

Russia's Byzantine Heritage: The Anatomy of Myth

A.V. Korenevskiy

*Pussy-cat, pussy-cat, where have you been?
I've been to London to look at the Queen.
Pussy-cat, pussy-cat, what did you there?
I frightened a little mouse under her chair.*

English nursery rhyme [Opie, 1997, p. 357]

Abstract. The article explores the process of conceptualization of historical bonds between Byzantium and Russia and their transformations to the political myth of Modernity. The author shows that the myth of "Byzantine heritage" was used both in apologetic, and in incriminating sense: contradictory political forces applied the same verbal formulas (Byzantism, the Third Rome) giving them polar sense and turning the myth into the counter-myth. The article focuses on the circumstances of the emergence of the essay "Russia's Byzantine heritage" by A.J. Toynbee as the pivotal moment in reduction of historical myth into political cliché. Toynbee receipted Berdyaev's interpretation of the Russian communism as inverted Third Rome messianism and transformed it to a postulate of Cold War, which later became ingrained in the Western political discourse. In 1990s this concept also spread out in Russia. It was apprehended not only by pro-Western circles, but also – paradoxically – by their opponents who looked at "the Byzantine heritage" as the proof of civilizational incompatibility of Russia and the West. In turn, it acted as a catalyst to reanimation of the Cold War dogmata in the West where again "the Byzantine heritage" is treated as a key to understanding of the Russian history, culture and policy.

Keywords: Russia, Byzantine heritage, Byzantism, the Third Rome, messianism, Toynbee, myth, the West, civilization.

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Византийское наследие России: анатомия мифа

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается процесс зарождения и эволюции представлений об узах исторической преемственности между Византией и Россией (византийская идея, византизм, Третий Рим) и их трансформации в политический миф Нового и Новейшего времени. Автор показывает, что миф о «византийском наследии» активно использовался как в апологетическом, так и в разоблачительном смысле: противоборствующие политические силы применяли одни и те же словесные формулы (византизм, Третий Рим, третьеромизм) придавая им диаметрально противоположный смысл и превращая миф в контрмиф. Фокусной точкой статьи является появление эссе А.Дж. Тойнби «Византийское наследие России», ставшего поворотным пунктом в превращении исторического мифа о «византизме» в политическое клише. Тойнби воспринял бердяевскую трактовку русского коммунизма как инверсии мессианской идеи Третьего Рима и трансформировал ее в постулат холодной войны, прочно вошедший в западный политический дискурс. Эта концепция также получила распространение в России. Она была воспринята не только прозападными кругами политического класса, но и – как это ни парадоксально – их оппонентами, увидевшими в «византийском наследии» доказательство цивилизационной несовместимости России и Запада. В свою очередь, это послужило импульсом к реанимации догм холодной войны на Западе, где «византийское наследие» вновь трактуется в качестве ключа к пониманию русской истории, культуры и политики.

Ключевые слова: Россия, византийское наследие, византизм, Третий Рим, мессианизм, Тойнби, миф, Запад, цивилизация.

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Russia's Byzantine Heritage is the title of an essay by A.J. Toynbee published in "Horizon" magazine in 1947 [Toynbee, 1947]. It was based on Toynbee's public lectures delivered at Toronto University in April of the same year. This essay appeared at the apex of Toynbee's popularity, when he, as his biographer William McNeil wrote, became "a professional wise man, whose pronouncements on current affairs, on the historical past, and on religious and metaphysical questions were all accorded serious attention by a broad spectrum of earnest souls seeking guidance in a tumultuous postwar world" [McNeill, 1989, p. 206].

Thirteen months precisely before Toynbee's lecture another Briton, ex-prime minister and the living personification of vanishing empire "where the sun never set" delivered his well-known speech *The Sinews of Peace* to declare the beginning of the Cold War and a new era of American world leadership. Now his compatriot offered a "historical" underpinning for this declaration: as it happens, Bolshevism is the fruit of Russia's fatal inclination to the ghost of the "totalitarian" Byzantine Empire with its eternal feeling of hostility toward the West. This idea was not anything new for Toynbee. Way back when – during his travel to the USSR in 1930 – Toynbee tried to explain the strange facts of Soviet life, Russian culture and mentality as "the quintessence of the Byzantine spirit" [Toynbee, 1931, p. 302].

However his statements then did not receive any significant public response. Now Toynbee appeared in the right place at the right time: he told that American audience and all "the Free world" (later it would be habitually called "the West"¹) what they wanted to hear. The obvious example of the impact of Toynbee's idea is *Memorandum* by Wallace Stevens written in the same year 1947:

Say this to Pravda, tell the damned rag
That the peaches are slowly ripening,
Say that the American moon comes up
Cleansed clean of lousy Byzantium [Stevens, 1957, p. 89].

Further, such public responses became the reason for including this essay in the book *Civilization on Trial* as a separate chapter [Toynbee, 1948, p. 164–183]. Then – and it was even more remarkable – the famous Byzantinist D. Obolensky used the same title for a response essay devoted to the criticism of Toynbee's politically utilitarian interpretation of Byzantine heritage [Obolensky, 1950, p. 36–63]. Moreover, later he included this essay in the book *Byzantium and the Slavs* [Obolensky, 1994, p. 75–107]. Therefore both Toynbee and his opponents attached symbolic significance to this essay. In fact Toynbee managed to create one of the basic myths of the Cold War. Certainly, Toynbee did not invent the concept of Byzantine heritage or Byzantism as the quintessence of Russian history and as the key for the understanding of the Russian mentality. But the literary talent and prophetic charisma of the English thinker turned this idea into something like an axiom.

¹ About the change of notion *the Free World* by the euphemism *the West* see: [Huntington, 1996, p. 54–55, 184].

Certainly, it is myth and political cliché, but it does not mean primitive consideration of myth as fiction or falsification. Myth is a secondary, semiological (modeling) system, or, in other words, the overwriting of a new, or another sense on the meaning of narration (language) – the primary semiological system. Therefore the main characteristic of myth is the nonidentity of narration and message, but not any authenticity or falsity of this narration which is just the measure for the transmission of implicit sense. It is the nonidentity of narration and message, that is the reason for the great power and the great danger of myth.

The seeming evidence of the narration conceals a covert and barely detectable but very effective imperative. As Roland Barthes wrote, “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” [Barthes, 1991, p. 115]. The myth orders us to see, to hear and to understand what it defines as important and not to notice that is not essential in a mythological system of coordinates. Actually the person in the space of myth is similar to the cat from the English nursery rhyme, who could not see anything except the mouse.

For this reason the deconstruction of myth assumes not so much the search and exposure of factual distortions or falsifications (this is not the most important task), as recovery and analysis of its genealogy and “anatomy”, because the solution leads to an understanding of the implicit meanings which turn the myth into a tool of manipulation.

Thus, Toynbee didn't invent – *sensu stricto* – the idea of Russia's Byzantine heritage, because some “invented” narration cannot be the “raw material” of myth as a measure for the transmission of implicit senses. It would be only something easily recognizable, detected as evidence. No doubt, Russia's Byzantine heritage as a historical phenomenon (not notion) is such evidence. Byzantium stands at the origin of Russian spiritual development. Constantinople was not only the destination point of the Dnieper trade rout and a desirable target of military campaigns for Russians, but also an object of unconcealed and unreserved admiration. Their sincere worship of the high civilization, created and sustained by the Greeks, was one of the main reasons why Russia chose Eastern but not Western Christianity.

Benedict Sumner wrote that “Byzantium brought to Russia five gifts: her religion, her law, her view of the world, her art and writing” [Sumner, 1947, p. 178]. This formula seems to be very attractive, but it needs to be itemized. Firstly, the gifts were not imposed, they were perceived consciously and rather selectively: if, for example, in the sphere of religion the authority of the Greeks was almost indisputable, the borrowings from legislation were rather fragmentary. Secondly, and which is more important, Byzantium not only gave her view of the world, it would be better to say that the Empire of “Rhomaïos” (as the Greeks called themselves) became the part of such view. Byzantium played the role of fundamental religious, political and cultural landmark, according to which Medieval Russia created and formed its identity.

It was the religious isolation of the Kievan state from its close neighbors, caused by Christianization, which determined the genesis of Russian medieval ethnical and political consciousness. Orthodoxy became, as W. Medlin wrote, “the national criterion” [Medlin, 1952, p. 45] of Kievan Rus’. That is why Russians became aware of their exclusive character as “Orthodox people” and their contribution to the defense of true Christianity (both from “Latins” and “pagans”), which was no less significant than the contribution of the Greeks. The protest against Byzantine religious paternalism turned into the idea of Russia as God’s chosen people. For the first time these ideas turned into distinct words and actions in the period of the reign of Yaroslav the Wise. In the architecture of that time there is a desire to dispute the right of Tsargrad (as Russians called the capital of Byzantine Empire) as or spiritual heritage of Jerusalem (being the capital of the Christian Empire, Constantinople was officially named New Rome and New Jerusalem). Golden gate and Cathedral of Sophia (Wisdom) in Constantinople were the signs of its spiritual power inherited from the Holy City: the Savior entered Jerusalem through Golden gate, and Zion’s temple as “Wisdom house”² were the highest spiritual symbol of the Holy City.

The idea was turned into words in “Discourse on Law and Grace” written by Hilarion – Kievan Metropolitan, who was raised to cathedra by the will of Yaroslav the Wise contrary to Byzantium. The central subject of this work is the divergence between the “old” and the “new” people. According to Hilarion, the sacred history can be divided into two epochs – the epoch of the Old Testament (“Law”) with Israel as its custodian, and the epoch of the New Testament (“Grace”) with Russia as its keeper and protector. From this point of view, Byzantium was considered to have some positive meaning, but only as a legal representative of the biblical heritage, the successor of the “old people” and its keeper till the moment, when the “new people” would come to the historical stage. Thus, here we can see the idea of Byzantine heritage in ‘latent’ form, that would have ‘flesh and blood’ after 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottomans.

From that very moment the idea of Russia as the successor of Byzantium has constantly excited the mind of Russian scholars. They have tried to consider the present and the future of their country and people as a direct extension of the history of ‘Rhomaïos’ Empire, but they interpreted the subject of heritage, which Russia had to use, in different ways. Nestor Iskander and Maxim Greek understood Russia’s Byzantine Heritage as the right and the duty of Muscovite rulers to re-conquer the throne in Constantinople. In a series of works about Monomakh’s Cap the Byzantine theme serves to prove the ambitions of Muscovite rulers for the title of tsar. In *The Tale about the White Cowl* the succession between Byzantium and Russia also exists in the symbols of power, in this particulare case – only spiritual, not temporal power. In *Notification on Paschalia* written by the Metropolitan Zosima, Russian Chronograph, the theory of “Moscow the Third Rome” the idea of spiritual heritage is declared: Moscow acquires the mystic significance

² “Wisdom hath builded her house” (Proverbs 9:1).

of Tsargrad as a universal center of the true Orthodox godliness, the earthly reflection of God's kingdom and the last obstacle for Antichrist.

The establishment of the Patriarchate in 1589 was motivated by the application to the mission of the Third Rome and this idea helped Russians to withstand rebellions and invasions during Time of Troubles. Consideration of Moscow as the last obstacle for Antichrist fasten the people against the external and internal enemies, but the same idea presaged the tragedy of "the Raskol" – the Russian Church schism in the second half the 17th century. Nikon's reform, aimed amending the canon of the liturgy, for a significant part of Russian Orthodox Christians, was perceived as leading to the ruining of the Third Rome and an omen of Doomsday. The scale of the Old Believers movement – twenty thousand victims of self-immolation and numerous people who escaped from the "Antichrist army" to Lithuania, to the north, behind the Urals, to the Don and Kuban lands (later to Turkey) – shows how deeply the idea of the Third Rome had reached peoples mind. Its significance for the sub-ethnic identity of the Russian Old Believers is proved by the great number of copies of Filofey's writings, that date back not only to 17–18th centuries, but also to 19–20th centuries.

It is clear that for some part of the Russian society that accepted Nikon's reform, the concept of the Third Rome might have lost its previous meaning, however other variations of the Byzantine idea carried on influencing the social consciousness. For example, in one of the "historical songs", Ivan the Terrible said the following words: "I have brought the tsarship ("tsarevanie") from Tsargrad" [Pypin, 1907, p. 38], and in Russian folk *Tale about Borma-yaryzhka* [Skazki, 2003, p. 37–41] there are motifs of *Legend about the Princes of Vladimir* and *Story about Babylon*.

The idea of wining back Constantinople revived in 17th century on the pages of the *Tale of the Siege of Asov*. It was a dream of tsar Alexey Mikhailovich, who sky-hooted about victorious campaign against Ottomans and promised Eastern patriarchs to liberate them from infidel yoke. It could seem that this idea was forgotten after the Petrine reforms, however the Constantinople dream re-emerged in the famous *Greek project* of Empress Catherine the Great, who planned to crush the Ottoman Empire and to crown her second grandson, Constantine, in liberated Tsargrad.

Every visitor to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg can see Richard Brompton's portrait of Grand Princes Alexander and Constantine, where the elder Empress's grandson holds in his hands a sword and a knot, but the second Grand Prince leans on the *labarum* – his great namesake's banner. This portrait was painted in 1781 at the height of the struggle against Ottomans and reflected the main idea of the Greek Project.

However such views were popular not only in the 18th century. Later, in the 19th and 20th centuries during every conflict with Turkey the dream about the liberation of Constantinople became the subject of political doctrines, polemical writings and common gossip. A pro-Byzantine way of thinking is clearly seen in the ideology of Nicholas I who tried to construct a new non-European identity for his subjects to protect them

from Decembrists' ideas and "Revolutionary infection" from Western Europe. Neo-Byzantine architectural style and the establishment of Byzantinist chairs in universities were elements of this doctrine which became famous as Uvarov's theory of "official nationality". Both P. Chaadaev's words about *la misérable Byzance* as the perpetrator of Russian backwardness and the negative view on Nicholas's Russia in famous book by Marquis de Custine are different reflections of anti-European sentiments which were increased in the Russian society of that epoch.

The Byzantine idea or Byzantism was not forgotten after Nicholas's death and kept its popularity both during the reforms of Alexander II and the counter-reforms of Alexander III. F.M. Dostoyevsky considered its incredible value in *Dairies of the Writer*. Famous conservative philosopher and political thinker N.K. Leontiev wrote: "Byzantism organized us, the system of Byzantine ideas created our majesty in connection with our patriarchal simple fundamentals" [Leontiev, 1997, p. 303]. Vice versa, V. Soloviev recognized Russia's Byzantine heritage as "the original sin of nationalist particularism and absolutist caesaropapism" [Soloviev, 1997, p. 336].

All this evidence may raise some doubts. Certainly, those authors might have been captivated by political or poetic chimera, but was all society fascinated by the same chimera? However there is rather indisputable proof of the deep roots of the Byzantine idea in the Russian consciousness in the 19th century. It is found in *The History of a Town* written by Mikhail Saltykov-Schedrin. The trustworthiness of this evidence is guaranteed by the fact that this satire deals with well-known phenomena only. Just something that is well-known and easy to recognize may be laughed to scorn. Byzantism of the town Glupov (Stupid Town) is marked by two axes of ideological coordinates. The historical perspective is given in *Registrar's Appeal*, and the geopolitical significance is presented in the description of contiguity of the pasture lands of Glupov and Byzantium (which caused Byzantine herds to mix with the herds from Glupov) [Saltykov-Schedrin, 1984, p. 17, 41, 81].

There are some other striking examples of parallels between imperial ideology and public consciousness. For example, we find very interesting reminiscence of that imperial myth in rumors that used to circulate among people in 1826 and remain extant thanks to the notes of Fedorov, a servant of a landowner from Caluga Zembulatov: "Out of the Black Sea there comes a throne with the words on it: I was launched by the Tsar Constantine and I will be taken by the Tsar Constantine, no one else can take me" [Chistov, 1967, p. 202].

Keen public interest in the idea of Byzantine inheritance certainly had an influence upon the formation process of approaches to its historical investigation. On the one hand, this lively interest worked to attract of scholars' attention to this problem, but on the other hand, historians felt the direct or indirect influence of the political conjuncture and society's common sentiments. This effect was especially clearly manifested in numerous polemical articles and pamphlets concerning the so-called *Eastern Question*. The idea of Byzantine heritage was considered by the authors of these texts as a justification for anti-Ottoman politics. However, conscious or unconscious confession of Russian

predestination to the Byzantine inheritance is found even in the works of professional historians. The young Russian Byzantinist, K.N. Uspensky, wrote in 1917 protesting against the political commitment of elder scholars: "Only one look at any of the recent books on Byzantine history is enough to make certain that this specific scholastic interest towards the problem is determined by the idea of Russia as the inheritor and successor to the Eastern Orthodox Empire" [Uspenskiy, 1917, p. 1]. But as soon as a certain idea is transformed into the subject of faith, its academic verification becomes practically impossible. The historian sharing this idea can appear only as an illustrator but not a researcher. Here we can observe the specific features of myth defined by R. Barthes as language-robbery [Barthes, 1991, p. 131]: marking some kind of phenomenon, myth creates an illusion of evidence, which as though liberates the scholar from explaining it.

A priori, recognition of Byzantism as the dominating spiritual and political idea of Russian history made any studying of its genesis and of those factors that determined its evolution simply unnecessary. As a result, the task of the historian was limited to the simple study of writings containing the aforementioned idea. However, in this area Russian historians had some good results. In the late 19th and early 20th century many sources reflecting the idea of Byzantine heritage were introduced to the academic community. Among those sources published during that time were the writings of Maxim Greek, *Notification on Paschalia* by the metropolitan Zosima, *Russian Chronograph* and *The Tale of the White Cowl*. A.A. Pavlov, V. Zhmakin and V. Malinin published the epistles of the monk Filofey on *Moscow as the Third Rome* [Pavlov, 1861; Pavlov, 1863; Zhmakin, 1882; Malinin, 1901]. I. Zhdanov published a series of writings discussing the Byzantine backgrounds of Russian coronation regalia and the false Roman genealogy of the Rurikid dynasty [Zhdanov, 1895]. At the same time archimandrite Leonides published *The Tale on the Taking of Tsargrad* by Nestor Iskander [Povest', 1886]. It seems to be quite possible that here we deal with the rare fact of a certain positive influence that myth could impact on academic history: public attention towards the historical ties between Russia and Byzantium stimulated the growth of scholars' interest in their search for new sources to be researched. Nevertheless, all the interpretations of Byzantism were determined by a speculative model according to which the very concern to inherit Constantinople (both in the spiritual and geopolitical sense) was a certain mainstream of Russian culture totally shared by all Russian people from august personages to ignorant peasants. And we must admit that the propaganda of the imperial myth attempted by the intellectual elite did not fail: historians and writers of both camps, supporters of autocracy and their opponents, considered it as a fundamental element of Russian identity. For example, P. Chaadaev in his *Philosophical epistles* does not attempt to analyze or refute the Byzantine myth but reproduces from an opposing viewpoint turns it inside out. While the apologists of the Empire consider its Byzantine roots as a sign of superiority and a token for the universal triumph, Chaadaev created a counter-myth of *la misérable Byzance* as the real reason of Russian backwardness. We can also find this Chaadaev's counter-myth in V.S. Soloviev's concept of Byzantism.

The reaction to imperial propaganda was quite similar outside Russia. As F. Engels (who can be hardly called a "Russophile") wrote, "that empire which, with two capitals such as

St. Peterburg and Moscow, has not yet found its centre of gravity, as long as the “City of Czar” (Constantinople, called in Russian Tsargrad, the Czar’s city), considered by every Russian peasant as the true metropolis of his religion and his nation, is not actually the residence of its Emperor” [Engels, 1919, p. 92]. It is not hard to notice that this passage is just a free retelling of Tutchev’s famous verse: “Oh, Moscow and City of Peter, and City of Constantine! These three are the treasured capitals of Russian Tsardom” [Tutchev, 1965, p. 118].

The ideological patterns are even more evident in works published after 1917. The myth of Russia as the inheritor of Byzantine power was considered as the best and the most evident context for understanding the roots of the Bolshevik revolution. N. Berdyaev wrote in his book *The Origin of Russian Communism* about the internal affinity of Russian messianic concepts and radical revolutionary ideology: “The doctrine of Moscow the Third Rome became the basic idea on which the Muscovite state was formed. The kingdom was consolidated and shaped under the symbol of a Messianic idea. The search for true, ideal kingship was a characteristic of the Russian people throughout its whole history. The profession of the true, Orthodox Faith, was the test of belonging to the Russian kingdom. In exactly the same way profession of the true communist faith was to be the test of belonging to Soviet Russia, to the Russian communist state” [Berdyaev, 1937, p. 9]. Moreover, Berdyaev builds the bridge between two notions – the Third Rome as the quintessence of messianic optimism and the Third International as compensation for historical frustration: “The Russian people have not realized their messianic idea of Moscow the Third Rome. The ecclesiastical schism of the seventeenth century revealed that the Muscovite Tsardom is not the Third Rome; still less, of course, was the Petersburg Empire a realization of the idea of the Third Rome. In it a final cleavage took place. The messianic idea of the Russian people assumed either an apocalyptic form or a revolutionary; and then there occurred an amazing event in the destiny of the Russian people. Instead of the Third Rome in Russia, the Third International was achieved, and many of the features of the Third Rome pass over to the Third International” [Berdyaev, 1937, p. 143]. The theme of the Third Rome is a peculiar keynote of Berdyaev’s book: this concept is mentioned thirteen times!

The same approach in a different ideological framework can be observed in the ideas of Georgy Florovsky who was probably one of the greatest philosophers of the Russian Emigration. Florovsky was the first to emphasize the fundamental difference between Filofey’s concept and its further outcomes. While the opposition of two Romes, the Third and the Second, appeared in Filofey’s theory as a warning intended to remind readers about moral and religious obligations, “the subsequent concepts used this apocalyptic scheme which having been secondly interpreted by official writers in panegyric sense, turned into the theory of official chiliarism” [Florovsky, 1937, p. 11]. Thus, in its second meaning the idea of the Third Rome, according to Florovsky, appears specifically as the tool for “nationalistic self-assertion”, which finally leads to “irresponsibility of nation’s spirit”: “And here the tragedy of Russian culture begins ... And it finds its end in a furious fit of madness, ungodliness and breaking off” [Florovsky, 1937, p. 12].

We don't know, whether Florovsky's views were known outside of the circle of the Russian emigrants or not, but *The Origin of Russian Communism* by Berdyaev gained a rather wide circulation in Western society. It was translated into German and English and published in 1937. No doubt, Toynbee read this book, because he refers to Berdyaev in the 7th volume of *A Study of History* [Toynbee, 1954, p. 701–703].

The continuity between Berdyaev's views and Toynbee's concept is rather obvious. But there are also two important differences. Firstly, Berdyaev considers communism as degradation, a perversion of the Russian messianism expressed in idea of the Third Rome, but Toynbee, vice versa, insists on the relative invariability of the basic elements of the Byzantine civilization – from the Eastern Roman Empire to the Bolshevism. From his point of view totalitarianism is inherent not only to the Soviet Union, but also Medieval Russia, and the Byzantine empire. This invariability of political foundations is expressed in idea of the Third Rome: "Under the Hammer and Sickle, as under the Cross, Russia is still 'Holy Russia', and Moscow still 'The Third Rome'" [Toynbee, 1947, p. 95].

Secondly, Berdyaev pays the main attention to internal aspects of Bolshevism's prehistory, but Toynbee is more interested in the external part of this process. Therefore the most important component of Russia's Byzantine heritage (except the institution of the totalitarian state) is, from Toynbee's point of view, the eternal conviction that "Byzantium is always right and the West is always wrong" [Toynbee, 1947, p. 77].

Both of these ideas were strongly acquired in the Western historiography. So, for example, the statement about the static character of the Byzantine civilization was further developed in the monograph "Moscow and East Rome. A Political Study of Church and State in Muscovite Russia" by W.K. Medlin: "The historical process at work in the Greek-Russian Orthodox oikoumene was less visited by processional phenomena than by reproduction of the same relations, concepts" [Medlin, 1952, p. 224]. Moreover, wishing to be more *Toynbeean* than Toynbee, Medlin declared: "To the mind's eye, the path leading from Constantinople to Kiev and to Moscow has traced a much longer course in the dimension of time and space that in the actual evolution of political ideology" [Medlin, 1952, p. 224].

Many Western historians tried to develop Toynbee's statement on anti-Western hostility as the main feature of Russian messianism and considered Byzantism or *The Third-Romism* [Toumanoff, 1955, p. 436] as the ideology of autocracy and an expansionist political course – "the permanent mission" [Kohn, 1948], "dialectic of aggression and of persecution complex which characterizes Russia's attitude toward the 'outside'" [Toumanoff, 1955, p. 447]. At the same time Soviet authors on their behalf pointed out that the idea of Byzantine heritage had no impact on the real political process and for that reason it was hardly possible to speak either about the official character of those ideas or about their significant influence on nation's mentality. However such conclusions were not always based on the results of serious research work. As it was before, ideological motives in historical studies of the phenomenon took over the academic concerns while the weakness of arguments was hidden by the pathetic struggle against "bourgeois

falsifications". In this sense the discussion around the theory of Moscow the Third Rome seems to be quite remarkable.

Thus, Western historians confident in the permanent Russian objective to triumph over Constantinople have always been intended to decode Filofey's idea of universal power given to the Russian tsar as a foreign-policy program similar to that of Nestor Iskander and Maxim the Greek. Soviet historians in their turn tried to show that Russia in 15th–16th centuries had no concrete plans concerning the Balkans, and concluded that the theory of the Third Rome could find no positive response in official circles. But at the same time it was overlooked that the very term *inheritance* could have different connotations and a certain similarity of phrasal construction might not necessarily mean their sameness. But far from all Soviet historians shared the thesis of this theory's aggressive nature. More often we deal with another verdict: Filofey's conception is "clerical and reactionary". This offensive criticism can be explained by the atheistic Soviet ideology on the one hand and by *etatism* of Soviet ideology on the other. Its idea of state power as a major value motivated Soviet authors to sing the praises of the ideologists of autocracy. But those thinkers who proposed the importance of certain moral limits for authorities were not observed among serious authors and were called "nearsighted".

After the Cold War it could seem that ideological motivation no longer played a leading role in studies of Byzantine heritage. In the 1990s there could be seen some lively interest towards Russian political-religious thought and its influence on ethnic political identity. The series of seminars named "From Rome to the Third Rome" was dedicated to this problem as well as the monograph "The Third Rome: Sources and Evolution of the Russian Medieval Concept" by N.V. Sinitsina [Sinitsina, 1998]. More precise research of all cases and definitions of Byzantine heritage help to overcome many myths existing in the historiography and in political thought. But at the same time some works about the destiny of Byzantine heritage in Russia show a strange "logic from the opposite" based on the false equating of myth with fiction: if some notion is a myth, we need to discover the truth by turning this notion inside out. However objective analysis and deconstruction of myth is impossible if the mythologization is *a priori* considered as a falsification. In this case, the study of myths turns into the construction of some new or restoration of old mythological schemes. Such an approach makes the evolution of historiography similar to the pendulum's trajectory: again and again one thesis gets replaced by the anti-thesis, but – in spite of Hegel's idea – no synthesis arises from it. And the sad joke of Ms. Clio is that after 1991 both politically committed views on Byzantine heritage were renewed in Russia: pro-Western liberals reproduced Chaadaev's myth, just as conservative anti-Western ideologists held themselves out as Uvarov's inheritors. But now this new round of Old Russian controversy was developing not only in newspapers and magazines, but in the space of the growing Russian Internet. Moreover, in fact the Internet became the main discussion platform in this debate, because more and more media outlets began publishing online and their readers became Internet-users.

The articles about Russia's Byzantine heritage appeared in political and so-called "geopolitical" web-sites, and this discourse was developing in the framework of

a civilizational approach. What is the most remarkable, these articles as a rule included favorable responses to A.J. Toynbee and rather large citations from his works. It is a real paradox: one of the main creators of contemporary Western anti-Byzantine discourse inspired Russian philosophers and political researchers to look for Byzantine sources of Russian identity. But this strange situation has a rather simple explanation. Firstly, a reduced Russian translation of "A Study of History" was published in 1991. Its editors for a long time strove for permission to publish this book, and in the end they had to cut all the politicized subjects from the original text. So Toynbee in Russian translation looked more academically respectable, than original English text. The first readers of Toynbee did not know about real author's attitude towards Byzantine civilization. They simply understood that Russia is part of this civilization, and that was enough for them.

Why was it so? This is the second part of the answer. There was the Department of history of the Communist party in every Soviet university or institute from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok. And in 1991 this huge army of ideologist workers lost both their job and their methodological North Star. The thousands of former party historians had to become lecturers of Russian history and they needed to find a substitute for the crushed and debunked Marxism-Leninism. And the Russian translation of Toynbee became a happy boon for them. The former Marxists turned into the acolytes of the English "prophet". So later, when Samuel Huntington published his famous "The Clash of Civilizations" and then it was translated into Russian, the seed fell into good soil. The conditions for an admiring reaction among post-Soviet intellectuals were ripe. Boris Mezhuev, one of the active authors of the Internet-project "The Russian World" wrote in 2001, recalling this time: "Reading of Huntington and discussion of his ideas in 1994–1996 accustomed Russia to thought about her cultural and political independence. This painful procedure – an understanding of civilizational loneliness – was necessary for Russia" [Mezhuev, 2001].

The next stage of this process was the reception of the Russian pre-revolutionary ideological heritage. A typical anti-Western text of that time is the article by Alexander Efremov, "Struggle for History. Vladimir Soloviev as the critic of Nicolay Danilevsky" in the Internet-magazine of the Russian conservative mind "Golden Lion" [Efremov, 2005]. Certainly the author proved that Danilevsky was an intellectual colossus, but Soloviev, who, following Chaadaev, considered Byzantism as the reason for Russia's cultural isolation, in comparison with Danilevsky looked as a miserable dwarf. Then, after Danilevsky, Konstantin Leontiev, a radical-conservative anti-Western thinker and "prophet" of Byzantism, became one of the most popular heroes of the Russian Internet. The search request "Konstantin Leontiev" in Russian search engine Yandex results in one million answers³. The search request "Konstantin Leontiev. Byzantism and Slavdom" (his most famous article) results in about fifty thousand answers⁴.

³ URL: <https://yandex.ru/search/?text=Константин%20Леонтьев&lr=39&msp=1> (accessed 29 January 2016).

⁴ URL: <https://yandex.ru/search/?text=константин%20леонтьев%20византизм%20и%20славянство&lr=39&rnd=2984> (accessed 29 January 2016).

A good example of this reanimation of the old ghosts is the monograph "Byzantine Tradition in Russian Mentality" by G.V. Skotnikova which attempts to justify the expansionist ideas of F. Tutchev [Skotnikova, 2002, p. 135–141]. Another remarkable illustration is the anthology titled "The Three Romes" (foreword and compilation by N. Lisovoy) where the list of great creators of the Universal Orthodox Empire, the Roman Caesars, Byzantine emperors and Russian tsars is supplied with Joseph Stalin [Lisovoy, 2001, p. 14–16]. On the other hand the word "Byzantism" became one of the most habitual invectives of the liberals against their opponents. For example the article in *Kommersant* (24.10.2005) about one of the "architects of Perestroika" Alexander Yakovlev and his struggle against M.A. Suslov and other conservative Communist leaders was entitled "True Suslov's Byzantism" [Zhironov, 2005].

Step by step the debate on Byzantism in the historiography and journalism became more and more similar to the Old Russian controversy in the 19th century between pro-western liberals and anti-Western conservatives.

The pivotal moment in this process was the appearance of the documentary film by the archimandrite (currently bishop) Tikhon (Shevkunov) "Death of the empire. The Byzantine lesson". It was shown on TV channel "Russia" in 2008, on January 30 and immediately the Internet exploded and divided users among the passionate admirers and angry antagonists. The first thanked the author for opening their eyes to the historical truth about the great Byzantine civilization and the revelation of the monstrous West. The second called it primitive propaganda.

As for me, I am not a fan of Tikhon Shevkunov and agree that it is a propagandist myth, but I do not agree, that it is primitive. Liberals tried to find falsifications in this film, but used the wrong approach and thinking. The author used another tool. He demonstrated real facts. Who wouldn't agree, that Byzantines created a great civilization? Who does not agree, that the Fourth Crusade was an evil crime and the Western knights were odious and cruel robbers? No doubt, it is truth. But it is extremely remarkable that sometimes the author uses rather strange and absolutely non-Byzantine words and terms: the power vertical, stabilization fund, oligarchs, insurgent governors etc. And if you pay attention to such strange words and expressions you can understand that the author is talking not about Byzantium. "The Byzantine lesson" was enthusiastically received in national-conservative circles. A lot of articles and essays were published, numerous Byzantophile Internet resources appeared: Byzantine lesson (<http://www.vizantia.info>), Moscow the Third Rome (<http://www.3rm.info>), Katehon – Byzantine portal (<http://www.katehon.ru>) etc. Now, eight years after its release, this film is still popular on the Internet. A search request in Yandex results in 331,000 answers. And it proves that this film is not primitive, but a rather effective manipulation. Actually a lot of responses to Shevkunov's opus from both sides were more primitive.

A good example is an absolutely evident political Byzantophile anti-Western manifest "On the Adamant Soil" by Valery Fadeev, the editor of the "Expert" magazine and Internet-project "Expert-online". "Russia will step out from the crisis of European civilization in the

best form. The basis for this purpose is its Byzantine roots" [Fadeev, 2014, p. 11] – declares our new "prophet", and actually it seems to be very similar to a famous sentence of Count Alexander Benkendorf, the chief of Gendarmerie about Russian history, as it was seen in the context of anti-Western Uvarov's doctrine: "The past of Russia was surprising, her present is more than perfect; as for the future, it is higher than the most brave imagination can draw; this is, my friend, a point of view, from which Russian history must be seen and written" [Lemke, 1909, p. 411]. As is well-known, this statement was the response to Chaadaev's Philosophical Letters. But, alas, responses from another side were sometimes much more rough. A typical example of such attitude is the article by the editor of "Snob" magazine Nicolay Uskov. Confirming the name of his magazine, this new and the worst incarnation of Chaadaev writes: "Russians have no history. We, as a primitive people, still live in the space of myth. A bedding of romantic imaginations, evil-minded lies, falsifications, in fact, make Russian history today" [Uskov, 2013].

A similar historiographical (or mythological?) pendulum could be seen in contemporary academic and non-academic Western texts dedicated to the Russian political mind. If during the Cold war the theory of The Third Rome was understood as a key structure of Russian identity, now it is almost replaced from academic attention by another concept – the idea of the New Jerusalem [Raba, 1995; Rowland, 1996]. This interest itself is caused by a concept which was really important for Russian medieval culture and mentality and which was unreasonably overlooked by the majority of scholars. But what truly startles us in all these works is the specific conjunction in their titles: it is supposed to indicate the impossibility of any co-existence and simultaneous cultural influence of the two mentioned ideas. But here the paradox appears: contemporary Russian historians rejecting Soviet myths revive the pre-revolutionary ones, while the Western scholars trying to break down the Cold War myths borrow the views of the Soviet authors and even surpass them in the abruptness of their assessments. So, according to M. Poe the emergence of the Third Rome theory was not inevitable, but it was "invented" absolutely accidentally [Poe, 2000], while another scholar P. Bushkovitch calls it just "an apocalyptic delirium of a provincial, marginal monk" [Bushkovitch, 2003, p. 115]. And the saddest circumstance of this radical reconsideration is its political background, as some authors confessed: "Recent events in the former Soviet Union have stimulated the rethinking of many previously axiomatic notions about the past and present of Russia" [Rowland, 1996, p. 591].

Another view on these two ideas – the Third Rome and Holy Russia – is offered by Peter Duncan, the author of the *grand narrative* about Russian messianism: "In Russia, two trends of messianist thought may be identified, one emphasizing the State and the other emphasizing the people. In the sixteenth century, the theory of 'Moscow the Third Rome', as developed in the Orthodox Church, centered on the person of the Tsar and the Muscovite State. The popular folklore of 'Holy Rus' put the emphasis on the land and the people" [Duncan, 2000, p. 142]. But it is a too difficult task – to create grand narrative in 148 pages (without notes, bibliography and index) and to prove in such frugal volume, that "Russian messianism has been a persistent phenomenon, appearing with differing strengths and different forms at various times in Russian history" [Duncan, 2000, p. 1].

The result is absolutely logical. As Vera Tolz wrote in a review on this book, “the author tries to assess the positions of too many intellectual figures. This leads to the fact that the majority of them are treated in a very schematic and therefore uninformative way” [Tolz, 2002]. In another words, the author on such occasions becomes like a cat in the royal palace seeing nothing except a mouse.

But Duncan’s book is not the worst example. In any case its author demonstrates his knowledge of primary sources and tries to maintain academically restrained language. Other authors do not attempt the same. And again, as it was in the 1930s and 1950s, Russian emigrants are in the first rank of the warriors for Western values against Byzantine authoritarianism and imperialism: Dmitry Sidorov writes about *Post-Soviet Third Romism* (Toumanoff’s concept receives new life!) as one of the main directions of contemporary Russian geopolitical thinking [Sidorov, 2006]; Nina Khrushcheva [Khrushcheva, 2008] and Irina Papkova [Papkova, 2009] frighten readers by talking of a revival of Byzantine imperialism in contemporary Russia.

Thus, the pendulum continues to be shaken, and cats don’t see anything except mice. ►

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