

Aleksey Kamenskikh
Perm State University (Perm, Russia)

The Image of the Second Rome through the Prism of the Third

Since the 1920s in various fields of Greek culture (in the rediscovered novels and stories by A. Papadiamandis, in the works of Ph. Kontoglou and N. Pentzikis in iconography and painting, of D. Pikionis in architecture, of B. Tatakis, Ch. Yannaras, J. Romanides, J. Zizioulas and others in philosophy and theology) one may see a development of a tendency which may be characterised to a first approximation as “Neo-Byzantinism.”¹ In general, the main principle of this movement might be formulated as following: Greece is not an ordinary nation and cannot build its identity according to the model of a neo-European national state (in spite of the fact that just this process actually occurs in 20th c.). The fundamental principle of Greek culture is recognized in *the Byzantine Orthodoxy* as supra-territorial and moreover supra-ethnic cultural model.

It is very interesting that many of the mentioned Greek intellectuals find a detailed development of philosophical, theological, artistic aspects of this model in the writings of Russian religious philosophers and byzantinists of 19th and 20th c. – from the early Slavophiles (like I. Kirejevsky and A. Khomyakov) up to Russian émigré authors like G. Florovsky, V. Lossky and L. Ouspensky. It seems significant that Greek authors “recognise” in writings created by the representatives of “the Third Rome” the cultural model appropriate for “the Second one,” perceive this model as *own*.

In this paper I’d like to touch several most interesting moments of such perception and – as far as it goes – to describe some key principles of this play of reciprocal reflection of Russian and Greek cultural identities.

¹ See X. Γιανναράς, *’Ορθοδοξία και Δύσηστη Νεώτερη Ελλάδα*, Αθήνα 1999 [Ch. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West in New Greece*, Athens 1999]; монах Диодор (Ларионов), “Пути” греческого богословия, “Богослов.Ру. Научный богословский портал,” <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/2593536.html#_ftn14>.

I

To some extent “the Neo-Byzantine movement” might be considered as a kind of reaction to the failure of the political and cultural project that had its beginning in the Greek revolution of 1821 and its tragic result in the destruction of Greek communities in Asia Minor in 1923 (afterwards also in Constantinople). From the first steps of the Greek revolution the aim of struggle for independence had a distinctly *national* character; it was not a restoration of the Byzantine Empire, but a foundation of the state of the Greeks.² It was no mere accident that the founders of the Kingdom of Greece called themselves not *the Romaioi* (or *the Christianoi*), as did the Byzantine Greeks whose identity was established by the awareness of themselves as the Orthodox Christians and heirs of Rome, but *the Hellenes*. As any political project, the idea of the future Greek national state had its perspective and retrospective aspects. The first, a quasi-Napoleonic *Μεγάλη Ιδέα*, “the Great Idea,” provided for a reunification in one political whole of all parts of the scattered Greek nation. The new state, with Constantinople as the capital, ought to embrace all territories of the Balkans, the Archipelago, Asia Minor and the northern shore of the Black Sea. The second, “retrospective” aspect of the project presupposed reinterpretation of the Byzantine Empire image which was perceived now not in its real polyethnic and multi-linguistic manifoldness, but first of all as *the state of the Greeks*. (It’s not wonderful that the development of this nationalistic tendency provoked the split within *millet-i Rûm*, the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire: Bulgarians, for example, began to see in the Orthodox episcopos and in the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople himself ethnic Greeks predominantly³). Some key points of the attempts to realise this project are: the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece (1832), “the Bulgarian schism” and the series of Greek-Bulgarian conflicts (from 1860s), the failed intervention in Odessa (1918–1919) and the tragic endpoint – the downfall of the Pontic Greek communities, the massacre in

² Surely, I mean here only the prevailing tendency, the most significant among the Greek population of the Peloponnese and the Central Greece. Ideas of the so called Phanariots, rather influential at the first stage of the Greek national struggle, up to the end of the 20th c. were pushed to the sidelines, along with with the Phanariots themselves. See S.W. Sowards, *Twenty-five lectures on modern Balkan history (the Balkans in the age of Nationalism)*, Lecture 6: East-Lansing, Michigan State University, 1996–2012, <<http://staff.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/>>.

³ Л.А. Герд, *Константинополь и Петербург: церковная политика России на православном Востоке (1878–1898)*, Москва 2006, Chapter VI, pp. 239–307.

Smyrna and all “the Asia Minor catastrophe” (Μικρασιατική καταστροφή) in 1922–1923.⁴

Perhaps it is no accident that *Fotis Kontoglou* (Φώτης Κόντογλου, 1895–1965), in 1922 a young painter and a teacher who was to become one of the most influent figures of “the Neo-Byzantine” movement, was among more than one and a half million Greeks who departed from Asia Minor. By that time F. Kontoglou had gained experience of studying at the Athens School of Fine Art, travelling in Western Europe, working in Paris as a book illustrator. But, as F. Kontoglou’s biographer Nikos Zias writes, “the tragedy of the Greek Asia Minor has a tremendous effect on him, separating him radically from the West, on the one hand, and, on the other, making him feel responsible for the continuation, even in another space, of the long-lived tradition which had withstood the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire and survived for four centuries and was now in danger of being completely lost as it had been uprooted from its own place...”⁵ In the spring of 1923 the painter visited Mount Athos, and his artistic career took a new direction: “Experiencing a kind of holy intoxication on Athos, [Kontoglou] set about copying wall-paintings and icons and made it his task to unravel the secrets of Byzantine art, while at the same time he painted the Athos landscape, the monasteries and their monks, and wrote short tales brimming over with life and poetry.”⁶

In the coming years he removes wall paintings and creates numerous frescoes and icons on wood in tens of churches all over Greece, works at the Byzantine Museum of Athens, at the Coptic Museum in Cairo, organizes the Byzantine Museum in Corfu, undertakes the monumental wall painting of the Athenian Municipality, writes numerous works on the hagiographic heritage of Byzantium. By efforts of Fotius Kontoglou and his pupils the “neo-Byzantine” style has become predominant in the contemporary Greek iconography.

For the purpose of this paper it is very important that the “methodological horizon” for Kontoglou’s views on the phenomenon of the Orthodox icon was formed to a large extent by the writings of Leonid Ouspensky – Kontoglou’s friend, a Russian icon-painter, historian of icon and a lecturer in iconography in the Orthodox institute of St Dionysius in Paris. In

⁴ S.W. Sowards, *Twenty-five lectures on modern Balkan history*, Lectures 6 and 14.

⁵ N. Zias, *Fotis Kontoglou and the Modern Greek Painting*, in *Memoriam of Kontoglou*, Athens 1975. English translation (by H. Mathioudakis): <http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/zias_kontoglou.html>.

⁶ N. Zias, *Photis Kontoglou: Reflections of Byzantium in the 20th century*, Athens 1997, p. 15.

1948 Kontoglou supervised the Greek translation of Ouspensky's brochure *L'Icone, Vision du Monde Spirituel*, which was published twice (in 1948 and 1952) in Athens. Some scholars note the influence of Ouspensky's works on Kontoglou and emphasise that "the bulk of Kontoglou's writings were published *after* this encounter with the writings of Ouspensky."⁷ It is noteworthy that through Ouspensky's writings Kontoglou was affected by *the whole tradition* of Russian philosophy and theology of icon, elaborated in the writings of Eugene Trubetsky, Sergei Bulgakov and Paul Florensky.⁸

Actually, a reader of Kontoglou's writings on iconography encounters the concepts familiar to him from P. Florensky's *Iconostasis* (though some of these concepts are treated in a simplified and strictly polemic mode). Both Florensky and Kontoglou suggest that the Byzantine iconography was not a stepping-stone on the way to the innovations of the Italian Renaissance, but the highest point in the development of religious art. Its essence is symbolic realism. The Renaissance art has an immanent, naturalistic and illusionistic character (which expresses itself, for example, in the use of a "direct," linear perspective that makes the spectator the central point of the world; in the use of natural phenomena such as clouds and sunrays for the presentation of the divine, etc.), and developed in close connection with the philosophical, rationalistic immanentism of its time. Unlike the "modern,"⁹ Renaissance art, Byzantine iconography intends to present the transcendent spiritual world (and the icon as a visible image of the invisible; it is "a window" in this world); it has liturgical and *anagogical* character¹⁰. The absence of linear perspective and shadows, transformed

⁷ E. Freeman, *Redefining the Icon. The Problem of Innovation in the Writings of Florensky, Ouspensky and Kontoglou*, New York 2009, p. 33.

⁸ Е.Н. Трубецкой, *Умозрение в красках. Вопрос о смысле жизни в древнерусской религиозной живописи*, Москва 1916 (E. Trubetsky, *Icons: Theology in Color*, transl. by G. Vakar, New York 1973); П.А. Флоренский, *Иконостаc*, in idem, *Имена*, Москва 1998, pp. 341-448 (P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, transl. by D. Sheehan, O. Andrejew, New York 1996); С. Булгаков, *Икона и иконопочитание*, Париж 1931 (S. Bulgakov, *The Icon and its Veneration*, in idem, *Icons and the Name of God*, transl. by B. Jakim, Michigan 2012, pp. 1-112); Л. Успенский, *Богословие иконы Православной Церкви*, Пере-славль 1997 (L. Ouspensky, V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icon*, transl. by G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky, New York 1982).

⁹ Kontoglou explores the terms "modern" and "naturalistic" as synonymous. So, he may speak about "Hellenistic modernism" and "modernism" of Baroque icons as relative phenomena.

¹⁰ Ph. Kontoglou, *What Orthodox Iconography Is*, "The Word Magazine: The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America," September 1964, pp. 5-6, <http://www.orthodoxiconsonline.com/articles/Kontoglu_whatisonography.asp>.

proportions of human bodies do not mean lack of skill of icon-painters. These stylistic features of *hagiographia* (along with all the other means and forms of the Orthodox liturgical art) lead a human to experience the living reality which is not a continuation of this immanent space (hence the absence of direct perspective), the world where shadows don't exist and where each creature undergoes "beautiful transformation."

As a moment not of conceptual dependency but rather of congeniality of Kontoglou's and Florensky's positions we may note a specific relation of these authors to art of the avant-garde. Both authors find a kind of similarity between the traditional Christian art and avant-garde artistic searching in negation of naturalism and aspiration to the invisible.¹¹

II

Another point of the specific Greek reception of Russian intellectual tradition as a modus of the Byzantine one (and hence, in turn the reason for the declaration about "the vital force of the Byzantine spirit") we find in the last chapter of the famous *Byzantine Philosophy* of Basil Tatakis (Βασίλειος Ν. Τατάκης, 1897–1986). The book of Tatakis was published at first in 1949 in French as a supplement volume of Émile Bréhier's series "Histoire de la philosophie." In his work Tatakis undertook a pioneering attempt to study the history of Byzantine philosophy in its entirety over some one thousand years. Before that Byzantine philosophy was considered by professional historians of philosophy a far periphery in relation to the mainstream of philosophical movement, "an aberrant offshoot of Western philosophy, a storehouse for the treasures of Hellenism, which from the 13th through the 15th century, would, when needed, nourish Western thought."¹² An enormous number of philosophical sources were not

¹¹ Cf. the paraphrase of Plato's *Phaedrus*, 247b-e in Florensky's *Iconostasis* (П.А. Флоренский, *Иконостаc*, p. 352) regarding both forms of non-naturalistic art, church and avant-garde. It was no accident that the recent conference devoted to Florensky (Venice, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, 3-4.02.2012) was named "Paul Florensky – between icon and avant-garde." On the other hand, some signs of the "avant-garde past" may be traced in Kontoglou's paintings. As N. Zias claims, some features characteristic of the "Byzantine" style of Kontoglou ("lack of perspective and consequently the lack of a third dimension, (...) the absence of a single light source, and the use not of tonal gradation, but of color contrasts that often serve to complement one another") were acquired by the painter during "his exposure to Modern Art in Paris" (N. Zias, *Photis Kontoglou: Reflections of Byzantium in the 20th century*, p. 16).

¹² É. Bréhier, *Preface to the French edition*, in B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, transl. by N. Moutfakis, Indianapolis 2003, p. viii.

published and awaited research in manuscript libraries all over the world. Thanks to Tatakis use a large number of almost unknown texts entered the research spotlight. He succeeded in presenting Byzantine philosophy as an autonomous discipline, distinct from Christian theology. He initiated an approach in which theories and arguments of Byzantine thinkers began to be taken philosophically seriously; their writings were no longer simply studied as works of the past of mainly antiquarian or historical interest, but were studied rather as philosophical works on their own merit. As a brilliant historian of ancient philosophy, Tatakis showed the ways, different from the Western ones, in which the classical heritage of Platonism and Aristotelianism was accepted and interpreted by medieval Byzantine authors.

Now *Byzantine Philosophy* of Tatakis is considered by specialists a classical book on the subject; it opens the chronological lists of historiographic surveys of contemporary studies in Byzantine philosophy¹³ and in many aspects preserves its academic value. But within the framework of our paper the last chapter of the monograph – “Byzantium after Byzantium” – is of main interest.

Summing up all the previous chapters, Tatakis concludes that he has been able to demonstrate that the traditional-for-European-history-of-philosophy estimation of the role of Byzantium as *only* a mediator in transition of scientific and philosophic ideas in diachronic (from Antiquity to Renaissance) and synchronic (from the Persians, Arabs and the Chinese to the western Europeans) plans is incorrect. In the realm of thought Byzantium created a special type of intelligence that contributed to the formation of Arabic philosophy and western Scholasticism. It played an important role in the blossoming of Italian Renaissance.

But the historical role of Byzantine intellectual tradition is not limited to the active influence on the Western and Eastern neighbours during the Middle Ages. Tatakis' most interesting statement is that Byzantine philosophy outlived the fall of the Byzantine Empire; Byzantium “*has continued to exist in our time.*”¹⁴ The cultural model framed by Byzantium was preserved by the Greek Church and affected the Turks themselves, who patterned their own empire on this model. Moreover, as a cultural and spiritual structure it may be transmitted through any spatial borders and

¹³ See K. Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, Oxford 2002, p. 7; И.А. Иванов, *Византийская философия в современных зарубежных исследованиях*, <<http://www.academia.edu/1152411/>>.

¹⁴ B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, p. 264 (italics is mine – A.K.).

really became the inner basis of many national cultures of the Slavic and Eastern world: so, “Czarist Russia, molded by Byzantium, remained, in all facets of its life, the true image of fallen Byzantium until the dawn of the 20th century.”¹⁵

Tatakis asserts that without the study of Byzantium “it is totally impossible for one to delve into the intimate and most essential aspirations of the Neo-hellenic and Slavic spirit, the spirit of all Orthodox people.”¹⁶ He recognises the “brilliant description” of tragedies of these (Slavonic? Neo-hellenic? Byzantine?) souls in the works of Dostoevsky; he emphasises the statement of Ivan Kirejevskij, an early Slavophile of 19th century, that the future Russian philosophy will be based upon the ecclesiastical writers of Byzantium. He finds, at last, the expression of the same spiritual intention in Nikolai Berdyaev's philosophical quest.¹⁷ Having recognised Russian philosophers of 20th century as rightful heirs of their Byzantine ancestors, Tatakis optimistically concludes: “we can safely maintain, therefore, that the philosophy, or rather the spirituality, of Byzantium has not yet uttered its final word.”¹⁸

III

In the conclusion of this paper I'd like to discuss some Russian connotations of “the Byzantine idea” in works of the group of eminent Greek theologians and religious philosophers belonging to the “generation of the 60s” – Christos Yannaras (Χρήστος Γιανναράς, b. 1935), John Romanidis (Ιωάννης Σ. Ρωμανίδης, 1927–2001), John Zizioulas (Ιωάννης Ζηζιούλας, b. 1931) and Nellas Panagiotis (Νέλλας Παναγιώτης, 1936–1986). These authors (sometimes referred to as “the neo-Orthodox”) perhaps may be considered among the most interesting representatives of contemporary Christian thought. High philosophical level, theological boldness, fusion of intellectualism with strict emphasis on practical, living character of

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁷ “It is easy to recognize that this spirituality is none other than Byzantine” (*ibidem*).

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 265. We may add that Émile Bréhier, head of the edition project “*Histoire de la philosophie*” and an eminent scholar, in his preface to *Byzantine Philosophy* completely accepts Tatakis' view on Russian religious philosophers (“that ecumenical movement of which Russia had so many representatives around 1900”) as bearers “of an autonomous and sturdy spiritual structure, one that resists historical disasters and is captured so well by the title of this book's final chapter: ‘Byzantium after Byzantium’” (É. Bréhier, *Preface to the French edition*, pp. ix-x).

Christian κήρυγμα are those features of their works which helped the Orthodox tradition in Greece in the 2nd half of the last century become attractive for many young people. Michel Stavrou mentions, among the factors that determined the intellectual formation of these theologians, the publishing of numerous modern-Greek translations of the works created by representatives of a movement called “the neo-patristic synthesis” (Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff).¹⁹ Ch. Yannaras also mentions in his autobiographical notes that in 1968 he arrived in Paris, already being familiar with the writings of Russian emigrant theologians and religious philosophers.²⁰ Yannaras met and conversed with Paul Evdokimov (the last representative of the first generation of Russian emigrants in Paris), was friendly with L. Ouspensky, N. Lossky (Jr.), P. Struve, O. Clément. But the most significant and important event experienced by while in communication with members of the Russian Orthodox community in Paris (an the end of 1960s already mainly francophone) was not connected with some doctrines or theoretical constructions; the discovery which changed his life was that of a social kind; it was a special type of community united by the Eucharistic event – the Orthodox parish.

This ecclesiastic reality of the Christian parish that can be realised in any place and among any people becomes the main object of Yannaras’ philosophical research and theological care. Here, by the way, we again meet the image of ideal Byzantium found by a Greek among the Russians.²¹

¹⁹ М. Ставру, *Предисловие*, in X. Яннарас, *Вера Церкви. Введение в православное богословие*, transl. by Г.В. Вдовина, Москва 1992, <http://azbyka.ru/hristianstvo/sut/vera_tcerkvi_02-all.shtml>. It is to be noted that these relations in many cases became immediate and personal. So between 1960 and 1964 John Zizioulas did his doctoral research under Georges Florovsky at Harvard. J. Romanides was also a pupil of Florovsky (see J.S. Romanides, *F. Georges Florovsky: The Theologian in the Service of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogue. Lecture at St. Vladimir’s Seminary 23 May 1980*, <http://www.romanity.org/htm/rom.29.en.f_georges_florovsky.htm>).

²⁰ X. Яннарас, *Православный Париж*, <http://krotov.info/libr_min/28_ya/an/naras.htm>.

²¹ Cf. Yannaras’ favorite trope “Hellenism is οὐτόπια:” from the classical antiquity “Greek idea” had no strict topological sense; it was connected to a greater extent with the special type of social organization and culture – and therefore might be realised anywhere. Cf. also J. Romanidis’ concept of “Ρωμηόβουνη” (“Romanhood”) as an extra-territorial and extra-ethnic essence of the Greek national identity (J. Romanidis, *Romiosini, Romania, Roumeli* (in Greek), Thessaloniki 1975).

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