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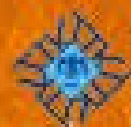
Papers from
the Conference
'Byzantine Days of
Istanbul'
May 21-23 2010

Edited by Dean Sakel

TÜRK TARİH KURUMU

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'Byzantine Days of Istanbul'
held on the occasion of
Istanbul being European Cultural Capital 2010
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BYZANTIUM AND THE SLAVS

Trying to cram the issue of Byzantine influence on the Slavs in an article that derives from a thirty-minute conference paper is not an easy task. Paradoxically, the relations of Slavs with the Greek world date back even before Slavs as a self-identified group came into existence. In the pronunciation of Greek, the sound 'b' turned into 'v' by the third century. It is highly curious to note that the Slavic word *korab*, which is definitely derived from the Greek *karabos* or *karabion*, has a 'b' and not a 'v', which means that it dates back from the times preceding any possible existence of the Slavs as a self-identified community.[1]

The very first mention of Slavs and their very name is attested by Byzantine authors of the sixth century, and it is Procopius of Caesarea who happened to get acquainted with the Slavic mercenaries in the army of Belisarius under the walls of Rome in April 537. The inquisitive historian accurately reproduced what these people told him. Today's researchers from Slavic countries like to emphasise Procopius' words that Slavs 'are not ruled by a single person but from old times they live in democracy'. The same researchers are much less eager to recall the next phrase, in which Procopius mentions fastidiously that their language is 'unbelievably barbarous'.[2]

The last-minute contact between the Slavs and Byzantium coincided with the last breath of Byzantium itself; it was a Slav named Nestor-Iskander, probably a Russian prisoner who had adopted Islam and was enlisted in the Ottoman army, who left for us a precious description of the last siege of Constantinople. The great advantage of his memoirs is that it is written from inside the Turkish camp but at the same time is filled with great sympathy towards the doomed City.[3]

The thousand years which lie in between the sixth century and the fifteenth are filled with wars and dynastic marriages, conquests and learning, trade and conversions, adoration and hatred. The life of southern and eastern Slavs cannot be described, let alone understood, without taking into consideration Byzantine influence. Novgorod is probably the farthest point from the imperial borders (1,500 km) where Byzantine masons and icon-painters worked, and we even know some of their names. This is where the most distant St. Sophia was found, 2,000 km away from the Great Church in Constantinople. These are examples of religious homage paid to Byzantium, but religion was not the only thing that attracted Slavs: coming to Constantinople for pilgrimage or for business, the Slavs always marveled at its beauties. One

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1   *LSJ* 877a, for both Greek forms.

2   *Wars*: *Procopii Caesariensis opera* vol. II, 7.14.22–30 (p. 357–8).

3   'Повесть о Царьграде' in D.S. Lichachov, ed., *Библиотека литературы Древней Руси* vol. VII (St. Petersburg 1999) 26–71.

of them, Zosima the Deacon, exclaimed: 'O man, who it was who built it! What kind of people these were!'[4] And by way of modest competition with the great capital on the Bosphorus, two Old-Rus' cities, Kiev and Vladimir, erected their own Golden Gates.

The Slavs not only competed with the Greeks, they sometimes quarreled with them, and very often they expressed suspicion or disdain about them. In the Russian *Primary Chronicle*, the description of the snares of Byzantine imperial diplomacy ends with a wistful remark: 'The Greeks are wily until these days'.[5] The *Novgorodian First Chronicle* says about Antony, Bishop of Chernigov: 'This is what he uttered, enwombing guile in his heart, for he was a Greek by birth'.[6] Slavs knew very well that Byzantines viewed them as barbarians. An intriguing Bulgarian document, the *Legend of Thessalonica*, has come down to us. The date of its composition is not known with precision but was most likely during the era of Byzantine rule in Bulgaria or during the period of the Second Bulgarian Empire.[7] This document retells the story of the alphabet's discovery in the name of St. Cyril. The voice of God orders the hero to go and enlighten the Bulgarians: 'I was greatly sorrowed, for I knew not where the Bulgarian land lay'.[8] When Cyril arrived in Thessalonica:

> I appeared to Metropolitan John and when I informed him he began to curse me greatly, saying, 'You are mad, old man. The Bulgarians are all cannibals and will slay you'. I went to the market and heard the Bulgarian speech, and my heart was seized with fear, and I was literally in hell and in darkness.[9]

The *Legend of Thessalonica* gives us a unique opportunity to peer at the Greek 'image' of a barbarian through the very eyes of the barbarians themselves. The author seems to be winking at his readers, as if to say, 'See what absurdities the Greeks stoop to; they consider us cannibals'!

And yet, in spite of all the grievances, disappointments and resentments, Byzantium was the only frame of reference, the only focal point of prestige, for Bulgarians, Serbs and Russians alike (by 'Russian' hereafter I imply the ancestors of both today's Russians and today's Ukrainians; by Serbs — the ancestors of today's Serbs, today's Slavic inhabitants of FYROM and today's Montenegrins). This frame of reference is less important for non-Orthodox Slavic nations, but even there Byzantine influence can be traced: suffice it to say that the most revered icon of the Virgin, the famous *Matka bozka Częstochowska*, the holy protector of Poland, was painted in Byzantium around the year 1000; the frescoes of the Church of St. Krševan in the north Croatian city of Zadar were made in the Byzantine style of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and Byzantine imports dominated in Bohemia

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4   Majeska, *Russian Travelers* 184.

5   *Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов* (Moscow & Leningrad 1950) 121.

6   *Полное собрание русских летописей*, vol. II (St. Petersburg 1908) col. 523.

7   See B.N. Florja, 'Кирилло-мефодиевские традиции в развитии срдневековой болгарской культуры' in *История, культура, этнография и фольклор славянских народов. X Международный съезд славистов* (Moscow 1988) 164–5. We are not in agreement with the dating of this document as defended in the works of G.M Prochorov, 'Глаголица среди миссионерских азбук' *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы* 45 (1992) 178–99 at 191–2; and V.L. Lurie, 'Около Солунской легенды. Из истории миссионерства в период монофелитской унии' in *Славяне и их соседи* vol. VI: *Греческий и славянский мир в средние века и раннее новое время* (Moscow 1996) 23–52.

8   I. Ivanov, *Български старини из Македония* (Sofia 1931) 282–3 at 282.

9   *Loc. cit.*

and Moravia up until the tenth century. But Slavic Orthodox nations were, understandably, influenced much stronger. Hilarion, the first Slavic metropolitan of Kiev, in his *Sermon on Law and Grace*, explained why Vladimir chose to adopt Christianity: he 'often would hear about the devout land of the Greeks, their love for Christ... how their churches are filled with people, how devout are their cities and villages, how, zealous in prayer, all stand before God'.[10]

Byzantine impact can be traced not only in architecture and icon-painting, but also in enameling and niello, in book-making and coin-minting, in literature and the liturgy; the very Slavonic script, the so-called Cyrillic alphabet, is nothing more than the Greek slightly augmented. In the lexical structure of the Slavic language Greek loanwords abound. Needless to say, the number of these borrowings varies from one region to the next; they are more numerous in Bulgarian (1,400) and less so in Serbian and Old Russian (1,000 in each). If I speak only of my native Russian, there would be words which pertain not exclusively to the religious and political spheres, not only to arts and crafts, but also to everyday life. Words for vinegar and griddle-cake, beets and cucumber, washtub and puppet, rope and lime, lantern, bench and bedstead, etc. were taken by my ancestors from Greek. The word for buckwheat in Russian is *grechka* ('the Greek one'), and for walnut it is *gretskij orech* ('the Greek nut').

Alexander Pushkin, the father of the Russian literary language, wrote in 1825:

> The fate of the Russian language is extremely auspicious. In the eleventh century the ancient Greek language suddenly opened its lexicon to it, its treasure of harmony; donated the code of its studious grammar, its beautiful locutions, its majestic flow of speech. In short, Greek adopted Russian.[11]

Many brilliant scholars have contributed to the study of Slavo-Byzantine relations, notably Frantisek Dvornik and John Meyendorf, Ivan Dujcev and Christian Hannik, Andzej Poppe and Ihor Ševčenko. It can probably be generalised that the single most influential book has been Sir Dimitri Obolensky's *Byzantine Commonwealth* (London 1971), which remains one of the most widely read works on Byzantium today. Obolensky deliberately equates the system of relations between Constantinople and Orthodox Slavic nations to the British Commonwealth of Nations, which, by the time Obolensky was writing his book, had replaced the defunct British Empire. From today's perspective, this analogy appears far-fetched. Of course, I pay tribute to Sir Dimitry, so much so that I translated his book into Russian. But precisely because I worked on this translation I was obliged to delve deeper into the logic of his argument, and many a time I saw its weaknesses.

My translation was published in 1998 and soon afterwards I came across some of my own doubts in the articles of other scholars. They were articulated most clearly by Jonathan Shepard.[12] Obolensky portrayed Byzantine cultural policy abroad as indefatigable efforts of the state and the church to bring more barbarians into the realm of the imagined family of Orthodox nations. The 'Commonwealth' metaphor urged Obolensky on to liken Byzantine attitudes towards 'barbarians' to British attitudes towards former colonies. Classical nineteenth-century imperialism cherished the idea of the acculturation of the 'barbarians', of

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10   S. Franklin, ed., *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus,* Harvard Library of Early Ukranian Literature 5 (Cambridge Mass. 1991) 18.

11   A.S. Pushkin, *О предисловии г–на Лемонте к переводу басен И.А. Крылова* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 16 томах* (Moscow 1937–50) vol. XI (1949) 31.

12   J. Shepard, 'Byzantium's Overlapping Circles' in *CIEB XXI* vol. I, 15–55 at 18.

endowing them with the fruits of civilisation. It probably can be argued that this imperialistic approach ultimately goes back to the activism of mediaeval missionaries. In the Latin West, there exists a whole hagiographic genre of the 'missionary *vita*' and we know dozens of names of those who learned the languages of the pagans, went to live among them, taught them and cured them, and only then preached to them. In Byzantium such a genre of hagiography simply never existed. In the whole of Byzantine history we can cite no more than five or six names of missionaries preaching to 'barbarians'. The only two *vitae* of such a kind — the famous *Lives of Cyril and Methodios*, characteristically survived only in their Slavonic version.

When speaking of Cyril and Methodios' mission to Moravia, one needs to stress its completely unique place in Byzantine history. The widespread opinion shared, among others, by the great George Ostrogorsky, namely that the Moravian mission was 'an impressive and spectacular manifestation of Byzantine religious and cultural expansion', must clearly be overturned.[13] No matter how strange it may seem, the journey of the brothers from Thessalonica was, from the Byzantine point of view, more of a unique episode than an integral part of a global missionary undertaking.[14] In effect Constantine and Methodios were not even church hierarchs when they were living in Byzantium, and even after so becoming most likely performed the Roman rite and not the Greek. Finally, it is impossible to consider it a complete accident that no contemporary Greek source mentions a single word about either of the brothers! Quite simply, the Empire, after sending the brothers off to Greater Moravia, displayed no interest in the fate of the entire undertaking.

The Byzantines were not able to break through their general world-outlook in which the essential watershed between 'Romans' and 'barbarians' was impassable. In practice this meant that the Greek clergy were reluctant to learn the languages of their new flocks, they were unable to share any useful knowledge (technological or medical) with them, and they refused to adjust their precepts to the mentality of the converts. One can talk of this cultural 'autism' of Byzantium having a great impact on the historical fate of Orthodoxy.

The nature and mechanism of the Byzantine impact should be analysed with this peculiarity in mind. To begin with, we should try to distinguish what was loaned through official channels and what passed through the undercurrent of more popular contacts. Of course, when high-ranking Constantinopolitan clerics travelled to a newly baptised Slavic country, they brought with them a whole repertoire of books, all of which were well-proven from the point of view of Orthodoxy. The role of translators and interpreters was performed by Slavic subjects of the Empire, these being the assimilated former invaders of the Balkans.

Yet, very soon texts which differed from the existing canons began to appear in the Slavic realm. First of all it was the apocryphal texts. Compared to their place in Byzantine literature, the Apocrypha are overrepresented among Slavic translations from Greek. The earliest translations were made in Bulgaria at the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth, and the earliest manuscripts in which they are found survive from the Croatian Glagolitic tradition of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of them are known only from their Slavic translations, since they completely disappeared from Byzantium. Amongst the Slavs

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13   G. Ostrogorsky, 'The Byzantine Background of the Moravian Mission' *DOP* 19 (1965) 1–18 at 3–4.

14   Z.R. Dittrich, *Christianity in Great Moravia* (6th ed. Groningen 1962) 99, 102–4, 116–8; M. Salamon, 'Konstantyn i Metody – typowi ezy nietypowy misjonarze bizantynscy' in A. Barciak, ed., *Środkowoeuropejskie dziedzictwo Cyrylo-Metodiańskie* (Katowice 1999) 74–91 (in Polish).

however such texts circulated widely. Some of them are even quoted in the highly colloquial Birch-Bark Letters from Novgorod, these private, handwritten documents unearthed during archaeological excavations. This is the first case of evidence that Christianity was brought to the Slavs not only through official, clerical channels.

In this context it can be interesting to look at the earliest Slavic designation for 'monk'.[15] It is true, there existed words such as '*mnich*' (a borrowing mediated by Latin), and '*kaluger*', an adaptation of *kalogeros* ('good elder'), '*inok*' (an East Slavic rendering of the Greek word *monachos* meaning 'solitary'), or *otkhodnik*, a calque for '*anachoretes*'. But the main word and the oldest one was *chernorizets* ('one in black robe'), which occurs in written texts from the earliest Bulgarian translations onwards. This compound word is obviously a translation of the Greek '*melaneimon*', but this word was extremely rare and never played the role of a common *terminus technicus* designating an ordinary Byzantine monk. The only case when it is not a poetical metaphor or a synecdoche but a special term, is in the 42nd canon of the Ecumenical Council *in Trullo*. The canon forbids entrance to cities of the 'so-called desert-dwellers, a group which is also named 'those dressed in black'[16]. It is clear from the context that although many monks dwelt in the desert, the Fathers of the Council implied something very specific, maybe a self-designation of a precise group. This term defined vagabond monks not ascribed to any monasteries that were looked upon with growing suspicion by the Church authorities. It can be suggested that it was these vagabonds who were prone to various heresies and it was also they who would travel to the lands of the 'barbarians' much more easily than 'normal' monks loyal to the principles of '*stabilitas loci*'.

It is also necessary to bear in mind that Greeks tended to regard the Christian mission as an undertaking that was hardly holy. The Byzantine *Tale of the Demon in Captivity* tells how a demon, entrapped by Abbas Longinus, disclosed under duress, what means he used to deprive monks of eternal salvation. The enemy of mankind drew out his usual list of means of ensnarement such as vanity, greed, fornication, but then added a new one, this being that 'it is I who directs them (the monks) to the land of barbarians under the pretext of teaching'.[17]

Such a situation inevitably increased the role of vagabond monks in enlightening the barbarians. Their role can be demonstrated by an extremely interesting Old Bulgarian text, *The Story of the Iron Cross*, this being a collection of miracles worked by St. George in the newly converted Bulgaria. One may here add that this literary work as a whole is a great monument to the Byzantine-Slavic symbiosis since it was first compiled in Greek, though in Bulgaria; it has survived in Slavic but is told from the Greek point of view.[18] It is from this text that we learn that vagabond monks were quite numerous in late ninth-century Bulgaria.

Here I ought to stress that I do not mean to say that all vagabond monks were unruly and heretical, but only that their presence in the milieu of the newly converted Slavs can (at least to

15   See in more details my article: 'The Origin of the Oldest Slavic designation of Monk' in D.E. Afinogenov & A.B. Muraviev, eds, *Традиции и наследие Христианского Востока: материалы международной конференции* (Moscow 1996) 239–46.

16   *Σύνταγμα κανόνων* vol. VI, 385–6.

17   N.N. Durnovo, *Легенда о заключенном бесе в византийской и старинной русской литературе* (Moscow 1915) 13.

18   A.A. Turilov, 'Византийский и славянский пласты в сказании инока Христодула' *Славяне и их соседи* vol. VI, 81–99.

some extent) explains the disproportionate role of Apocrypha in Slavic as opposed to Greek.[19]

Let us now turn to the selection of Byzantine hagiography which was translated from the end of the tenth century up until the middle of the eleventh.

A huge variety of *vitae* of saints was translated in Bulgaria. In most cases the selection of *vitae* was determined by the content of the Greek *Menologia* which served as the prototypes for these translations. One such collection, the so-called *Codex Suprasliensis* of the eleventh century, survived *in corpore*. It constitutes a pre-Metaphrastic *Menaion* for March that contains twenty-eight *vitae*, the Greek originals of five of which no longer exist. Another example of a translated pre-Metaphrastic *menaion* is the *Menologium* of the Volokolamsk Monastery near Moscow, which, in all probability, represents a yearly hagiographic collection of the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople.[20]

As we know, the Metaphrastic reform at the end of the tenth century was aimed at unification and harmonisation of hagiographic material. The comparison between pre-Metaphrastic and Metaphrastic *vitae* of the same saints, where it is possible, betrays invariable standardisation and editing. The goal (probably not declared) of this reform was the 'domestication' of saints, making them less extravagant. The pre-Metaphrastic versions of *vitae* became less frequent in the course of time. As Cyril Mango has aptly written: 'it may be an exaggeration to say that the Metaphrast spelled the death of Greek hagiography, but he certainly contributed to its emasculation'.[21] Yet, what Byzantine scholars have not yet asked themselves is this: how is it that at this very period, when the imperial church was trying to draw a line under the list of saints, several new *vitae* emerged whose heroes are anything but tame or meek. Here I have in mind the *Lives of Basil the Younger*, *Andrew the Fool* and *Niphon of Constantiane*. One could ask whether this appearance constituted a sort of reaction against the attempt at 'taming' the saints — a rebellion of grass-roots hagiography against the 'learned' one? In any case, there exists another question, much more pertinent to our present purpose. This is: why were these *vitae*, dubious, marginal and elephantine as they are, translated into Slavic immediately after their completion in Greek? The *Life of Andrew the Fool* was finished around the middle of the tenth century and was translated, probably in Novgorod, by the end of the eleventh. It became one of the most widely read *vitae* in Rus', surviving in more than two hundred copies and giving birth to one of the most beloved holidays of the Russian Church (and unknown in Byzantium), this being Pokrov - the day of the intercession of the Veil of the Virgin. The *Life of Basil the Younger* was finished in the second half of the tenth century and its first translation appeared one hundred years later; it was made from the first redaction of the *Vita*, most probably in Old Rus'. Excerpts from it are to be found in the Russian *Primary Chronicle*.[22]

However, the most striking illustration of the popularity of this type of hagiography among the Slavs is the *Life of Niphon of Constantiane*, which happens to be the least studied

19   M.V. Rozhdestvenskaja & A.A. Turilov, 'Апокрифы в славянской и русской письменности' *PE* 3 (2001) 55–7. M.V. Rozhdestvenskaja, *Библейские апокрифы в литературе и книжности Древней Руси. Историко-литературное исследование* (Doctoral thesis, State University of St. Petersburg 2004).

20   D.E. Afinogenov, 'Новгородское переводное четье-минейное собрание: Происхождение, состав, греческий оригинал' in E. Maier & E. Weiher, eds, *Abhandlungen zu den Grossen Lesemenaen des Metropoliten Makarij: Kodikologische, Miszellanologische und Textologische Untersuchungen* vol. II, Monumenta linguae Slavicae dialecti veteris 49 (Freiburg im Breisgau 2006) 261–83.

21   Mango, *Byzantium* 250.

22   T.V. Pentkovskaja, 'Житие Василия Нового' *PE* 7 (2004) 210–2 at 210–1.

of the three, either by Byzantine or Slavic scholars. This huge and highly interesting text was finished in Greek, according to Lennart Ryden, around the year 1000, but the saint is first mentioned not in a Greek, but in a Slavic *Menologion*, this being the Glagolitic one from *Evangeliarium Assemani* already compiled by 1037.[23] Moreover, an excerpt from this *Vita* appeared in Slavic translation in the so-called *Izbornik*, a Kievan collection from the year 1076. By the year 1080 a portrait of Niphon appears in the Macedonian church of Veliusa; and the oldest extant copy of a full Slavic translation of this huge text is much older than the oldest extant copy of the original Greek. Now if we take into consideration that the translator was a Bulgarian, and he could hardly have gotten to work before the conquest of Bulgaria in 1018, then the surprising speed of the translation is particularly impressive.

To be sure, the Metaphrastic collection of the *vitae* of 135 *approved* saints was also translated into Slavic, most probably on Mt. Athos, at the turn of the twelfth century, but this is hardly surprising, as this *corpus* became an indispensable part of the Orthodox liturgy; by contrast, the *vitae* mentioned above are long texts meant for individual reading.[24] There is also evidence of unauthentic versions of *vitae*: the Byzantine writer and magnate of the eleventh century Michael Attaleiates, when compiling a catalogue of his private library, intriguingly described one item as follows: 'The four biblical books of Kingdoms (in one binding); actually containing two books of Kingdoms and the Life of Andrew, the Fool for Christ's sake'.[25] One can speculate that the binding acted as a sort of camouflage, but even if this was not the case, the fact is that Andrew the Fool was not a particularly acknowledged saint – he appears in only one version of the *Constantinopolitan Synaxarion*, compiled on Mt. Athos around 1300 (*Paris. Coisl.* 223). Nonetheless in spite of official opposition, the *Vita* was popular in Byzantine monastic circles with thirty copies dating from Byzantine times surviving till this day. It is from these circles that the *Vita* moved to the Slavic world and gained a popularity that surpassed that of the donor culture.

One may further note here that the Slavic bookmen were hardly unaware of the dubious nature of these texts. One Code of Ecclesiastical Law, the *Kormčaja Kniga*, states point blank: 'The *Life of Niphon* is distorted and we do not accept it, since it is not part of the tradition'. A Serbian monk from the Chilandar Monastery on Mt. Athos left a marginal note on a manuscript of the *Life of Niphon* that says: 'Each one who will read this will be badly influenced by this *vita*, which is pernicious and harmful'.[26] Yet in spite of all this, the *Vita* was copied again and again.

Another unexpected sphere in which Byzantium influenced its Slavic converts was magic. As Robert Mathiesen has written in his article 'Magic in Slavia Orthodoxa: The Written Tradition' published in the influential book *Byzantine Magic*, in Slavic letters 'the surviving magical texts are ...sufficiently numerous ... The Orthodox Slavs translate(d) and ... cop(ied)

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23   S.A. Ivanov, 'К датировке жития в. Нифонта (*BHG*, 1371z)' *VizVrem* 58 (83) (1999) 72–95; id., "Житие св. Нифонта": славянский перевод и греческий оригинал' in T. M. Nikolaeva, T.V. Tsivyan et al., eds, *ПОЛУТРОПОΝ. К 70-летию Владимира Николаевича Топорова* (Moscow 1998) 500–12 at 500.

24   For the modern translation, see O.V. Loseva, *Жития русских святых в составе древнерусских прологов XII- первой трети XIII в.* (Moscow 2009) 29.

25   Diataxis Attaliate 125.173–4: 'Βιβλίον τὸ Τετραβασίλειον, δύο βασιλείας ἔχον καὶ τὸν βίον τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀνδρέου τοῦ διὰ Χριστὸν σαλοῦ'.

26   D. Bogdonovich, *Каталог Кирилских рукописа манастира Хиландар* (2 vols Belgrade 1978) vol. I, 346.

such problematic texts in the first place'.[27] For example, the so-called 'snake amulets', widely circulating in Byzantium as pagan phylacteries against womb diseases, were borrowed by the Slavs and hundreds of them have survived, some with incantations inscribed in Greek, some in Slavic, and some in both languages.

Besides ecclesiastical and other 'spiritually beneficial' reading, the Slavs also translated secular literature. They dealt eagerly with world chronicles, completely ignoring classicising history. At the turn of the tenth century they translated the *Ekthesis*, a sixth-century *Mirror of Princes* written for Justinian by Agapetos the Deacon; this work became hugely popular in Rus' in the Late Middle Ages. The animal parables, such as *Stephanites and Ichnelates*, were translated several times, in Serbia, Bulgaria and in Rus'. These and other kinds of non-religious literature reached the Slavs through translations, which is not surprising, since pilgrims, merchants, hostages and mercenaries moved back and forth, bringing with them commodities, gossip, anecdotes but also texts.

I have already mentioned how some of those texts were harshly criticised by the Byzantine church authorities. Meanwhile, some of the texts circulating amongst the Slavs had been strictly forbidden by the state authorities of the Empire: the most striking example here is the Old Russian *Devgenievo Deyanie*, which is a version of the *Digenes Akrites* epic.[28] The Slavic text is not a rendering of any of the surviving Greek versions. It brings down to us a version which sounds like an anti-government lampoon. The closing part of this Old Russian work is a tale about the relations of the hero with an emperor named Basil. This emperor features in the *Digenes* epic as well, but there their relations are depicted as peaceful. Not so in the Slavic text, which reads:

> There was a certain emperor named Basil who, on learning of the exploits and brave deeds of Devgeny, became exceedingly angry with him, and sought by every means to catch him. The emperor Basil ... sent Devgeny messengers with a letter that was all lies and flattery .... Devgeny read it, and realised that it was deceptive. Then he answered the emperor: ... 'If you wish to meet me, ... try not to make me angry, because youth incites a man to do many foolish things. If I become angry, I shall exterminate your army, and you will not return safe and unharmed'. ... The emperor was very angry, and at once gave orders for them to reply to Devgeny: 'My child, ... my majesty has no other evil intention in mind.' ... Devgeny answered: 'I do not fear your majesty, ... and if you wish, come to the River Euphrates where we may meet. However, if you come with numerous troops, it will not go well with your majesty, and I shall destroy your troops.' The emperor exclaimed: 'How insolent you are that you do not want to submit to me!'

After many altercations, Basil came to the Euphrates with his army, which was in turn totally wiped out by our hero. The emperor sought safety in flight, but Devgeny overtook him and took him prisoner, and he sent to the city a messenger saying: 'Come out to meet Devgeny, from this day on God granted him the imperial power in your country'. Subsequently our hero becomes an emperor himself.

This version must have existed in Greek but was possibly extirpated as something politically dubious.

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27   R. Mathiesen, 'Magic in Slavia Orthodoxa: The Written Tradition' in H. Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic, DOLC* (Washington DC 1995) 155–77 at 172.

28   V.D. Kuzmina, *Девгениево деяние (Деяние прежних времен храбрых человек)* (Moscow 1962) 154–6.

I believe I have shown here how it was more through grass-roots culture, as opposed to any official policy of either Byzantine Church or State, that Greek mediaeval culture was passed on to the Slavs.

I will conclude by saying that the Byzantine 'frame of reference' survived the demise of the Empire. In 1472, the Russian traveller to India, Afanasij Nikitin, attempting to describe to the readers of his travelogue the huge statue of Shiva that he had seen in Parwat, chose to say: 'The deity raises its hand and stretches it forth, like Justinian, the emperor of Tsarigrad'.[29] He had of course in mind the famous equestrian statue on the Augusteon in Constantinople.

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29   'Хождение за три моря Афанасия Никитина' in *Библиотека литературы Древней Руси* vol. VII, 348–79 at 360.

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