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Byzantium and the Slavs*

IHOR ŠEVČENKO

To Cyril Mango

I

Throughout more than a thousand years of their history, the Byzantines viewed their state as heir to the Roman Empire, which pretended to encompass the whole civilized world. It followed that the Byzantine state, too, was a universal empire, claiming rule over the whole civilized world; that Byzantine emperors were by right world rulers; that the Byzantines were Romans; and that they were the most civilized people in the world. True, they had improved upon their Roman ancestors in that they were Christians; also, by the seventh century the Latin component had all but disappeared from their highbrow culture, which from then on was essentially Greek; but, like ancient Romans, the Byzantines felt entitled to pour scorn on those who did not share in the fruits of civilization, that is, on the barbarians. The best thing these barbarians could do was to abandon their bestial existence, and to enter—in some subordinate capacity of course—into the family of civilized peoples headed by the Byzantine emperor. The way to civilization led through Christianity, the only true ideology, of which the empire held the monopoly. For Christianity—to be more precise, Byzantine Christianity—meant civilization.

Throughout a millennium of propaganda, these simple tenets were driven home by means of court rhetoric—the journalism of the Middle Ages—of court ceremonies, of imperial pronouncements and documents, and of coinage. The Byzantine emperor claimed certain exclusive rights. Until the thirteenth century at least, he did not conclude equal treaties with foreign rulers; he only granted them privileges, insignia, or dignities. In correspondence with certain foreign states, he issued “orders,” not letters. He claimed the exclusive right to strike gold coinage (other peoples’

* This essay is a reworking of a lecture written a number of years ago. Thus it has a number of layers. While the earliest of these layers owe a debt to the standard picture of Byzantium drawn by Franz Dölger and George Ostrogorski in their day, the later ones reflect my present views on the topic.

gold coins were at first imitations or counterfeits; only in the thirteenth century did the western ducate replace the bezant, for almost one thousand years the dollar of the Mediterranean world). As the Byzantines were not blind, they had to accommodate themselves to the existence of other states besides their own. To fit them into their system, they elaborated the concept of Hierarchy of Rulers and States that, taken all together, ideally encompassed the whole world. The emperor headed this hierarchy; he was surrounded by subordinates, who would stand in an ideal family relationship to him: the English ruler was only his friend; the Bulgarian, his son; the Rus' one, his nephew; Charlemagne was grudgingly granted the position of a brother. Or else these rulers would be given titles of varying importance: ruler, ruler with power, king, even emperor. But never—not until the fifteenth century, if at all—Emperor of the Romans.

By the ninth century, the following truths were held to be self-evident in the field of culture: the world was divided into Byzantines and barbarians, the latter including not only the Slavs—who occupied a low place on the list of barbaric nations—but also the Latins; as a city, the New Rome, that is, Constantinople, was superior to all others in art, culture, and size, and that included the Old Rome on the Tiber. God has chosen the Byzantine people to be a new Israel: the Gospels were written in Greek for the Greeks; in His foresight, God had even singled out the Ancient Greeks to cultivate the Arts and Sciences; and in Letters and Arts, the Byzantines were the Greeks' successors. "All the arts come from us," exclaimed a Byzantine diplomat during a polemical debate held at the Arab court in the fifties of the ninth century. A curious detail: this diplomat was none other than the future Apostle of the Slavs, Constantine-Cyril. Cyril's exclamation implied that Latin learning, too, was derived from the Greeks. The Greek language, the language of the Scriptures, of the church fathers, also of Plato and Demosthenes, was rich, broad, and subtle; the other tongues, notably the Slavic, had a barbaric ring to them; even the Latin language was poor and "narrow."

The Byzantines maintained these claims for almost as long as their state endured. Even towards the very end of the fourteenth century, when the empire was little more than the city of Constantinople in size, the Byzantine patriarch lectured the recalcitrant prince of Muscovy on the international order. The prince should remember—so the patriarch explained—that he was only a local

ruler, while the Byzantine emperor was the Emperor of the Romans, that is, of all Christians. The fact that the emperor's dominions were hard-pressed by the pagans was beside the point. The emperor enjoyed special prerogatives in the world and in the Church Universal. It therefore ill behooved the prince to have discontinued mentioning the name of the emperor during the liturgy.

By the end of the fourteenth century, such a claim was unrealistic, and, as is to be deduced from the Byzantine patriarch's closing complaint, it had been challenged by the Muscovite barbarian. But throughout more than half of Byzantine history, such claims worked. Why?

The first reason why they worked was that for a long time the claims were objectively true. In terms of the sixth century, Justinian, under whose early rule the large-scale Slavic invasions occurred in the Balkans, was a world emperor, that is, a ruler holding sway over the civilized world. In the east, his dominions extended beyond the upper Tigris River; they skirted the western slopes of the Caucasus. In the north, Byzantium's frontier ran across the Crimea, and along the Danube and the Alps. The empire had a foothold in Spain, it controlled the coast of North Africa and much of Egypt, it dominated today's Israel, Lebanon, and a great deal of Syria. Now let us skip half a millennium. In the time of Basil II (d. 1025), under whose reign the Rus' accepted Christianity, the situation was not much worse: it was even better in the east, where the frontier ran beyond Lake Van; for a stretch, it hugged the Euphrates. Antioch and Latakia were still in Byzantine hands; in the North, the Crimea was still crossed by the Byzantine frontier, and the Danube and the Sava were the frontier rivers—thus in this sector, too, Byzantium possessed as much as Justinian did. In the West, parts of southern Italy with the city of Bari were under Byzantine sway. In the ninth and tenth centuries, which were decisive for the Byzantinization of the Slavs, the empire's capital at Constantinople was, with the possible exception of Baghdad and Cairo, the most brilliant cultural center of the world as not only the Slavs, but also western Europe, knew it. Its patriarchs were Greek scholars and politicians. Its prelates read and commented upon Plato, Euclid, and even the objectionable Lucian; its emperors supervised large encyclopaedic enterprises; its sophisticated reading public clamored for, and obtained, reeditions of old simple Lives of Saints, which were now couched in a more refined and complicated style. The Great Palace of Constantinople,

covering an area of ca. 100,000 square meters, was still largely intact and functioning. The pomp of the court ceremonial and of the services at St. Sophia, then still the largest functioning building in the known world, was calculated to dazzle barbarian visitors, including Slavic princes or their emissaries. Byzantine political concepts influenced western mediaeval political thinking down to the twelfth century; the western symbols of rule—scepter, crown, orb, golden bull—owe a debt to Byzantium. The mosaics of Rome, of St. Mark in Venice (thirteenth century) and of Torcello near Venice (twelfth century), of the Norman churches in or near Palermo (twelfth century), are reflections of Byzantine art, and some of them were executed by Byzantine craftsmen.

The renaissance of theological speculation in the High Middle Ages was stimulated by the imperial gift which arrived from Byzantium at the court of Louis the Pious in 827. The gift was a volume of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, in Greek, of course. This work, translated twice into Latin, the second time by Johannes Scotus Eriugena (d. 877), spurred subsequent western theological speculation. It is difficult to imagine a western church without an organ—yet, this instrument, too, arrived from Byzantium in 757 and 812. On the latter occasion, the Byzantines refused to leave the organ with the Westerners, who attempted to copy it in secret, but only later successfully reproduced it. The silk industry was introduced to the West in the middle of the twelfth century, as a result of a Norman raid on Central Greece—the Normans abducted Byzantine skilled laborers from Thebes and settled them in their dominions. Even the fork seems to be a rediscovery of Byzantine origin—an eleventh-century Greek-born dogissa introduced forks to Venice, to the great horror of a contemporary ecclesiastic. No wonder that the Slavs experienced the influence of Byzantium: the West, which could fall back upon refined Latin traditions, experienced it, too, long after Byzantium's political domination over parts of Italy had ceased. So much for the first reason—Byzantine claims worked because they were objectively valid.

The second reason why the Byzantine claims of superiority worked was that they were accepted as valid by the barbarians, whether western or Slavic, even after they had ceased to be objectively valid. The usurpation of Charlemagne occurred in 800. But he, the ruler of Rome, did not call himself emperor of the Romans—he knew that this title, and all that it implied, had been preempted by the Byzantines. It was not until 982 that the

titulature "Imperator Romanorum" appeared in the West. And it was only with Frederick I Barbarossa (second half of the twelfth century) that a logical consequence was drawn from this titulature by a western ruler. Since there could be only one Emperor of the Romans, the Byzantine emperor should not be called by this title—he was to be called only what in fact he had been for a long time: the *rex Graecorum*. But did Frederick reflect that the very concept that there should be only one emperor was a Byzantine heritage? The Slavs were much slower to be weaned from Byzantium and never drew a conclusion similar to that of Frederick. With them, emulation of Byzantium was always but another form of Byzantium's imitation. True, Symeon of Bulgaria in the early tenth century and Stephen Dušan of Serbia in the mid-fourteenth assumed the title of Emperor of the Bulgarians and Greeks or of the Serbians and Greeks, respectively. But they did not think of proclaiming a Slavic counterpart to the Western doctrine *Rex est Imperator in regno suo* and thus downgrading the Byzantine emperor. Rather, they dreamed of supplanting him by taking Constantinople and seating themselves on his throne; and the same fantasy occurs in one text produced in thirteenth-century Rus', *Slovo o pogibeli russkoj zemli*.

Short of supplanting the Byzantine emperor, many a Balkan ruler aimed at securing for himself the prerogatives of that emperor, or attempted to imitate imperial pomp and usage. Ways of doing this were varied. One instance was by having a patriarch of his own: in the ninth century, the newly converted Boris of Bulgaria wanted to have one; around 900, Symeon of Bulgaria succeeded in setting one up; so did Stephen Dušan of Serbia in the mid-fourteenth century, not without resistance on the part of Byzantium. Another instance was by striking gold coins: the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Asen II (d. 1241) managed to do it, but he appeared on his coins in the garb of a Byzantine emperor with Christ on the reverse; another, by having the court hierarchy bear Byzantine aulic titles: Stephen Dušan named sebastocrators and logothetes; yet another, by assuming the epithet "second Justinian" on the occasion of the proclamation of new laws; still another, by looking to Byzantium as a reservoir for prestigious marriages—between the thirteenth century and the fall of Bulgaria in 1393, we count eight Greek women among 21 Bulgarian tsarinas; another, by patterning one's own capital after Constantinople: Symeon of Bulgaria's Preslav copied the Imperial City, as, by the way, did Prince Jaroslav's Kiev in the 1030s.

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Muscovy, the attitude toward Byzantium and its patriarchate was less than friendly; but when the Muscovite bookmen began to formulate an indigenous state ideology, they drew heavily upon Byzantine sources, in particular upon a *Mirror of Princes* written in Greek for the emperor Justinian in the sixth century; and they called Moscow “the reigning city,” a formula by which the Byzantines usually referred to Constantinople. In sum, throughout their Middle Ages, the Balkan and to a considerable extent the East Slavic ruling elites were beholden to the Byzantine model in the matter of political concepts.

The Byzantine cultural impact did not presuppose the existence of friendly relations between Byzantium and the Slavs. Sometimes it looked as if the more anti-Byzantine the Balkan Slavs—like the Normans of Sicily—were in their political aspirations, the more Byzantinized they became; they fought the enemy with the enemy’s own weapons. What the Byzantine cultural impact did presuppose was the acceptance—both by the producers and the receivers of cultural values—of the Byzantine world view and civilization as superior to all others.

II

The Christianization and cultural Byzantinization of the Balkans was a pivotal event. It affected both the medieval and the post-medieval history of the Balkans and of eastern Europe; what is more, its effects are with us today. Whether the consequences of this event should be considered as beneficial or baneful is a matter of judgment that depends on the historian’s own background and on the modern public’s political views. It remains that the Christianization of the Balkans not only determined the cultural physiognomy of Serbia and Bulgaria, but also prepared and facilitated the subsequent Byzantinization of the East Slavs, an event which, along with the Tartar invasion, contributed to the estrangement of Rus’ from the European West. In the light of the preceding remarks, however, the Byzantinization of the South and East Slavs should be viewed just as an especially successful and enduring case of Byzantium’s impact upon its neighbors, whether in Europe or in the Near East.

It was an especially successful case on two counts. First, when we speak of those Balkan Slavs who experienced the strongest influence of the Byzantine culture, we mean Serbs and Bulgarians.

But we forget that these peoples formed the rear guard, as it were, of the Slavic populations that had penetrated into the territory of the empire. In the late sixth century, the Slavs attacked the outer defenses of Constantinople; around 600, they besieged Thessalonica. About the same time, they reached Epirus, Attica, and the Peloponnesus; by the middle of the eighth century, the whole of Greece—or, at least, of the Peloponnesus—“became slavized,” to use the expression of a text written under the auspices of a tenth-century Byzantine emperor. Slavic raiders reached Crete and other Greek islands. We do hear of Byzantine military campaigns aiming at the reconquest of the lands settled by the Slavs, but judging by the paucity of relevant references in our sources, it is wise to conclude that these campaigns were not too frequent. And what remained of those Slavs? About 1,200 place-names, many of them still existing; some Slavic pockets in the Peloponnesus, attested as late as the fifteenth century; about 275 Slavic words in the Greek language; perhaps a faint Slavic trace or two in Greek folklore. Nothing more. In matters of cultural impact, the ultimate in success is called complete assimilation. When it comes to mechanisms that facilitated this spectacular assimilation, we must keep in mind the role played by the upper strata of the Slavic society, for by the end of the ninth century the Slavs were already socially differentiated. In my opinion, it was this Slavic elite, as much as the Byzantine missionaries, that served as a conduit in the transmission of Byzantine culture to the Slavic population at large.

Second, Byzantium held more than its own in its competition with Rome over the religious allegiance of the Balkan Slavs. For historical reasons, which had some validity to them, the Church of Rome laid jurisdictional claims to the territory of ancient Illyricum, that is, roughly the area on which the Serbs, Croats, and some Bulgarians (Slavic and Turkic) had established themselves. Croatia and Dalmatia were the only Byzantine areas where western Christianity was victorious in the ninth century. The Serbs were first Christianized by Rome about 640; but only the second Christianization took permanent roots there. It occurred in the seventies of the ninth century and it was due to Byzantine missionaries, later aided by Bulgarians. For a while, the newly converted Bulgarian ruler Boris-Michael flirted with Pope Nicholas I; but in 870, the Bulgarians entered the Byzantine fold, and they have remained there ever since.

True, the Cyrillo-Methodian mission in Moravia and Pannonia, which originally was staged from Byzantium, ended in failure shortly after 885, when Methodius's pupils were expelled and supplanted by the German clergy of Latin rite. But if this was a failure, it was a qualified one: the Moravian and Pannonian areas had never belonged to Byzantium.

Before its collapse, the Cyrillo-Methodian mission did forge the most powerful tool for indirect Byzantinization of all Orthodox Slavs: it created—or perfected—the Old Church Slavonic literary language. The Byzantinized Slavic liturgy did continue in Bohemia—granted, in a limited way—until the very end of the eleventh century; and the expelled pupils of Methodius found an excellent reception in late ninth-century Bulgaria and Macedonia, in centers like Preslav and Ohrid, from where they continued and deepened the work of Christianizing and Byzantinizing the Bulgarian and Macedonian Slavs. Occasional attempts on the part of the thirteenth-century Serbian and Bulgarian rulers to play Rome against Constantinople had no durable effects. True, both the Serbian Stephen the First-Crowned and the Bulgarian Kalojan, tsar of Bulgaria, obtained their royal crowns from the pope (1217 and 1204, respectively). But their churches, although autonomous, remained in communion with the Byzantine patriarchate in exile (1220 and 1235, respectively); they even remained under its suzerainty, in spite of the fact that at that time the Latin Crusaders resided in conquered Constantinople and the Byzantine empire was just a smallish principality of Asia Minor, fighting for its survival.

The loss of Moravia and Pannonia by the Byzantine mission was amply compensated for by a gain in another area which (except for the Crimea) had never been under the actual Byzantine government: I mean the territories inhabited, among others, by the East Slavs. There, too, the field was not uncontested, for Rome had sent its missionaries to Kiev in the middle of the tenth century. In addition, Byzantium had to struggle there with other religious influences, Islamic and Jewish. It emerged victorious: the ruler of Kiev adopted Christianity for himself and his people in 988/9, and the act was sealed by the prince's marriage with the Byzantine emperor's sister. In retrospect, the Christianization and concomitant Byzantinization of the East Slavs was the greatest success of the Byzantine cultural mission. Churches in Byzantine style still stand in Alaska, and in Fort Ross in California; this marks the

furthest eastward advance of Byzantine Christianity under the auspices of a predominantly East Slavic state.

The cultural Byzantinization of the Orthodox Slavs was also an especially enduring case of the Byzantine impact on Europe. Chronologically speaking, this Byzantinization, as opposed to complete assimilation, started with the ninth or tenth century, depending on the area, and it lasted long after the fall of the empire in 1453, down to the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century. Paradoxically enough, after 1453, new possibilities of expansion were opened to Byzantine culture, the culture of an empire that was no more.

Before 1453, the history of the relations between Byzantium and the Slavic churches and states was that of intermittently successful attempts to shake off the administrative tutelage of the Byzantines. Now, both the Balkan Slavs and the Byzantines were subjects of the Ottoman Empire; in the eyes of the Ottoman conquerors these peoples, all of them Christian, formed one entity, *Rum milleti*, that is, "Religious Community (or Nation) of the Romans"—a name coined in good Byzantine tradition. To the Ottomans, the patriarch of Constantinople was now the head (civilian and ecclesiastical) of all the Christians in the Ottoman Empire.

Although their circumstances were reduced, the patriarchs were in some areas of activity heirs to the Byzantine emperors, and the Greek church was a depository and continuator of many aspects of Byzantine culture. This culture had now the same, if not better, chances for radiation among the Balkan Slavs as before, because both the Greeks and the Slavs were now united within the same Ottoman territory.

The churches in the Balkans were administered from Constantinople, especially since the late seventeenth-century, when Phanariote Greeks had obtained great influence at the Sublime Porte. From that time on, native Greeks, rather than Hellenized Slavs, began to be installed as bishops. The historical Slavic Patriarchates of Peć and Ohrid were abolished in the second half of the eighteenth century (1766 and 1767, respectively). Dates marking the official independence of the Bulgarian and Serbian churches from Constantinople coincide roughly with the achievement of political independence by those countries. This rule of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, often unwisely exercised, created much bad blood between Greeks and Bulgarians in the nineteenth

century. By that time, the élite of the Balkans was looking to Vienna, Paris, and westernized St. Petersburg for inspiration. But down to the eighteenth century, Greek—that is, post-Byzantine—culture, largely represented by Greek or Hellenized churchmen, was the highest culture in the area.

Eastern Europe, too, very slowly moved away from Byzantium. The Tartar invasion of the 1240s first cut and then weakened contacts with the West, and brought about a falling back upon those forms of local cultural heritage that were in existence in the forties of the thirteenth century. This heritage had been mostly Byzantine; now, it was being preserved and elaborated upon, but not substantially enriched. The Ukraine and Belorussia were reopened to western influences somewhat earlier than other areas, as they gradually fell under the domination of Catholic Poland-Lithuania, especially from the fourteenth century on. But even there the union of Churches did not occur until some two hundred and fifty years later (I am referring to the Union of Brest in 1596), and it was only a limited success, even from the Catholic point of view.

In Moscow, the jurisdictional dependence on the Patriarchate of Constantinople continued until 1448. When the break came, it was motivated by the accusation that Byzantium was not Byzantine enough, that it had fallen away from the true faith by compromising with the Latins at the Council of Florence (1439), while the true Byzantine Orthodoxy was from now on to be preserved in Muscovy. The establishment of an independent patriarchate in Moscow had to wait until 1589. Its confirmation necessitated the assent of other patriarchs, but it was easily obtained from the impecunious Greeks. Western influences penetrating through the Ukraine were present in seventeenth-century Muscovy, but it was only Peter the First, ascending the throne as Tsar and Autocrat, Byzantine style, and leaving it in death as August Emperor, western fashion, who put an end to the Byzantine period in the history of the Russian cultural élite, but not in the history of the Russian lower classes.

III

The two main—but not the only—channels through which Byzantine influences entered the Orthodox Slavic world were church hierarchy, secular and monastic (both for a long time largely Greek, even in eastern Europe), and the respective princely courts. Thus, Byzantium was imitated, above all, in those aspects of culture

in which the church, the state, or the upper layers of the Slavic society were interested: script, literary language, both sacred and secular, literature, ecclesiastical and secular learning, art (both in its ecclesiastical and aulic variety), ruler cult, state ideology, law, and the sphere of gracious living. But the upper layers of medieval Orthodox Slavic society were less refined than their Byzantine counterparts. There was much in Byzantine culture which they did not yet need; on the other hand, there were many elementary things not exactly belonging to the exalted sphere that they had to learn. Thus while the most sophisticated products of Byzantine literature were never translated into medieval Slavic, the Bulgarian words for onions (*kromid*) and cabbage (*lahana*) and the Serbian expression for fried eggs (*tiganisana jaja*) have been taken over from Greek. Art is an exception, for there Byzantium gave the Slavs the best it had to offer. But art is not primarily an intellectual pursuit, and it can be appreciated even by newcomers to civilization; moreover, then as now, money could buy the best.

From the court and the episcopal residence, borrowed elements of Byzantine culture seeped down to the people. Also, pilgrims traveled to Constantinople and brought back with them both wondrous tales of the capital's splendor and objects of devotional art; monks moved to the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Rus' monasteries of Mount Athos and had Greek-Slavic conversation manuals composed for them (we know of one dating from the fifteenth century). In areas geographically closest to Byzantium, like Bulgaria, Byzantine direct domination, and later the post-Byzantine symbiosis under the Ottomans, brought close contacts on a popular level. Thus we have reflections of Byzantine influences in Slavic popular language and folklore: we know of at least 107 (perhaps as much as 245) proverbs that the Slavs borrowed directly from Greek. Eighty percent of these borrowings were preserved by South Slavs, twenty percent by East Slavs.

IV

The extent of Byzantine cultural impact upon the Orthodox Slavs can best be demonstrated by discussing two cases: that of literary language and that of literature. The Old Church Slavonic language was formed by two generations of Byzantine and Slavic missionaries in the second half of the ninth century and the very beginning of the tenth, originally as a vehicle for spreading the word of God in

Slavic. It was a tool with which to translate from the Greek. We do know of some original Slavic writings by the immediate pupils of Saints Cyril and Methodius, but the bulk of the literary activity of the Slavic Apostles and of their direct successors consisted in translations from Greek: excerpts from both Testaments (soon followed by the full translation of the Gospels), liturgical books, edifying sayings of the monks, codes of ecclesiastical and secular law. In late ninth- and early tenth-century Bulgaria, the situation was much the same. The most bulky literary products of John, the exarch of Bulgaria, were interpolated translations of St. Basil's *Hexaemeron* and of John of Damascus's *Fountain of Knowledge*. The *Mirror of Princes* by Agapetus (sixth century) was most probably translated into Old Bulgarian at this same early period, and thus became the very first secular work of Slavic literature. This meant that Old Church Slavonic had to struggle with the world of theological, philosophical and political concepts and other notions, as they were expressed in Hellenistic, early Byzantine, and middle Byzantine Greek. No wonder that Old Church Slavonic teems with simple, semantic, and phraseological calques, that is, word-formations and expressions closely patterned on Byzantine Greek. To a linguist, the results of that patterning often look un-Slavic, even if the Orthodox Slavs of today no longer react to the Byzantine calques in Old Church Slavonic as un-Slavic—a thousand years of familiarity took care of that. For instance, Slavic makes little use of composite words: Greek, especially late antique and Byzantine Greek, loves them; accordingly, Old Church Slavonic abounds in composites like *blagosloviti*, *bogonosъcbъ*, *bogorodica*, *samodrъžъcbъ*, to mention those words which have survived in several modern Slavic languages, including modern Russian. This slavish adherence to Byzantine templates can be explained in part by the character of the originals selected for translation: the words of these originals were sacred or of high political importance, be they the words of God, of a church father, of a saint's Life, or of an imperial charter. They had to be rendered with the greatest exactitude, even at the price of doing violence to the tendencies prevalent in early Slavic.

The calque character of Old Church Slavonic was not exclusively a bad trait. Greek, the model of Old Church Slavonic, was a very highly developed and supple language; and the more sophisticated Byzantine writers intended to imitate Demosthenes and Plato, even if in fact they often imitated the much later and more mannered imitators of these authors. In wrestling with the complicated

Greek, Old Church Slavonic acquired something of that language's quality and versatility. The impressive stylistic possibilities of modern literary Russian are due to the fact that much—some say roughly one-half—of its vocabulary is made up of Church Slavonic words, a feature that enables a Russian writer to play on two linguistic registers at will. Old Church Slavonic, with admixtures of respective vernaculars, remained the main literary vehicle for the Orthodox Slavs down to the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century, depending on the geographical area and the literary genre. This language was Slavic according to its sound, but largely Byzantine according to its word formations and even its content.

The lexical borrowings from Greek in the languages of the Orthodox Slavs are legion. There are about fourteen hundred of them in Bulgarian, about a thousand each in Serbian and Russian. Their distribution is most dense in the area of Christian terminology, such as ecclesiastical dignities, ceremonies and activities, buildings, names of liturgical texts and songs, and names of months. The language of law, court, administration, education, and the army also abounds in borrowings from Greek. In a less exalted sphere, Greek provided the Slavs with many piscatorial and nautical terms, as well as terms of commerce, coinage and measurement, agriculture and horticulture, and, finally, with terms pertaining to civilized living. Thus the words for basin (*harkoma*), floor (*patoma*, *patos*), cushion (*proskefal*), breakfast (*progim*), desert (*glikizmo*), pan (*tigan*), bench (*skamija*), fork (*pirun*), drug (*voitima*) are Greek in medieval Serbian or Bulgarian. Even some expressions for family relationships (*anepsej*, *bratovčed*), some prepositions (*kata*, as in *kata godina*), interjections (*elate*, originally an imperative), and morphological elements (the verbal suffix *-sati*) come from the Greek. Some other linguistic traits common to the Balkan peoples (Slavic and non-Slavic alike) are attributed by some to the impact of late (that is, in part Byzantine) Greek: I have in mind such phenomena as the lack of an infinitive, or forming the future with the Slavic equivalents of *θέλω ἔνα*.

When we speak of older Slavic literature, we think first of all of the creative effort of Slavic writers. Still, literature is not only what one creates, but also what one reads. When we are asked what was read, say, in an important Muscovite cultural center like the Kirillo-Belozerskij Monastery around the year 1500, we can give an answer, for we possess a catalogue of this monastery's library dating

from that time. The answer is revealing. Out of 212 books listed in the catalogue, some 90 have a liturgical character; most of the others are translations from Byzantine homiletic, hagiographic, and ascetic texts. Not only fourth-to-ninth-century Greek fathers of the church appear on the shelves of the library of Kirillo-Belozerskij Monastery around 1500 (Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Basil, Ephrem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, John of the Ladder, Theodore of Studios), but also Byzantine writers of the tenth and eleventh centuries (Symeon the Younger, the Theologian), the eleventh (Nikon of the Black Mountain), and even the fourteenth (Gregory Palamas). A few of these translations are explicitly described as coming from the Balkans. Only two texts in the library are written by Kievan authors (Hilarion's *Slovo* and Cyril of Turov's *Sermons*). One more treats a Rus' subject of interest to Muscovy (the Life of Metropolitan Peter [d. 1328], by Metropolitan Cyprian). Only two of the texts, Josephus Flavius's *Jewish War* and *Barlaam and Joasaph*, are secular, and even these were considered recommended reading in one's pursuit of sacred learning. Needless to say, both of them are translations from the Greek.

V

What has been said about language and literature (and could have been as convincingly said about art and music) should have suggested to us that Byzantium thoroughly dominated the cultural horizon of the Orthodox Slavic elite in the Middle Ages; and we should remember that for some of these Slavs the Middle Ages lasted down to the eighteenth century. Such is the truth, even if it is not the whole truth. For in the matter of the transfer of cultural goods from one society to another, telling about what was transferred and through what channels it was transferred amounts to showing only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin would consist in telling what was selected for importation and what happened to the imports once they reached the receiving society—how they were understood (or misunderstood) and for what purposes they were used. This, however, is subject matter for another essay.

Whether the Byzantine impact on the Slavs was a good or a bad thing is for a Slavist, not a Byzantinist, to decide. True, when Machiavelli was writing his *Prince* and composing his *Discorsi* on

Livy, Muscovite bookmen were still piecing together their political doctrines with some sixth-, ninth-, and twelfth-century Byzantine material. But it was not Byzantium's fault that the Orthodox Slavs took so long to break its spell.

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