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NOSTALGIA FOR BYZANTIUM: HOW AND WHY WE CONTINUE *TO SAIL*

SILVIA RONCHEY
University of Siena, Italy

*La pensée d'un homme est avant tout
sa nostalgie.*

Albert Camus

Constructive nostalgia

“O City, City, eye of all cities, universal pride, other-worldly wonder! [...] O City, that has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury!¹ [...] What malevolent powers have lusted after you?² [...] O prolific City, once garbed in royal silk and purple, and now dirty and squalid and heir to many evils [...]! O City, formerly enthroned on high, *striding far and wide*³, *magnificent in beauty and more becoming in stature*⁴! Now your luxurious garments and elegant royal veils are rent and torn. Your flashing eye has grown dark.”⁵

Dear colleagues, you will have recognized Nicetas Choniates’ famous lament for Constantinople, when in 1204 it fell into the hands of “foolish nations, or, rather, those people who are not truly nations⁶, but obscure and scattered tribes”⁷: the Crusaders.

Shortly before 1204, Nicetas’ older brother, Michael Choniates, the erudite classicist and former student of Eustathius of Thessalonica, had, you will remember, raised a similar lament – no less moving, but bleaker and more subdued, because it was not dictated by such apocalyptic circumstances – on the fate of another imperial city: not its capital, but the capital of Greek culture, the very symbol of Byzantium’s Hellenism: Athens.

¹ Cf. Isaia 51,17.

² The question is followed by a quotation from Luke 22:31: “[...] And taken you to be sifted?”

³ Cf. Od. 11, 539 (significantly in the *Nekyia*: these are the “great strides” with which Herakles sets off through the field of asphodels.)

⁴ Cf. Od. 5, 212–213 (this is Calypso, who claims to be “better in body and stature”, being an immortal demi-goddess, than Penelope, Odysseus’ mortal wife.

⁵ This first passage of the *Chronike diegesis* is taken from Nic. Chon. VIII, pp. 576–577 van Dieten (p. 317 in Magoulas’ English translation.)

⁶ Cfr. Deut. 32, 21; Ep. Rom. 10,19.

⁷ These are the same who – Niceta continues – “seeking to avenge the Holy Sepulcher raged openly against Christ and sinned by overturning the Cross with the cross they bore on their backs, not even shuddering to trample on it for the sake of a little gold and silver”. The two quotations are taken from Nic. Chon. VIII, respectively p. 577 van Dieten (p. 317 Magoulas) and p. 576 van Dieten (p. 316 Magoulas).

The love for Athens once so great
 inscribed these verses, shadow game,
 solace of the fire of my regret.
 [...]

 Forgive me, for if I did not find
 The famous city of Athenians
 I raised instead a stele of letters.

As is well known, Michael Choniates was Metropolitan of Athens from 1182 to 1204, and it was during this period that he wrote his *Funeral verses on the ruins of Athens*⁸. Even before the fall of 1204, a presentiment of doom hung over the empire. Nicetas' narration, which begins in the year 1118, is also permeated with the foreboding of something that proved to be, in effect, the great catastrophe of the empire. At the end of his lament for the fallen Polis⁹, Nicetas uses the wording of the biblical *Lamentationes* to exclaim: "Our inheritance has been turned away to aliens, our houses to strangers."¹⁰

Nostalgia for Byzantium – this is my first point – precedes its fall in 1453. It is born right after 1204 and combines nostalgia for a lost political status, inherited directly from the Roman empire, with the affirmation of a more strictly cultural status: that of direct heir to Hellenistic literature and philosophy. The same tradition which allied itself with the Roman administration and law in rendering Byzantium the predominant civilization of the Middle Ages. The civilization to which politicians, statesmen, and intellectuals alike looked as an exemplum, while the minor Western "holy Roman emperors" lusted after the untarnished title of legal heir to the empire of the Caesars.

With the waning of Byzantium's role as political and military superpower after 1204, Greek heritage and the preservation and maintenance of the Greek classics become characteristics of Palaiologian identity for the duration. Pessimism and nightmares of political decline on the one hand, nostalgia for and identification with classicism as a recipe for survival on the other. This is the distinctive note of the last and perhaps greatest of the Byzantine renaissances. Just when Byzantine culture had come to know and better appreciate the classical model, intellectuals are forced to recog-

⁸ As is well known, Michael left the city after the conquest to take refuge first on the island of Kea, in the Sporades, under seige by the Venetians at the time, and then (1217) across the Euboea, in the Monastery of the Prodromos at Budonitza, where he died around 1222. We still read his writings in the 19th century edition of Spirydion Lampros (*Michael Akominatou tou Choniatoi ta sozomena*, I–II, Athens 1879–80, repr. Groningen 1968).

⁹ Within the context of a modestly rhetorical act of contrition before God, which anticipates already in part the ecclesiastical doctrine of "sweet punishment," in which the orthodox church of the 15th century will see the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks as a punishment for the sins of its inhabitants.

¹⁰ And adds, again citing the biblical passage: "Turn us, o Lord, to thee, and we shall be turned" (*Lamentationes*, 5, 1–2 e 21). An allusive phrase, which in this context elicits interesting interpretations we should not expand on here.

nize its inability to understand and order the surrounding reality. Or better, after the blow delivered by the Fourth Crusade, they note the practical inadequacy of Byzantium's civil and political reality in perpetuating those classical values in which they and the state recognized themselves. This period from the 13th to the 15th century is dominated by the obsessions of a mythical, ahistorical empire, now out of reach¹¹.

Exile – “Our inheritance has been turned away to aliens, our houses to strangers” –, regret, expressed in the words of the Odyssey, for the “former high throne”, which dominate the 14th and 15th centuries in Byzantium, inspire the migration of the learned men and books that will, more or less methodically, ferry Byzantine Hellenism to safety in the West, passing the torch to the Humanist International and giving life to the very last of the Byzantine renaissances, what we call “the” European Renaissance.

The nostalgia continues and becomes more acute with the last generation of Palaiologians. “Ruin-writing” and the appearance and identification of every future Byzantine residue of ancient tradition recur as leitmotifs in Manuel II's letters. I am thinking of the moving letter sent in the winter of 1391, during the campaign in Asia Minor in the Turkish sultan's train: “Most of these cities now lie in ruins, a pitiable spectacle for the people whose ancestors once possessed them. But not even the names have survived [...]. How can anyone spell out places which no longer have a name?”¹²

Manuel and his favourite philosopher, Georgius Gemistus, are infected with nostalgia for a Greek Byzantium in that veritable laboratory of Byzantine political reinvention that will be the school of Mystras. The design of a new form of state, only seemingly utopian – in theory Platonic in mould but in practice revised along the lines of modern Western models – foresaw a new, re-founded Byzantium like a sort of city-state, half-way between the Italian renaissance *signoria* and the Greek polis. We can read in this light the subdivision of the empire enacted by Manuel and opposed by a good part of the contemporary Byzantine statesmen of whom George Sphrantzes was the spokesperson. As noted by Pertusi, Manuel's policy aimed at the reduction of the empire to one or more city-states along the Greek model¹³. Again,

¹¹ On this *Stimmung* of the intellectuals of the Palaiologus renaissance, cf. I. Sevcenko, *Society and Intellectual Life in the Fourteenth Century*, in *Actes du XIV^e Congrès international des Etudes byzantines* (1971), Bucharest 1974, I, pp. 69–92 (Id., *Society and Intellectual Life in Byzantium*, London, Variorum, 1981, no. I), reviewed by A. Kazhdan in *Greek Orthodox Theological Revue* 27, 1982, pp. 89–97; Id., “The Decline of Byzantium as Seen through the Eyes of its Intellectuals,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15, 1961, pp. 169–186 (Id., *Society and Intellectual Life in Byzantium*, no. II); I. P. Medvedev, “Neue philosophische Ansätze im späten Byzanz,” *Jahrbuch der österreichische Byzantinistik* 31/2 (1981), pp. 528–548; Id., *Vizantijskij Gumanizm XIV–XV cc*, Leningrad 1976; C. G. J. Turner, “Pages from the Late Byzantine Philosophy of History,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964), pp. 246–373.

¹² Manuel Palaiologus, *Ep. 16 (To Cydones)*, p. 45 Dennis.

¹³ Cf. A. Pertusi, “In margine alla questione dell'umanesimo bizantino: il pensiero politico del cardinal Bessarione e i suoi rapporti con il pensiero di Giorgio Gemisto Pletone,” *Rivista di*

nostalgia for all things Greek plays a crucial role in the thinking of the last great Palaiologian sovereign and in the elaboration of writings sent to him and other Byzantine princes by both Gemistus and his pupil Bessarion – working documents, which propose concrete reforms in some cases so advanced as to encourage Vasiliev to compare the school's political ideas to those of Rousseau and Saint-Simon¹⁴.

This is a fertile nostalgia because it nurtures, as I have noted, Western humanism. The Italian Renaissance flowers metaphorically from the bones of Gemistus, sent to Italy by Sigismondo Malatesta during his last crusade in the Morea and still immured today in the most symbolic of Renaissance monuments, the Malatesta Temple in Rimini. But, in addition, the Renaissance takes its cue from Gemistus and his pupil Bessarion in its actions. Perhaps the best example of the mechanism this peculiar nostalgia for Byzantium sets in motion – on which Bessarion confers a visual dimension when, looking from the Island of St. George toward St. Mark's Basilica, he claims to see in Venice an "alterum Byzantium"¹⁵ – doesn't relate to literature, or even political philosophy, but rather science.

Commissioned by Bessarion, and guest with him and Niccolò Perotti in the monastery of St. George, Regiomontanus had written the Latin epitome of Ptolemy's *Almagest*: a deft, clear compendium of the pivotal text of ancient astronomy. Bessarion had commissioned it to make the Greek geocentric vision of the cosmos accessible to Western humanists. Regiomontanus' *Epitome*, present with his dedication in Bessarion's library and then included in the cardinal's donation to Venice, was published there by Hamman in 1496¹⁶. The very same year when a young man came to study in Italy, a Pole from Torun, born a few kilometres away from Regiomonta-

Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici n.s. 5 (1968), pp. 95–101; see also Pertusi, "L'Umanesimo greco dalla fine del secolo XIV agli inizi del secolo XVI", in *Storia della cultura veneta*, III. *Dal primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, I, Vicenza 1980, pp. 177–264.

¹⁴ For operational documents sent to Byzantine rulers, cf. D.A. Zakythinos, *Le despotat grec de Morée*, I. *Histoire politique*, revised and expanded edition by C. Maltézou, London 1975, pp. 175–180; Pertusi, "In margine alla questione dell'umanesimo bizantino," op. cit., pp. 101–104; see also A.G. Keller, "A Byzantine Admirer of "Western" Progress: Cardinal Bessarion," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1955), pp. 343–348. The comparison with Rousseau and Saint-Simon can be found in A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, II, Madison 1929, p. 338.

¹⁵ Cf. S. Ronchey, *Bessarion Venetus*, in AA.VV., *Philanagnostes. Studi in onore di Marino Zorzi*, C. Maltezou, P. Schreiner and M. Losacco (eds.), Venice, Edizioni dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, 2008, pp. 375–401.

¹⁶ Regiomontanus worked in Venice in the Monastero of San Giorgio Maggiore between July 1463 and July 1464: cf. M. Zorzi, "Bessarione e i codici greci", in G. Benzoni (ed.), *L'eredità greca e l'ellenismo veneziano*, Florence 2002, p. 105; L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsman*, I–III, Paderborn 1923, repr. Aalen 1967, I, 300. The manuscript in question is known today as Marc. Lat. 328; another copy of the *Epitome*, now Marc. Lat. 329, was in Bessarion's library: cf. A. Rigo, "Gli interessi astronomici del cardinal Bessarione", in *Bessarione e l'umanesimo*. Exhibit catalogue (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 27 April – 31 May 1994), G. Fiaccadori (ed.), Naples 1994, pp. 109–112.

nus, who could read it right away. The young man had Latinized his name to Nicolaus Copernicus. So it was that the *Epitome* commissioned by the Byzantine cardinal from the astronomer of Königsberg to spread Ptolemy's work inspired the work by the astronomer of Toruń, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, destined to destroy the Ptolemaic system definitively.

This brief parable serves to underline how nostalgia for Byzantium doesn't produce necessarily retrograde, reactionary, or conservative effects. In contrast to today's current definition of nostalgia as proposed by Starobinski, nostalgia for Byzantium reveals itself almost always as a proactive force for innovation in philosophy as well as politics, literature, and science. And also in the arts¹⁷.

The most important artistic innovation of the Renaissance – perspective – is permeated with nostalgia for Byzantium. Indeed, we could say that the birth of perspective in painting, which finds its principle exponent in Piero della Francesca – whose crucial relationship with Byzantium I do not want to focus on, even if it would be more than pertinent here, for no other reason than that I devoted my lecture to him at the last international congress in London¹⁸ – is really aimed at displaying a Byzantine past which produces the effect of suddenly projecting forward the present that integrates that past in the years immediately preceding the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople: a driving mechanism – recently revisited in Hans Belting's *westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks*¹⁹ – that is also a kind of visual reproduction of that innova-

¹⁷ The need to recognize and re-examine these elements in early Renaissance painting has recently awakened discussion among scholars of Italian art history, as well as Byzantine Studies, but it is still of minor interest. The presence of Byzantium at the origin of the iconographic sources, pictorial projects, and symbolic implications of the paintings has been demonstrated in only rare cases: alongside the pioneering panorama outlined in A Chastel's posthumous volume, *L'Italie et Byzance*, Paris 1999, see L. Ventura, "La religione privata: Ludovico II, Andrea Mantegna e la Cappella del Castello di San Giorgio," *Quaderni di Palazzo Te* 7 (1987), pp. 23–34; S. Ronchey, *Il "salvataggio occidentale" di Bisanzio. Una lettera di Enea Silvio Piccolomini e l'allegoria pittorica di Bisanzio nel primo Rinascimento*, in *Bisanzio, Venezia e il mondo franco-greco (XIII–XV secolo). Atti del Colloquio Internazionale organizzato nel centenario della nascita di Raymond-Joseph Loenertz o.p.* (Venice, 1–2 December 2000), C.A. Maltezos and P. Schreiner (eds.), Venice, Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, 2002, pp. 125–150 and 529–544; Ronchey, *Piero, Pisanello e i bizantini al concilio di Ferrara–Firenze*, in *Piero della Francesca e le corti italiane* (exhibit catalogue) Milan, Skira, 2007, pp. 13–19; *Ibid.*, *Tommaso Paleologo al Concilio di Firenze*, in *La stella e la porpora. Il corteo di Benozzo e l'enigma del Virgilio Riccardiano. Atti del Convegno di Studi* (Florence, 17 May 2007), G. Lazzi and G. Wolf, eds., Florence, Polistampa, 2009, pp. 135–159; in addition, for the *status quaestionis* it would be useful to consult Ronchey, *L'enigma di Piero. L'ultimo bizantino e la crociata fantasma nella rivelazione di un grande quadro*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2006, with documentation of preceding scholarly debate and complete bibliography of scholarly contributions in the *Regesto Maior* (online).

¹⁸ S. Ronchey, *Orthodoxy on Sale: the Last Byzantine, and the Lost Crusade*, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress in Byzantine Studies: London, 21–26 August 2006*, I–III, Aldershot, 2007, I, pp. 313–344.

¹⁹ H. Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad. Eine westöstliche Geschichte der Blicke*, Munich, Beck, 2008,

tive capacity that looking back at the Byzantine millennium inspires in Westerners, beyond the Byzantines themselves.

After the Fall

“O prolific City, once garbed in royal silk and purple [...]! O City, formerly enthroned on high, striding far and wide!” After 1453 the fall of Constantinople had, in effect, made vacant something more than the fragile throne of a micro-Asiatic-Balkan kingdom almost completely eroded by the centuries-old Turcoman invasion. It tempted Westerners with nothing less than the prize of the title of Emperor of the Romans, transferred there eleven centuries before by the very same Constantine on whose fantastic Donation, and therefore, on the lawfulness by the papacy to constitute itself a temporal authority, debate was not lacking.

When Constantinople was submerged by the crusader wave from the West in 1204, the Empire had found refuge temporarily in the East at Nicea in Asia Minor. According to the plans drawn up and cultivated by the most recent generation of Byzantine Realpolitiker²⁰, if Constantinople were to be invaded by a Turkish wave from the East, the empire would have entrenched somewhere in the West. The Morea, working bridgehead for the geopolitical designs of the states involved, as for the specific economic interests of the Venetians, had been established from the time of Manuel for this western exile. The crusade project of the Christian princes against Islam formulated at the Council of Mantua in 1459 aimed at the re-conquest of Mystras, certainly not any longer Constantinople²¹.

The notion of a “Save Byzantium in the West” project on the Peloponnesus was

(Italian trans. *I canoni dello sguardo. Storia della cultura visiva tra Oriente e Occidente*, Milan, Bollati Boringhieri, 2010.)

²⁰ Who had had their inspiration and sponsor in Manuel II and their formative training in the school of Gemisthus: cf. S. Ronchey, *La Realpolitik bizantina rispetto all'Occidente dall'XI al XV secolo*, in *Purificazione della memoria. Convegno storico* (Arezzo, Palazzo Vescovile, 4–11–18 March 2000), Arezzo, Diocesi di Arezzo–Cortona–Sansepolcro/Istituto di Scienze Religiose, 2000, pp. 173–186; Ibid., *Giorgio Gemisto Pletone e i Malatesta*, in *Sul ritorno di Pletone*, M. Neri, ed., Rimini, Raffaelli, 2004, pp. 11–24.

²¹ Thomas Palaiologus, Manuel II's last child, would have been reinstated on the throne of the “new Byzantium.” The cause of the liberation of the Morea and the “western re-foundation” of Byzantium was, moreover, underwritten also by a nucleus of Italian *signorie* which had gradually woven a tight web of blood relations with the last reigning Byzantines. This explains why one of the pope's great enemies, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, faced a more than challenging rapprochement so he could become captain general of the land troops of the Morea expedition that set off from Rimini in 1464 – the same during which he had Gemisthus' bones recovered and sent to Rimini. Cf. S. Ronchey, “Malatesta e Paleologi. Un'alleanza dinastica per rifondare Bisanzio nel quindicesimo secolo,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 93/2 (2000) pp. 521–567; Ibid., *Il piano di salvataggio di Bisanzio in Morea*, in *L'Europa dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli: 29 maggio 1453. Atti del XLIV Convegno Storico Internazionale del Centro Italiano di Studi sul Basso Medioevo – Accademia Tudertina* (Todi, 7–9 October 2007), Spoleto, Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2008, pp. 517–531.

created and cultivated by Bessarion from the start of his diplomatic career in Ferrara in 1437. He had found in Pius II the most motivated and ruthless of sponsors, who, immediately on becoming pope, had entered that very high stakes game: to resolve with one masterful stroke the two greatest problems of medieval politics – selection of the heir of the Roman empire from among the reigning European sovereigns, and determination of the foundation of temporal papal power. These united the sovereignty of the first and second Rome in a single legal entity, whose constitution was already a sure thing, and was made operative with the union decree of 1439, which aimed to provide a “mixed” religious platform for the new city-state of Byzantium, formed at Mystras as a Greco-Christian enclave within the Ottoman dominion²².

It would be pointless to speculate on how the history of the Mediterranean would have been affected if Pius II's and then Sigismondo Malatesta's crusade had not failed amid the accumulation of negative contingencies; if the “Save Byzantium in the West” project had not also fallen through when, within a short period of time, almost all of its principal supporters died one after the other. With the definitive failure of the dynastic transfer of Constantine's throne to the West to join the papal throne, the *rhomaiosyne* will take a third way. This is certain.

Bessarion ensured the continuity of classical Byzantine culture by the fortunate transfer of its book-DNA to the Serenissima. The *translatio ad Russiam* of the genome proper of the imperial dynasty was his last and supreme strategic move, by means of which he removed the legal inheritance of the successors of Constantine from the papacy in Rome. We can see Bessarion's strategy behind the negotiations of Giovanbattista Della Volpe, the Gran Kniaz's self-styled legate, who negotiated the most phenomenal dynastic alliance of the modern era²³. In 1472, thirty years after

²² The fruits of the Council of Ferrara–Florence, much discussed from the outset, barely followed up on and, in the end, so ineffective over time, was undoubtedly essential to and systematic for the process then *in fieri*, which was intended to reunite not just the two churches, but finally also the two sovereignties into which the Roman empire had been split for eleven centuries: Peter's mitre and Constantine's sceptre: cf. S. Ronchey, *Andrea, il rifondatore di Bisanzio. Implicazioni ideologiche del ricevimento a Roma della testa del patrono della chiesa ortodossa nella settimana santa del 1462*, in *Dopo le due cadute di Costantinopoli (1204, 1453). Eredi ideologici di Bisanzio. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia* (4–5 December 2006), M. Koumanoudi and C. Maltezos, eds., Venice, Edizioni dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, 2008, pp. 259–272.

²³ For Della Volpe, mentioned by the name ‘Ivan Frjazin’, “the little Frank”, or “the Latin”, cf. E. Carusi (ed.), *Il Diario Romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*. Appendix I. *Diario concistoriale del cardinale Ammannati attribuito dal Muratori a Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, ed. E. Carusi in *Rivista*, XXIII/3, Città di Castello 1904, p. 141; other western document sources in R.P. Pierling, *La Russie et l'Orient. Mariage d'un Tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Sophie Paléologue*, Paris 1891, pp. 59–60 and 75ff. (reproduced with minor variants in Pierling, *La Russie et le Saint-Siège* I, Paris 1906), Appendix II, pp. 186–187; Pierling, “Le mariage d'un tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Zoé Paléologue,” *Revue des Questions Historiques* (1887), pp. 15ff and notes; A.L. Choroškevič, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v sisteme meždunarodnyh otnošenij*, Moscow 1980, pp. 176–183 e 240; and the entry *Della Volpe, Giovanbattista* di L. Ronchi De Michelis in *Dizionario*

the *Kehre* at the Council of Florence, the Byzantine mole betrayed the interests of Latinism and the Roman Curia in favour of Orthodoxy²⁴.

As recorded in the *Russian Chronicle according to Nikon*, Bessarion was the source, if not also the hidden author, of the letter delivered to Ivan III by a mysterious emissary: the “Greek named Jurij”, in reality George Tarchaniotes²⁵. And, in fact, Ivan III responded in writing to Bessarion²⁶. Bessarion’s intervention is noticeable behind the deft manoeuvre by which the substantial funds for the “holy war against the Turks,” held in Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici’s bank in the custody of the commissioner cardinals of the crusade, were almost completely diverted to subsidize the operation. The marriage between the daughter of Thomas Palaiologus, the last Greek imperial heir, and the founder of the Russian empire would be the unshakeable foundation for the annexation of the title of Constantine to the throne of Moscow, which was already considered the Third Rome.

After the marriage, Ivan III took on the double-headed eagle as symbol and, as sovereign of all of Russia, asserted both the legal succession and the ideological inheritance and geo-political role of the now definitively extinct *basileia*²⁷. Ivan III and

Biografico degli Italiani 38 (Rome 1990), pp. 7–9, with remaining bibliography updated.

²⁴ Besides, the alliance with Russia figured in the purest imperial tradition and in the precise political plan of the first and main inspirer of Bessarion’s strategy: again, Manuel Palaiologus, father of Thomas and his five older siblings, who before negotiating the second marriage of his first son, John VIII, to Sofia di Monferrato, had married him, you will remember, to Anna Vasiljevna of Moscow. Cf. PLP 21349, with sources and bibliography.

²⁵ A reference to the *Chronicle according to Nikon*, year 6977, 11 February, in *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej*, XXVII, Moskva–Leningrad 1962, p. 126; cf. Pierling, *La Russie et l’Orient*, pp. 20–21, 59 e 195. The money order in the name of George Tarchaniotes is in the Vatican Archives, Exitus, 452, 173b, 10 June 1468. For the identification of George Tarchaniotes as Jurij cf. Ronchey, *Malatesta/Paleologhi* op. cit., p. 561, n. 188. George and Demetrius Tarchaniotes would be present in the wedding procession in 1472: cf. Pierling, *La Russie et l’Orient*, p. 195. The two Byzantines belonged to the family, originally from the Peloponnesus, of Michael Marullus Tarchaniotes, humanist and neo-platonic poet, friend of Bessarion, and central figure in the Aragonese humanist circle in Naples, to which the Caracciolo princes were connected. Zoe was related by her first marriage to the princes who figured in the Confraternita di S. Spirito in Sassia, crucial to the “Western Save Byzantium” project: cfr. Ronchey, *L’enigma di Piero*, pp. 258–259 and note ad loc.

²⁶ The letter Bessarion sent to the Consistory of Siena on May 10 of the same year confirms that he was behind the operation. In it he underscores how the alliance of the “niece of the emperor of Byzantium” was dear to his heart as a “priority question and object of every effort and thought” of loyalty toward “the Byzantine princes who had survived the great catastrophe” and toward “the unfailing national and racial connection”: Siena, Archivio di Stato, Consistory 2005, c. 94 (10 May 1472), published in S. Lampros, *Palaiologeia kai Peloponnesiaka*, I–IV, Athens 1926–1930, IV, pp. 311–314.

²⁷ Cf. Pierling, *La Russie et l’Orient*, p. 141. For a synthesis of the events that led to the *translatio ad Russiam* cf. recently S. Ronchey, *La “Terza Roma”*, in *Il medioevo*, U. Eco (ed.), X, *Quattrocento: Storia*, Milan, Motta, 2009, pp. 260–268. On the political and legal implications of the union, cf. P. Catalano, *Fin de l’Empire romain? Un problème juridico-religieux*, in P. Catalano–

Zoe/Sofija's heirs continued to adopt the Palaiologus name²⁸. The passage of the inheritance of the universal orthodox empire from Byzantium to Moscow was theorized in the letters attributed to Filofej of Pskov and in their re-workings²⁹.

But the grandson of Zoe/Sofija, Ivan IV, will complete and give expression to the ideology of the Third Rome in the purest line of Byzantine political thought. First of all, in the famous letters of the vitriolic Prince Andrej Kurbskij, in whom the Byzantine doctrine of universal autocracy of divine right found a true founding father. Ivan claimed for his own throne the Roman imperial law of Constantine, "first emperor in piety," and "of all the orthodox sovereigns" of Byzantium who "like eagles soared above the civilized world."

We could say, therefore, that the Third Rome was the product of the failed reunification of the first and the second. Its rise would gradually extinguish the powerful reflections that Byzantium had left in the imagination of the Catholic world – in particular, as I've mentioned, in Italian painting – rendering them indistinguishable and unintelligible. But looking at the Big Picture, observing how all of this has determined *our contemporary* vision of political geography, and trying to understand through the evolution and use of its memory *what Byzantium is for us today*, we have to recognize the enormous importance of the revival of ancient autocracy effected in Russia in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Again, it's from the nostalgia for Byzantium – in its purest "Roman" meaning, this time – or, if we prefer, from an unabashed as well as sly post-Byzantine use of Byzantium, that the ideology is affirmed with which Ivan IV, suffocating the power of the boyars, reorganizes the imperial administration along the principles of the Byzantine centralized state and gives rise to modern Russia. An ideological use, applied to an autocratic form, which is not necessarily progressive, but certainly innovative with respect to the feudal formula to which Rus' had remained tied to up to that point. An innovation taken from the past that would condition the cultural and political history of Europe up through the 20th century and beyond. So, again, a "constructive" or "dynamic" nostalgia.

P. Siniscalco (eds.), *Da Roma alla Terza Roma. Studi*, I. *Roma Costantinopoli Mosca*, Naples 1983, pp. 584ff., nos. 24 and 27, with bibliography.

²⁸ Cf. A.Th. Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen 1259–1453*, Munich 1938, repr. Amsterdam 1962, no. 69.

²⁹ For an analysis of the legal-religious ideas concerning the *translatio ad Russiam* of the Christian church (in addition to the Roman empire) and the "Roman" genealogy of the Great Muscovite Prince, cf. M. Capaldo, "L'idea di Roma in area slavo-ortodossa nei secoli IX–XVI", in P. Catalano–V.T. Pašuto (eds.), *L'idea di Roma a Mosca*, op. cit., pp. xxix–xxxiv. For general information on the transfusion of the doctrine of universal autocracy within the Muscovite principate, cf. G. Maniscalco Basile, *La sovranità ecumenica del Gran Principe di Mosca. Genesi di una dottrina (fine XV–inizio XVI secolo)*, Milan 1983, with bibliography and sources.

Baroque Recognition

From the north-eastern steppes of the first branch into which the Roman-Byzantine empire splits after the Fall, let's return to the second, the south-eastern or Ottoman empire, which, though without the legal-dynastic anointment conferred on the Russian, proclaims itself *de facto* heir of the Roman Caesars and physically occupies the seat, Constantinople, now capital of the new "Roman" empire of the Ottoman sultans. During the 16th century when Ivan Groznij sanctions the political revival of Byzantine autocracy in the Russian empire, the Polis continues to prosper under the Ottoman empire which also inherits in part the political tradition but which, more importantly, receives the privilege of its crucial geo-political function and the control of the Straits.

I won't elaborate here on the many eloquent appeals of *romanitas* vis-à-vis the Ottoman sultans, nor the indubitable forms of continuity with the Byzantine empire demonstrated by the Ottoman empire beginning with its first "Caesar", Mehmet II³⁰. I prefer to follow the tradition of nostalgia for Byzantium in the West, which, as we shall see, will help us discover new would-be, but no less relevant, heirs.

Already by the second half of the 15th century, right after the Conquest of 1453, the Polis was a half-sunk relic fit for treasure-hunters, a submerged Atlantis with a map. A population of erudite travellers from Europe, spared by the Ottoman wave, set off to explore her. The richness of the unlimited Byzantine past comes forth in the pages of these scholars who gravitated toward the Bosphorus, attracted by the historical magnetism of the place. They studied that proud body, venerated and lusted after for so many centuries, that now, vanquished, revealed itself to all. And there was almost shyness in that pathetic autopsy.

Despite its partial disfigurement, the Polis was easy to move around in. Still in contact with ancient sources, the travellers knew what they were looking for, found it, uncovered it, and related its fate with the kind of familiarity with the City's past and experience with its evidence that testified to their knowledge of its importance. The catalogue is a long one: from those of the late 15th and 16th centuries, like Bonsignori, Maurand, Belon, Nicolas de Nicolay, Ghislain de Busbecq, Du Fresne-Canay, Gerlach, Schweigger, Palerne, on to the greats of the 17th century, with Fynes Moryson, George Sandys, Pietro della Valle, Michel Baudier, Vincent de Stochove, Nicolas

³⁰ Having occupied the Byzantine imperial seat, Mehmed could legitimately claim inheritance of the authority of the *kayser-i Rûm*, emperor of the Rhomaioi, by right of conquest and, therefore, any territories belonging to the fallen empire (cf. the two letters he received from George of Trebisonde, the second of which refers to him as "emperor of the Romans and the whole world": see F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, trans. from the German by R. Manheim; edited, with a pref., by W.C. Hickman, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 249). In addition to *khansultan*, the title given to a Bāyazīd I by the Caliph of Cairo in place of *emir* from 1395 on, Mehmet was now *padishah* and *khudāwendigār* (*chorodobedikiare* in Greek), titles connected to the Persian tradition and equivalent to the Byzantine terms *authentes* and *basileus*, which were adopted by Mehmet II from 1453 on, and *autokrator*, which appears among Ottoman titles only after 1481, with the reign of Bayzid II.

du Loir, Balthazar de Montconys, Jean de Thévenot, Paul Tafferner, Thomas Smith, Jacob Spon and George Wheler, Cornelis de Bruijn, Aubry de la Motraye, and finally, touching on the 18th with Joseph Pitton de Tournefort³¹.

Their names recite like a devotional rosary for the City. Two of them will leave posterity priceless testimony of later lost or disfigured Byzantine monuments. The first is Pierre Gilles, who, landing on the submerged continent in the mid-15th century, will explore it with descriptive, historical, and administrative texts in mind, like the ancient information about its subdivision into regions; and he saw the finds, in some cases – as in that of the Basilica Cistern – discovering and salvaging them for the International of Scholars³². The second is Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, who, with courage and passion, will manage to capture in his drawings, despite Ottoman prohibitions, details of the interior of Hagia Sophia, during his stay in the City in the 1670s. He stayed hidden in its galleries for days in order to deliver to the Sun King in the *Relation nouvelle* the most sumptuously illustrated description ever seen³³.

Why such urgency? The fact is that, in the 16th and 17th centuries, Byzantium – filed away as a political problem after the papacy and the other European pretenders had failed to win the prize put forth with the fall of Constantinople, the roman imperial title – had continued to be an object of attention and study on the part of scholars who had spied the possibility of political and ideological recycling, if not also legal and dynastic re-claiming, of the Byzantine tradition. In effect, if the inheritance of the Palaiologus dynasty had passed to Moscow, another hereditary right had remained dormant and vacant: what harked back to the crusade conquest of Constantinople in 1204, the event which Ivan IV, in his letters to Kurbskij, saw as the first and genuine fall of the Byzantine empire.

I will not cite the entire introduction, dedicated to Louis XIV, from Villehardouin's *Chronicle* on the crusade conquest of Constantinople, published by Charles Du Cange in 1658, which opens the former's fantastic career as a Byzantine scholar. Marie-France Auzépy, who has recently analyzed the subject, writes concerning Du Cange's *Adress au roy*: "Research explained the history of the Byzantine empire in such a way as to legitimize the imperial inheritance of the King of France, an inheritance he intended to claim back not just from the Habsburgs, but also from the Otto-

³¹ A collection of their texts, in the Italian translation with bibliography, along with those of Gilles, Grelot and other major witnesses to the monuments and topography of Byzantine Constantinople, can be read in S. Ronchey – T. Braccini, *Il romanzo di Costantinopoli. Guida letteraria alla Roma d'Oriente*, Turin Einaudi, 2010.

³² He will classify and rearrange them in a reconstruction published posthumously, on which we base our knowledge of the topography of Constantinople to a large degree still today: *Petri Gyllii de topographia Constantinopoleos, et de illius antiquitatibus libri quatuor*, Lugduni, apud Guilieum Rovilium, 1562.

³³ *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople, enrichie de planz levez par l'Auteur sur les lieux [...] présentée au Roy*, la Boutique de Pierre Ricolet, Paris 1680.

man sultan.”³⁴ In the same period historical research into proof of French right to the throne of Constantinople via the Latin empire accompanied the diplomatic offensive against the Sublime Porte and Louis XIV’s spies at work carrying out discreet but accurate surveys of Ottoman city walls and preparing encoded projects for the take-over of the Ottoman empire³⁵.

In this atmosphere, the realization of the doctrine of the *basileia* of divine right within the French absolutist monarchy gives rise to the first pre-positivistic version of Byzantine studies. Publications of the most famous Byzantine historians begin to appear in the *corpus* published under the patronage of Colbert by the Louvre *Imprimerie Royale*, with the collaboration of the great scholars of the period. In the space of a few decades, Louis XIV’s extraordinarily efficient patronage machine produces the first complete edition of the main sources of Byzantine history. The so-called Louvre Corpus³⁶ is, as you well know, inaugurated in 1645 with John Cantacuzenus’ *History*. In 1648 Philippe Labbe’s preface, heading the second volume of the series, Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *Excerpta de legationibus*, lays out the publishing project and calls on scholars the world over to collaborate, while underlining the major importance of Byzantine history for modernity.

During the same decade when Grelot sketches Constantinople onsite, Cousin’s *Histoire de Constantinople* is published in Paris, and from this time on fundamental research tools, beginning with Du Cange’s still irreplaceable *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis* (1688)³⁷. This scholarly work allows French absolutism to reuse many elements of the Byzantine concept of the state, which then, in a virtuous circle of mutual stimulus, comes to be inspired by politics.

Nostalgia for Byzantium, which emerges as an individual trait from the travels and reconstructions of travellers and as a collective necessity from historians’ studies and treatises, generates an authentic Byzantine transference in the modern absolute

³⁴ Documentation on the French crown’s hereditary right to the two empires of East and West was, in fact, presented in 1648, ten years before Du Cange published his Villehardouin, by Suarès, bishop of Vaison, who produced evidence for the marriage of the granddaughter of the Latin emperor Baldwin II to Charles of Valois. See M.F. Auzépy, *Le XVII^e siècle: le savoir au service de la gloire*, in *Byzance retrouvée. Erudits et voyageurs français (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)*, exhibit catalogue (Chapelle de la Sorbonne, Paris, 13 August – 2 September 2001), M.-F. Auzépy and J.-P. Frémois, (eds.), Paris 2001, p. 18.

³⁵ Valuable details of the complex affair in J.P. Grémois, *En Orient, l’offensive diplomatique*, in *Byzance retrouvée* cit., pp. 39–43.

³⁶ To which the Jesuits Philippe Labbe (whose *Concilia* will provide the foundation for Hardouin’s and Mansi’s later editions) and Pierre Poussine, the Dominican François Combefis (the first editor of Greek Patristic writings), and the jurist Charles-Annibal Fabrot (first editor of the *Basilika*) contribute, among others. On the “Byzantine du Louvre” and its contributor, cf. the now valuable chapter by N. Petit, with profiles of the scholars, chronological list and complete description of the works, in *Byzance retrouvée* op. cit., pp. 70–80.

³⁷ To follow, in the Benedictine context, Bernard de Montfaucon’s *Paleographia Graeca*, Jean Mabillon’s *De re diplomatica*, and the *Oriens Christianus* of the friar preacher Michel Le Quien, to cite only the most significant.

monarchies. The parallel interest of protestant scholarship in the history of Constantinople in the 16th and 17th centuries provides the premise, in fact, for the connection that will later provide the means of transferring “Byzantine” state ideology from the French monarchy to the Prussian. From Wolf, the first publisher of John Zonaras, Nicetas Choniates, and Nicephorus Gregoras to Hoeschel, publisher of Photius and the *Excerpta constantiniana* to the Dutch Vulcanius and De Meurs, up to Hankius and Vossius, the world which produced many of the moving testimonies of the topography of Constantinople was the cosmopolitan community of reformation intellectuals, whose sympathy – and nostalgia – for Byzantium was conditioned also by their anti-papal allegiances.

Also in the case of France, the juxtaposition of the earlier Byzantine state to the ideology of French absolutism is the implicitly anti-papist vocation that a similar idea of sovereignty presupposes. But here, as never before, the crescendo of nostalgia for and research on Byzantium culminates under Louis XIV in the re-definition of the Byzantine autocratic model and the symbols of its sacredness, from the very image of the sun-king, which from the Justinian symbology put forth by Agapetus had surrounded the figure of the basileus in all of the encomiastic and parenetic Byzantine literature, and it had remained tenaciously entrenched in absolute monarchy, up until the last Palaiologus sovereigns, seeing its last literary expression in the verses Bessarion, then a twenty year-old courtier at Mystras, had dedicated in 1424 to the emperor-symbol of the continuation of Byzantium in the West, Manuel II³⁸.

In the modern era, the creation of a Byzantine imagination is always tied to a new injection of content in misunderstood historical packaging. Byzantium is so protean that its image is reborn over and over again in the most varied forms. From the moment Pseudo-Dionysius’ treatise on *Celestial Hierarchy*³⁹ began circulating and from

³⁸ This iambic *stichoi*, in reality Byzantine dodecasyllables, are preserved in a signed manuscript, the Marc. Gr. 533, completed by Bessarion shortly after the end of 1444, at the same time as the failed Varna crusade: cf. S. Ronchey, *Bessarione poeta e l’ultima corte di Bisanzio*, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo*, op. cit., pp. 52–54; for the metrical scheme, see *ivi*, *Appendice*, p. 65; on the manuscript, see A. Rigo’s entry, *ivi*, 394–397. The sun-king is linked to God by an affinity in image which raised him above human sensibility and destiny. But in the “soleil de blasons” composed by Du Cange and taken from the *Mémoire sur les manuscrits de M. Du Cange* published in 1752 by his grandson Jean-Charles Du Fresne d’Aubigny (Paris, BNF, Manuscrits, impr. 4° 465; cf. *Byzance retrouvée*, op. cit., p. 38, fig.10), part of the rays which encircle the shield of France hark back “à l’Empire d’Orient conquis par les Français en 1204 et occupé par plusieurs princes de la Maison de France” (*ivi*, p. 26). Therefore, the same concept expressed in the introduction to Villehardouin’s *Cronaca* is expressed here, that is, the sovereignty of Byzantium is rightfully part of the imperial inheritance of the French monarchy and not only is her sun-king to be considered the theoretical continuation of Roman-Byzantine sovereignty, but a concrete and direct dynastic right to the crown of Byzantium should, moreover, inspire him – Du Cange urges this – to reconquer it militarily: cf. Auzépy’s valuable notes in, *Le XVIIe siècle*, op.cit., in *Byzance retrouvée*, op. cit., p. 18; and fig. 10, *ivi*, p. 38, with entry p. 37.

³⁹ The *corpus Areopagiticum* is another of the cornerstones of Byzantine imperial doctrine in the Justinian era, brought to France many centuries before during the second Byzantine Icono-

the doctrines it expressed via figures and visions of such hieratic and wild magnificence, France developed the first model of what we can call Byzantine aesthetics, at the dawn of the modern era. And she instilled it in the *grandeur* of the absolute monarchy of divine right, which saw its sublime projection and symbolic stage in Versailles⁴⁰.

Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Stalin in person, a Byzantine-loving statesman of the 20th century, identified an affinity between Louis XIV and Ivan IV, even if, in the emulation of the Byzantine state example, he attributed chronological and ideological primacy to the Russian autocrat he loved⁴¹. If east of the Iron Curtain 15th century Byzantium carried on uninterruptedly, becoming gradually more impoverished and debased in its isolation and detachment from western culture⁴², the Byzantine revival in the age of Louis XIV would revive a series of further, increasingly more eccentric and marginal reawakenings in politics and aesthetics of the oriental empire. With the changing of the guard between France and Germany at the Congress of Vienna, when the publishing of Byzantine history moves, not by chance, to Prussia and to the Bonn Corpus, the witness to Byzantine studies will pass to the nascent hegemony of the Hohenzollern, and the symbolism of Byzantine power will again be assumed within a monarchy⁴³. But, this time, the German one.

Karl of Prussia, brother of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, cultivated a solitary alternative to the philo-occidentalism Prussian cultural mores and architecture expressed

clasm, but elevated to a symbol-text in the 17th century. On its links to the doctrines of Agapetus and the Pseudo-Patricius and its importance in the history of Byzantine political thought, cf. H. Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin*, Paris 1975, pp. 133ff.; on its contemporary remodelling in 17th century France, see Auzépy, *Le XVIIe siècle*, op. cit., in *Byzance retrouvée*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ The revival of truly Byzantine ceremonies in the palace has been posited for a long time, but not yet demonstrated. Various clues lead us to believe that in the ritual of the court of the Sun-King and in its very architecture, a shadow of the Great Palace of Constantinople was projected not just theoretically. The study of Versailles *sub specie Byzantii* is a research project yet to be undertaken: cf. *Palais et Pouvoir. De Constantinople à Versailles*, M.F. Auzépy and J. Cornette, eds., Paris 2003; in particular, on the relationship between topography, architecture, and the related visual engine of Versailles with Jean Domar's doctrines see *ivi*, p. 7.

⁴¹ At Ejzenstejn's cross-examination in the Kremlin in February 1947 (see below), Stalin exclaimed: "Tsar Ivan was a great and wise ruler, and if we compare him to Louis XIV, then Ivan IV is the tenth heaven!"; cf. G. Maryamov, *Kremlevskii Tsenzor*, Moscow 1992, pp. 84–91.

⁴² On the continual refashioning of the Byzantine past in the Russian and Slavic world, on its political implications, and historiographical outcomes, cf. in synthesis S. Ronchey, *Lo stato bizantino*, Turin, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 169–175 and 246–247 (bibliography).

⁴³ In 1828 the Agathius of Niebuhr edition inaugurated, as is well known, the new Bonn Byzantine Corpus. The Louvre Corpus had concluded slightly earlier with the edition of Leo the Deacon edited by L. Hase, which appeared in 1819: cf. Petit, *La "Byzantine du Louvre"*, op. cit., p. 80.

both in Friedrich II's cosmopolitanism and his palace, Sans Souci, as well as in the Germanism of his successors and their residences of medieval Gothic inspiration. In startling and bizarre antithesis, the decorative scenario of Prince Karl's so-called Klosterhof, which we can now visit in the park of the Castle of Glienicke just outside Berlin⁴⁴, with its purple columns, mosaics, perfect replicas and ancient artefacts, celebrated the religious, universalistic ideal and the Byzantine utopia of a monarchy which would straddle East and West, dominated by a Caesar (*Kaiser*) holding the world together with a cross and a sceptre⁴⁵.

The Byzantine ideal will return to inspire the designs of one of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's descendents in even more politically ephemeral expressions. After the break-up of the German Confederation in 1866 from which his sovereignty emerged strengthened, Ludwig II, the bizarre king of Bavaria, dreamed of recreating an absolute monarchy of divine right. During the greater part of his reign, between 1869 and 1884, he dedicated himself to a reactionary literary project, which would be tinged with ever-greater veins of mysticism as he became more and more mentally unstable. Initially, Ludwig's project was born of his well-known passion for Louis XIV and his less well-known but no less enthusiastic mania for Byzantium. The young king had devoured Krause's manual of Byzantine studies and Schnaase's pages on Byzantine art history⁴⁶, and especially, after having studied in minute detail, Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De ceremoniis* in Reiske's Bonn edition. This is confirmed by the German translations of many excerpts from the text in his Nachlass, found in Bavarian State Archive by Albrecht Berger⁴⁷.

From decade to decade throughout the 19th century, the sacredness of autocracy and its sumptuous rituals was emptied of its true significance, becoming a theatrical backdrop. It is not a coincidence that in 1885, a few months before the Parisian

⁴⁴ Cf. G.H. Zuchold, "Byzanz in Berlin. Der Klosterhof im Schlosspark Glienicke," *Berliner Forum* 4 (1984), esp. pp. 7–10; also, *Der "Klosterhof" des Prinzen Karl von Preussen im Park von Schloss Glienicke in Berlin*, Berlin 1993.

⁴⁵ This is how the sovereign is represented in the so-called Kaiserrelief, the magnificent 12th century roundel. The only original piece missing, the bas-relief is now in Washington, DC in the Byzantine Collection at Dumbarton Oaks, which acquired it in the mid-1930s: cf. H. Pierce-R. Tyler, "Three Byzantine Works of Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 2 (1941), pp. 4ff.

⁴⁶ J.H. Krause, *Die Byzantiner des Mittelalters*, Halle 1864; C. Schnaase, *Geschichte der Bildenden Künste*, 2nd ed., vol. I, Düsseldorf 1869, pp. 105–301. As A. Berger points out in *Les projets byzantins de Louis II de Bavière* (in *Byzance en Europe*, under the direction of M. F. Auzépy, Paris 2003, p. 78 and notes ad loc), Ludwig read pages 168–172 on the Great Palace of Constantinople in the latter work with particular attention, as his diary and correspondence prove: cf. H.G. Evers, *Ludwig II. Theaterfürst, König, Baubherr*, Munich 1986, pp. 119; G. Baumgartner, *Königliche Träume. Ludwig II. und seine Bauten*, Munich 1981, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, geheimes Hausarchiv, Kabinettsakten Ludwig II., No. 303. The exact content, referred to me verbally by Albrecht Berger, is the following: Book I: 1 (extract), 3 (extract), 4, 24, 38–41, 60, 62–63, 68, 69/1–5, 7–14, 70, 71/4, 73, 89–92; Book II: 15, 20–22. Some chapters were translated independently by various people; cf. Berger, *Les projets byzantins de Louis II de Bavière*, op. cit., p. 78 and notes ad loc.

première of Victorien Sardou's *Théodora*, which we can consider the start of the fin de siècle revival of literary Byzantinism⁴⁸, Ludwig had a private performance given at the Royal Theatre in Munich⁴⁹. As Albrecht Berger wrote, late 19th century Byzantium was now only "the possibility of an historical masquerade among many."

Besides, from that point on, the literary evaluation of Byzantine political life would coincide increasingly with the stereotypical image of a decadent, aestheticized court, the exclusive kingdom of female or effeminate intrigue, i.e. vacuous and senseless. With the rise of democracies, Byzantine power will be definitively emasculated, so to speak. Not surprisingly, the prudish moralizing of popular literature will transfer the male sovereignty of the sun-king to the corrupt, immoral figure of woman. The symbol of Byzantium will be Theodora, the prostitute-empress. Through the literary digressions with her as protagonist, the political myth of autocracy will arrive in the "Short Century", in bourgeois culture, in mass popular literature, and in western European cinema completely overturned and discredited⁵⁰.

The distorted opinion the 20th century had of Byzantium, the derogatory meaning we still give to the adjective "Byzantine," the political stereotype of Byzantinism as incurable corrupter of power, along with the irrational perception of Byzantine history as indefinitely protracted "Decline and Fall" are all derived from this image.⁵¹ In reality, western nostalgia for Byzantium burned out with the Enlightenment. Even more lacking in Europe is the "proactive nostalgia," capable of creating real and proactive cultural, aesthetic, and political innovation on the foundation of the memory of Byzantium.

This is a scenario which does not apply, however, to the oriental quadrant, where the legacy of Byzantium is concrete and vital, independent of the strictly political judgment we might give the forms of state it has generated. And it is in both branches the Byzantine empire split into in the 15th century: the south-eastern, the multi-ethnic Ottoman empire⁵², and especially, the north-eastern, the Russian Orthodox em-

⁴⁸ Sardou's *Théodora* was staged for the first time in Paris on December 26, 1884: for its influence on the image of Byzantium in fin de siècle Europe, as on contemporary Byzantine historiography and 19th century literature, see S. Ronchey, *Teodora Femme Fatale*, in *La decadenza*, S. Ronchey, ed., Palermo, Sellerio, 2002, pp. 19–43.

⁴⁹ On which occasion he conferred the cross of Commander of the Royal Merit Order of St. Michael on the author.

⁵⁰ Cf. S. Ronchey, *Teodora e i visionari*, in "Humana sapit". *Etudes d'antiquité tardive offertes à Iellia Cracco Ruggini*, J.-M. Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa, eds., preface by P. Brown, Turnhout, Brepols, 2002, pp. 445–453; Ead., "La Femme Fatale bizantina," *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002): *For Professor Ihor Sevcenko on his 80th birthday*, no. 2, pp. 103–115.

⁵¹ Cf. S. Ronchey, *La "femme fatale", source d'une byzantinologie austère*, in *Byzance en Europe*, M.-F. Auzépy, ed., Paris, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2003, pp. 153–175; cf. also Ead., "Charles Diehl, o del bizantinismo," in C. Diehl, *Figure bizantine*, Italian edition, Turin Einaudi 2007, pp. vii–xiv.

⁵² Where the sultans not only had applied Roman law as the common law of subjugated Christian peoples, but they had also changed the administrative and tax structures of the Byzantine em-

pire where the imperial vocation of mediation between ethnic groups never ceased: an undeniable common tradition that carried on by branching with the post-Byzantine use of the ideology of Byzantium and, for better or worse, in a “constructive” nostalgia, very different from the decadent re-evocation in western Europe from the 18th century through the entire 19th century.

The Byzantine concept of power and, in some way, the aesthetic of Byzantine power will perpetuate themselves through the Tsarist empire up until Stalin’s soviet empire. It will not be a coincidence if, when we want to show something like the Byzantine court on the big screen, we end up choosing one great work from all the filmography of the 20th century. It’s an irony of history that the two films which make it up, especially the second, were filmed at the expense of persecutory censorship by an autocratic power so similar in essence as to be itself, *en travesti*, the subject.

I’m referring to two truly Byzantine films in their ambiguous guises: homage to power and its denunciation, burnished praise and raw Kaiserkritik, in the most classic tradition of Constantinopolitan court historiography⁵³. I mean Sergej Ejzenstejn’s *Ivan The Terrible, part I* and its sequel, *Ivan The Terrible, part II: The Boyars’ Plot*, filmed in the Soviet Union in 1943 and 1946, respectively, as the first and second parts of the incomplete trilogy on the sovereign Stalin loved to cultivate and emu-

pire, in turn heirs to those of the Romans: cf. S. Vryonis, “The Byzantine legacy and Ottoman forms,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 23–24 (1969–1970), pp. 251–308; A. Bryer–H. Lowry (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*, Birmingham, University of Birmingham 1986; C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: the Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1995. In particular for the discussion on Byzantine *pronoia*/Ottoman *timar* cf. R. Alarcón, *Pronoia y timar: comparación de sistemas*, in M. Motos Guirao–M. Morfakidis Filaktò (eds.), *Constantinopla. 550 años de su caída*, Granada, Centro de Estudios Bizantinos, Neogriegos y Chipriotas, 2006, pp. 93–101; A. Kazhdan, “Pronoia: the history of a scholarly discussion,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 10 (1995), pp. 133–163; N. Oikonomides, “Ottoman Influence on Byzantine Late Fiscal Practice,” *Südöst-Forschungen*, 45 (1986), pp. 1–24.

⁵³ A purple thread of subversion and irony always permeates these writings, in which the centuries-old conventional gaze of the Europeans missed the encrypted signals of Byzantine cultural resistance. But in Russian culture, particularly Soviet, their updating is evident, like the transference between autocratic past and totalitarian present. In reality, Jakov Ljubarskij’s famous essay on Michael Psellus (Ja.N. Ljubarskij, *Michail Psell. Ličnost’ i tvorčestvo*, Moscow 1978) pronounces not only on the position of the Consul of Philosophers at the Byzantine court, but also on the theme of the relationship between intellectuals and the Soviet State. And his reflections on Psellus’ writings are certainly applicable also to Ejzenstejn’s films: the false deference of the encomium hides the political fronde behind rhetorical encryption. This is nevertheless discernible by an intellectual elite able to decipher the citations in which present and past contaminate each other. After all, the art, literature, historiography, and culture of the 20th century Soviet *intelligencija* are almost entirely dominated by the same ambivalence: cfr. S. Ronchey, “La passione di Kazhdan per Bisanzio,” *Quaderni di Storia* 46 (1997), pp. 5–24; Ead., *Kazhdan, l’oligarchia sovietica e l’aristocrazia bizantina*, in A. P. Kazhdan–S. Ronchey, eds., *L’aristocrazia bizantina*, Palermo, Sellerio 1998, pp. 9–29.

late⁵⁴. A work “without a doubt filmed in Byzantine style”, as the uncompromising critic Zhdanov pronounced during the shocking cross-examination which took place between the director, the principal actor, Cherkasov, on one side, and Stalin, Zhdanov, and Molotov on the other, one day at the end of February 1947 at the Kremlin⁵⁵.

We wouldn't be able to find anything of Byzantium in the improbable sets and laughable costumes of the western Byzantine *sword-and-sandals*, that insubstantial cinematographic tradition which from the end of the 19th century up until almost today declined the image, theorized since the Enlightenment and accredited in the source exegesis of bourgeois historians at the beginning of the century, of a Byzantine court not only decadent and corrupt, but fundamentally apolitical, frivolous, and brainless, in stubbornly anti-historical forms.

As I have said, western public opinion had met Byzantium in the guise of the prostitute-empress, Theodora, denigrated by Procopius, elevated by Montesquieu to symbolize a world worthy of condemnation, reinvented by Sarah Bernhardt in Sardou's theatre pièce⁵⁶. The most innovative and popular of 20th century artistic forms

⁵⁴ The affair surrounding the trilogy commissioned from Ejzenstejn follows the “Byzantine” ambiguity of relations between the artist and power like a parabola. The intense polemic of the first part, filmed right after Stalingrad, was not, in fact, deeply understood except by a few. The unmistakable identification between ancient and modern autocrat, the transposition of the present into the past, apparently brought to the foreground the appeal to patriotic national unity and the reinforcement of international alliances (then with Elizabeth I and now with the England of Churchill) to fight the common enemy (then the Baltic powers and now Nazi aggression.) *Ivan the Terrible* even won the Stalin Prize. However, when, in the *Boyars' Plot*, the director accentuated the similarities between the first tsar of All of the Russias and Stalin, with description of the climate of constant suspicion in the tyrant's palace, his repressive methods, and his growing thirst for blood, the film was banned by the Central Committee and the clip of the last part, which Ejzenstejn had filmed in the meantime, was destroyed. Ejzenstejn, struck down by a heart attack, was locked away in hospital. In order to gain release, he begged Stalin in vain to let him film a new version of the *Boyars' Plot* in line with bureaucratic requirements. He never even succeeded in beginning to shoot. A second heart attack killed him in 1948 at 50 years old. *The Boyars'* was shown for the first time in 1958 under Krušev, on the 60th anniversary of the director's birth. Naum Kleiman, director of the Ejzenstejn Museum in Moscow, seized the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the director's birth in 1988 – under Gorbačev, in full *glasnost* – to finally show one surviving scene from the third part of the trilogy. In it Ivan the Terrible interrogates a foreign mercenary, and the method of interrogation is based meticulously on the methods used by Stalin's secret police: cf. M. Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein, A Biography*, London 1978²; J. Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema and History*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

⁵⁵ The 1947 cross-examination at the Kremlin is available in its entirety in Maryamov, *Kremlevskii Tsenzor*, op. cit., pp. 84–91.

⁵⁶ On the divine, even slightly pathological, interpretation by Sarah Bernhardt, who interpreted her for years throughout Europe and America, cf. the assessment of Sigmund Freud, who was an enthusiastic spectator at the *première* in 1884, quoted by S. Ronchey, *Teodora Femme Fatale*, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

did no more than replicate the reductive and belittling schema, eventually vulgarizing it and making it worse⁵⁷.

On the other hand, beyond its reconstruction of the best-known and clearest illustration of the ideology of the Third Rome, Ejzenstejn's film manages to render, thanks to the unambiguous choices of the scenographer, Isaak Spin'el, and costume designers Nadezhda Buzina and Leonid Naumov, the visual essence of Byzantine historical reality: of that scenography of power, of that power as theatrical set, which was the first mark of autocracy. The superimposition of the two figures – Stalin, the modern autocrat, and Ivan, the 16th century autocrat – is mediated in Ejzenstejn by an aesthetic pursuit guided by history and hypnotized by philology⁵⁸.

The shadow of the two-headed eagle is projected from the sceptre onto the Tsar's face from the first scene of *Ivan The Terrible*, the coronation sequence. Amid the crowd of dignitaries on bended knee in the *proskynesis*, the procession of long-bearded prelates wrapped in sumptuous orthodox vestments advances intoning hymns below the basilica vaults frescoed with Byzantine saints, dimmed by the haze of incense. The holy character of universal power of divine right is evoked in every detail. Before the spectators' eyes runs not only the extraordinary reconstruction of the customs and courtly rites introduced by the marriage of the last Palaiologus princess, but a true visual compendium of Byzantine political doctrine⁵⁹.

And yet, while the continuation of the Tsarist empire in the Soviet empire reveals the political "nostalgia" for Byzantium more alive than ever in its politicians and pro-

⁵⁷ Reruns on screen by other more or less popular actresses, films like *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio* by Ernesto Mario Pasquali (1909), Henry Pouctal's French *Théodora* (1912) and a classic liberty silent like Leopoldo Carlucci's *Teodora* made in Turin in 1922 will spring up. The *sword-and-sandals* of the second half of the 20th century will ultimately be the heirs to Sardou's same vision, from Riccardo Freda's puerile *Teodora* (1954) to Robert Siodmak's ambitious *Kampf um Rom* di (1968–69), an Italian-German co-production based on Felix Dahn's 19th century novel and starring, among others, Orson Welles in the role of Justinian. On these two dreadful films, cf. A. Viganò, *Storia del cinema storico in cento film*, Genoa, 1996, pp. 62–66.

⁵⁸ "Ejzenstejn elaborates references to Byzantine figurative art in memory of expressionist cinema (space as 'mental construct,' the ideological symbology of shadow, theatricalisation of dramatic conflict) and tends to linger particularly on the liturgical component of the historical event [...]. History tends to become more and more a stylistic experience and [...] the 'representation of power' translates more and more as reflection on the 'power of representation.'": Viganò, op. cit., p. 98.

⁵⁹ Ivan Vasilievič is proclaimed by the patriarch not only "Caesar," *csar*, but "anointed by God" and "lord autocrat." He receives "directly from God" the sceptre with the eagle and the globe surmounted by the Greek cross, which symbolises his complete supremacy and the joining of secular and religious power in the imperial person. Nothing is more Byzantine than the speech Ejzenstejn has the newly-crowned basileus pronounce. The plan to reconquer the ancient empire, those "coastal lands of our forefathers" which "for the moment remain under the dominion of other sovereigns" is founded openly on the legitimate inheritance of the Second Rome. "Two Romes fell," intones Ivan Groznij, "but the third, Moscow, exists and a fourth Rome will come to be. The only supreme lord of this Third Rome, the Muscovite state, from today on will be me. *Alone*."

poses again the realization of the ancient autocracy in the new along with its critique *en travesti* in artistic and scholarly works, something else happened in the 20th century, the century that sees at its onset the disintegration of the second of the empires into which the Byzantine empire had split. Just as we did for the 17th century, let's apply our magnifying glass again to the epitome of Byzantium that always was and still is the Polis of Constantinople.

History, like the psyche, moves by associations, hidden intuitions, combinations, lapses. Chance is king, as Robespierre liked to say, but this doesn't mean that the concatenation of events is random, quite the contrary. *Zeitgeist* works in a strange way⁶⁰. The effect of the creation of Byzantine studies as a science and university discipline – we can establish its birth right in the Polis between 1875 and 1885, with the travels of Gustave Schlumberger and Karl Krumbacher – produces a cultural recovery that is surprising in the immediacy with which it is received also by the more distracted literati or those outside the academy who begin to read with disconcerting speed what the young field of Byzantine studies has to offer them: if Dos Passos studies Diehl on the Orient Express, Butor reads the edition of Psellus published by Renauld in the *Belles Lettres* in a café at the old Galata Bridge and manages to visualize, almost in a

⁶⁰ The case of the Kariye Camii is illustrative for all. During the freeze of 1929, the crumbling of a layer of plaster covering the extraordinary Koimesis over the entrance to the church, whose “perfect” beauty elicited the ecstatic admiration of 19th century aesthetes, is certainly a case. But that isolated church in the area of the Blacherne had already attracted visitors between the 16th and mid-19th centuries. For an obscure magnetic attraction in the beginning, as in the case of Gilles, who could not have made out more than its exquisite shell and its marble decoration. Then, for obvious reasons. After the external structure had also fallen into ruin, and thanks to the architect Pelopidas Kouppas’ advocacy before the English consul Carlton Cumberland, the major part of the mosaics had been discovered in 1876, and were able to be contemplated not only by the young Krumbacher – who intuited the importance, was struck by the softness and “classicistic” fluidity of their features and spoke of “Pompeian realism” – but also by travellers who between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century had had the audacity to make their way there, like Régnier or Marie Léra. And yet it is the casual event of 1929, natural and almost miraculous, that gives birth to the real “Chora syndrome,” which moves Whittemore to undertake the restoration in 1948. While the work is going on, word spreads with a surprising speed that isn't normal for archacology. Cocteau visits the Kariye Camii in 1949 and succumbs to a fascination so profound as to be inexplicable given his complete lack of knowledge of Byzantium, and which, however, he passes on in magnificent writings. Whether they read them or not, more and more travellers visit the Church. When Whittemore dies, the restoration finds other patrons. The Byzantine Institute of America, founded by Whittemore is flanked by the new Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, financed by the Blisses. Underwood succeeds Whittemore; Sitwell hears about a café from an American friend back from Afghanistan and so organises his first trip to Constantinople. Leigh Fermor talks about the “summer of St. Martin” of Byzantine art. In short order, the Church of Theodoros Metochites becomes a Musuem; it is a Constantinopolitan myth that every one runs to see. His founder's turban and the pallid face of the imperial nun Melania become icons of what, they don't really know, but something they want to begin to understand: cf. S. Ronchey, *La Città delle città*, in Ronchey – Braccini, *Il romanzo di Costantinopoli*, pp v–xxvii

trance, the *facies* of Byzantine Constantinople⁶¹. In turn this literature sets in motion new interest in excavations, restoration, and research, in the virtuous circle that will lead in the 40s and 60s, after the restoration of Hagia Sophia, to the great recovery of St. Saviour in Chora (the Kariye Camii), Pammakaristos (the Fethiye Camii), some of the Palace mosaics, and the first systematic excavations in this and other areas of the ancient City.

From then on, this subterranean dialectic between research and writers will accelerate knowledge. In the second half of the 20th century, not only will literary culture begin to orient itself again within the City, to overcome the labyrinth along with the Minotaur hiding within – the Ottoman empire – but scientific and scholarly culture will commit itself increasingly to investigation of the past, to finding and following its traces, not only topographic or architectonic, but historical, documentary, philological, and literary.

Epilogue. A ghost haunting Europe

A ghost moves through 21st century Europe, since the Short Century, the 20th, brutally liquidated its last descendents. The political ghost of Byzantium continues to hover, invisible and misunderstood, over the incandescent regions of our contemporary world, over its areas of conflict. The boiling territories of the globe are those where the multi-ethnic *basileia* had continued to dominate in its successive metamorphoses.

With the disintegration of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the 20th century and that of the USSR at its end, the 21st century has inaugurated its geopolitics against the backdrop of ethnic conflicts between those peoples unified for so many centuries, for better or worse, by Constantine's legacy. After the fall of the Sublime Porte at one end and the Berlin Wall at the other, the Byzantine legacy of multi-ethnic government continued no longer. But its twentieth century dispersion leaves – from the Balkans to the Black Sea, from Central Asia to ancient Sogdiana and Bactria, which we call Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq – a screen of smoke and blood yet to dissipate.

The great French historian, Fernand Braudel, taught us to look at history, especially medieval history, with an eye to isolating the Mediterranean as its central unit and to refer to what he called the Greater Mediterranean: a “spatially-dynamic area which recalls a magnetic or electric force field” stretching to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, into which Mediterranean civilisation spread⁶².

⁶¹ The passages by Dos Passos and Butor can be read in the Italian translation (with reference to the original texts and bibliography) in Ronchey – Braccini, *Il romanzo di Costantinopoli*, pp. 47–48 and 331–333.

⁶² A civilisation which, according to Braudel, measures itself by these irradiations, since “the destiny of Mediterranean civilization is easier to read at its fringes than at its centre:” for this citation and the concept of “Greater Mediterranean,” see F. Braudel, *Civiltà e imperi del Mediterraneo nell'età di Filippo II* (Ital. trans.), Turin 1986³, I, pp. 166–169.

It is not a coincidence that Braudel's Greater Mediterranean coincides with areas of friction, of ethnic conflict, with the thresholds of crisis in the 21st century⁶³; that they are the same areas where, for eleven centuries, the Byzantine empire in continuity with the Roman empire had negotiated conflicts and amalgamated the continuous migration of populations. If we stop ignoring the fact that the ghost of Byzantium inhabits these geopolitical areas, it's easier to understand the turbulence that marked the beginning of our century. Ancient pre-Roman, pre-Byzantine fault lines of conflict began to make themselves felt as soon as the multinational empires, heirs of Byzantium, began to fall apart.

If we return to that privileged point of harkening which is the Polis, we note that the critical mass of Byzantine knowledge brought ever-closer interaction between the progress of academic Byzantine studies and a new, no longer decadent, Byzantinophilia, even if it was not directly observable. It produced a new "nostalgia," instilled a new proactive and innovative talent in a new type of *Sehnsucht* for Byzantium: an intense Byzantine nostalgia in the fullest sense because it is truly aware of itself and its subject, perhaps for the first time in all the centuries we have revisited here⁶⁴. At the moment when the modern autocratic forms Byzantium had evolved into came up wanting, the historical lesson of Byzantium can emerge cleansed of its propagandistic superfluity, of its reactionary expressions of nostalgia.

Because what interests us in 21st century nostalgia for Byzantium are certainly not the sporadic, retrograde meanings, not neo-Byzantinism understood as pan-Orthodox fundamentalism or, still worse, neo-autocratic, nationalistic, anti-western claims of the type expressed, for example, in the recent Russian film, *Lesson on Byzantium* by Tichon Sevkunov, in which the realisation of the Byzantine past assumes the debatable and worrying forms of government propaganda. On the contrary, what interests us is, again, that form of "proactive," constructive and innovative nostalgia that translates into an understanding of the importance of the Byzantine past and the use of the knowledge of that past for the advancement of work in the present.

Active and innovative nostalgia is what today re-defines, in the writings of authors, the Byzantine millennium as an example for the resolution of postcolonial conflicts, and Constantinople herself, especially in her topography, as a symbol of that mediation between civilisations in which confrontation is considered by some to be inevitable, or worse already in motion. But here again the City, her heart, her epitome, becomes the "bridge" on which Turkish intellectuals see themselves. Gürsel: "I am the bridge over the Bosphorus that unites not only two shores, the Asiatic

⁶³ Of which, as contemporaries, we can only write the eventual chronicle, that "of single events seen by contemporaries at the rhythm of their brief life." A history, then, not of long waves, but of brief ripples on the surface: a *bi-story* subject to our contingent vision and philosophy of history, if not to ideology and political propaganda: cf. Braudel, *ibidem*.

⁶⁴ And about which, see also S. Ronchey, *Bisanzio Continuata. Presupposti ideologici dell'attualizzazione di Bisanzio nell'età moderna*, in G. Cavallo (ed.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, III/1. *La cultura bizantina*, Rome-Salerno, 2005, pp. 691-727.

and the European, but men and cultures.” Pamuk: “I understood that the best thing was to be a bridge between two shores. To speak to the two shores without belonging.” Constantinople comes back to be the point of physical, as well as metaphorical, mediation between Europe and the Asia whose “decrepit, jewelled hand,” as Cocteau put it, is seen as a young, armed hand, but not for this less rich in past and dense with human potential and alive with stimulation.

The “bridge,” which recurs metaphorically as the manifesto of non-membership in declining Europe as much as turbulent Asia, but also as the promise of civilisation in the mediation and acceptance of conflicting cultures attested and symbolised by the history of Byzantium, is again filled with young people, intellectuals, travellers no longer lost, tourists no longer tourists now beginning to live on the shores like an observatory of the new century.

Dear colleagues, don’t let yourselves be fooled by the difficulties we all suffer, from the decline of universities to the crisis of academic chairs. Byzantine studies are now more than ever part of the *Zeitgeist*. Reactivating the memory of the peoples who today have entered and continue to enter that Europe which Byzantium contributed so much to create, reviving the common past through research on the Byzantine common denominator can and must be the strong point of our discipline.