

New Perspectives on Late Antiquity
in the Eastern Roman Empire

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Edited by

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P U B L I S H I N G

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BETWEEN THE THIRD ROME
AND THE NEW JERUSALEM:
THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE
VIEWED BY RUSSIANS¹

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‘A new third Rome will rise, truly Rome-love
that will respond to all anguishes’
—*Sergei N. Bulgakov*²

‘The Lord hath made known his salvation:
His righteousness hath he openly
showed in the sight of the heathen’
—*Psalm 98, 2*³

The night of May 24th, 1453, a partial eclipse of the moon was already interpreted as an unpropitious omen by the wretched inhabitants of Constantinople. In four days, the city would fall to the Turks, thus putting the final nail to the coffin of the Roman Empire. Niccolò Barbaro, the Venetian physician witness to fall of the City, narrates as well how the Emperor Constantine XI, aware of the exiguous forces on his side, despite his concessions at the Council of Ferrara, and refusing to flee the city, as advised by members of his court, stated that the city could only put its

¹ I have greatly benefited from the comments and suggestions made by Donald Ostrowski (University of Harvard) to this article before its publication. His generosity has been, as always, beyond my capacity of expressing my deep gratefulness in words. All mistakes and shortcomings remain solely mine.

² Cited in B. Marchade, “Sergei Bulgakov and ‘The Roman Temptation’.” In *S. N. Bulgakov: Religious and philosophical Road*, Moscow: Russkyj Put’, 2003: 274

³ All Biblical quotations in English in the present article are given following the King James version (Carroll and Prickett, 1997)

trust in Christ, His Mother and in the Emperor Constantine, its founder⁴. Indeed, the eclipse and other signs were already foretellers of the disaster to come: the Emperor died in the siege, by the walls, the City was rampaged and Santa Sophia sacked, which, according to some sources, was deeply regretted by Mehmet II himself⁵.

The Fall of Constantinople, 1123 years after it had been inaugurated by its founder, Emperor Constantine, also referred to as Second Rome, or New Rome, was indeed a shock to its contemporaries, probably to some more than to others. The present article tries to elucidate whether there was any relation between the Fall of Constantinople and the emergence of the myth of Moscow as the 'Third Rome' and whether the myth was, or was not, a direct effect of the former.

The relation of Russia, or Rus', at that time, with Byzantium, the Eastern Empire, had started almost five centuries before, when Princess Olga had been baptised in Constantinople in 955 and later Vladimir converted Kievan Rus' to Christianity in 988. By accepting Christianity in the Eastern rite, Rus' entered what Dimitri Obolensky called the Byzantine Commonwealth⁶. They were not the only ones, Bulgaria, Serbia,

⁴ Barbaro, 47, ed. E. Cornet 1856.

⁵ Doukas, 40, ed. V. Grecu 1958; Kritoboulos 68, 2-3, ed. D.R. Reinsch 1983.

⁶ The term 'Byzantine Commonwealth' coined somewhat diffusely by Obolensky himself has been useful in late decades to denote those territories who adopted Christianity in the Eastern Orthodox rite and were, at least immediately after their conversion to Christianity, culturally as well as religiously influenced by Byzantium. Whether the term would or should incorporate a political dimension, more in accordance with the modern sense of Commonwealth, or whether Obolensky himself applied it rigorously in his own study, is another matter (cf. Raffensperger, 2003). Of course the position of all these territories changed over the course of time with respect to Byzantium, even when a greater cultural and religious homogeneity was still present (acknowledgement of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, origin of translated texts, church and court rituals). Despite denoting mainly a communion of religious interests and practices, it cannot be denied that it had a cultural dimension as well that joined these areas together, particularly if compared to those territories who adopted Christianity in the Latin rite. Other equally satisfactory attempts have been made to take into account the similarities and differences among Slavs in the course of time, from the *Cyrrillo-Methodiana* denomination of Central Europe, taking into account the Christianised Slavic speaking territories before the Schism of 1054, to the rather more cultural division between *Slavia Ortodossa* and *Slavia Romana*, proposed by R. Picchio, or

Macedonia and other territories had also become ‘members’ before them, but in the long run it was going to be Rus’ the only one that managed to establish itself as a strong political and religious entity. It would be easy to state, as has traditionally been done, that Russia was the only one susceptible to inherit the imperial crown of Constantinople, that there was certain teleology in the so-called doctrine of Moscow as the Third Rome, but the truth is that the relation between both facts is dim. The supposed messianic call of Moscow to become ‘the’ stronghold of Orthodox Christianity is probably more linked to an Old Testament ideology of the chosen people encapsulated in the ‘land-temple-monarchy’ principle than to a feeling of continuation of the Roman Empire by the newly created principality of Moscow. The Fall of Constantinople came to corroborate, only to a certain extent, and analysed backwards *a fortiori*, the place of Russia in history.

1. The Fall

The City of Constantinople, built upon the ancient Greek colony of *Byzantion*, had been erected copying to the utmost detail Old Rome: it was outlined with fourteen regions and seven hills, and the building policy of both Constantine and his successors was as imitative of the original Rome as it could possibly be. Its new inhabitants called themselves Byzantines, thus honouring the name of the city that Constantine had preferred even to Troy itself to become the new capital of the Eastern Empire (Herrin, 2008, 5-6). The city quickly acquired its new sobriquet ‘New Rome’ and, accordingly, its inhabitants considered themselves to be ‘Romans’ (in Greek, *Romaioi*) (Herrin, 2008, 25) and indeed enjoyed all the privileges of living in what had become, *de facto*, the only surviving capital of the Roman Empire, since Old Rome, even before its definitive Fall in 476, had been threatened and sacked by the Goths for decades⁷. The proud inhabitants of the New Rome apparently took no heed of St. Augustine of Hippo’s call to build the *City of God* after the sacking of 410. They preferred to become an Empire, and it was precisely this vanity what cost

the later one proposed by W. Veder (2006) between *Slavia Slavonica* and *Slavia Latina*, according to the means and procedures of textual transmission.

⁷ This denomination of Constantinople as the ‘New Rome’ was endorsed at the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381, Canon 3), and incorporated as well in Canon 28 at the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451). I thank D. Ostrowski for pointing me to these.

them so dear a thousand years later, according to some sources.

Aside from the accounts of the Fall in historiographic sources (Barbaro, Chalkokondyles, Doukas, Kritoboulos, Sphrantzes, Leonard of Chios, Ubertino Pusculo), mostly based on witnesses' accounts, another collection of documents reveals itself quite useful in order to know not so much the facts, but the perception and interpretation of those facts, and their eventual changes. In the songs and laments composed over the Fall of Constantinople (*threnos*), all anonymous authors coincide in qualifying the Fall of the City as a punishment from God. Regardless of their length, language or purported time of composition, they all present a similar structure. After commencing with a lament for the loss of the City, they offer an interpretation of the causes of the catastrophe, followed by a more or less detailed description of the siege itself (description of enemy forces, details of the sacking, final moments of the emperor) to end up with an exhortation to foreign powers to regain the City from the Infidel and an expression of hope in Divine Intervention⁸. The Fall of Constantinople was quickly interpreted in Byzantine sources as a divine punishment for the sins committed by the City, very much in line with the divinely inspired interpretation of history present in the Old Testament.

However, the role played by foreign powers as well as the trust in the future is modified as time goes by. Those composed soon after 1453 also express hope in a quick recovery of the City if Western powers unite in a new crusade to liberate it from the Turks. In one of the first ones to be composed after the Fall, probably within a few years, *Ἀλωσις τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, the Russians, not Moscow, are mentioned only once alongside other powers who betrayed the trust of Constantine XI after the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438. The anonymous author exculpates the Emperor since he had been cheated by all of those who were expected but never came:

Τὸ θάρρος ὁποῦ ἤλιζαν οἱ χριστιανοὶ ἴς τὴν Πόλιν
ἦτον ἴς τὸν ἀγώτατον τὸν πάπαν τε τῆς Ρώμης,
καὶ εἰς τοὺς γκαρδιναλίους του, νὰ δώσουσιν βοήθειαν·
εἰς τοὺς ρηγάδες τῆς Φραγκιάς, τῶν ἀθηντῶν τῶν ὄλων,
δουκάδες, κούντους, πρίγκιπες, καὶ τὰ κουμμούνια ὅλα,
μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως τε τοῦ τῆς Ἀλαμανίας,

⁸ The remarkable general introduction and partial studies in García Ortega and Fernández Galvín 2003 have provided most information for the present article in relation to the *threnoi*, as well as the critical editions of the texts in Greek included herewith.

Σέρβους και Ρούσους, Βλάχους τε, ὁμοίως και Οὐγγάρους.
(vv. 173-179, García Ortega and Fernández Galvín, 2003, 72)⁹

This same author abounds in the idea that the loss of Constantinople is an immense tragedy to all Christians, Romans (which is his denomination for the Orthodox Christians) and Latins alike, and he exhorts foreign powers to regain the City as soon as possible, united under the command of the Pope. He includes in his long list of exhortations former Orthodox territories now under Turkish rule, such as Bulgaria and Serbia, but does not mention the Russians. The perception of the Fall being a divine punishment from God is in this piece very dim, rather the author cries out to God asking Him how could He let this happen.

This idea of the Fall of the City as a punishment from God that the City has brought upon itself is more explicit in later compositions. As time goes by and Western powers do not attempt to regain Constantinople, a series of supposed fulfilled prophesies appear in more recent compositions, as well as more references both to Old Testament and apocalyptic literature. In *Ανακαλημα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (circa. 1454), the Virgin and the angels decide to abandon the City in view of its sins (vv.110-118). Apparently, there was a popular legend in which the Virgin asked the Emperor to give her back the crown of the City, which she will hold until a God-sent candidate will come to recuperate the City for Christianity¹⁰. The idea of a self-inflicted punishment is also present in other *threnoi*, *Θρήνος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, *Θρήνος ἐπὶ ἀλώσεως τῆς Πόλεως*, *Θρήνος τῶν τεσσάρων πατριαρχείων Κωνσταντινουπόλης*, *Ἀλεξανδρείας*, *Ἀντιοχείας* καὶ *Ιερουσαλήμ*.

The only other composition where Moscow is mentioned is a lament composed by Matthew of Pogoniani (1550-1624) almost a century after the Fall and inserted within his verse chronicle of the history of Hungary-Wallachia. This is particularly relevant for our study because it mentions Moscow as a possible liberator, echoing a dubious identification of the blond people with the Russian people.

⁹ “The confidence of the Christians in that City was laid on the most holy Pope of Rome, and on his cardinals so they gave aid; on the kings of the West, on all the lords, dukes, counts, princes and all the cities, together with the emperor of Germany, Serbs and Russians, Walachians and Hungarians as well”. (Unless otherwise stated, all translations in the present article are mine)

¹⁰ The idea of a God-sent ruler is frequent in apocalyptic literature, and was also present in Pseudo-Methodios *Revelation* or *Apocalypse* (see *infra*, n. 16).

ἐλπίζομεν καὶ εἰς ξανθὰ γένη νὰ μᾶς γλυτώσουν,
νὰ ᾿λθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν Μόσχοβον, νὰ μᾶς ἐλευθερώσουν.
(vv. 2333-2334, García Ortega and Fernández Galvín, 2003, 212)¹¹

This reference is relevant for two reasons: firstly, because Moscow has already acquired an international status which makes it a suitable liberator of the City (alongside Spain or Venice, according to Pogoniani); and, secondly, because the confusion of blond peoples with Russian peoples took place in the transmission of the Russian text, a version of which could have been available to the author either while he held the bishopric of Mira (Venice) or during his final retirement in Walachia, since the chronicle was composed between the appointment of Gabriel as *vojvoda* of Walachia, 1617, and the death of Pogoniani in 1624 (García Ortega, R and Fernández Galvín, A.I., 2003, 203)

The first mention of the blond (lat. *flavius*) peoples in relation to the fate of Constantinople is to be found in an oracle attributed to the Emperor Leo the Wise (886-912). Usually inserted after the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses (1130-1187) or Zonaras (d. after 1159?), the oracle might actually refer to the Sack of Constantinople in 1204, and therefore the *flavum genus* referred to in the text would actually be, as suggested by the editor of the *Patrologia Graeca*, the Franks.

Βύζαντος αὐλή, ἐστία Κωνσταντίνου, Ῥώμη, Βαβυλῶν, καὶ Σιών ἄλλη
νέα, τρὶς τρὶς ἑκατὸν καὶ σὺ συνάρξεις κράτος μιᾶς ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑστερούσης
εἰκαδός. Ὅς χροῦν ἀθροίσεις τῶν ἐθνῶν τὸ χρυσιόν, καὶ πασας ἄρξεις τὰς
πέριξ φυλαρχίας. Ἀλλὰ σε πυρίστατον καὶ ξανθὸν γένος (65) πᾶσαν
τεφρώσει καὶ τὸ σὸν λύσει κράτος¹².

¹¹ “We also have hopes in the blond/fair race to save us, that they come from Moscow and set us free”

¹² The text in the *PG* CVII follows the edition made alongside the Chronicle of Manasses as prepared by Johan Leunclavius (1533-1593). On this particular passage, the editor inserted the following note: “(65) Ἰλλά σε πυρίστατον καὶ ξανθὸν γένος. Antiquus interpretes Oraculorum Leonis haec ita vertit: *Sed te ignis summus flavum genus*. Videtur ergo in codice eius pro πυρίστατον scriptum fuisse πῦρ ἰστατον. Illi vero, quos hic Leo igneum et flavum genus hominum appellat, videntur esse Latini, qui duce Balduino comite Flandrensi anno Christi 1203, fugato Alexio Angelo Comneno, Constantinopolim ceperunt, et integros quinquaginta annos occuparunt. Iidem similiter ξανθοῖανθοῖη vero, quos hic Leo igneum et flavum genus hominum ἠιφέρων τε τὸν πόλεμον καὶ αὐτῶν ξανθῶν τὰ ἀμνηχανάς. (Bellum bellicaque flavorum populorum exercet, *Oracula Anonymi paraphrasis 1146B*)”. If we follow this reading, the translation of the oracle would be as follows: “The court of Byzantium, home of Constantine, another new Rome,

The text finishes with a recommendation to the City to pay more attention to the things of God, in order to receive divine protection.

The identification of this ‘pale’ or ‘blond’ race, then, does not necessarily refer to the liberators of Constantinople, although in another oracle it does refer to the expulsion of the Ismaelites uniting forces with the blond race (φέρων τε τὸν πόλεμον καὶ τῶν ξανθῶν τὰς μηχανάς). This second oracle is probably the one referred to by Pseudo-Sphrantzes in his *Chronica Maior*, in which a blond race will claim back the territory from the Ishmaelite people and expel them forever. A reference to this omen was also included in the Russian sources of the Fall.

1.1 The Fall in Russian sources

The literature concerning the Fall of Constantinople also arrived to Moscow in due time, and not very long after the event. The first account of the Fall is to be found in a historiographic source dated 1508 (Svod 1508. g.). This short version, most likely translated from a yet unknown Greek source, *О взятии Царьграда от безбожных турчан* (On the capture of Constantinople by the atheist Turks), was elaborated and acquired its final form in a chronicle dated to the year 1520. Secondly, there is a lament, *Плачь о падении Царьграда* (Lament on the Fall of Constantinople) included in another chronograph dated 1512, focused on the description of dramatic scenes during the sacking of the City; specialists have not yet reached an agreement on whether it was fully composed in Old Russian or whether it was an adapted translation of the *threnos* composed by John Eugenikos (b. after 1394-d. after 1454/5) that had been previously translated into Serbian. Finally there is another account, *Повесть о взятии Царьграда турками в 1453 году* (Tale of the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in the year 1453), which has been preserved in two redactions: one, usually called the ‘Iskander’ redaction, because the most archaic manuscript preserved (TSL 773), from the linguistic point of view, contains a colophon with this name, a certain Nestor Iskander¹³; and

Babylon and Sion, for three and three hundred [years] you will rule jointly as one power among them until the twentieth day of the last month, in which you will gather together a heap of gold of these peoples and you will rule over all these tribes. But a blond (pale) race and the last fire will consume you completely to ashes and you will lose your power.”

¹³ Some specialists have pointed out the possibility that this name could actually be a literary character, and not a real person, added by the scribe to give more realism to his piece (Tvorogov 2000, 494). ‘Iskander’ would be the Turkish form of

a second one, traditionally labelled ‘chronographic’, because it lacks the colophon, apart from other differences, and because its main source seems to have the chronographic text included in the chronicle of 1520. The final version (our second redaction) would be included in the Chr. of 1533, and it was the most widely diffused¹⁴.

This Russian text includes a tale of the Foundation of the City by Constantine, even an omen on its future Fall in the hands of the Infidels¹⁵.

Alexander. Both the dates of composition and copy of this text are unknown. The only time reference we have is an *ante quem*, since this version was included in a Serbian manuscript (Hil. 280) dated in 1585 (Casas Olea 2003, xxviii). The differences in the Serbian text by comparison to the so-called ‘Iskander’ redaction leaves open the question of its direct filiation, in view of the other existing redaction of this very text of the Fall.

¹⁴ The most significant differences between the two redactions are that the ‘Iskander’ one contains the colophon, at least in one mss. (TSL 773), and parts of the apocryphal *Vision of Daniel*, as well as biblical quotations and other prayers. The date of commencement of the Tale also varies: the first one starts in the year 5803 (295) and the second one in 5818 (311). This second one also includes a list of the Byzantine Emperors and the division into chapters (Casas Olea 2003, xxvii-xxx). A purported protograph has been adduced as a possible explanation for these differences, but, bearing in mind the fact that the second redaction was based upon *О взятии Царегграда от безбожных турчан* (On the capture of Constantinople by the atheist Turks), definitely based upon Greek sources, not only the purported protograph, but also the authorship or even the existence of Nestor Iskander itself should be called into question. The pre-eminence given to the ‘authorial’ redaction of Nestor Iskander, due to its supposed originality and to the conviction that it was composed in Russian by a Russian, is sustained only on a certain “archaic” language. If it had really preceded the redaction included in the chronicle of 1533, indirectly derived from a translation from a Greek source dated to 1508, Nestor’s version would have been dated between 1453, the year of the Fall, and 1508. Less than half a century in the evolution of the language should not be enough to hold a definite position over the relative composition dates of two texts in Medieval Russia, since it could also be the result of two diglossic uses of the same stage on linguistic evolution.

¹⁵ This omen is, of course, a complete anachronism, since it occurs during the foundation of the City by Constantine, in the year 295 according to our tale, and 324 according to history. It describes how the Emperor Constantine the Great witnesses together with the citizens how a snake (serpent or dragon) came out of its shelter and suddenly from the sky an eagle descended upon the snake, captured it and flew away. The snake, however, managed to curl itself around the eagle, and finally the eagle fell to the ground on the same spot, since it had been overthrown by the serpent. People ran to the spot, killed the serpent and liberated the eagle. Although the omen might be remotely inspired in *Iliad*, Book XII, its interpretation

The Tale insists on the idea, already present in Byzantine sources, of understanding the attack of the Turks as the outcome of God's wrath. Surprisingly enough, it dwells long on the activities of the Genovese contingent, headed by Giustiniani, providing more details than other accounts, and presents the emperor as sacrificing himself for the Orthodox faith, going to meet his death in martyrdom.

The conclusion of the tale is relevant to our study because the author underlines two important ideas in characterising the Fall: firstly, it is as a self-inflicted punishment for its sins, and secondly it fulfils the prophecies of Methodios of Patara¹⁶ and Leo the Wise, ending with the above-

by sages questioned by Constantine, according to the text, was that the eagle was the symbol of Christianity and the snake represented the 'besermen', a people of subject to the Tatars, that has traditionally been equated by Russian historians to Muslims. The prophecy would indicate that Christianity was going to fall in the hands of that people, but later the city would be regained by Christians. In that sense, it might be more related to Apocalypse 12: 14-17.

¹⁶ The text mentions "the prophecies of Methodios of Patara" when, in fact, it was probably referring to the text currently known as the *Revelation* or *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodios, the real one having been Methodios of Olympus, or Patara, in Lycia, depending on the sources. This apocalyptic text is believed to have been composed in the 7th century, and most likely in Syriac, although it was originally thought to have been composed in Greek. Among the many things to happen, the text mentions the victory of a God-sent Holy Roman emperor who will bring the terror of Islam to an end ("After a week of years, when they have already captured the city of Joppa (modern Jaffa), the Lord will send one of the princes of his host and strike them down in a moment. After this the King of the Romans will go down and live in Jerusalem for seven and a half-seven times, i.e., years. When the ten and a half years are completed the Son of Perdition [the Antichrist] will appear", ch. XIII, 21). This coming of a God-appointed king is situated in the apocalypse as happening after the liberation of the peoples that Alexander had enclosed beyond the Gates of the North (ch. XIII, 19-20) [the Gog and the Magog?; the Ishmaelites?]. The Son of Perdition, however, will reign in Jerusalem after the spirit of the King of the Romans had been taken up to heaven until the city will be finally freed by Enoch and Elijah ("When the Son of Perdition has arisen, the King of the Romans will ascend Golgotha upon which the wood of the Holy Cross is fixed, in the place where the Lord underwent death for us. The king will take the crown from his head and place it upon the cross and stretching out his hands to heaven will hand over the kingdom of the Christians to God the Father. The cross and crown of the king will be taken up together to heaven. This is because the Cross on which our Lord Jesus Christ hung for the common salvation of all will begin to appear before him at his coming to convict the lack of faith of the unbelievers. The prophecy of David which says, "In the last days Ethiopia will

mentioned oracle attributed to Leo the Wise: "The blond people together with those who founded [the City] in the past will defeat all the [race of] the Ishmaelite and will inherit the Seven Hills [City] together with their previous lawful [owners] and the blond people, sixth and fifth nation, will reign in it and will keep the Seven Hills, and will sow seeds in it and will feed many in revenge for the saints". It is apparently in the textual transmission of this version which explicitly included the paraphrase of the above-mentioned oracle where the term 'blond/fair' (lat. *falvus*; rus. *rusii*) started to be changed for 'ruskii' (Russians) in later copies, making therefore the Russians somehow liberators of the fallen City and heirs of the Empire¹⁷. However, the author, whoever he was, apparently saw no connection between the facts narrated in the tale and the future of Moscow, no trace of *translatio imperii*: only later copyists did in changing the ethnic ascription of the future liberators.

No other sources dealing specifically with the Fall of Constantinople

stretch out her hand to God" [Psalm 67:32] will be fulfilled in that these last men who stretch out their hands to God are from the seed of Chuseth, the daughter of Phol, king of Ethiopia. When the Cross has been lifted up on high to heaven, the King of the Romans will directly give up his spirit. Then every principality and power will be destroyed that the Son of Perdition may manifest... When the Son of Perdition appears, he will be of the tribe of Dan, according to the prophecy of Jacob. This enemy of religion will use a diabolic art to produce many false miracles, such as causing the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear. Those possessed with demons will be exorcised. He will deceive many and, if he could, as our Lord has said, even the faithful elect. Even the Antichrist will enter Jerusalem, where he will enthrone himself in the temple as a god (even though he will be an ordinary man of the tribe of Dan to which Judas Iscariot also belonged). In those days, the Antichrist will bring about many tribulation; but God will not allow those redeemed by the divine blood to be deceived. For that reason, he will send his two servants, Enoch and Elias, who will declare the prodigies of the Antichrist to be false, and will denounce him as an impostor. After the death and ruin of many, he will leave the Temple in confusion; and many of his followers will forsake him to join the company of the righteous. The seducer, upon seeing himself reproached and scorned, will become enraged and will put to death those saints of God. It is then that there will appear the sign of the Son of Man, and he will come upon the clouds of heaven.", ch. XIV, 2-13). The reign of the Son of Perdition in Jerusalem was probably compared with the entrance of Mehmet in Constantinople, whereupon the final victory of God is still to come.

¹⁷ The present translation follows the edition by Tvorogov 2000, 68-69, who reads 'rusi', like M. Casas Olea (2003, 92-93). The mistranslation, however, has found echo in other scholarly works, cf. G. Vernadsky and Pushkarev 1972, vol. 1, 160 or Geanakoplos 1984, 447.

were known among Russians at that time. The sources that have repeatedly been pointed to in the creation of the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome only mention the events of 1453 in a rather oblique way.

2. The Myth of Moscow as the Third Rome

In view of the abundant use of the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome in modern historiography, it might be, therefore, surprising to find so little echo in Russian sources of the very historical fact that, theoretically, would have given them such a relevant place in history. Other pieces of evidence traditionally adduced to justify the emergence of this myth have been called into question not only in their very existence, but also in the role they could have developed in the creation of an imperial ideology by the principality of Moscow.

Among the pieces of 'evidence' that would have pointed to Moscow as being a natural, rightful heir to the ancient Empire are a few that are systematically repeated by specialists and non-specialists alike as a definitive proof of the existence of what D. Ostrowski has called this 'historical ghost' (Ostrowski, 2006). Firstly, in chronological order, a comment made by Zosima, Metropolitan of Moscow, in 1492 in a document addressed to Ivan III (r. 1462-1505), in which he calls the addressee "pious and lover of Christ, Grand Prince Ivan Vasilievich, ruler and autocrat of all Rus', new emperor Constantine of the new city Constantinople-Moscow, and of all the Russian land". A little bit earlier, the same author has referred to Constantinople (*Tsargrad* in the original Russian, meaning 'Imperial City') as New Rome. This reading, as Ostrowski states, was instrumental among scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries to see a progression from Rome to Moscow via Constantinople. However, as D. Ostrowski affirms (2006, 171) the reading 'New Rome' is only in one of the manuscripts (TSL 46, f. 93v), whereas the others read 'New Jerusalem', which is probably the right reading, despite the fact that 'New Rome' is the most common epithet of Constantinople in Byzantine sources since its foundation. The reading Jerusalem is also, as we will see, more consistent with Moscow ideology, regardless of whether it was the original reading or modified in the transmission process accordingly. So the difference between the most archaic reading ('New Rome') and the others present in later copies ('New Jerusalem') could be, in fact, not due to a misreading of the copyist of TSL 46, but, on the contrary, a conscious modification on the part of later copyists, to keep more in line with the official ideology of the 'New Jerusalem'.

The document in which these laudatory words are dedicated to the tsar

is relevant in itself, since they are included in the new paschal canon (*paskhalia*) that the Metropolitan of Moscow had to compose after the year 7000 from the Creation, when the Second Coming of Christ was supposedly to have happened. They had inherited from Byzantium paschal canons only up to this point, because the end of the world was expected to occur at the end of the seventh millennium. And it did not. Constantinople had fallen, though, and they were not to turn to them for advice. In fact, in 1448 a synod called by the then Prince of Moscow, Vasilii II, had already elected, for the first time, without waiting for Constantinople's response, the Russian Iona as Metropolitan of Rus', thus effectively proclaiming their national Church as autocephalous. For the first time, the Russian church was regulating their own issues from within. The endearing words to the Emperor, as a ruler of Christianity, very much in line with the attributions traditionally given to Byzantine emperors, and so different from those of Western Christian rulers, who depended on the Pope for such issues, are legitimised by the author by tracing the line, not of cities, but of people: first the apostles, then Constantine, then Vladimir I of Kiev, who christened Rus' people, and finally Ivan III, who provides the means for practicing orthodoxy¹⁸. The idea that the ruler had to be 'equal to the apostles' (ἰσупόστολος) was common in Byzantium from the 5th century (Dagron, 1996, p. 153) and also persisted throughout time (Angelov, 2007, 78-102; 357-363; 384-392). The same epithet, translated into East Slavic ('ravnnoapostolnyi') was already applied to Vladimir I, The Saint (Butler, 2002, 70-71).

The very famous words "for two Romes have fallen, a third stands and a fourth will not be" are the creation of Filofei of Pskov, written in the first quarter of the sixteenth century amidst a polemic with a pro-Latin astrologer, Nicholas Bulev. The reading, again, is ambiguous (Ostrowski, 2006, p. 174) but might not necessarily refer to Russia. Finally, another reference in a text by a certain Agathon, inserted in an epilogue of a treaty on paschal canons, dated to 1540, refers specifically to the "magnificent reigning city of New Rome Moscow, mother of cities" (Casas Olea, 2011, p. 97).

¹⁸ Incidentally, the author does insist on the fact there have only been seven ecumenical councils, the last one to be acknowledged was Nicaea 787 condemning iconoclasm. Once again, as it had been done by Vasilii II, the Council of Florence-Ferrara is fully rejected. The full text of the dedication has been translated into Spanish by M. Casas Olea 2011, 74-77 from the above-mentioned manuscript TSL 49.

All these texts, accurately transmitted or not, had certainly something in common: the role to be played by the ruler as defender of Christianity, as it used to be the prerogative of the Byzantine Emperor (Angelov, 2007, p. 412), the purported place of Moscow in a teleological sacred historiography, and the visceral rejection of the Latin church. Easier as it might be to unify all these complex aspects of imperial ideology under one single label (“Moscow, the Third Rome”), the fact was that they had various and different causes, as well as different manifestations, and most likely would have evolved in the same way had Constantinople fallen or not in 1453. The existence and survival of this myth, or historical ghost, as of any other is directly dependent on its functionality, like any given metaphor: if it fulfils its purpose, if it synthesises complex realities into more simple axioms, it is valid. We have already seen how the echo of the Fall in Russian sources is weak, how the evidence of a self-conscience of imperial continuation in the minds of the immediate contemporaries to the Fall, or even among those who almost a century later were proposed *a posteriori* as makers of such ideology, is flimsy. The question to ask, maybe, is not how the myth was created, with more or less historiographic base, or when, if after the Fall, after the victory of Kazan, etc., but rather why was it at all used, and even it is now, both by Russians and non-Russians alike. As I said before, the reason might be in what does encapsulate, and in this sense, I think its functionality rests upon three main ideas: the sacralisation of the ruler, the firm belief of being God-chosen people and a deep-felt aversion for anything coming from the West. Any modern historian would say that these could as well define the Soviet state. Precisely.

3. The Functionality of a Myth

3.1. The Sacralisation of the Ruler

The identification of the ruler of Rus’ as a ‘New Constantine’ is an old literary *topos* in Rus’. Already applied to Vladimir I ‘The Saint’ for having Christianised Kievan Rus’ in 988, it was an epithet profusely used in his liturgy as saint once he was canonised (Butler, 2002, p.70). In this equation a few concepts were also implied: not only that it had effectively, from above, changed the religious inclination of his realm, like Constantine had done, but also that it was, in the line with that comfortable but elusive concept of ‘cesaropapism’, in the words of G. Dagron, an emperor that

pretended to be priest¹⁹. The attributes of holiness dispensed to Rus' rulers, from the times of the founder of the Moscow lineage, Aleksander Nevskii, were common. He inaugurated a new model of holy prince as defender of Christianity, a holy warrior, a title that would be later applied to Vasiliï II when he rejects the council of Florence²⁰. As M. Cherniavsky had already shown (1955, 350-351), contemporary sources to the Council left no doubt as to the fact that it had been the prince who had had to intervene to save Orthodoxy. In both cases, the defence of the Orthodox faith was made against the Latins, not against non-Christians. In line with other Christian rulers, princes of Rus' were therefore presented as putting their armies to the service of the defence of the Christian Orthodox faith, *defensores fidei*, but, unlike their Western counterparts, they kept the privilege of having an opinion over dogmatic questions and calling up synods and councils to regulate the issues of the Church, both questions that had been left in the hands of the Pope for centuries in the west. After the council, called up by Vasiliï II to elect Iona as Metropolitan in 1448, it would also fall on the hands of Ivan IV to summon the Council in Moscow in 1551 that would be known as the Hundred Chapters, issuing the first corpus of canon law not directly inherited from Byzantium. From then until the proclamation of Job as first Patriarch of Moscow in 1589, equating him to other members of the ancient Pentarchy (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria), the fate of the successive metropolitans was in the hands of the *tsar*: in a hundred years, from 1461 to 1563, out of a total of nine metropolitans, at least five found their relations with the tsar or the court somehow problematic (Gonneau and Lavrov, 2012, 499-501). One aspect, however, that was absent from the idea of Christian Orthodox ruler was the vocation that the Byzantine Emperor always had of being 'ecumenical'. Conscious as they always were of being direct heirs of the *oikumene*, they took into consideration the position of the other members of the Pentarchy (Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem) in their truly universal vocation as rulers of Christendom. That

¹⁹ Dagron, nevertheless, admits that separation of spheres of power was rigorously maintained both by the Emperor and the Patriarch, except during iconoclasm, in line with the Biblical message "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's (Matthew, 22, 21). It would be better to speak, then, of a symphony of interests (Dagron 1996, 318). Likewise, this situation seems to have been adopted in Moscow, see Ostrowski 1998, 206-209.

²⁰ On the religious attributes of princes since Aleksandr Nevskii, see Torres Prieto 2012.

never happened in Rus'. As we shall see, the idea of Orthodoxy was deeply national, circumscribed exclusively to the lands under the dominion of the Gran Prince of Moscow, or the *tsar*. The fate and choices of other nations, however close geographically or historically, were not an issue, from the religious point of view, as long as they were not subject to the authority of the *tsar*. As Antonios of Constantinople had harshly reminded Vasilii I himself in 1395 "it is impossible for Christians to have a Church and not an empire"²¹. Antonios was thinking about all the Christians of the world, and Simeon of Suzdal, on praising Vasilii II, only about "the Russian land".

3.2 The New Jerusalem

While the process of sacralisation of the ruler followed more or less the pattern of the Byzantine emperor, this fact in itself does not necessarily imply that the territory was modelled upon the Eastern empire. In terms of the administration of the realm, Moscow was more indebted to the Golden Horde than it ever was to the court at Constantinople²². While the stress has always been put on finding parallels between Rus' and the Eastern Empire, which were probably more effective in Kievan Rus' than from the 13th century onwards, various specialists have turned their eyes to Jerusalem as a model for imperial ideology in Moscow. In a classic article, D. Rowland (1996) showed how, in many respects, the ideology in 15th and 16th century Moscow was closer to the classic Old Testament formulation 'temple-land-monarchy' present in the books of the Prophets than to any late Roman or Hellenistic formulation²³. Indeed, the rulers of Moscow were often equated to David or Solomon, Moscow was often

²¹ The sentence is quoted in Cherniavsky 1955, 356, and the letter of Antonios in which is included is translated into English in Geanakoplos 1984, 143-144. It is apparently a response to a letter from Vasilii I in which he put into question the authority of the Emperor while accepting the authority of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate.

²² On the various aspects in which Muscovy was indebted to the Mongols, see Ostrowski 1998, especially 36-63; 164-198 and, on the 'Third Rome' myth, 219-243.

²³ On the political ideas of the Old Testament and, particularly, a detailed analysis of the different forms of messianic thought in the context of Antiquity, see Nemo 1998, 637-710. On the various medieval and modern uses of the idea of 'New Israel', particularly focusing on its use in the Frankish kingdom, see M. Garrison, 2000.

called 'New Jerusalem' and, as M. Flier has also shown (2006, 387-408), rites and architecture policies aimed at reflecting a New Jerusalem. This idea, of course, was one that could only be developed retrospectively, not at the time, for example, of the Fall of Constantinople. Interestingly enough, the Byzantine imperial ideology had also shifted towards Jerusalem after the sacking of the City in 1204 by the Crusaders, particularly during the Empire of Nicaea, in exile, and after the recapturing of the City by Michael VIII (Angelov, 2007, 98-101). Only after certain historical events could the idea of being God's chosen people become political ideology, and the disastrous events of 1453 were only one of the signs, and maybe not the most important one. Alongside the Fall of Constantinople, other clues could have been relevant: Serbia and Bulgaria, Orthodox realms like Moscow, had definitely fallen under the Turks, the Mongols had returned to the East, the other principalities in what once had been Kievan Rus' had disappeared or were in rapid decline. And if all this has happened and the Lord has rewarded them, it must have been because Moscow had done something that had pleased the Lord, because they, and only they had kept the Covenant, as the prophets of the Old Testament said. The rejection of the Council of Florence-Ferrara could easily be that 'something'.

3.3 The animosity towards the Latins

One of the reasons that might explain the lack of interest in Moscow on the fate of the City that only a few centuries before had marvelled the Rus' delegation, so much so that, according to the *Povest' vremennykh let*, the founding chronicle of the Kievan Rus', such grandeur had convinced them that they must be the believers in the true God, and therefore accepted Christianity, was probably to be found in the Council of Florence-Ferrara of 1439.

The open rejection in Moscow towards anything that had to do with the Roman Church, the 'Latins', had already started when Aleksander Nevskii, father of the founder of the Moscow dynasty, Daniil Aleksandrovich, had to fight the Swedes at the river Neva in 1240 and then the Teutonic Knights at Lake Chud in 1242. To a certain extent, Moscow's anti-Latin feeling was twofold: one, for having had Roman armies threatening their lands; and two, for mirroring the anti-Latin polemic already present in Constantinople that was directly imported in Church literature.

The tension between the Old and New Rome had been made evident already from the times of the schism in 1054 and only increased in the

years thereafter. The siege and sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the establishment of the Latin Empire of Constantinople and the eventual regaining of the City by Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261 did most certainly contribute to harvesting mutual animosity²⁴. In both sides condemnation of the other's practices and suspicion on their ulterior motives abounded. Nevertheless, the Emperors in exile, in the empire of Nicaea, John III Vatatzes and Theodore II Laskaris, did foster contacts between Latin and Greek church representatives, perhaps already poignantly aware of the bigger menace that the Turks implied. The death of pope Clement IV in 1269, belligerently anti-Byzantine, permitted the election of Gregory X in 1272, who, in agreement with the Byzantine emperor, Michael VIII Palaiologos, saw the Muslims as a greater threat and announced a general council that would finally impose rules for both western and eastern churches to respect. Similar attempts were made by the Emperor in the newly regained City, but faced the opposition of numerous bishops and monks, apart from the Patriarch Joseph himself, who could not easily forget the desecration and occupation of churches and monasteries not so long ago. Two points were considered unacceptable by the Eastern clerics: the Latin wording of the Creed (the so-called *filioque* controversy) and the recognition of Rome its primacy over the other Churches of the Pentarchy. The meeting of delegates of both churches that took place in Lyons in 1274 included these questions in their debates, apart from the awkward question of Purgatory. The three Byzantine delegates (George Akropolites, former Patriarch Germanos III and Archbishop Theophanes of Nicaea) finally swore loyalty to the Pope and agreed to the Roman version of the Creed, whereas the question of the Purgatory remained open, for the moment.

While the Roman Church thought it had obtained a victory over the whole Orthodox Church, the acceptance of the Emperor Michael VIII himself and of his high officials, Church and Government ones, was certainly not binding for the rest of the Empire, and certainly not for the Orthodox Church. At the end, none of the parties obtained what they had aimed for: Michael VIII soon demanded Rome permission to go back to the wording of the Creed previous to the Schism, despite finally accepting the existence of Purgatory; furthermore, Gregory X died before being able to put into practice an army of joint forces to launch a Crusade against the Infidel, leaving the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII without the help he had sought to obtain. When Michael VIII died eight years after the

²⁴ As D. Angelov has shown (2007, 418-419).

Council, the next Emperor repudiated the Union in 1285. The attempt had lasted more or less the lifetime of their prime movers.

The critics to such union on both sides amounted to more than the three critical points mentioned above (primacy of Rome, rewording of the Creed and the existence of Purgatory): aside from particular dietary requirements, the Eastern clerics could not understand the usage of unleavened bread in the Eucharist by Romans, the celibacy by Roman priests, naming the Theotokos ‘Santa Maria’, as if she were only another saint and not the Mother of God, using whole hand or two fingers, instead of three, representing the Trinity, to cross themselves from the other side. In contrast, the Westerns did not understand the veneration of icons by Byzantines, their resistance to genuflexion and even the lack of Aristotelian based arguments in theological discussions. Another final, not minor aspect, of the Liturgy, kept them apart: the Latins discovered in Constantinople that Consecration is followed in Eastern churches by an invocation (*epiklesis*) to the Holy Ghost, which for the Latins was against the dogma, since it was the words pronounced by Christ, and these alone, as St. Thomas Aquinas had stated, that allowed transubstantiation.

Despite more efforts in the decades to come, even the ephemeral conversion of Emperor John V Palaiologos in 1399 to Catholicism and the intervention of Christian military forces led by Serbia against the Turks, which were finally defeated at Marica in 1371, the distance between both Churches about these issues did not grow smaller. When Thessalonike fell in 1430, Constantinople found itself surrounded by Turks from the East as well as from the West. In a last desperate attempt John VIII Palaiologos attempted again, and this will be the last time, to reunite the churches. In 1438 he led a delegation of more than 700 people to Ferrara to meet the Papal party. Among these were two people worth mentioning: Mark Eugenikos of Ephesos, clearly opposed to the demands of Rome, whose brother, John Eugenikos would compose a *threnos* about the Fall very critical to Westerners and soon translated into Slavic (cf. *supra*), and the Metropolitan of the Russian Church (1437-1442), Isidore of Kiev, clearly favourable to the Union, who was immediately incarcerated by Vasili II when he arrived back in Moscow²⁵. He would be, in fact, the last Metropolitan of Russia appointed by Byzantium. The same issues that had been treated in Lyons almost two-hundred years before were placed on the table once again, although one issue would have a long impact in the

²⁵ See Cherniavsky 1955 for details of life and perceptions of his ‘betrayal’ in Russian sources, mainly by Simeon of Suzdal.

history of Christianity: Rome's insistence of being acknowledged as superior to other members of the Pentarchy before the union of Churches stretched the patience of the Eastern delegates. In 1443, only four years after the bull *Larentur caeli* proclaiming the Union of Churches, the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem disavowed it.

Moscow was certainly aware of the differences between both Churches, and in the polemical literature against what was called the heresy of the 'Judaizers' at the end of the 15th century, whether these were really Jews or Catholics using unleavened bread, the accusations were similar to those found the Byzantium against Latins²⁶. Despite the official acceptance by the Emperor and his officials of the resolutions of the Council, the people were certainly not supportive of the idea, and so it is reflected, as we have seen, in non-official sources, permeated with anti-Latin feelings. It has been traditionally attributed to grand admiral Lukas Notaras having said, before the Fall, "better the Turkish turban than the Papal tiara", thus echoing the words of Patriarch Michael III (1170-1178) to Emperor Manuel I Komnenos "I would rather have the Muslim as my material lord rather than the Latin as my spiritual one".

4. Conclusion

On December 12, 1452, compelled by Pope Nicholas V, Constantine XI, last Emperor of the Romans, solemnly proclaimed the Union of Churches in Santa Sophia, against the recommendation of the fifteen members of a council of experts – five metropolitans among them –, appointed *ad hoc* by the Emperor himself. Alongside the Emperor were Patriarch Gregorios and the now Catholic cardinal Isidore, former Metropolitan of Moscow, as representative of the Holy See. That very day, an incensed mob ran to the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople to ask Gennadios (Georgios Scholarios), whose mentor had been Mark Eugenikos, what was there to do. This brilliant philosopher and theologian, advocate of Aristotelian philosophy and deeply knowledgeable of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, nailed his answer to the door of his cell: "O unhappy Romans, why have you forsaken the truth? Why do you not trust in God, instead of in the Latins? In losing your faith you will lose your city" (Geanakoplos 1984, 388). For him, if the Latins saved the City, they would have to accept the resolutions of the Council of Florence, something

²⁶ See Martin 1995, 259-262; Poliakov 1989, 29-32; Herrin 2007, 303-304; Geanakoplos, 1984, 202-225.

that had already been unacceptable for his mentor. The only thing to do, therefore, was what the monks of Mount Athos had done when the prince of Thessalonike had asked the Venetians for help against the Turks: handing themselves to the Turks. Gennadios was captured and freed by Mehmet II and subsequently appointed Patriarch by him. In 1484, the four Greek Patriarchs rejected the Council of Florence and all its decisions.

Moscow, in the meantime, had already started to walk its own path. The Fall of Constantinople was probably of very little relevance to the construction of their imperial ideology. Many of the concepts that had been encapsulated in the metaphor of the “Third Rome”, because it cannot amount to much more than that, were already present in Byzantine sources: the idea of the ruler as a *defensor fidei*, the aversion towards the Latins, considered heretics and treacherous, the need to claim a pre-Rome biblical legitimacy, going back to the times of the Temple, the idea that the Fall of Constantinople was a punishment from God for accepting Papal authority. All that was there, and much more as well. The decision of the Moscow rulers not to take part in the politics of the Eastern Empire implied probably exactly what it means: that they, least than anyone, wanted to be identified with an ancient empire, rundown and exhausted, to which nothing tied them anymore, they aspired to something better, they aspired to become the New Jerusalem.