

SAMPLE

both monarchy and national unity were older than the idea that the one emperor mirrored the One God in heaven and they were not theological to begin with.³ Romania (which is what the Byzantines themselves called their polity) was not a multi-ethnic empire in the manner of the Ottoman one that succeeded it. With origins going back to the Roman *res publica*, it was defined by the twelfth century as ‘the nation-state of the Romans, a unified political community held together by common “custom” (*ethos*)’.⁴ The late Byzantine ‘Mirrors of Princes’ support this view.⁵ For Nikephoros Blemmydes, the king ‘is the head and brain of the whole body politic’ and his office is ‘the immovable foundation of a people’ (Barker 1957: 154). At the same time, ‘kingly power (βασιλεία) does indeed image the power of God (κράτος θεοῦ), as philosophy images the wisdom and the foresight of God’.⁶ Blemmydes’ pupil, George Akropolites, proclaims the truth of the ancient saying ‘that states will have rest from their evils, and be compassed about with blessings, when kings become philosophers or philosophers become kings’. In John III Vatatzes, Akropolites sees both of these things realised: a philosopher-king who ‘pursued philosophy to the heights’ (Barker 1957: 160). Next, Thomas Magistros writes that the emperor must be a man of intelligence and wisdom. He thus ‘makes not only himself, but also others, immortal, instead of merely mortal’ (Barker 1957: 165). This is not because he is an absolute ruler standing over and above the state but because he is a constituent part of it, symbolically embodying it. At the same time, on the theological level this political community – the state of the Roman people with the emperor at its head – also has an eschatological mission, which is

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3. Kaldellis 2007: 363. In a series of significant publications Kaldellis has almost single-handedly (but to my mind convincingly) pushed back against the prevailing idea of ‘the Byzantine theocracy’. See, especially, Kaldellis 2015: ch. 6, on the limits of ‘the imperial idea’.
 4. Kaldellis 2007: 76, summarising the views of the twelfth-century historian, Niketas Choniates.
 5. On the ‘Mirrors of Princes’, which, although often rhetorical exercises, sought to set out the emperor’s role and duties, see Païdas 2006.
 6. Blemmydes, *Imperial Statue* 7 (Hunger and Ševčenko 1986: 45). *Imperial Statue* (Βασιλικὸς Ἀνδριάς), paraphrased by two fourteenth-century scholars, George Galesiotes and George Oinaiotes, continued to be read until the end of the empire.

Introduction

Strategies of Religious and Cultural Survival

It is always useful to define one's terms. Not only is 'the imperial idea' of the book's title a modern term but so is 'Orthodoxy' in the sense of 'the Orthodox Church'. The first term, 'the imperial idea', signifies, in Norman Baynes' words, 'the political philosophy of the Christian empire'. Baynes goes on to say that the 'basis of that political philosophy is to be found in the conception of the imperial government as a terrestrial copy of the rule of God in Heaven: there is one God and one divine law, therefore there must be on earth but one ruler and a single law. That ruler, the Roman emperor, is the Vicegerent of the Christian God.'¹ This is still a commonly held view of the political ideology that underpinned the Byzantine Empire throughout its history. Baynes makes this judgement, however, in the context of a discussion of how the fourth-century theologian, Eusebius of Caesarea, in a speech celebrating the tricennialia of the emperor Constantine I, applied the Hellenistic idea of kingship to the first Christian Roman emperor.² However, as Anthony Kaldellis has argued in his important work on Byzantine Hellenism, '[t]he roots of

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1. Baynes 1955: 168. The essay containing this statement, 'Eusebius and the Christian Empire', was first published in 1933.
 2. Baynes is followed by numerous scholars who apply the theocratic ideal much more comprehensively, for example, by Gilbert Dagron, who in his classic study of Byzantine 'Caesaropapism' (Dagron 1996) focusses on the eighth to eleventh centuries.

to realise on earth a *mimesis* of heaven that expresses the universality and justice of God.⁷ The church is the empire's partner in this mission.

The second term, 'orthodoxy' (ὀρθοδοξία), was the characteristic, along with 'piety' (εὐσέβεια), that distinguished the true church from various sectarian versions of Christianity – which John Damascene reckoned in the eighth century to number more than a hundred.⁸ The most important marks of the imperial church remained always orthodoxy and piety, that is to say, correct doctrine and correct worship. For the Byzantines, the church was simply 'the church', or, more fully, 'the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ'.⁹ The designation 'the Orthodox Church' came to be adopted as a result of the struggle to mark off the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ from the Latin Church, which also called itself holy, catholic and apostolic, and those eastern churches, or portions of them, that remained faithful to Rome after the failure of the union of 1439. The first use of 'the Orthodox Church' in the modern sense seems to have been by Mark Eugenikos' younger brother, John (c. 1394-c. 1454/5), writing shortly after the Council of Ferrara-Florence, who refers to 'our own Orthodox Church' (ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς Ὀρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία) and 'Christ's orthodox church' (ἡ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἑκκλησία ἡ ὀρθόδοξος).¹⁰ In what follows, however, the imperial church throughout the Palaiologan era will be called 'the Byzantine Church', 'the Orthodox Church', or simply 'Orthodoxy'.

A further term also calls for clarification: 'political hesychasm'. A modern coinage, this heuristic term seeks to encapsulate the consequences of the victory of the Palamite version of hesychasm at the end of the Byzantine civil war of 1341-47 and the consequent accession of Palamites to positions of ecclesiastical power. In February 1347 the patriarch John XIV Kalekas was deposed, a Palamite, Isidore Boucheiras, was elected to succeed him, and a number of important vacant sees were filled with Palamite bishops. There was

7. As will be seen below, this is clearly implied in the relationship between Andronikos II and his patriarch, Athanasios I.

8. John Damascene, *On Heresies* (Kotter 1969-: IV, 19-67). John, not without reason, includes Islam as an Abrahamic sect (ch. 100).

9. The church is termed thus by Matthew Kantakouzenos in his *Horismos* of 1351 (Russell 2020: 376).

10. John Eugenikos, *Antirrhetic* 30 (Rossidou-Koutsou 2006: 140.18); *Oratio ad Notaram* (ed. S. Lampros 1912-30: vol 2: 41.21).

an immediate protest in July 1347 from a body of bishops opposed to the Palamites, who in a synodal *tomos* of their own, denounced what they saw as an ecclesiastical coup by a group acting like a church within the church.¹¹ Nevertheless, Palamites continued to occupy the patriarchal throne until the end of the century and beyond who were able to shape the spiritual outlook not only of the Orthodox of the Byzantine Roman polity but also of the Russian lands. This ‘translation of [a particular version of monastic] piety into an often political, sometimes administrative and always social form’ is what is meant by political hesychasm.¹²

In Late Byzantium, the Orthodox Church was in a state of permanent crisis. There were few periods from the recapture of Constantinople from the Latins by Michael VIII Palaiologos in July 1261 to its fall to the Turks and the death of the last emperor, Constantine XI Palaiologos, in May 1453, when the church, or significant parts of it, was not in conflict with the emperor with regard either to his moral character or his ecclesiastical policy. The latter throughout the Palaiologan era was two-pronged: on the one hand, it aimed at increasing the emperor’s control of the Orthodox Church, or at least neutralising its opposition to his policies; on the other, it pursued a strategy of ecclesiastical union with the Latins in the hope of securing western military aid against the Turks. It has been claimed that in this era the Byzantine Church successfully asserted itself against successive imperial attempts to control it and, in the process of doing so, itself absorbed the imperial idea by developing a hierocratic ideology, which in the event helped it survive the collapse of the empire.¹³ My own finding is that the

11. Text: Rigo, 2020: 104-22; trans. Russell, 2020: 311-22. The bishops complain (in § 5) of the Palamites’ attempt to monasticise society, infusing it with what they describe as ‘bigotry’.

12. The quotation is from the abstract of Sekulovski, 2010. See also Payne, 2011: 99-106; Bolanakis, 2020.

13. Dimiter Angelov says in his very fine book on imperial ideology and political thought in the early Palaiologan period: ‘Late Byzantine ecclesiastics, in addition to opposing their emperors, prepared the church ideologically for its important political position as leader of the multi-ethnic orthodox community in the rising empire of the Ottomans’ (2006: 416). My attempt here is, in a modest way, to continue Angelov’s discussion up to the fall of the empire in 1453, testing the truth of his assertion.

church's hierocratic thinking reached its apogee during the second patriarchate of Athanasios I (1303-9), was still significant under the powerful hesychast patriarchs of the fourteenth century, but thereafter died away. What enabled the church to survive the catastrophe of 1453 was in fact a rejection of the empire, a rejection made possible by an apocalyptic sense of the coming of God's kingdom allied with the victory of an interiorised version of hesychasm over the imperial policy of union with the Latins. As a way of introducing this theme, let us begin with seven snapshots, seven emblematic moments that illustrate the changing role of the church (ἡ ἐκκλησία) *vis-à-vis* the state (ἡ βασιλεία) in the Palaiologan era:

1. Michael VIII's Entry into Constantinople on 15 August 1261

The Latin Empire had lasted for 57 years since the Fourth Crusade had been diverted in 1204 from its declared aim of recapturing Jerusalem from the Muslims and had been turned by the Venetian doge, Enrico Dandolo, against Constantinople. The most important of the Byzantine successor states was that of Nicaea, which had reconstituted itself as the Byzantine government in exile in 1208 with the election of a patriarch and the coronation of Theodore I Laskaris as emperor (Angold 1975: 13). Theodore was succeeded by his son-in-law, John II Vatatzes, and John by his son, Theodore II Laskaris. However, Theodore II's son, John IV Laskaris, was still a minor when his father died, and in the power struggle that ensued, one of Theodore's military chiefs, Michael Palaiologos, proved victorious and in 1259 was proclaimed co-emperor. On 25 July 1261, a small reconnaissance force led by the caesar Alexios Strategopoulos was unexpectedly able to seize control of Constantinople. As soon as he could make appropriate arrangements for moving his capital, Michael Palaiologos set off for the imperial city. He entered it at midday on 15 August by the Golden Gate, the imposing gate at the southern end of the great walls used traditionally for the return of victorious emperors after successful military campaigns. However, this was a sombre, almost penitential, occasion, not a triumphal entry. With the empress, the senate, and the chief officers of state, Michael made his way on foot in the heat, preceded by the icon of the Hodegetria, to the Great Palace, the more comfortable Blachernai Palace having been left

in an uninhabitable state by the fleeing Latin emperor, Baldwin II. The mood of the crowds lining the route was subdued. They had not yet taken in what had happened, but their surprise was transformed into joy at seeing for the first time an emperor of the Romans in the Great Palace.¹⁴ The impoverished rule of the Latin emperors had left churches and palaces in ruins and even the city's Theodosian walls in a dangerous state of disrepair. Now the imperial city once again had an Orthodox emperor and an Orthodox patriarch. A new period of glory seemed to be dawning.¹⁵ The euphoria did not last long. Michael's policy of seeking union with Rome alienated many Orthodox. Moreover, many saw Michael as a usurper for having thrust aside the Laskarids in 1259 and then having his young co-emperor, John IV Laskaris, blinded and imprisoned in 1264. The patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos had excommunicated Michael on his accession, and Michael found a pretext in 1264 to depose him and appoint a successor, Joseph. The result was the Arsenite schism, which plagued the empire for nearly fifty years, the supporters of the former patriarch occupying the moral high ground against Michael as a usurper of the imperial office and a traitor to Orthodoxy and refusing to be in communion with the imperial church until they were finally reconciled through a compromise negotiated in 1310 (Nicol 1972: 45-48, 102-11).

2. Andronikos II's Pilgrimage to the Monastery of Xerolophos in January 1303

On 7 January 1303 Constantinople suffered a major earthquake. The emperor Andronikos II, Michael VIII's son and successor, was as pious in ecclesiastical affairs as his father had been severely pragmatic. His piety was not naive but like most of his subjects he took the earthquake to be a sign of divine displeasure. The intractable Arsenite schism, with the political problems it caused, was very much on his

14. Our informant is the historian George Pachymeres (1242-c. 1310), who describes the scene in detail in his *History* II, 31 (Failler and Laurent 1984: 218-19).

15. According to Pachymeres, Michael VIII was even called a 'new Constantine' by the patriarch who succeeded Arsenios' second tenure, Germanos III (1265-66), *History* IV, 21 (Failler and Laurent 1984: 391.5-7).

mind. The January earthquake had been preceded by a tremor 48 hours previously, on the very night after the ex-patriarch Athanasios I had sent him a warning from his monastic retreat that God was angry with the people of Constantinople and was going to punish them. After the major shock, the emperor announced that it had been predicted to him by a holy monk, and led a procession on foot to the monastery of Xerolophos, near the Forum of Arcadius, that had been founded by Athanasios as his place of retreat and eventual burial, in order to behold and venerate the divinely inspired monk. It was the emperor's desire to recall Athanasios to patriarchal office – Athanasios had resigned in October 1293 under pressure from the clergy, who resented the austerity he imposed on them – in the hope that this moral rigorist would satisfy the Arsenites and bring an end to the schism. The previous patriarch, John XII Kosmas, however, was not persuaded to resign until the 21 June. Two days later Athanasios was installed on the patriarchal throne, but not before he had made Andronikos sign a promise 'to fulfil servile obedience' to him. This promise of servitude, marking a new stage in the relationship of the emperor to the church, soon became part of the coronation oath, as recorded by Pseudo-Kodinos in his *Treatise on Dignitaries and Offices*, compiled between 1347 and 1368 (Verpeaux 1966: 253.24).

3. The Constantinopolitan Council of 8 February 1347

The church council held in the Blachernai Palace in Constantinople on 8 February 1347 marks another new beginning. When Andronikos III died suddenly in June 1341, leaving as his heir his nine-year-old son John, six years of civil war followed between the regent, the empress Anna of Savoy, and the former head of the army, John Kantakouzenos, who had himself expected to become regent. On 2 February 1347, Kantakouzenos entered Constantinople (less gloriously than Michael VIII, through a small gate opened by a palace servant) and within a week called a council to put an end to the ecclesiastical dysfunction caused by the civil war and the Hesychast Controversy. This controversy, which had begun in 1340, when a Greek of South Italy, Barlaam the Calabrian, brought a charge of heresy against Gregory Palamas, one of the leaders of the hesychast monks of Mount Athos, had repercussions for the life of the church as a whole. The council confirmed the deposition of the anti-hesychast patriarch, John XIV

Kalekas, appointed a new patriarch, and filled the large number of sees that had remained vacant during the war. The new patriarch was Isidore I Boucheiras, a hesychast. Again, a new era seemed to be dawning, with an Orthodox emperor (even if Kantakouzenos had Andronikos' son, John V, as his co-emperor) and an Orthodox Church in which the hesychasts were now dominant both working in unison (and without the strings attached to help from the Latin West) to restore unity and peace in what remained of the Eastern Roman Empire. Very soon these hopes, too, were dashed.¹⁶

4. John V Palaiologos' Submission to Rome on 18 October 1369

John VI Kantakouzenos was forced to abdicate in December 1354, leaving John V Palaiologos free to pursue a policy of seeking Western military aid. Knowing that the ecclesiastical establishment was thoroughly hostile to union with the Latin Church, John V decided, under pressure from his cousin Amadeo of Savoy, that his best option was to make a personal submission to the pope. The Latins, assuming that the emperor had more control over the Byzantine Church than was actually the case, were delighted. John arrived in Rome in early September 1369, and on 18 October, in an apartment occupied by Cardinal Nicolas de Besse at the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, in the presence of four cardinals and Paul, titular Latin patriarch of Constantinople,¹⁷ signed a declaration abjuring Greek errors and professing the same faith as that which the Roman Church

16. Rigo 2020: 16-26, 40-45; Russell 2020: 291-93; 294-308 (trans. of the *Tomos* issued by the council).

17. The Greek text, with a Latin translation from the papal archives, is in Allatius 1648: 843-52. Nicolas de Besse, a French cardinal and nephew of Clement VI, died on 5 November only eighteen days after the emperor made his profession of faith. The four cardinals who witnessed the profession were William, bishop of Ostia and dean of the college of cardinals, Bernard, priest of the Twelve Apostles, Francis, priest of Santa Sabina, and Raymund, deacon of Sant Andrea. Paul, a southern Italian (no doubt an Italo-Greek), was already well known to the emperor as papal legate on several occasions to Constantinople.