Great gave to Pope Sylvester I. The Short Redaction of the Tale, however, was most likely written after the Church Council of 1564 and in response to the decision of that council concerning which prelates were allowed to wear the white cowl (fig. 103). And the Long Redactions were probably compiled after 1589, because they “predict” the establishment of the patriarchate, which occurred in that year. Yet, even if one accepts the traditional dating, one should note that the progression of the white cowl is not Rome to Constantinople to Moscow.

The reference to Third Rome, which does not appear in the Tale’s Short Redaction, was added when the First Long Redaction was compiled. According to the Long Redactions of the Tale, Constantine the Great, in the early fourth century, in gratitude for Pope Sylvester’s curing him of leprosy, gives the pope the white cowl. After doing so, Constantine decides it is not appropriate for the temporal ruler to reside in the same city as the spiritual ruler. Since Sylvester, as pope, is ruler in Rome, Constantine repairs to Byzantium, where he founds the city of Constantinople. A subsequent pope, Formosus (r. 891–96), betrays the faith and hides the white cowl, which he despises. Almost five hundred years later, an unnamed pope sends the white cowl to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheos Kokkinos (r. 1353–54, 1364–76). Philotheos, in turn, is told in a dream to give it to Archbishop Vasili of Novgorod (r. 1330–52), but is reluctant to do so because he wants to wear it himself. In another dream, he sees Constantine and Sylvester, and the pope tells him why he needs to acquiesce:

for ancient Rome fell from glory and from the faith of Christ through pride and willfulness. In the new Rome, that is in Constantinople, the Christian faith will also perish through the violence of Hagar’s sons. In the Third Rome, which is in the Rus’ land, the grace of the Holy Spirit will be revealed. Know then, Philotheus, that all Christians will come in the end and unite in one Rus’ tsardom for the sake of Orthodoxy."

Nowhere in any redaction of the Tale does the phrase “Moscow the Third Rome” appear. Instead, the formulations that do appear are “the Rus’ land” (Ruskaia zemlia) and then “the Rus’ tsardom” (Ruskoie tsarstvo). Nor can it be legitimately argued that, since Moscow was the capital of the Rus’ land in the sixteenth century, the author had Moscow in mind. The Tale of the White Cowl, in fact, is explicitly pro-Novgorodian and implicitly anti-Muscovite in both secular and ecclesiastical terms. Significantly, the white cowl was not sent to the head of the Rus’ church, the metropolitan, who resided in Moscow, but rather to the second-ranked prelate, the archbishop of Novgorod, whom the Tale thus designates as the spiritual leader of Rus’. This distinction is important because it is linked to the ongoing dispute between the Moscow metropolitinate and the Novgorod archiepiscopate over which city represented the true spiritual center of Rus’ (and thus which prelate had the right to wear the white cowl).

A close reading of the Tale leads to the conclusion that the author intended to
demonstrate that the progression of true Christian spirituality, as indicated by the progression of the white cowl, was Rome to Constantinople to Novgorod. In drawing the parallel between Rome and Rus', the author places the spiritual ruler, in Novgorod, in a city separate from the temporal ruler, in Moscow. And, of course, Constantine had decreed that the temporal ruler in Constantinople (read: Moscow) should not interfere with the spiritual ruler in Rome (read: Novgorod), not only in spiritual matters but also in temporal matters affecting that city. For these reasons, among others, the Rus' church explicitly condemned the Tale at the Council of 1666–67. The Tale of the White Cowl should thus clearly not be used as an example of a Moscow the Third Rome formulation.

A third source, or rather a cycle of sources, that has been associated with the formulation is a series of three letters attributed to Filofei, an early-sixteenth-century monk at the Eleazorov Monastery in Pskov: the Letter against Astrologers to Mikhail Grigor'evich Misiur' Munekhin, the grand princely secretary (d'iaik) in Pskov, the Letter concerning the Sign of the Cross to Vasili III, and the Work concerning the Offenses to the Church to a certain Ivan Vasil'evich.

A close reading of each of these works reveals no basis for the conclusion that their author was formulating an imperial ideology either for the Muscovite ruler or for the expansion of the Muscovite state. Indeed, the intent is very different—to specifically remind the ruler to perform his duties in regard to the Novgorodian church. Included are warnings against allowing people there to make the sign of the cross improperly, “widowing” the Novgorodian church by allowing the archiepiscopal position to go unfilled, and otherwise harming the Novgorodian church by taking away its lands, permitting sodomy in the monasteries, and being miserly and truculent: “Change your stinginess to generosity and your inclemency to kindness.”

Some scholars have proposed that the Letter against Astrologers was written to counter the pro-Catholic and pro-Unionist writings of Nicholas Bulev, a doctor and practitioner of astrology. In their opinion, Filofei was rejecting the claim that the Holy Roman Empire was the Third Rome. In his letter, Filofei does condemn astrology as being atheistic, and he also criticizes the Latin church for using unleavened bread in the church service. Yet, the most accurate reconstruction possible of the original Letter indicates that Filofei identifies the “Roman tsaroom” (Romeisko tsarstvo) as the Third Rome. The archetype of Filofei's letter most likely reads “all the Christian tsarooms came to an end and gathered into the one tsaroom of our sovereign, according to the books of the prophets, and this is the Roman tsaroom: for two Romes have fallen, a third stands, and a fourth will not be.”

In this context, “Roman tsaroom” could be understood to refer to the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V. It seems that copyists of the Letter were concerned that their readers would understand it that way, for a number of them added some sort of phrase explaining that the Roman tsaroom meant the Russian tsaroom. In one variant branch of the main text, a copyist merely changed me to sī, thereby transforming Romeisko tsarstvo directly into Rossisko tsarstvo (Russian tsaroom). Clearly certain copyists were uncomfortable with the original form of Filofei's articulation of Third Rome. Nonetheless, the only way to see any of the three letters as implying an imperial ideology is to divorce the Third Rome formulation from the context of the rest of the letter.

In their recent biography of Ivan the Terrible, Andrei Pavlov and Maureen Perrie write: “In the sixteenth century, as Moscow increasingly came to regard itself as the ‘Third Rome,’ it was no longer prepared to accept Byzantine canons as the ultimate authority.” The authors do not, however,
present any evidence for the statement that “Moscow [was] increasingly... regard[ing] itself as the ‘Third Rome.’” The phrase “Third Rome” does appear in 1589 in the declaration of the establishment of the patriarchate, in which the “Russian tsardom” (Rosiiskoe tsarstvo) is designated the Third Rome. And this phrasing was most probably included in that document by representatives of the Novgorod branch of the church. There does seem to have been an attempt at unofficial levels from the 1590s on for some in Moscow to co-opt Third Rome status away from Novgorod, but none of that is ever given official standing.

A psalter from 1594 belonging to the boyar D. I. Godunov bears an inscription referring to “the imperial city Moscow, the Third Rome.” This inscription is the first time in the extant sources that the Third Rome is directly associated with Moscow. The seventeenth-century Tale of the Founding of Moscow also contains an explicit “Moscow the Third Rome” formulation: “Then our Third Rome, the Moscow state, was built not without blood but by the spilling and shedding of much blood.” But the Tale, apparently intended for a popular audience, had no official status. Likewise, another seventeenth-century source, the Kazan’ Story (Kazanskata istoria), refers to Moscow specifically not only “as a second Kiev” but also “as a third new great Rome.” The Kazan’ Story is also of dubious worth as evidence for the assertion that the Moscow the Third Rome formulation was beginning to be accepted in official circles. It is not an official document but a work of historical fiction that contains numerous errors and fabrications.

In the eighteenth century, some Old Believer texts refer to “the great Russian tsardom [velikoe Russijskoe tsarstvo], Third Rome” and state that “for the sake of piety your governmental Moscow tsardom [ivne gosudarevo Moskovskoe tsarstvo] was named Third Rome.” But each of these references is couched in the context of a petition pointing out to the tsar why the pre-Nikonian church was the true inheritor of the Orthodox mantle. As in the letters attributed to Filofei, the flattery in these texts was intended to gain something—in this case, the ruler’s protection for the petitioners, who were being persecuted by the Moscow church. The reforms of Patriarch Nikon (r. 1652–81) were intended to bring the Rus’ church into closer conformity with the Greek church, which the Old Believers considered to be in apostasy because of the Greek church’s being under the Turks. Yet none of the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century sources containing a Third Rome formulation denounced the Greek church.

The preceding analysis of the early sources leads to the following conclusions. Metropolitan Zosima’s commentary from 1492 implies a Third Jerusalem, not a Third Rome, progression for Moscow. The original Third Rome, as written in the archetype of Filofei’s letter, was the Roman tsardom. It was subsequently changed by copyists to the Russian tsardom. The letters show concern about the Muscovite ruler’s treatment of the Novgorodian church. The Third Rome in The Tale of the White Cowl was the Rus’ land, with its spiritual capital in Novgorod, but this work was condemned by the central church. The only time Third Rome appears in an official document is the Decree of 1589 establishing the Moscow patriarchate, yet even there Third Rome is not Moscow but the Russian tsardom. The first dated source that refers to Moscow as Third Rome is from an inscription on a psalter from 1594.

Additionally, in the seventeenth century, two works of historical fiction, the Kazan’ Story and the Tale of the Founding of Moscow, disseminate the formulation Moscow the Third Rome. The Old Believers of the eighteenth century were using variants of the phrase to make the point that the Muscovite church had lost its way. Yet no official document of the Russian church or
state ever specifically utilizes the Moscow the Third Rome formulation. How then did it become so closely associated with Russia? How did it become part of Helmut Schmidt’s vocabulary and of the consciousness of a modern audience? How did it develop the connotations of Russian expansionism and messianism?

III

Interpretations of Moscow the Third Rome went through several stages from the nineteenth century to the present as part of an effort among intellectuals to determine Russia’s place in the world. Little notice was taken of Third Rome until 1861, when Filofei’s Letter against Astrologers was first published. The editor, A. S. Pavlov, mainly noted that the Old Believers had misinterpreted Filofei’s formulation. By 1869, however, the historian V. S. Ikonnikov was describing Third Rome as part of a translatio imperii from the Byzantine Empire to Moscow as the universal empire, and in so doing, he conflated the “Russian tsardom” of sixteenth-century texts with “Moscow.” Ikonnikov’s reinterpretation spread, so that by the end of the nineteenth century Third Rome had become enounced as a way to interpret early Russian history.

But it would require late-nineteenth-century historiosophists, like the Pan Slav writer Vladimir Lamanskii, to apply the term to modern Russia. In this reformulation, Moscow as Third Rome was given a “global-historical feat” to perform for the Russian people and, through them, for the world. Another historiosophist, Vladimir Solov’ev, interpreted the concept to mean that Russia, as “third principle,” could unite East and West. According to the historian I. Kirillov, writing in 1914, early Russia was aimless, but because of Filofei’s formulation, it has ever since been fulfilling its mission to the world.

After the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev spun these notions of Russian fulfillment into an anti-Communist contrivance. Previously Berdyaev had seen Third Rome as crucial to the development of the Slavophiles, although the Slavophiles never mentioned it. Now he saw a connection between Third Rome and the Third International. For him, the Communists were adopting the messianism of Russia for their own purposes.

Until the mid-1940s, Soviet scholars had rejected Moscow the Third Rome as an explanation for Russian history. But, in large part owing to the revival of patriotism in connection with World War II, a number of attempts were made to attach that doctrine to Ivan IV, including a revised popular biography by the historian R. Iu. Vipper and an article by N. S. Chaye. But perhaps the most well-known attempt occurred in Sergei Eisenstein’s film Ivan the Terrible, in which the actor Nikolai Cherkasov, as Ivan IV, says: “Two Romes have fallen. Moscow is the third. There will be no fourth, for I am absolute master of this third Rome, the Muscovite state.” Of course, no evidence exists that Ivan IV ever knew of any version of the Third Rome formulation, let alone specifically Moscow the Third Rome. Almost immediately, D. S. Likhachev, the doyen of early Russian studies in the Soviet Union, launched a corrective counterattack pointing out that the doctrine had had no impact on any state policy or official.

Moscow the Third Rome entered the conventional wisdom with a vengeance during the cold war. Many articles and entire books with this concept as the main theme were written to explain Russian state, and thereby Soviet, behavior. Statesmen, scholarly specialists, and textbook writers all cited the formulation as established historical fact. Since the end of the cold war, contrary to what one might expect, invocations of Moscow the Third Rome have proliferated, despite the pleadings of a few specialists for a more accurate
employment of the term. At times, Third Rome is used as a metaphor for Muscovy itself. Political scientists continue to use Moscow the Third Rome in theoretical constructs to explain Russian state behavior. Alternative historians in Russia, devotees of the New Chronology, place it in the context of an apocalyptic clash-of-religions paradigm with three Third Romes—one in Moscow as the world center of Orthodoxy, a second in Rome as the world center of Catholicism, and a third in Istanbul as the world center of Islam. And Russian ultranationalist organizations, such as Pamiat’, have been appropriating it as a symbol of Russian renewal and superiority. While specialists in Muscovite history have warned and continue to warn against using Moscow the Third Rome as a theory to explain Russian state behavior, generalists and popularizers continue to inflate and exaggerate its importance out of all proportion to the evidence.

Moscow the Third Rome has been maintained and propagated by detractors of Russia with the intention of denigrating it, by those with an agenda to glorify Russia, and by those who have not studied the sources firsthand but want an easy explanation for what to them must appear to be otherwise confusing evidence.

There is no explicit evidence that the Third Rome idea had any impact on Russian historical development. Whether invoked by a former chancellor of West Germany or a college president being inaugurated, by nineteenth-century historians or recent biographers of Ivan IV, the formulation of Third Rome has found echoes, repetitions, and resonances many centuries distant and thousands of miles away from when and where it first appeared. Those who want to use Third Rome as an interpretive tool to explain Russian state or church behavior need to be aware that they are adopting a modern interpretation that distorts it out of any relationship to the way it appears in the historical sources.

4. The research and analysis of part II are taken from, but also develop further, the research and analysis I presented in my Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1558 (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 221–43; and in my “Ironies of the Tale of the White Cowl,” Palaeoslavica 10, no. 2 (2002), pp. 27–54.
9. Ibid., pp. 53–54.
10. Ibid., pp. 54–55.
19. Malinin, Stavro Elenazavo monastyrna Filofe, Appendix, 45.
21. Ibid., pp. 73, 75, 77–78.
23. The fact that the declaration was signed by Jeremiah, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the prelates in his entourage led for a while to the mistaken notion that this formulation of Third Rome derived from the patriarch. Yet, if one can believe the testimony of Hierotheos, the Metropolitan of Monemvasia, Jeremiah and the others signed the declaration without knowing what it said, since they could not read Russian and no translation was provided to them. See my Muscovy and the Mongols, pp. 240–41.
24. Opisanie neskopoi Solovetskogo monastyrja, nakho- dlashchikhsia v Biblioteki Kazanskoi dukhovnoi akademii, 3 vols. in 1 (Kazan’, 1881–98), vol. 1, p. 23 (Ms. Rossisskaiia national’naiia biblioteka, Solovetskoe sobranie, No. 15/748, fol. 5).
30. See, for example, Grigorii, Archbishop of Kazan’, Istino drevniaia i istino pravoslavnaia Khristova tsarkov’, 2d ed., 2 parts (Saint Petersburg, 1855), part 2, p. 3 n. 1.
33. V. Ikonnikov, Opyt izloedeniia o kulturnom znachenii Vizantii v nasom istorii (Kiev, 1886), p. 364.
34. V. I. Lamanski, “Rossiya izhe tem polezn slavlanam, chto ona ushel, svyshchestvuet,” in Bytskaia pomoci’ postadai- ushim semeistvariesenii Benoi i Gertsgovnii (Saint Petersburg, 1876), p. 17. Indicative of the rapid expansion of the application of this phrase is its appearance in the coronation ritual of Alexander III in 1881. Opisanie sviashchennogo koronovaniia ikh Imperatorskikh velichestv Gosudaria Imperatora Aleksandra Tietskho i Gosudarnyui Imperiatrui Marii Fedorovnyi voi Rossi (Saint Petersburg, 1881), p. 27.
42. In 1994, for example, R. G. Skrynnikov published an abridged popular version of his scholarly monograph Gosudarstvo i tsarkov na Rusi XIV–XVII vv.: Podezhdiki neskoi tsarkov (Novosibirsk, 1991) with the title Tretii Rim (Saint Petersburg, 1994). Although both books
are about the state and church in Moscovy, there is no discussion of the Third Rome formulation in either.


45. Albright College, Reading, Pa., May 1, 1993.
Byzantine Palaiologan Icons in Medieval Russia

Medieval Russia adopted Christianity from Byzantium at the end of the tenth century, thus becoming part of the greater Byzantine Orthodox world. The images of Russians in the Byzantine Empire varied during different periods of Russian–Byzantine contact. From the tenth through the twelfth century, the Russians were commonly portrayed in Byzantine chronicles and documents as savages and barbarians. However, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the opposite view took hold and the Byzantines regarded the Russians as the most devout Christians. The fall of Constantinople in 1204 was a turning point in the Byzantine attitude toward the Russians. One of the first Byzantine authors to write about the Russians in positive terms was the historian Niketas Choniates (d. 1217), who named them “the most Orthodox people.” That image of medieval Russia was firmly established in the period from about 1350 to 1450, during which time the unity of Orthodox peoples was widely proclaimed and the Russians were included in the list of allies and coreligionists of the Rhomaioi. John Kanavucza, a Greek from the island of Chios, exclaimed in the second third of the fifteenth century, “We are all Christians and we were baptized in one Faith.”

The subject of the rise of Russia and of Moscow as its capital is amply documented in Palaiologan diplomatic papers, which present the Russian Grand Princes—Ivan Kalita, Dimitri Donskoi, Vasily I—as true defenders of Christianity.¹ In 1325, with the blessing of the Constantinopolitan patriarch, the residence of the Russian archbishop was transferred from Vladimir to Moscow; with this move, Moscow became the kingdom’s official religious and political center. As earlier Byzantine emperors and patriarchs had done in Constantinople, Russian Grand Princes and metropolitanians began to collect in Moscow relics, renowned and miracle-working icons, and copies of those icons, drawn from throughout the Orthodox world. Further following the Byzantine model, they enlisted the best architects and artists to construct and decorate the city’s churches and monasteries.²

From the second half of the fourteenth century through the first half of the fifteenth, Russian icon painting reached its highest level of development, being transformed from a provincial branch of Byzantine art into an independent regional school with its own recognizable style. That the foundation of the Russian school lies in the tradition of Byzantine icon painting³ is clearly demonstrated by a group of contemporary icons, now in Russian museums, that may have been painted by either an itinerant Byzantine artist or a local Russian painter. For example, art historians continue to debate the origin of such well-known icons as the Virgin of the Don, which has a scene of the Dormition on its reverse, or the Transfiguration icon from Pereiaslav—I–Zalesky. It is unclear whether they were created by the master painter Theophanes the Greek or a Russian pupil of his.⁴ The same question plagues a fine diminutive icon of the Annunciation donated to the Trinity—Saint Sergios Lavra in Zagorsk, near Moscow, presently in the State Tret’jakov Gallery, Moscow,⁵ as well as the monumental sanctuary doors from the same gallery exhibited in “Byzantium: Faith and Power
(1261–1557)” (fig. 104). The same attribution problem exists for the painted wooden frame with the Deesis and seven saints, into which is mounted a Byzantine portable mosaic icon of four Church Fathers, now in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (fig. 105). The frame’s good state of preservation, and especially the condition of the wood, support the possibility of a Russian provenance. The painting itself is unquestionably of high quality and is Byzantine in style. The work was most likely created by Byzantine artists working in Moscow at the time or by local Russian artists trained in the Byzantine tradition. Whatever the nationality of the artists, these works reflect the interest in the spiritual qualities of the Byzantine Palaiologan style and the sophistication of Muscovite art during the centuries of their production.
The paintings of Andrei Rublev represent the high point of Russian icon painting in the early fifteenth century, with the artist’s name becoming a synonym for the most spiritual and exquisite art. Only two works—the Holy Trinity icon (fig. 106) and the frescoes decorating the Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir (figs. 107, 108)—are documented as being by Rublev. Both have been damaged by age and past restorations, but despite this, their spirituality and heavenly beauty are still discernible. Traditionally such works are claimed to be “not made by human hands.” Rublev’s icon and frescoes display elements of the ancient Hellenistic tradition, passed down through Byzantine art, as well as a theological and aesthetic basis grounded in Byzantine culture. It has therefore been commonly proposed that Rublev may have traveled to Byzantium, for such an
Fig. 106. Andrei Rublev (1360?–ca. 1430). Icon of the Holy Trinity. Russian, 1425–27. Tempera and gold on wood. State Tret’iakov Gallery, Moscow (13021)
understanding of Byzantine art could be achieved only by directly studying the original monuments, especially the mosaics, frescoes, and icons of Constantinople. Even though no evidence has been found in Russian documents that Rublev visited the Byzantine Empire, in theory he had many opportunities to travel to Constantinople, either as a pilgrim or as a member of a diplomatic mission, for contacts between Moscow and Byzantine centers at that time were close and frequent. For example, he could have been part of the entourage that in 1411 accompanied the Russian princess Anna, bride of John VIII Palaiologos, to Constantinople.

Very often, when Russian pilgrims returned from Constantinople, they visited monasteries at Mount Athos and prayed at the Holy Mountain. Rublev could have traveled the same way. If he did, it would have been Mount Athos, with its spiritual, nearly mystical atmosphere, its Hesychast hermits, and miracles of faith that would have provided the soul of the Russian monk-painter with the spiritual perfection that we admire in his works. In 1997 I visited the treasury of the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos, where restored Palaiologan icons were then kept that are now in the monastery’s museum. Among the works I saw was a set of sanctuary doors representing the Annunciation (figs. 109–112). My first reaction was surprise, for the doors appeared to be Russian works of the early-fifteenth-century Moscow school, and moreover by an artist from the...
circle of Andrei Rublev. When I returned to the monastery the following year, I was able to study the doors more thoroughly and to confirm that my first impression was correct. Furthermore, I came to the conclusion that Rublev himself painted the sanctuary doors, for their style is very close to that of the Holy Trinity icon (see fig. 106).

The doors were published by Euthymios Tsagaridas in the monumental volumes on the treasury of the Vatopedi Monastery. Tsagaridas identified as their closest parallel the images of the angels in Rublev’s Holy Trinity, concluding that the doors were created in an early-fifteenth-century Constantinopolitan workshop that had a decisive influence on the great Russian icon painter. He did not, however, cite any other monuments of this Constantinopolitan workshop, and the Vatopedi’s sanctuary doors are at present unique in style among Palaiologan icons. In their details, however, they strongly recall Rublev’s style, whose uniqueness scholars have not yet been able to adequately articulate. Summarizing the scholarly literature, there are three generally accepted primary characteristics of Rublev’s works: his ideally drawn contours, his manner of applying color, and the impression in his works of the perfection of genius.

The Vatopedi doors, which are well preserved, are composed of two symmetrical panels: the left representing the Archangel Gabriel, the right the Mother of God standing before her throne (figs. 109, 110). They are made of chestnut wood, which suggests that they originated from Athos, where chestnut and oak were most widely used in the monastic icon workshops. Their present dimensions are not the original ones, for all the sides were cut down when they were transferred to the iconostasis of the library’s Church of the Nativity of the Virgin. It is said that before they were transferred to the library, the church doors were kept in one of the monk’s cells located outside the monastery’s walls.

The backgrounds of both door panels are in a color close to ivory, with a greenish hue. The nimbi of the archangel and Virgin differ in color: the former is a warm, reddish pink ocher, while the latter is almost white, with a slight grayish blue tint painted in concentric circles of varying color density that produces a halo effect. The colors here bear a symbolic significance: Mary’s white nimbus reflects her purity and chastity, while that of the archangel denotes grace and life-giving light.

The contrast between the archangel, a celestial creature with no material body, and Mary, the chosen one but a human girl, is emphasized by the artist’s choice of painting technique. Gabriel’s figure has no defined anatomical features. It displays youthful clumsiness and soft feminine grace but no traces of strangeness or sentimentality. The semitransparent flesh is marked by smooth transitions, as well as by delicate flushing and shading. It is truly the image of a heavenly, nonmaterial creature. Mary’s figure on the other hand is painted more densely, with strong flesh tones (traces of the painter’s brush are even visible on her arm). While this gives her figure a certain distinct materiality, it also makes for a very lyrical and spiritual image, one that meets the artistic ideals associated with classical Greek sculpture.

Built upon the combination of blues, greens, and browns of differing shades and saturation, the coloration is well harmonized. Naturally, in such a palette, the bright blue dominates, as it does in Rublev’s Trinity icon. The composition is built up in such a way as to create an impression of distance and detachment from the spectator. Echoing key elements in music, the artist has given great emphasis to the rhythm of the lines and the harmony of the colors. The figures convey an expression of poetic contemplation tinged by a gentle sorrow. Also noteworthy is the specific typology of the faces, shown in the elusive state of “calm-motion.” All these technical and aesthetic features reflect the accepted characteristics of works by Rublev. The author of this masterpiece, whether a Byzantine or Russian artist, may well be identified in the future. Today the
Opposite
Figs. 109, 110. Attributed here to Andrei Rublev (1360?–ca. 1430). Iconostasis doors with the Annunciation, left panel depicting the Archangel Gabriel, right panel depicting the Virgin. Early 15th century. Tempera and gold on wood. Vatopedi Monastery, Mount Athos

Left
Fig. 111. Detail of figure 109

Below
Fig. 112. Detail of figure 110
doors remain the best examples of a certain stylistic tradition and of the aesthetics of the icon tradition of Russian and Byzantine artists at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The quality of the painting and its spirituality are so exceptional that, after ages had passed, these artists were compared to the geniuses of the Renaissance.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, Byzantine icons acquired greater status in Russia as symbols of the legitimate heritage of the Orthodox faith and the power of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Muscovite kingdom was the strongest and largest Orthodox state. Russia truly then became “the most Orthodox country,” and its rulers the defenders of the faith. When, in 1473, the Russian Grand Prince Ivan III married the Byzantine princess Sophia Palaiologina, niece of the last Byzantine emperor, there could be no doubt of Russia’s legal claim to supremacy. Moscow ambitiously imitated Constantinople in the luxury of its court, in its ceremonial practices, and in its numerous religious festivals, celebrated with splendid liturgical processions.

The palladium of the Muscovite state, its protector and holy patron, became the twelfth-century Byzantine icon of the Virgin of Vladimir (fig. 113). The significance of this icon in the history, spiritual culture, and ecclesiastical life of Russia was similar to that of the Hodegetria icon of Constantinople, which according to legend was painted by the evangelist Luke. The Virgin of Vladimir was also ascribed to Luke’s authorship in

Fig. 113. The Virgin of Vladimir. Constantinople, 12th century. Tempera on wood. State Tret’iakov Gallery, Moscow
the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In Moscow, however, an exact copy of Constantinople's Hodegetria icon was venerated as well. Russian chronicles record that, in 1381, the archbishop of Suzdal, Dionysios, visited the Byzantine capital and sent back to Russia two copies of the famous miracle-working icon. One, its present location unknown, was sent to Nizhny Novgorod. The other was kept in Suzdal, the residence of the archbishop at that time, until the early fifteenth century, when it was taken to Moscow and made the principal icon in the Ascension Convent of the Kremlin.

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century, with the reign of Sophia Palaiologina, this icon became an object of special veneration. Ceremonies honoring the icon are attested by a wide variety of sources including the frontispiece of the Hamilton Psalter (ca. 1300, Staattliche Museen zu Berlin) and the icon with the Triumph of Orthodoxy (ca. 1400, British Museum, London; fig. 114). Unique evidence showing how the Hodegetria icon was worshiped in Constantinople and Moscow is provided by a late-fifteenth-century embroidery from the workshop of the Grand Prince (see fig. 21). This scene depicting a liturgical procession with the Hodegetria icon has been interpreted in various ways. Some regard it as a specific historical event, namely, the coronation of Prince Dimitri in 1498. Others treat it as an illustration of the Akathistos Hymn to the Virgin, while still others interpret the scene as an actual procession in the Moscow Kremlin. All agree, however, that the procession represented here is identical with the ceremony that
royal regalia claimed to have been inherited from the Byzantine Empire—the barnas and cap of Monomachos, the goblet of Emperor Augustus, the carved throne illustrating scenes from the life of Constantine the Great and the gifts of Constantine Monomachos—began to be used. By the mid-sixteenth century, many widely venerated Palaiologan icons, including those of the Virgin of the Don and the Virgin of Pimen, had assumed the status of Russian national relics. Russian chronicles describing the disastrous 1547 fire in the Kremlin indicate the sad loss of Byzantine icons from the treasury of the tsar. One chronicle woefully exclaims that old Byzantine ("Greek" in the chronicles) icons decorated with gold and precious stones inherited by Ivan the Terrible from his ancestors were gone. (In his personal treasury, Ivan had sacred icons from Chersonesos and Tsar‘grad, the Russian name for Constantinople.)

That the Byzantine icons in the possession of Ivan the Terrible were authentic is evidenced by two surviving portable mosaic examples. One, the icon of "Saint Anne and the youthful Virgin in the silver frame" at the Vatopedi Monastery, has on its reverse the cross-monogram of Vatopedi and a Slavonic inscription recording that the object belonged to Tsarina Anastasia, Ivan’s first wife (figs. 115, 116). There are two ways that this icon may have come to Russia. One possibility is that it was presented to Anastasia by the monks of Vatopedi and returned to them after her death on August 7, 1560. The other is that it might have been brought to Russia by the Countess Anna Glinskaya, Ivan the Terrible’s granddaughter and a relative of Serbia’s rulers. She might have used the icon to bless Anastasia, her grandson’s bride. After Anastasia’s death, Ivan would then have given it to the Vatopedi monastery.

Exactly how this mosaic icon came to Russia is thus unknown, but there is no doubt how it reached Mount Athos. It was sent there to pray for Anastasia’s soul, in accordance with the practice of making imperial donations to Vatopedi that had originated with earlier Byzantine emperors. As the
grandson of Sophia Palaiologina and son of Countess Helena Glinskaya, Tsar Ivan had good reason to consider himself the successor of the Byzantine emperors. For this reason he sent lavish gifts to the monasteries of Mount Athos, especially the Greek Vatopedi and the Serbian Hilandar monasteries.

The other mosaic icon from the Hermitage collections attesting to the authenticity of Tsar Ivan’s Byzantine icons is that representing the four hierarchs. The poor condition of its original wooden ground made it necessary to place the mosaic icon within a painted frame (see fig. 105). The icon depicts the Church Fathers John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Nicholas the Miracle-Worker, and Gregory the Theologian. Dating to the early fourteenth century, it was undoubtedly produced in a Constantinopolitan court workshop. Both the technique and style of the mosaic are exceptional, most notably in the individualized, psychologically nuanced faces of the saints and in their simple, elegant vestments.

The iconography of the Hermitage mosaic icon and its setting in a frame are equally relevant for our purposes. The four hierarchs were often represented together in the Byzantine tradition, for they were regularly appealed to in difficult situations, including those involving state affairs. This was especially so for the Moscow tsars after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, when these rulers began to consider themselves as successors of the Byzantine emperors, and Moscow as a New Constantinople. The protection of the ecumenical hierarchs was thought to be responsible for the city’s being spared during the earthquakes of 1460 and during the Tatar invasions of 1481 and 1521. During the conflict with Novgorod in 1471 the Grand Prince Ivan III prayed to the four Church Fathers as well as to the Archangel Michael and the anagyroi for help. A late-fifteenth-century diptych icon from the Annunciation Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin, which was among the holiest possessions of the Moscow rulers, depicts the four hierarchs together with the Moscow metropolitans. Similarly, when the Byzantine mosaic representing the hierarchs came to Moscow, the tsar and his family regarded it as worthy of the highest veneration.

The frame surrounding the Hermitage mosaic is composed of wood panels taken from an older fourteenth-century icon. Relics

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Fig. 116. Reverse of figure 115 (detail), showing cross-monogram of Vatopedi Monastery and Slavonic inscription naming Tsarina Anastasia as owner

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of the saints depicted are inserted into the frame near their images. Most probably created in Russia, this border was undoubtedly influenced by Byzantine icon reliquaries such as those in Cuenca’s cathedral (fig. 117) and Meteora’s Transfiguration Monastery.26 The reverse of the mosaic icon and its frame was covered with two layers of fabric, known as jackets, the inner a sixteenth-century Italian silk and the outer a seventeenth-century Chinese silk (figs. 118, 119), which reflect Moscow’s active trade and diplomatic contacts with both West and East.

Large rolls of imported fabrics were acquired and kept in state storehouses to be distributed for various uses over many years. Thus, the same Italian silk decorating the Hermitage mosaic icon served as a background for embroideries made in the workshop of Tsarina Irina Godunova, the wife of Tsar Feodor, son of Ivan the Terrible. It can be seen, for example, in the pall depicting Saint Alexander of Svir’ (1582, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg) and Saint Nikon of Radonezh (1586, Museum of the Trinity Monastery, Sergiev Posad).27 It was used earlier in the pall representing Metropolitan Peter that was commissioned about 1574 by Princess Uliana, wife of Prince Yuri, the brother of Ivan the Terrible.28 The same fabric appears in the embroideries made by the family workshops of the Godunov boyars, including three sudar’ (embroidered liturgical silks for covering the chalice), decorated respectively with the figures of Saint Demetrios (Kremlin Museum, Moscow), Saint Ipaty of Gangr (Kostroma Museum of History and Architecture), and the apostle Philip (State Historical Museum, Moscow). All the Godunov textiles were embroidered in the second half of the sixteenth century and were presented by the boyar Dimitri Godunov to the Ipatievsky Monastery in Kostroma.29 The workshops of the Stroganov family also used the same Italian silk at the end of the sixteenth century. There, small pieces of this silk were
used as decorative frames for embroidered images, as on the podeas with the Dormition of the Virgin and the Holy Trinity, both in the Solvychegodsk Museum.  

Chinese silks were not widely available in Russia until the seventeenth century, when close mercantile contacts had been established with the East. The high-quality, yellow-ocher silk from China decorated with blossoming plum trees and flowers seen on the Hermitage icon (see fig. 119) can be found frequently on Russian artworks dating from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Such a silk was used as a lining for the tomb pall of Tsarina Natalia Kirillovna (d. 1694), now in the collection of the Moscow Kremlin. In the case of the fourteenth-century Hermitage mosaic icon, during a late-seventeenth-century restoration of the image and its frame, the Chinese silk was placed over the Italian silk on the reverse. At the same time, restorers added contemporary silver revetments to the background of the mosaic and placed silver books in the hands of the hierarchs. The use of silk for the jackets, along with the icon’s later restoration and embellishment, attests to the fact that it was highly venerated for centuries.

I believe that the Hermitage mosaic icon, handed down for generations, was one of the holiest relics of the Moscow tsars. I also believe that this unique Byzantine mosaic, enclosed in what is most probably the oldest Russian painted frame with holy relics of bone inserted, belonged to Tsarina Anastasia Romanova (d. 1560), the first wife of Ivan the Terrible. Near the frame’s lower right corner—a traditional location for a portrait of the donor or his or her patron saint—appears the figure of Saint Anastasia. This iconography must be considered in the context of the royal family and its likely patronage of the work. In the sixteenth century, only one person from the tsar’s family is known to have been named Anastasia, Ivan’s wife. Even if she were not the patron, the Byzantine mosaic was most likely embellished with its painted frame containing relics and covered with the Italian silk in Moscow about the middle of the sixteenth century.

Since John the Baptist was the patron saint of Ivan the Terrible, paintings of the

Fig. 118. Inner silk jacket on reverse of figure 105 (detail). Italian, 16th century

Fig. 119. Outer silk jacket on reverse of figure 105 (detail). Chinese, 17th century

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Fig. 120. Icon of Saint John the Baptist, from the Tolg Monastery, near Yaroslavl. Moscow, 16th century. Tempera on wood. Yaroslavl Art Museum
Fig. 121. Icon of Saint John the Baptist. Byzantine, 14th century. Tempera on wood. The Menil Collection, Houston
saint became very popular in the sixteenth century, especially at the tsar’s court. Ivan donated several icons of the Baptist, produced in Moscow’s royal workshops, to various Russian monasteries to ensure prayers be said for his and his family’s health. Among these is an icon from the Andrei Rublev Museum, Moscow, and another given by the tsar to the Tolg Monastery, located on the Volga near the town of Yaroslavl (fig. 120). Similar icons survive in Ryazan and at other Muscovite sites. The icon of Saint John of Pskov donated by Ivan the Terrible was patterned after a Byzantine prototype. The figures of Saints Theodore Stratelates and John Klimax on the borders are the holy patrons of Ivan’s sons Theodore and Ivan. The icon is dated to the second half of the sixteenth century.

The prototype for all these icons is the same: the icon of John the Baptist from the Annunciation Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin. One of the most elegant sixteenth-century icons produced in the royal workshops, it displays both an exquisite technique and a refined artistry. If the attribution to a Russian artist of the 1560s is correct, the work must have been modeled on a now-lost Byzantine icon, once greatly venerated by the Moscow autocrats, for instance, a Palaiologan icon brought to Russia by Princess Sophia, the grandmother of Ivan the Terrible. A number of fourteenth-century Byzantine icons with related iconography are painted in a similarly refined style, including those in the Menil Collection, Houston (formerly Bradley Collection; fig. 121), in a private European collection on Corfu, and in the Pantokrator Monastery on Mount Athos (dated about 1360). In Russia there is also one fourteenth-century icon that could have served as inspiration for the anonymous artist working at the time of Ivan the Terrible: the icon of John the Baptist, the Angel of the Desert, ascribed to Theophanes the Greek and dating to the end of the fourteenth or the early fifteenth century. Comparison of the faces painted on these icons (see figs. 120, 121) confirms the importance of the Palaiologan prototype for sixteenth-century Russian paintings.

Russia’s road toward the image of an ideal Christian state was a long and difficult one. It started with the passionate declaration by the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates after 1204 and was achieved with the establishment of the Russian Patriarchate in 1589. On this road, Byzantine icons played a significant part in creating the image of Christian Russia. The Palaiologan icons that were brought to Russia and used to decorate Russian churches are but small fragments of the great art of the Byzantine Empire. However, they possessed such beauty, faith, and power that they were able to maintain the Byzantine tradition through the centuries. They were a never-ending source of inspiration for Russian art as well as the material evidence proving the legitimacy of Russia’s claim to the title of the “most Orthodox people” after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. As we view the icons presented at the Metropolitan Museum’s splendid exhibition “Byzantium: Faith and Power,” we feel the faith and power of Byzantine art to this very day.

In English-language sources, the author’s name has previously been transliterated as “Piatnitskii” rather than “Piatnitsky.”


3. For important studies concerning the Moscow school in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see G. V. Zhidkov, Moskovskaiia zhivot’ sredni XIV veka (Moscow, 1928); O. S. Popova, Iskusstvo Novgoroda i Moskov pervoi poloviny chetyreneadsatogo veka: Ego sviaz’ s Vizantiei (Moscow, 1982), pp. 89–171; E. S. Smirnova, Moskovskaiia ikona XIV–XVII vekov (Leningrad, 1988); V. N. Lazarev, Russkaiia ikonopis’ ot istokov do nachala XVI veka (Moscow, 1983), pp. 81–114.
5. For the icon from the Trinity—Saint Sergios Lavra, see Gosudarstvennaia Treť' iakovskaia Galereia, vol. 1, pp. 172–73.
14. Abbot Ephrem and the holy brothers graciously invited me to examine Vatopedi’s Russian artworks in connection with my book about Russian relations with the monastery. During my month or so at the monastery, I had the opportunity to study more than a thousand such objects.
Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives


31. For a more detailed argument, see Pyatakovs, “Unikal’nyi pamyatnik vizantinskogo iskusstva iz kollektiv Ermizhaza” (forthcoming).


38. [Richard Temple], *Masterpieces of Byzantine and Russian Icon Painting: 12th–16th Century*, exh. cat.,


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Hans Belting: figs. 82, 84
Osvaldo Böhm (reproduced with the permission of Hans Belting): figs. 80, 81, 83, 85
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Gianfranco Fiaccadori et al., Bessarione e l’Umanesimo (Naples, 1994): figs. 26, 27
Grigorii Gagarin, Sobranie vizantiiskikh’ gnezinskikh’ i drevnerusskikh’ ornamentov’ i pamiatnikov’ arkhitektury/Reussel d’ornements et d’architecture byzantines, géorgiens et russes (Saint Petersburg, 1897): fig. 92
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Bruce White: figs. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 31, 40, 41, 44, 48, 55, 58, 63, 67, 70, 74, 76, 104, 105, 113, 114, 117