Michael A. Conti

Rus' Expressions of Romanitas between the Tenth and Fifteenth Centuries

ABSTRACT: *Two Romes have fallen, and the third still remains: this idea—contrasting the decline of Rome (476) and Constantinople (1453) as capitals of the Roman Empire with the endurance of Moscow—surfaced in a sixteenth-century letter written by the monk Philoteus (Filofei) of Pskov to Grand Prince Vasili III of Moscow. On the basis of textual, architectural, and artistic evidence from the tenth to fifteenth centuries, this article argues that the Rus' developed a Romanized identity and expressed it in their faith, myths, and art. It further asserts that the "Moscow as the Third Rome" doctrine is an extension of this Romanized identity and continues to be relevant today.*

KEYWORDS: *medieval history; Rus'; Russia; Rome; Constantinople; Moscow the Third Rome; Russian Primary Chronicles; myth; art; Romanitas*

Introduction

Two Romes have fallen, and the third still remains: this idea—contrasting the decline of Rome (476) and Constantinople (1453) as capitals of the Roman Empire with the endurance of Moscow—surfaced in a sixteenth-century letter written by the monk Philoteus (Filofei) of Pskov to Grand Prince Vasili III of Moscow.[1] In situations of instability, it is not uncommon to seek legitimacy by looking to ancient paradigms; accordingly, the Rus' and later Russians developed a sense of *Romanitas*, or Roman-ness, and have expressed it since their conversion to Orthodox Christianity in the late tenth century. This article argues that, although the Rus' and later Russians developed a unique identity, Roman-ness featured prominently between the tenth and fifteenth centuries in their faith, myths, and artistic expressions. My research shows that Russia's Romanized identity predates the "Moscow as the Third Rome" doctrine, has been a continuous concept, and—as evidenced by the words and actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin—remains significant in the modern era.[2]

Primary sources for the Rus' cover their official baptism in 988 and the subsequent centuries. They include the fourteenth-century *Laurentian Text* and the sixteenth-century *Nikonian Chronicle*, which are the respective first and last compilations of the Russian Primary Chronicles, as well as the *Hypatian Codex*, also known as the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*.[3] In addition to these chronicles, there is

---

[1] For an English translation of Filofei's letter, see Philoteus of Pskov, "Filofei's Epistle to Grand Prince Vasili III" [1515–1521], in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Basil Dmytryshyn, 3rd ed. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991), 259–261.

[2] See, for example, Editor, "Full Text of Putin's Speech on Crimea" [March 18, 2014, The Kremlin, Moscow], *Prague Post*, March 19, 2014, online.

[3] *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, trans. Samuel H. Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1973); *The Nikonian Chronicle: From the Year 1425 to 1520*, trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty Jean Zenkovsky (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1989); *The Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, trans. George A. Perfecky (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973).

the late fifteenth to early sixteenth-century origin myth known as the *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir of Great Russia*.[4] Source anthologies edited by Basil Dmytryshyn and Simon Franklin supplement these texts; these anthologies include Hilarion of Kiev's eleventh-century sermon "On Law and Grace," and Philoteus of Pskov's abovementioned sixteenth-century letter.[5]

Scholars have analyzed medieval Russia and highlighted the pro-Roman themes of early Rus' society, but there do not appear to be works that explicitly look at them as examples of Russian *Romanitas*. Marius Telea's 2015 article discusses Byzantine motives to convert the Rus' in the tenth century to prevent further war.[6] Works by Alexander Avenarius (1988) and Justyna Kroczak (2016) analyze the formation of pro-Byzantine religious and political thought in Rus' following its people's baptism.[7] Monographs by Olga S. Popova (1988) and Dmitry O. Shvidkovskiĭ (2007) shed further light on how the Rus' legitimized themselves and expressed their new identity through architecture and art.[8] Alexander Maiorov's 2019 article discusses a Rus' prince wearing Byzantine-influenced regalia while under Mongol occupation,[9] and Dana Picková's 2017 article analyzes the Latin Roman and Byzantine-influenced myths in the *Tale of the Grand Princes*.[10]

This article takes a thematic approach and uses a comparative methodology. To illustrate Russia's Romanized identity during the medieval period, recourse to ancient Roman sources, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, is necessary to draw parallels between the ancient Romans and the medieval Rus'.[11] For instance, I compare the *Aeneid* to the *Tale of the Grand Princes*, a narrative that

---

[4] *The Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir of Great Russia*, trans. Rufina Dmitrieva and Jana Howlett (Cambridge: typescript, 2012).

[5] *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Dmytryshyn; *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus'*, trans. Simon Franklin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[6] Marius Telea, "Mission and/or Conversion: Strategies of Byzantine Diplomacy," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 6, no. 3 (2015): 81–105.

[7] Alexander Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus': The Problem of the Transformation of Byzantine Influence," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12/13 (1988): 689–701; Justyna Kroczak, "The Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought in Kievan Rus' (as Exemplified by Ilarion of Kiev, Kliment Smolatič, and Kirill of Turov)," *Studia Ceranea: Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe* 6, no. 6 (2016): 61–74.

[8] Olga S. Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); Dmitry O. Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture and the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[9] Alexander V. Maiorov, "Byzantine Imperial Purple in Ancient Rus'," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasion History* 20, no. 3 (2019): 505–527.

[10] Dimitri Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome: Sources of the Doctrine," *Speculum* 28, no. 1 (1953): 84–101; Dana Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs in *Сказание о князьях владимирских* (The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir)," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica*, no. 2 (2017): 253–267.

[11] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (Urbana: Project Gutenberg eBook, 1995); Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita,* trans. Daniel Spillan (Urbana: Project Gutenberg eBook, 2006).

created a sense of legitimacy for the Russians, as they took the title of "Tsar" (derived from the Latin term *caesar*) and proclaimed themselves heirs of the Roman Empire. As for the latter (Livy), I relate his founding myth of Rome to the narrative concerning the foundation of Kiev in the *Russian Primary Chronicles*.

In emphasizing that the "Moscow as the Third Rome" doctrine has been engrained in Russia since well before Filofei's sixteenth-century proclamation, it is my hope that this doctrine will be taken more seriously in western scholarship, as it has been invoked in the modern era following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Considering such events, it is unlikely that military actions in eastern Europe will stop at the locus of Vladimir the Great's 988 baptism (i.e., Crimea or Kiev). The Russian Orthodox Patriarch's annual visit to Kiev over the past years, Russia's continual support for armed uprisings in Ukraine, and Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine suggest that Moscow's re-taking of the first capital of Rus'—in addition to other territories of the former Soviet Union—is a logical next step.

However, before investigating the Romanized faith, myths, and artistic expressions of Rus', it needs to be established what is meant here by Roman-ness. When comparing the Rus' to the Romans, this article repeatedly refers to the Eastern Empire (i.e., Byzantium). Although the idea of being Roman is often associated with the Latin west, Byzantium was the eastern half of an empire that continued to exist and operate well after the fifth century. Yet, modern scholarship continues to push the idea that *Romanitas* was strictly tied to the Latin west and the city of Rome. According to historian Anthony Kaldellis, "the indisputable fact that the Byzantines firmly believed themselves to be Romans has not received the attention and emphasis that it deserves in modern scholarship. This is because both Greek and western European scholars have had an interest in downplaying it, as the former wish to find a national identity behind a Roman façade while the latter believe that the Roman legacy is fundamentally western and Latin."[12] Kaldellis further explains that "the Romans, either of Old or New Rome, formed a coherent and continuous society unified and defined by the institutions of their state, the most longevous in history, and the customs of their society: the *res publica*…Roman soldiers fought and died for their *patria* Rome, and the emperor swore an oath of office like everyone else. That is why he was always the emperor *of the Romans* and not a Hellenistic monarch who simply was the state."[13]

To illustrate the notion that the Byzantines were in fact Roman, one may look to Emperor Constantine the Great's founding of Constantinople (i.e., the Second Rome) in the fourth century. According to Sozomen's fifth-century *Ecclesiastical*

[12] Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43. On the Romanness of Byzantium, see also Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[13] Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 43–49.

History, Constantine traveled to Greece with the intent to found a city that would be equal to Rome.[14] He initially went to the "foot of Troy near the Hellespont," then changed his mind at the behest of God, went to the town of Byzantium in Thrace, and "enlarged the city, surrounded it with high walls, populated it with people from Rome and other countries, constructed a hippodrome, fountains, porticoes, and other embellishments, named it Constantinople and New Rome, and constituted it the Roman capital for all the inhabitants of the Eastern Empire."[15] Lastly, Constantine "created another senate, which he endowed with the same honors and privileges as that of Rome, and he sought to render the city which bore his name equal in every respect to that of Rome in Italy."[16] Considering that Constantinople was established by a Latin Roman emperor, populated by Roman citizens, given a senate with the same rights as that of Rome, and was pronounced the capital of the eastern half of the empire, any notion that its emperor and citizens were somehow not Roman is anachronistic. This notion becomes even more questionable when one looks to the so-called "fall" of the Western Empire.[17]

Historians Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal explain that "by the end of the fifth century, the Roman government in the west had ceased to function, as Roman garrisons were withdrawn and Germanic tribes settled as far south as the river Somme by 450."[18] If the Western Empire ceased to function by the middle of the fifth century, why was the eastern half not seen as a logical successor? Thatcher and McNeal elaborate that the idea that the eastern Romans were not the rightful monarchs of the Roman Empire stems from the coronation of Charlemagne in 800.[19] They suggest that, despite the fact that "there had been no emperor in the west since 476, and that the emperor of Constantinople had lost control of that part of the Roman Empire, the west still regarded itself as a part of the one great empire. In the eyes of the pope, the coronation of Karl the Great (Charlemagne) was the *translatio imperii* (transfer of empire) and the final act in a rebellion against the control of the emperors of the east."[20] However, primary

---

[14] Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen*, trans. Edward Walford (London: Bohn, 1855), 53–54.

[15] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History,* trans. Walford, 53–54.

[16] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History,* trans. Walford, 53–54.

[17] In an acclaimed 1997 TV documentary, the host (archaeologist John Romer) pointedly comments on the rise of Constantinople by stating that "Rome didn't fall; it just got poor." See *Byzantium: The Lost Empire*, hosted by John Romer, directed by Ron Johnston (1997; Silver Sprin: Discovery Communications, Inc., 2003), DVD, Episode 1, 00:34:45. For this reason, the term "fall" is placed in quotation marks here.

[18] Editors' comments, in *A Source Book for Mediæval History: Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Oliver Joseph Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal (Urbana: Project Gutenberg eBook, 2013), 27.

[19] Editors' comments in *Source Book for Mediæval History*, ed. Thatcher and McNeal, 48.

[20] Editors' comments in *Source Book for Mediæval History*, ed. Thatcher and McNeal, 48.

sources show a more ambiguous picture as Charlemagne was apparently not satisfied with the pope simply giving him the crown and title and "wished to peacefully acquire the title of 'emperor of the Romans' through negotiations, because he still regarded the eastern emperors as the legal successors of the Roman Empire."[21] Ecclesiastical historian Henry Mayr-Harting emphasizes that, while Charlemagne was reluctant to call himself "emperor of the Romans," he wanted to be an emperor to convert and rule over the recently-defeated Saxons.[22] After Charlemagne had sent his ambassadors to Constantinople in 812, Emperor Michael I sent his own representatives who "addressed him [i.e., Charlemagne] on this occasion, in Greek, as emperor and *basileus*."[23] However, the papal coronation of an emperor in the west would not occur again until that of Otto I in 962, and political scholar Walter Ullmann explains that this event was, once again, less about creating a Roman emperor and more about seeking a protector, as papal control of Italy had been in contention.[24] Considering the 162–year gap between these coronations, it seems that the title of "emperor of the Romans" was symbolic rather than literal in the west, and it is no wonder that any imperial title in the west was rejected by Roman emperors like Basil I (r. 867–886) and Nicephorus II Phocas (r. 963–969) who thought of western "emperors" as usurpers.[25]

Meanwhile, well after the "fall" of the Western Empire in the fifth century, the eastern emperors continued to function and were routinely referred to as Romans. For example, Agathias, a sixth-century historian during the reign of Emperor Justinian I, explicitly called Anastasius I Dicorus (r. 491–518) "emperor of the Romans."[26] Several centuries later, in her *Alexiad*, Anna Comnena referred to her father Alexius I Comnenus (r. 1081–1118) also as "emperor of the Romans."[27] However, a particularly poignant instance that drives home this point is the Constantinopolitan imprisonment of an envoy of the western "emperor" Otto I in 968/969 for referring to Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas as "emperor of the Greeks"

---

[21] Editors' comments in *Source Book for Mediæval History*, ed. Thatcher and McNeal, 58.

[22] Henry Mayr-Harting, "Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation of 800," *The English Historical Review* 111, no. 444 (1996): 1127.

[23] "Royal Frankish Annals on the Recognition of Charlemagne by the Emperor of Constantinople [812]," in *Source Book for Mediæval History*, ed. Thatcher and McNeal, 58.

[24] Walter Ullmann, "The Origins of the Ottonianum," *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 11, no. 1 (1953): 120–121.

[25] Ludwig II, Holy Roman Emperor, "Letter from Ludwig II to Basil I [871]," in *Source Book for Mediæval History*, ed. Thatcher and McNeal, 110; Liudprand of Cremona, "Report from Constantinople to Holy Roman Emperor Otto I [968]," in *Selected Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, trans. Ernest F. Henderson (London: George Bells and Sons, 1905), 443.

[26] Agathias, *The Histories,* trans. Joseph D. C. Frendo (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 7.

[27] Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (Cambridge: In Parentheses Publications Byzantine Series, 2000), 3.

rather than "emperor of the Romans."[28] Sources from both sides of this conflict for imperial universality reveal that the Eastern Empire continued to act in accordance with the *res publica* from Constantinople; Charlemagne really only accepted the imperial title after receiving permission from Emperor Michael I; there was no papal coronation of an emperor in the west for another 162 years; and later Byzantine emperors refuted the notion of Charlemagne and his successors as emperors of the west. From the eastern perspective, the 30th surah of the *Qur'an* refers to the Greeks as Ar Rûm ("the Romans").[29] Furthermore, after their eleventh-century invasion of Asia minor, the Seljuks named their new political entity the sultanate of "Rum" (i.e., the sultanate of "Rome"). Although Rus' sources often refer to the Byzantines as "the Greeks," they also refer to the city of Constantinople as "Tsar'grad," which is a combination of the Latin term and title *caesar* and the Slavic word *ѯpaꙋ* ("city"). Thus, the Eastern Empire's *Romanitas* was broadly acknowledged. Due to geographical proximity, it was Byzantium (and not the city on the Tiber) that provided the Roman frame of reference for the Rus', as the latter had little to no contact with the city of Rome.

Following this explanation, I now turn to the question of how the Rus' expressed *Romanitas* between the tenth and fifteenth centuries via their faith, textual myths, and artistic expressions. The first chapter ("Faith") investigates the death and remembrance of Vladimir the Great in 1015, the establishment of Rus' religious and political identity in Hilarion of Kiev's "Sermon on Law and Grace," and the adoption of military saints. The second chapter ("Myth") considers the narrative surrounding the founding of Kiev, a prophecy that foretold the liberation of Constantinople in the late fifteenth century, and the *Tale of the Grand Princes*. Lastly, the third chapter ("Art") looks at the construction of St. Sophia's Church in Kiev, the *Ostromir Gospel* of 1056–1057, and the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*'s account of Prince Danilo Romanovych of Galicia donning Byzantine regalia. While the sources for some of these examples hail from later centuries, five of the nine instances that are analyzed here pertain to the eleventh century; the reason for this focus is that the eleventh century, which started only twelve years after the official baptism of the Rus', was a pivotal time in the shaping of Rus' identity. Early ideas and artwork set trends that continued in later centuries, such as the adoption of military saints, the architectural themes of Kiev's St. Sophia, and the *Ostromir Gospel*. Along the same lines, some of the later sources used here derive from previous and undated sources such as the *Laurentian Text*, the *Nikonian Chronicle*, and many themes found in the *Tale of the Grand Princes*.

---

[28] Liudprand of Cremona, "The Embassy of Liudprand the Cremones Bishop to Constantinopolitan Emperor Nicephoros Phocas on Behalf of the August Ottos and Adelheid," in *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona (Medieval Text in Translation)*, trans. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 267–269.

[29] *The Qur'an*, trans. Edward Henry Palmer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 124.

I. Faith

Nothing speaks to identity like faith, and this was no different in the Middle Ages. This chapter looks into the conversion of the Kievan Rus', and how they developed and expressed their identity by drawing on the Bible and Roman ideology. But before doing so, some information on the key source cited in this chapter is in order, namely, the *Laurentian Text*, the first official compilation of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* that covers Rus' history up until the early twelfth century. It is named after its copier, Lawrence (Lavrentiy), and it was copied between January 14 and March 20, 1377, for Prince Dmitriy Konstantinovich of Suzdal', a town located east of Moscow and the home of a northern cadet branch of the Rurikids (i.e., the early ruling dynasty of Rus').[30] The manuscript from which Lawrence made his copy was a much older work, attributed to Nestor, a monk of the Crypt Monastery in Kiev, from the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth centuries.[31] However, Nestor's version of the text has not survived, and the *Laurentian Text* is actually based on an 1116 revision by Sylvester of St. Michael's Monastery in Vydubychi, a village near Kiev.[32] The text is biased in favor of the princes of Vladimir-Suzdal', but the subjects of analysis in this chapter—the baptism of Vladimir the Great (988), his death (1015) and remembrance, and the deaths of princes Boris and Gleb (1015–1019)—are relatively unchanged across the *Russian Primary Chronicles*.

The official baptism of the Kievan Rus' in 988 is often seen as one instance of a long-standing strategy implemented by the Byzantines to ally with or assimilate their neighbors.[33] While that may be true, this interpretation takes agency away from the Rus'. The greater context to this narrative is that Vladimir I ("the Great"), the leader who would convert his people, had unified his territories through war against his brothers from 978 until 980.[34] According to the *Laurentian Text* of the *Russian Primary Chronicles*, in 986, after consolidating his domain, Vladimir was visited by envoys sent by the Muslim Bulgars, Catholic Germans, Jewish Khazars, and Orthodox Greeks, who all attempted to convince him to convert to their respective religions.[35] The chronicle then explains how, after much deliberation, Vladimir was impressed by the Greeks' faith, took his army to the city of Cherson (near today's Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula), captured it, and offered it back to the Byzantine co-emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII in return for their unwedded sister, Anna.[36] The Roman emperors supposedly replied, "It is not meet for Christians to give in marriage to pagans," and required that Vladimir be

[30] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 4.

[31] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 6.

[32] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 4.

[33] See, for example, Telea, "Mission and/or Conversion," 85.

[34] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 91–93.

[35] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 96–98.

[36] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 111–112.

baptized before an arrangement could be made; the grand prince accepted, was baptized in the city of Cherson, returned to his capital at Kiev, and converted his people in 988.[37] Ioannes Skylitzes's eleventh-century *Synopsis Historiarum* explains that the marriage of Anna Porphyrogenita (i.e., the Purple-Born) to Vladimir benefited the Byzantine rulers as well, as it led to an alliance with the Rus', who subsequently aided in putting down a rebellion led by the Byzantine aristocrat Bardas Phocas the Younger.[38] While these retellings of events were likely constructed to favor their respective "side," the result of the events of the 980s was the emergence of the Kievan Rus' as an Orthodox Christian entity that would need to establish its own new identity.

Historian Samuel H. Cross, semantic scholar H.V. Morgilevski, and medieval architectural historian Kenneth John Conant point out that Christianity was not a new religion in Rus', as it can be traced back to at least the early to mid-tenth century.[39] There is also the famous case of Princess Olga, Vladimir's grandmother, who accepted baptism between 948 and 955 from Emperor Constantine VII with the assistance of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch (944–959) and took the name "Helena."[40] However, Cross, Morgilevski, and Conant eloquently explain the significance of Vladimir I's baptism when they state that "almost exactly thirty years after his grandmother's baptism, Vladimir I adopted Christianity and definitively brought the rising Kievan state into the sphere of European civilization."[41] After this establishment of Orthodox Christianity in the Rus', their new identity was "shaped by Holy Scripture and often came with pro-Byzantine motifs."[42]

One particular instance of this Romanized identity expressed through faith can be found in the *Russian Primary Chronicles*. After Vladimir had established control over Rus', converted his people to Orthodox Christianity, installed his sons as rulers over neighboring principalities, and collected tribute for a period of over thirty years, the *Laurentian Text* records the events leading up to and following Vladimir's death. Between 1012 and 1014, Vladimir's son and ruler of Novgorod, Yaroslav ("the Wise"), refused to pay his annual tribute of two thousand *grivny* to Kiev.[43] This event led to Vladimir "calling for the reparation of roads and the building of bridges" as he prepared for war against his son.[44] But before this war

---

[37] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 112–117.

[38] Ioannes Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 319.

[39] Samuel H. Cross, H.V. Morgilevski, and Kenneth John Conant, "The Earliest Mediaeval Churches of Kiev," *Speculum* 11, no. 4 (1936): 477.

[40] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 82.

[41] Cross, Morgilevski, and Conant, "Earliest Medieaval Churches of Kiev," 478.

[42] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 689.

[43] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 124.

[44] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 124.

could commence, the grand prince suddenly became ill and died on July 15, 1015.[45] The beginning of a Romanized identity in Rus' is reflected especially in the chronicle's eulogy of Vladimir, as it states:

> When the people heard of this [i.e., Vladimir's death], they assembled in multitude and mourned him, the boyars as the defender of their country, the poor as their protector and benefactor. They placed him in a marble coffin, and buried the body of the sainted Prince amid their mourning. He is the new Constantine of mighty Rome, who baptized himself and his subjects; for the Prince of Rus' imitated the acts of Constantine himself. Even if he was formerly given to evil lusts, he afterward consecrated himself to repentance… Even if he had previously committed other crimes in his ignorance, he subsequently distinguished himself in repentance and almsgiving… Vladimir died in the orthodox faith. He effaced his sins by repentance and by almsgiving, which is better than all things else… The people of Rus', mindful of their holy baptism, hold this Prince in pious memory.[46]

This passage reveals on several levels how heavily the Byzantines were influencing Rus' and its identity. For instance, the placing of Vladimir's body in a marble coffin is likely a direct reference to the marble sarcophagi widely used throughout the Roman Empire to bury notable citizens, priests, and emperors.[47] The mention of the grand prince being sainted is also a Roman tradition, as the Latins deified great emperors and the Byzantines sainted theirs; since the latter had played a key role in converting the Rus', it is logical that Vladimir was sainted. An even more explicit showing of Roman-ness is the comparison to Constantine, as the grand prince had imitated his actions and baptized his people. At first glance, the use of "imitated" might imply that the chronicle is using a figurative comparison to Constantine. Historian Marshall Poe goes so far as to call this a matter of rhetorical flattery rather than literal comparison.[48] However, considering that Vladimir had consolidated his domain through civil war, married into the Roman imperial family, and adopted the Orthodox faith, the notion of rhetorical flattery would be an oversimplification: on the other side of this debate, historian Alexander Avenarius explains that the respective term, *podobnice* ("imitator"), is deeply rooted in Byzantine ideology.[49] Avenarius further explains that the word "occurs in two variants and is always connected with the definition of the Byzantine emperor's relationship to God or Christ, as the emperor is to either imitate the deeds of Christ (*mimesis theou*) or should be like him."[50] A point of

---

[45] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 124.

[46] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 124–126.

[47] For an in–depth approach to the study and virtual reconstruction of Roman sarcophagi, see Eliana Siotta et al, "A Multidisciplinary Approach for the Study and the Virtual Reconstruction of the Ancient Polychromy of Roman Sarcophagi," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 16, no. 3 (2015): 307-314.

[48] Marshall Poe, "Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a 'Pivotal Moment'," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49, no. 3 (2001): 413-414.

[49] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 694.

[50] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 694.

interest in this passage is the comparison to Constantine rather than God or Christ, and Avenarius asserts that this is because Vladimir and other Slavic leaders may have recognized the Romans as the supreme entity in their religious hierarchy.[51] In light of the fact that the Rus' were a newly converted people who had not yet established a political ideology around their new faith, this interpretation is plausible.

Another curious aspect is the *Laurentian Text*'s statement that Vladimir "baptized himself and his subjects" as Constantine had done. Baptism is not conducted on or by oneself but is performed by a priest: Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia, while Vladimir was baptized by the Bishop of Cherson and Princess Anna's priests.[52] This could be a matter of mistranslation, as languages that are not from the same family do not translate uniformly, and the understanding that Vladimir and Constantine were baptized by someone else might have been implied. There is a more literal but unmentioned comparison that could be made between the two rulers. It pertains to the procurement of relics to make a non-holy entity into a holy one. According to the *Laurentian Text*, Vladimir's actions after his baptism included "sending and importing artisans from Greece to build a church dedicated to the Holy Virgin."[53] When it was completed, he entrusted it to Anastasius of Cherson, appointed Chersonian priests, and "bestowed upon the church all the images, vessels, and crosses which he had taken in that city."[54] The pertinent part of this quote is the transfer of items from the Byzantine city of Cherson that were placed in Vladimir's church dedicated to the Holy Virgin in Kiev. While it is difficult to know with any certainty whether the chronicler intended to refer to this, these actions are directly comparable to those of Constantine and his mother, Helena, who took relics from sacred sites and transferred them to Constantinople to make that city into a holy site; considering that Vladimir's maternal grandmother Olga had taken the baptismal name of "Helena," the implied comparison was probably not a coincidence. Lastly, the theme of emerging from darkness into light is a recurring theme in biblical texts (e.g., Isaiah 9:2; 1 Peter 2:9), and the absolution of the grand prince's sins through his repentance, conversion to the Orthodox faith, and almsgiving was a standard way for great rulers to atone for their sins. In sum, the death and remembrance of Vladimir I that references Holy Scripture and Byzantine ideology conveys a sense that a form of *Romanitas* was emerging in Rus' as early as the eleventh century.

---

[51] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 695.

[52] Jerome's fourth–century chronicle names "Eusebius, the bishop of Nicomedia" as Constantine's baptizer in 337. See Jerome of Stridon, *A Translation of Jerome's Chronicon with Historical Commentary*, trans. Malcolm Drew Donalson (Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1996), 42; *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 113.

[53] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 119.

[54] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 119.

Later in the eleventh century, we see another example of the Bible and Byzantine ideology being used in Rus'. It appears in the work of Hilarion of Kiev who served as metropolitan under Yaroslav the Wise, grand prince of Kiev (r. 1019–1054), and is known as his sermon "On Law and Grace," likely given during the consecration of St. Sophia's Church in Kiev (c. 1050).[55] Alexander Avenarius explains that the sermon contains "two ideological concepts, whose elements draw on two different sources and traditions."[56] Pro-Byzantine motifs include the fact that the Orthodox faith was brought to Rus' via the baptism of Prince Vladimir and the comparison of the grand prince to Constantine the Great.[57] While both motifs have already been addressed in the *Laurentian Text*'s eulogy, the second motif delves further into Byzantine ideology and Holy Scripture.

Justyna Kroczak, a historian of philosophy, explains that "On Law and Grace" is often divided into four parts: "On Law and Grace, How Grace spreads and reaches Rus', The encomium of Vladimir, and the prayer (Confession of Faith) in which the author indicates that he knew of and identified himself with the results and teachings of the Church Fathers."[58] Kroczak maintains that Hilarion was cognizant of and trying to maintain the tradition of Byzantine theology in his sermon, as it "promotes the New Testament over the Old, refers to the Old Testament's parable of Hagar and Sarah and interprets it as a notion of God's Grace, and refers to pagan times as one in which Rus' lands were desolate until the dawn of Christianity fertilized it."[59] However, there are passages in the sermon that separate the Rus' from the Romans. For example, Hilarion relates how Christianity came to Rus' and refers to Constantinople as "the New Jerusalem," suggesting that Constantinople was a Christian conduit rather than a pivotal reference for the conversion of Rus'.[60] Further, despite the fact that St. Sophia's Church is based on Justinian's Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Hilarion compares it to Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.[61] The proclaimed uniqueness of Rus' continues in the third part of the sermon, which is a eulogy to Prince Vladimir I.

While this third part is also translated in Simon Franklin's anthology,[62] historian Basil Dmytryshyn's translation and commentary make it more accessible to modern readers:

---

[55] Kroczak, "Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought," 63.

[56] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 693.

[57] Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 693.

[58] Kroczak, "Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought," 64.

[59] Kroczak, "Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought," 64–65.

[60] Hilarion of Kiev, "Sermon on Law and Grace," in *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus'*, trans. Franklin, 23; Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 695.

[61] Hilarion of Kiev, "Sermon on Law and Grace," in *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus'*, trans. Franklin, 23–24; Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus'," 695.

[62] *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus',* trans. Franklin, 17–26.

> "With panegyric voices, Rome praises [Saints] Peter and Paul because they brought to them [i.e., the Romans] the belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Asia, Ephesus [the ancient city in Asia Minor] and Patmos [an island in the Dedocanese archipelago] praise John the Theologian. India praises Thomas; Egypt praises Mark…Let us, therefore to the best of our abilities, praise humbly our great and wonder-creating teacher and mentor, the great *kagan* [i.e., leader] of our land, [Prince] Vladimir."[63]

On the surface, this passage explains how portions of the world came to learn of Christianity and exhorts listeners to thank the grand prince for the conversion of his people, but closer inspection reveals that this is more than a show of gratitude, as Vladimir I is actually placed on the same level as the apostles. Kroczak asserts that, in the eyes of Hilarion, Vladimir's conversion of the Rus' was "a deed that put him on par not only with the Byzantine emperor but also with the Evangelists."[64] While the conversion of a people can undoubtedly be seen as a great act, it does not quite explain why Hilarion chose to praise Vladimir rather than the apostles who had brought Christianity to the Romans in the first place, namely, Peter and Paul. Offering a plausible explanation, Dmytryshyn points out that the Kievan state was, at that time, in "dispute with Constantinople and was trying to frame itself as having the same dignity, rights, and status as the Byzantine Church."[65] It would therefore be logical for the Rus' to fashion for themselves a new identity that would emphasize their continuing sovereignty. By placing Vladimir amongst the apostles, the Rus' would gain legitimacy as a Christian entity, and working within the framework of Byzantine ideology kept them tied to the Romans' heritage. Kroczak concludes her article by saying: "the inspiration for Hilarion of Kiev and other chroniclers, both Byzantine and Old Rus', was the Bible…Old Rus' chroniclers were partly inspired by the Byzantine ones and partly by a sense of 'Slavic sensitivity…' the time between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries can be defined as the formative time for Russian outlook."[66] In sum, the eleventh to the thirteenth century was a period during which the Rus' underwent a period of accelerated change and saw the need to reestablish themselves. While it is apparent that they wished to maintain their own ideology, they developed it by aligning themselves with the Romans by comparing Vladimir I to Constantine the Great. They crafted a political and religious identity around Holy Scripture; and they did so within a Byzantine framework. Their actions went well beyond flattery or figurative comparisons.

In addition to drawing from Holy Scripture and Byzantine ideology, the Rus' further developed their identity between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries by adopting military saints. The Rus' looked to two saints in particular, princes Boris and Gleb, who were brothers and two sons of Vladimir the Great. The *Laurentian*

---

[63] Hilarion of Kiev, "Sermon on Law and Grace," in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Dmytryshyn, 46.

[64] Kroczak, "Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought," 65.

[65] Editor's comment in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Dmytryshyn, 45–46.

[66] Kroczak, "Role of the Bible in the Formation of Philosophical Thought," 71–72.

Text relates how these brothers were murdered and sainted after Vladimir's death. It explains how Svyatopolk, Vladimir's eldest son, hired assassins in Vyshgorod (modern central Ukraine) and sent them to Boris as false emissaries. When these hired men arrived at Al'ta (a river in modern central Ukraine), Boris was supposedly singing morning prayers in his tent, knew that he was about to meet his end, chanted several more prayers, and laid on his couch; the assassins then entered his dwelling and stabbed him.[67] Thereupon, the wounded prince was carried off to Svyatopolk, who ordered two Varangians (a term often used to describe people of Scandinavian descent) to finish him.[68] The *Laurentian Text* continues: "The impious Svyatopolk then reflected, 'Behold, I have killed Boris; now how can I kill Gleb?'…he craftily sent messages to Gleb to the effect that he should come quickly, because his father was very ill and desired his presence."[69] Despite warnings from his brother Yaroslav that this was an attempt to have him murdered, Gleb decided that it would be "better to die with his brother than to live on in this world," and he was killed by one of his servants before Svyatopolk's men could seize him.[70] Once Yaroslav had won the subsequent war against Svyatopolk, he had the bodies of his murdered brothers buried beside the Church of St. Basil in Vyshgorod.[71] While Boris and Gleb are not mentioned in the *Russian Primary Chronicles* beyond their appointment as rulers over the cities of Rostov and Murom—and died in rather unceremonious ways, they would be sainted alongside their father, Vladimir the Great.[72]

Since Boris and Gleb died in a fashion that carried no particular glory, it stands to reason that chronicle writers would have a difficult time portraying them. Monica White explains that the brothers became saints in a non-traditional sense because, rather than dying as the result of religious persecution, they "were innocent victims of violence and…had posthumous careers as military intercessors."[73] The practice of venerating military saints is grounded in Byzantine tradition. According to White, the "cults of military saints took shape and became increasingly prominent in the Byzantine court and army beginning in the late ninth century. This process continued with new vigor in the East Slavonic principality of Rus, which adopted Christianity as its official religion during the

[67] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 126–127.

[68] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 127.

[69] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 128.

[70] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 128.

[71] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 129.

[72] The appointment of Boris and Gleb as rulers of Rostov and Murom is recorded in the entry for the year 988. See *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 119.

[73] Monica White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137.

reign of Basil II."[74] According to White, "groups of texts and artefacts reveal that the idea of martyrs functioning as military protectors appealed to the princes of Rus."[75] White demonstrates that the Rus' initially imported the ancient military saints of Byzantium, but they chose to portray them as individuals rather than as a phalanx in the Byzantine tradition. Furthermore, White explains that "[e]arly Rus' iconography emphasized the saints' warrior qualities over their martyrdom by invariably portraying them wearing armor and holding weapons rather than martyrs' robes and crosses as is often found in Byzantine art."[76] An example of a Byzantine military saint who is often portrayed in both styles is Saint Theodore Tiron, who was martyred in the fourth century.[77] However, while the Rus' "imported an ancient corps of holy warriors from Byzantium, it was the saintly brothers Boris and Gleb who were looked to for success by their descendants. In both the Byzantine and Rus' context, it was the martyrdom of the saints that granted their posthumous powers, and a number of texts makes explicit comparisons between Boris and Gleb and various members of the corps of military saints."[78] These texts draw on the Old Testament and prove the worthiness of Boris and Gleb by comparing their deeds to those of patriarchs, prophets, kings, and other saints.[79] White concludes that "the similar means by which the attributes of martyr and warrior were expressed for both groups of saints is a strong indication that the emerging cult of Boris and Gleb was modeled on that of the holy warriors."[80]

It would appear, then, that yet another Roman tradition was adopted and morphed in early Rus'. Yet, rather than merely taking the saints of the Romans, the early Rus' venerated the murdered sons of Vladimir I. Moreover, they did so in a fashion that was unique to them, as the sainted brothers were seen as martyrs because they did not rise against their impious older brother. However, the *Laurentian Text*'s account of these assassinations is questionable. It was common for writers in Antiquity and the Middle Ages to embellish events, even more so when it came to the deaths of royalty. Thus, it would be just as likely, for instance, that Boris and Gleb were simply taken by surprise and murdered, which would create even more of an impetus to fashion these descendants of Ruirik into saints after their deaths. Comparing their likely fictitious deeds to those of patriarchs, prophets, kings, and other saints furthered the notion that these brothers were

---

[74] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 94.

[75] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 132.

[76] Monica White, "A Byzantine Tradition Transformed: Military Saints under the House of Suzdal'," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 3 (2004): 494.

[77] Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 44.

[78] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 132.

[79] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 139.

[80] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 132–133.

worthy of veneration. The striking similarities in the depictions of these two groups of saints strengthen the idea that the Rus' were expressing a unique identity that included a sense of Roman-ness. Although White mentions that this practice started in the tenth century, it continued into the thirteenth century in the house of Suzdal', suggesting that it became well established in Rus' religious ideology.[81]

A curious development occurred, however, as the tradition progressed. According to White, the princes of Suzdal' went back to the ideal of a collective force of saints while maintaining the martyr-warrior model.[82] White allows that a number of factors may have contributed to the cultural significance of Boris and Gleb. For example, the Rus' also included Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian martyrs in their various prayers.[83] The fact that the custom of venerating saints and martyrs can be traced back to various sources is logical, as Christianity was adapted to the many civilizations that adopted it. Yet, since the Rus' were already heavily influenced by the Romans, imported the Byzantines' existing group of military saints after their conversion, added Boris and Gleb to their pantheon, and expressed the martyr-warrior ideal in both an individual and group context, they were most likely adopting and morphing yet another Byzantine tradition. When added to the remembrance of Vladimir the Great with its Romanized themes and the establishment of a religious ideology in the Byzantine tradition, the expression of *Romanitas* in Rus' certainly appears to go beyond mere imitation or copying: it showed signs of emulation—of matching or even surpassing—that would conveniently fit the eventual narrative of "Moscow as the Third Rome." However, since the Romans continued to operate during this period, these instances demonstrate that Rus' *Romanitas* was rather more implicit or imaginative at this time.

II. Myth

All civilizations have their harrowing and grandiose myths, and the Rus' were no different. This chapter considers the Romanized tales of early Rus'; more specifically, it looks at the founding of Kiev in the *Laurentian Text*, at a fifteenth-century prophecy that foretold the liberation of Constantinople, and at the *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir of Great Russia*. While there are other myths in Rus' and Russian history, these particular narratives either predate or coincide with the "Moscow as the Third Rome" idea. They established Kiev as a legitimate Christian capital, framed the Russians as the heirs of the Byzantines, and justified Russia's taking of the title of "Tsar."

---

[81] White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus*, 168.

[82] White, "A Byzantine Tradition Transformed," 494.

[83] John H. Lind, "'Varangian Christianity' and the Veneration of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Saints in Early Rus'," in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 107.

The narrative of Kiev's inception and founding is a particularly intriguing instance of the Rus' expressing their Roman-ness, as it begins in the first century with the mission of St. Andrew, the brother of St. Peter, who was on his way to Rome. It is recorded in the *Laurentian Text* as follows:

> When Andrew was teaching in Sinope [i.e., modern northern Turkey] and came to Cherson (as has been recounted elsewhere), he observed that the mouth of the Dnieper was nearby. Conceiving a desire to go to Rome, he thus journeyed to the mouth of the Dnieper. Thence he ascended the river, and by chance he halted beneath the hills upon the shore. Upon arising in the morning, he observed to the disciples who were with him, "See ye these hills? So shall the favor of God shine upon them that on this spot a great city shall arise, and God shall erect many churches therein." He drew near the hills, and having blessed them, he set up a cross. After offering his prayer to God, he descended from the hill on which Kiev was subsequently built, and continued his journey up the Dnieper. He then reached the Slavs at the point where Novgorod is now situated. He saw these people existing according to their customs, and on observing how they bathed and scrubbed themselves, he wondered at them. He went thence among the Varangians and came to Rome, where he recounted what he had learned and observed. "Wondrous to relate," said he, "I saw the land of the Slavs, and while I was among them, I noticed their wooden bathhouses. They warm them to extreme heat, then undress, and after anointing themselves with an acid liquid, they take young branches and lash their bodies. They actually lash themselves so violently that they barely escape alive. Then they drench themselves with cold water and thus are revived. They think nothing of doing this every day, and though tormented by none, they actually inflict such voluntary torture upon themselves. Indeed, they make of the act not a mere washing but a veritable torment." When his hearers learned this fact, they marveled. But Andrew, after his stay in Rome, returned to Sinope.[84]

This tale is fascinating, as it essentially speaks to the early Slavs' pre-destined path to Christendom. Firstly, the use of Andrew, rather than Peter, as the apostle for this tale was likely a reference to the fact that the Rus' were destined to be Orthodox (rather than Roman) Christians; equally intriguing—since St. Andrew was the "protokletos," the "first-called" apostle, the *Laurentian Text* suggests the Rus' were first called to Christendom by the "first-called" apostle, thus setting aside any notion of Petrine precedence. Secondly, the consecration of the grounds where Kiev would eventually be founded could be seen as providing legitimacy to the city as a "locus" of Christendom; in fact, this would have given Kiev an elevated status over Constantinople (the Second Rome), as Kiev's founding would then have predated the "founding" of Constantinople (or the renaming of the city of Byzantium) by two centuries. This status would also raise Kiev above other cities in Christendom, as these did not convert until the late fourth century, furthering the authority of Rus' as a Christian entity. Thirdly, Andrew's supposed account that the Slavs were bathing and committing daily self-flagellation to a point near death would have suggested that these people were rugged, yet civilized, and already familiar with or predisposed to practices of the monotheistic faiths: the fact that the Slavs apparently thought nothing of their self-inflicted torture points to the idea that they were predisposed to being an especially pious

[84] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 53–54.

people, while their act of bathing displayed their advanced state as a civilization. From the perspective of a growing Orthodox Christian principality in the Middle Ages, this tale is especially authoritative, and it would have lent the Rus' an air of legitimacy. Yet, not surprisingly, a closer look at the origin of this narrative reveals it to be a construct.

A good starting point in deconstructing this tale is the faith of the Kievan Rus' before their official baptism. Until that point, the Rus' were pagan, and this can be seen in various entries of the *Laurentian Text*. For example, in 907, when Prince Oleg (r. 882–912) launched an attack against the Byzantines, he inflicted many casualties, forced the Greeks into capitulation, and secured trading rights.[85] The chronicle then states that "the Roman Emperors Leo VI and Alexander [i.e., likely Alexander Porphyrogenitus, Basil I's third son who would succeed Leo] agreed to peace, bound themselves to the terms of the treaty by oath, kissed the cross, and invited Oleg and his men to swear an oath likewise."[86] It continues: "according to the religion of the Russes, the latter swore by their weapons and by their god Perun, as well as by Volos, the god of cattle, and thus confirmed the treaty."[87] Another instance of invoking Perun can be seen in 945, when Prince Igor (r. 912–945) won another victory against the Romans and called upon the god to punish any who would violate their peace agreement.[88] Furthermore, Vladimir I's baptism of the Kievan Rus' was not a smooth endeavor, as linguist Roman Jakobson explains that "the Christianization of the Slavs was a gradual process that occurred between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, and it occasionally spurred pagan revolts."[89] Considering the chronicle's various entries that explicitly refer to pagan gods of old Rus' and the fact that the Slavs resisted conversion, where does this legendary tale of St. Andrew's journey to Kiev come from? According to the translators' footnote in the *Laurentian Text*, "The legend of St. Andrew in Rus' developed in Kiev during the eleventh century and is referred to ca. 1075 in a letter of Roman Emperor Michael VII Ducas [r. 1071–1078] to Prince Vsevold I Yaroslavich of Kiev [r. 1078–1093]."[90] The legend is not just interesting; it furthers the theme of the Rus' building their identity with elements from the Bible. Moreover, the description of Kiev's actual founding contains Romanized themes.

Some of the themes of Kiev's founding are loosely reminiscent of those associated with the founding of Rome. After the consecration of Kiev's foundation, the chronicle continues as follows:

---

[85] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 64–65.

[86] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 65.

[87] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 65.

[88] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 74.

[89] Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings 7: Contributions to Comparative Mythology: Studies in Linguistics and Philology, 1972–1982*, ed. Stephen Rudy (New York: Mouton, 1985), 3.

[90] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 224.

> While the Polyanians [i.e., an East Slavic tribe between the sixth and ninth centuries] lived apart and governed their families (for before the time of these brothers there were already Polyanians, and each one lived with his *gens* on his own lands, ruling over his kinsfolk), there were three brothers, Kiy, Shchek, and Khoriv, and their sister Lybed. Kiy lived upon the hill where the Borichev trail now is, and Shchek dwelt upon the hill now named Shchekovitsa, while on the third resided Khoriv, after whom this hill is named Khorevitsa. They built a town and named it Kiev after their oldest brother.[91]

The idea of siblings founding Kiev evokes the story of Romulus and Remus who overthrew their Etruscan kings and founded Rome. This narrative is recorded in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* from the first century BCE and relates how these two brothers began construction of the eternal city and were debating after whom the city should be named. Livy states: "For as they were twins, and the respect due to seniority could not determine the point, they agreed to leave to the tutelary gods of the place to choose, by augury, which should give a name to the new city, which govern it when built."[92] After "Romulus chose the Palatine and Remus the Aventine hill to make their observations, Remus spotted six vultures while Romulus saw double that number."[93] Because Remus saw his omen first and Romulus saw a larger number of vultures, they both asserted their claims to the kingdom.[94] Their disagreement ultimately led to the death of Remus and Rome being named after Romulus. Some of these themes (namely, the siblings, several hills, and the naming of the city) are also present in the telling of Kiev's founding. Since Kiev's consecration is a topic in the aforementioned 1075 letter of Emperor Michael VII Ducas to Prince Vsevold I Yaroslavich of Kiev, it stands to reason that there was a Roman inspiration for the telling of this event. The *Laurentian Text* conveniently inserts a distinctly older sibling whose seniority is acknowledged by his brothers. Although this makes for a less harrowing story, the lack of fratricide is logical as it keeps the tale in accordance with the Bible's Sixth Commandment which prohibits murder. Another noteworthy detail that is not mentioned in the chronicle is that Kiev, too, features seven hills, making it further comparable to Rome. While there are many cities that share this geographical feature, when added to St. Andrew's prophecy, Kiev's founding myth appears to be another example of *Romanitas* emerging in early Rus'.

The next textual myth to analyze in this chapter arose during the second half of the fifteenth century and pertains to the 1453 conquest of Constantinople and a prophecy that foretold its liberation by the Russians. The main source for this is the *Nikonian Chronicle*, which will be used here along with an article by historian Dimitri Strémooukhoff that describes and references the prophecy.[95] The *Nikonian*

---

[91] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 54.

[92] Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita,* trans. Spillan, 10–11.

[93] Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita,* trans. Spillan, 11.

[94] Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita,* trans. Spillan, 11.

[95] *Nikonian Chronicle: From the Year 1425 to 1520*, trans. Zenkovsky and Zenkovsky; Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome."

Chronicle is the last official compilation of the *Russian Primary Chronicles*; work on this text commenced in the office of the Metropolitan of Moscow in the sixteenth century but was later moved to the court of Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), Grand Prince of Moscow (1533–1547) and Tsar of all Rus' (r. 1547–1584).[96] The chronicle is named after the last noteworthy person who owned this manuscript, Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' (in office 1652–1658/1666).[97] Thought to be edited by the Metropolitan Daniel, "a 'professional' indefatigable moralist" in the words of Serge A. Zenkovsky, the chronicle is considered one of the more objective compilations.[98] The chronicle will be used here to highlight the relative insignificance of the conquest of Constantinople in its entry for 1453. Since the text of the prophecy concerning the liberation of the Second Rome does not appear to be available in English, I will be referencing and basing my analysis on Strémooukhoff's description of the prophecy.

From a modern perspective, the Ottomans' 1453 conquest of Constantinople should have been a momentous event for a people who would later proclaim themselves as the Third Rome. However, according to the editor's note pertaining to the *Nikonian Chronicle*'s entry for 1453, the chronicle's text is interrupted "by various stories concerning Constantinople and its fall that had no immediate significance for Russian history before it resumes with the reign of Vasili II."[99] A plausible explanation for this lackluster response is that the Rus' were still under Mongol occupation at this time and would not be sovereign again until 1480, following the battle of the Ugra River.[100] Many myths arose shortly after the Rus' had liberated themselves from Mongol occupation. In the mid-fifteenth century, the duchy of Moscovy (the Rus' entity that overthrew the Mongols) was on the rise and looking to establish itself as a champion for Russian unity;[101] as Strémooukhoff explains, the Muscovites had "abandoned their local character at this time in favor of a pan-Russian identity and were looking to cement their place in the history of Christian empires."[102] According to Strémooukhoff, there were three possibilities for the Russians to consolidate their position: "to admit that the fall of Byzantium was not final, and that the imperial city would be liberated by

[96] *The Nikonian Chronicle: From the Beginning to the Year 1132*, trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty Jean Zenkovsky (Princeton: The Kingston Press, Inc., 1984), xiii.

[97] *Nikonian Chronicle: From the Beginning*, trans. Zenkovsky and Zenkovsky, xxi.

[98] *Nikonian Chronicle: From the Beginning*, trans. Zenkovsky and Zenkovsky, xxx–xxxi.

[99] Editors' comment in *Nikonian Chronicle: From the Year 1425 to 1520*, trans. Zenkovsky and Zenkovsky, 95–96.

[100] The fifth volume of the *Nikonian Chronicle* details the 1480 Battle of the Ugra River. See *Nikonian Chronicle: From the Year 1425 to 1520*, trans. Zenkovsky and Zenkovsky, 211–215.

[101] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 88.

[102] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 88.

the Russians; to admit the supremacy of the Holy Roman Empire of the west; or to set up Moscow herself as a definite empire and the successor of Byzantium."[103]

One might assume that the Muscovites tended toward the last option, but it was, in fact, the first option that appealed to them at this time,[104] probably because the Rus' remained under Mongol occupation until 1480 and would need to liberate themselves before they could claim to be the heirs of Rome. Strémooukhoff explains that, by the mid-to-late fifteenth century, a prophecy was circulating that foretold events in the seventh millenary of the Orthodox calendar:

> We find it referred to in various versions of the Russian account of the taking of Constantinople by the Turks. The author, after having described the fall of the imperial city, adds: "If all the predictions of the time of Constantine the Great, such as were made by Methodius of Patara and Leo the Sage, if all the predictions concerning this great city have come to pass, then the ultimate prophecy will come to pass also, for it is said: 'The Russian tribes will battle against the Ishmaelites with the help of her erstwhile inhabitants, will conquer the city of the seven hills [Constantinople], and will reign there'."[105]

Later in the article, Strémooukhoff notes that the prophecy specifically describes Constantinople's liberators as a "fair-skinned people;" logically or perhaps even conveniently, the Muscovites assumed this role.[106] Strémooukhoff indicates that this prophecy could have been fashioned as early as 1472 and further cemented by that year's "marriage of Ivan III to Sophia Palaiologina, the heiress of the Paleologues."[107] The prophecy's reference to "predictions of the time of Constantine the Great" likely refers to an older prophecy according to which the first Byzantine emperor had supposedly said that the city would only fall during a lunar eclipse. On May 22, 1453, there was a lunar eclipse, followed by additional omens:[108] according to Kritovolous's contemporary *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, "a dense fog covered the whole city, lasting from early morning till evening. This evidently indicated the departure of the Divine Presence, and its leaving the City in total abandonment and desertion."[109] On May 29, 1453, the city was taken, fulfilling the "predictions of the time of Constantine the Great."

The fifteenth-century prophecy reflects the Romanized identity of Rus' in several ways. Firstly, combining the alleged fourth-century predictions with a prophecy that Russians would be liberating Constantinople speaks to how the Rus' saw themselves as inseparable from the Romans. Secondly, mentioning that the Russians would be fighting the Ishmaelites (a reference to the Ottomans and

---

[103] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 88.

[104] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 88–89.

[105] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 88–89.

[106] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 89.

[107] Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome," 89–90.

[108] Pierre Guillermier and Serge Koutchmy, *Total Eclipses: Science, Observations, Myths, and Legends* (New York: Springer, 1999), 85.

[109] Kritovolous, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, trans. Charles T. Riggs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 59.

their Muslim faith) alongside the city's "erstwhile inhabitants" and ultimately reign in the city conveys the sense that they were looking to inherit Rome's legacy; this is further supported by the description of the liberators as a fair-skinned people. Thirdly, the potential origin of the prophecy in the context of the 1472 marriage of Ivan III to Sophia Palaiologina, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor (Constantine XI), underscores a strong interest on the part of the Rus' to legitimize themselves in the event of Constantinople's reconquest. Finally, the prophecy illustrates that the Rus' viewed Constantinople as the Second Rome, as it refers to the city as "the city of the seven hills," a descriptor traditionally assigned to Rome in Italy.

While a prophecy like this could become self-fulfilling in the event of Constantinople's liberation, it could certainly serve as the basis for an ideological dream, and indeed, as history has shown, the prophecy's theme would carry at least as far as the eighteenth century and the reign of Catherine II ("the Great;" r. 1762–1796).[110] Although historian Daniel B. Rowland asserts that the "Moscow as the Third Rome" idea was not taken seriously by sixteenth-century Muscovites—who, as Rowland asserts, rather subscribed to the idea of themselves as the New Israel,[111] the evidence suggests otherwise. Rowland's analysis is based on themes from the Old Testament, which makes his assertion plausible. However, while the Rus' constructed their religious identity on the basis of the Old (and New) Testament, they did so within a Roman framework. Considering the *Laurentian Text*'s Kiev prophecy of St. Andrew and the ways in which the Rus' adopted their Romanized faith, the idea of "Moscow as the Third Rome" appears to have come to fruition by the fifteenth century.

Another myth to consider here is the *Tale of the Grand Princes*, a narrative that contains Latin Roman and Byzantine themes, and created legitimacy for the princes of Muscovy as they took the title of "Tsar." The dating of the *Tale* seems to be a matter of debate, as scholar of Slavic literature Dmitrij Ciževskij asserts that it appeared for the first time in 1523, and argues that attempts to date it before this time are not convincing.[112] However, historian Dana Picková explains that the main themes of this work have "survived in more than thirty manuscripts with the texts varying and being subjected to redactions."[113] According to Picková, the practice of "continually expanding, modifying, and reducing texts was common

[110] Catherine the Great's planned but never-realized "Greek Project" intended to retake Constantinople. She also named her grandson "Constantine" and groomed him for the Greek throne. For Catherine's reign and her "Greek Project," see Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

[111] Daniel B. Rowland, "Moscow—The Third Rome or the New Israel?" *The Russian Review (Stanford)* 55, no. 4 (1996): 595.

[112] Dmitrij Ciževskij, *History of Russian Literature: From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (Berlin: De Gruyter Inc., 1971), 252.

[113] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 259.

in medieval Rus', and it makes critical analysis of primary sources difficult."[114] While allowing that there "has not been a satisfactory or united opinion on the date of the text's creation or the identification of its author," Picková surmises that the predominant themes of the legend point to as early as the late fifteenth century and no later than 1523.[115] This range of dates creates the possibility that the text might be outside the scope of this article; however, it is included here because it emerged at the dawn of Moscow's rise to prominence and either predates or coincides with the "Moscow as the Third" Rome proclamation.

There are two main parts to the *Tale of the Grand Princes* that express Roman themes, both from the Latin and Byzantine heritage. Starting with the inspiration from the Latin west, the tale explains that, after Augustus had won the civil war against Mark Antony and taken his imperial title between 31 and 27 B.C., he appointed his relatives and other men of note as rulers over various territories.[116] An especially noteworthy appointment is recorded as follows:

> Prus, his [i.e., Augustus's] relative, [was appointed to rule] on the shores of the Vistula river in the city of Marbruck and Thurn and Khvoiny and famous Gdansk and many other cities along the river called Neman which falls into the sea. And Prus lived many years until the fourth generation and that is why the Prussian land is named thus even to this day… And at that time a certain military Novgorod leader by the name of Gostomysl was close to death…So they went to the Prussian land and obtained a certain prince by the name of Riurik who was of the family of the Emperor Augustus and the envoys from all the Novgorodians petitioned him to come and be their prince and Riurik the prince came to Novgorod with two brothers: one was called Truvor, and the second one Sineus and the third one was his cousin by the name of Oleg. That is when Novgorod became Great Novgrad and Grand Prince Riurik became the first prince of it.[117]

Yet again, the reader gets the impression that the princes of Rus' were a storied people. By referring to Riurik as a relative of Augustus, as well as his appointment in the lands of Novgorod, the Tsars of Muscovy could claim legitimacy through a lineage to the Latin Roman emperors. However, similar to the other myths discussed in this chapter, we are dealing with a mostly fictitious story, albeit containing an essence of truth. For instance, while he is credited as the first ruler of Rus', Riurik was of Scandinavian descent, and he lived more than seven centuries after the time of the first Roman emperor. The *Laurentian Text* records the selection of Riurik to rule over Novgorod as occurring between 860 and 862, and specifically describes him as being from "a particular Varangian tribe known as the Russes, just as some are called Swedes and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders."[118] Also according to the *Laurentian Text*, Riurik was asked to rule over the people of Novgorod, because its inhabitants wanted someone to "reign over

---

[114] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 259.

[115] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 259–260.

[116] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 3.

[117] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 3–4.

[118] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 59–60.

and judge them according to Law;" he was selected alongside his brothers Truvor and Sineus; and he would later bequeath his lands to his son Igor with his regency entrusted to Oleg, who was an unspecified relative.[119] As for the *Tale*'s fictitious parts, historians Rufina Dmitrieva and Jana Howlett explain that the legendary Prus is only found in the *Tale of the Grand Princes* and that Prussia was not an entity during Roman times.[120] But this part of the legend was necessary, as it created an opportunity to introduce Riurik as a relative of Augustus and as the first ruler of Rus'. According to Dmitrieva and Howlett, any connection between Riurik and Igor is doubtful, adding further complications to the genealogy of the Rurikids.[121]

The *Tale of the Grand Princes* continues with its origin story and eventually features Byzantine motifs when it claims that Vladimir I was a descendant of Riurik, that Vladimir Monomakh, Grand Prince of Kiev (r. 1113–1125), was Vladimir I's grandson, and that Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (r. 1042–1055) had bestowed upon Vladimir Monomakh "a necklace with the life-giving cross on which Christ was crucified, his imperial crown on a gold plate, and other gifts for the glory, honor, and coronation of his free and autocratic Tsardom."[122] This part of the tale adds another layer of assumed legitimacy to the Tsars of Muscovy with its assertion that a Byzantine emperor gave parts of his regalia to Vladimir Monomakh for the specific purpose of crowning future rulers. Yet, once again, we are dealing with fact that is intertwined with fiction. Starting with the former, the idea of Constantine Monomachus bestowing Byzantine regalia on Vladimir Monomakh is quite intentional. According to Dmitrieva and Howlett, the Rus' prince was born from a marriage between a son of Vladimir Iaroslavich ("Vladimir of Novgorod," r. 1036–1052) and a daughter of Constantine Monomachus, and the name "Monomakh" marked their son's descent from a Byzantine dynasty.[123] Picková adds that the "connection to imperial Rome is further reinforced because one of the insignia given to the Rus' was once in the possession of Emperor Augustus himself."[124]

However, the *Tale*'s narrative quickly unravels when one looks at the historical facts. Picková, Dmitrieva, and Howlett explain that by the time of Constantine Monomachus's death in 1055, Vladimir (b. 1053) was less than two years old, rendering a delivery of these gifts in 1114 highly unlikely.[125] Moreover, Vladimir Monomakh became grand prince as a result of a complex line of succession, making the knowledge of his future position during the life of Constantine

---

[119] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 59.

[120] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 9.

[121] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 9.

[122] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 6–7.

[123] *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 8.

[124] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 258.

[125] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 258; *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 8.

Monomachus impossible.[126] Lastly, the *Tale* features several anachronistic statements, as Dmitrieva and Howlett point out that Vladimir Monomakh "was neither an *avtokrator* (autocrat) nor a Tsar," and that there are mentioned military divisions in the Rus' army that were not instituted until the post-Mongol period.[127] Thus, in the words of Picková, the *Tale of the Grand Princes* is a work of fiction that "reshaped history to better serve arguments for the ascending political doctrine of a united Russian state and its autocratic rule."[128] From a modern perspective, it might be hard to believe that the Muscovites took these myths seriously. But this tale is not unlike Virgil's first-century *Aeneid*, an epic poem that legitimized the Julio-Claudian dynasty by claiming that they were the descendants of Aeneas, a relative of the Homeric King Priam of Troy. As evidenced by Roman historical texts and Constantine the Great's journey to Troy before eventually establishing Constantinople at Byzantium, it is apparent that Virgil's tale was taken seriously by the Romans.[129] Therefore, it stands to reason that the Muscovites created the *Tale of the Grand Princes* and were sincere in supporting its claims at a time when many cities during the European Renaissance were "finding" their respective connections to antiquity. According to Picková, the *Tale*'s claim of a Roman lineage all the way back to Augustus is not the declaration of *translatio imperii* (transfer of empire) that would later surface in Philoteus of Pskov's letter.[130] However, this document and origin myth established a model that Philoteus would have been aware of and that he could have built upon. In sum, the prophecy pertaining to Kiev's founding, the prophecy to liberate and reign in Constantinople, and the creation of an origin myth to establish the legitimacy of Russia's Tsars and subsequent claims to the Byzantine heritage all point to a sense of *Romanitas* that was expressed in the myths of the Rus' during the eleventh, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries.

III. Art

In the words of the twentieth-century sculptor, Louise Bourgeois, "art is a way of recognizing oneself."[131] This chapter considers examples of artistic expression in Rus', more specifically, the construction of St. Sophia's Church in Kiev in the eleventh century, the *Ostromir Gospel* of 1056–1057, and an instance of Byzantine regalia being worn by a Rus' prince in the thirteenth century. The rationale for

[126] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 258.

[127] The *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir* describes the division of the Rus' army as being led in formations of one-thousand men, one-hundred men, and fifty men. See *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 5. For their notes on how this division of men was created in the post-Mongol period, see *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir*, trans. Dmitrieva and Howlett, 9.

[128] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 258.

[129] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Dryden, Book VI.

[130] Picková, "Roman and Byzantine Motifs," 258.

[131] Louise Bourgeois and Donald B. Kuspit, *Bourgeois* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 82.

analyzing these particular sources is that they stem from the beginnings of Rus's political and religious identity and from a time of uncertain sovereignty (i.e., Mongol occupation) respectively.

In addition to expressing their Romanized identity in their faith and textual myths, the Rus' also manifested it in their architecture. While the consecration of St. Sophia's Church in Kiev has been touched upon in the first chapter, it is now time to look at its construction. In the entry for the years 1034–1036, the *Laurentian Text* relates that Mstislav, Yaroslav's brother and co-ruler, died while on a hunting expedition.[132] After assuming complete control over the Kievan Rus', Yaroslav went to Novgorod where he installed his son Vladimir as its ruler, appointed a bishop by the name of Zhidyata, and received news that the Pechenegs (a semi-nomadic people and historical enemy of the Rus' from central Asia) were laying siege to Kiev.[133] The grand prince gathered a force of Varangians, Novgorodians, and Kievans, met the Pechenegs "where the metropolitan church of St. Sophia now stands," and proceeded to drive away his enemy. Just before moving on to the church's construction, the chronicle curiously mentions what sounds like Yaroslav tying up loose ends, as he sentenced his brother Sudislav to life imprisonment for slander.[134] According to the *Laurentian Text*'s entry for the year 1037, Yaroslav then commissioned a series of projects such as "the Golden Gate, which imitated the Constantinopolitan triumphal gate of the same name, the metropolitan church of St. Sophia, the Church of the Annunciation over the Golden Gate, the Monastery of St. George [his patron saint], and the convent of St. Irene."[135] There appears to be some confusion concerning the date though, and art historian Elena Boeck has pointed out that both *The Chronicle of Novgorod* and Thietmar, bishop of Merseburg, record the church's founding in 1017 and 1018 respectively.[136] The *Chronicle of Novgorod*'s entry for 1017 states that "Yaroslav went to Beresti [a town in modern Romania], and St. Sophia was founded in Kiev."[137] For 1018, Thietmar relates the following:

> But the very strong city of Kiev was troubled due to the constant attack[s] of the hostile Pechenegs, who had been prompted by Boleslav, and seriously weakened by fire. Though it [i.e., Kiev] was defended by its inhabitants, it quickly succumbed to the external forces; for, once [it had been] deserted by its king who fled, it [i.e., Kiev] received, on August 14, 1018,

---

[132] In the year 1024, Mstislav went to war against and inflicted a crushing defeat upon Yaroslav. From 1026 until Mstislav's death (between 1034 and 1036), the brothers divided the territories of Kievan Rus' "according to the course of the Dnieper River" and ruled together. See *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 134–136.

[133] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 136.

[134] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 136–137.

[135] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 137.

[136] Elena Boeck, "Simulating the Hippodrome: The Performance of Power in Kiev's St. Sophia," *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 3 (2009): 283.

[137] *The Chronicle of Novgorod: 1016–1471*, trans. Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (Hattiesburg: Academic International Press, 1970), 2.

> Boleslav and its lord Sviatopolk, whom it had missed for a long time, by whose influence—and from fear of us—the entire region was subjugated. The archbishop of that city [i.e., Kiev]—with the relics of saints and various ornaments—honored those [who were] arriving [i.e., presumably, Boleslav and Sviatopolk] at the Monastery [or Church] of St. Sophia, which in the previous year, due to an accident, had miserably burned down.[138]

Lastly, the *Laurentian* Text describes the war of succession between Yaroslav and Sviatopolk with aid from the Polish King Boleslav I ("the Brave"), but the entry for 1017 simply mentions that Yaroslav began his reign in Kiev and "churches were burned" before Sviatopolk forced him out in 1018.[139]

Taken together, these passages form a complex account of when St. Sophia's Church was constructed: it sounds like the original building of St. Sophia in Kiev (presumably constructed in or shortly after the "baptism" of the Rus' in 988) burned down in 1017 and was rebuilt in 1037 (perhaps to commemorate Yaroslav's victory), and the *Laurentian Text* simply glossed over this fact, perhaps because the story of the fire was common knowledge at the time and did not need repeating. It is also possible that the architectural design of the first building of Sophia's Church was significantly different from the one constructed later, which would make the new structure worth mentioning as a separate church rather than something that was simply being rebuilt. While the founding date of the metropolitan church is not fully known, Boeck asserts that all the sources agree that Yaroslav ordered its construction, and that it is more likely that the founding date was 1037 when Yaroslav would have had the power and funds to spend on its construction.[140] This explanation seems most agreeable, as the last church construction of note had been Vladimir I's Church of the Tithes (also known as the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin) between 989 and 996. Moreover, something as grandiose as Kiev's St. Sophia's Church as it stands today would have been mentioned and glorified in the *Russian Primary Chronicles* if it had been constructed before 1037. While an analysis of the Golden Gate could be conducted to show another instance of *Romanitas* in early Rus', St. Sophia's Church is especially interesting.

---

[138] Thietmar, bishop of Merseburg, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, ed. Robert Holtzmann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Neue Serie 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1935), 530 (Book VIII, Chapter 32): "Urbs autem Kitava nimis valida ab hostibus Pedeneis ortatu Bolizlavi crebra inpugnacione concucitur et incendio gravi minoratur. Defensa est autem ab suis habitatoribus, sed celeriter patuit extraneis viribus; namque a rege suo in fugam verso relicta XVIIII. Kal. Sept. Bolizlavum et, quem diu amiserat, Zentepulcum seniorem suum, cuius gratia et nostrorum timore omnis hec regio conversa est, suscepit. Archiepiscopus cititatis illius cum reliquiis sanctorum et ornatibus diversis hos advenientis honoravit in sanctae monasterio Sofhiae, quod in priori anno miserabiliter casu accidente combustum est." English translation in the text (above) by Professor Jochen Burgtorf (Fullerton).

[139] *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text,* trans. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 132.

[140] Boeck, "Simulating the Hippodrome," 283.

According to architectural historian Dmitry Shvidkovskiĭ, St. Sophia served as an essential element for Yaroslav's introduction to and international extension of Rus' in the Christian world.[141] Shvidkovskiĭ further explains that the cathedral church was "the largest of its kind in Rus' until the end of the fifteenth century, suffered much destruction and rebuilding in the nine centuries of its existence, and has been subject to alterations in the seventeenth century. However, the interior remains preserved to a substantial degree."[142] While he points out that there are varying opinions on the "architectural forms of the cathedral," Shvidkovskiĭ emphasizes that experts do agree on a few things: "It belongs to the Byzantine building tradition, it is the largest and most important eleventh-century building in that tradition, and the Byzantine architectural language used in its construction is used to express an ideology that originates not in Constantinople but in Kiev, at the court of Yaroslav the Wise."[143] Shvidkovskiĭ asserts that, while Yaroslav used Hagia Sophia in Constantinople as a model for his church's construction, the grand prince "sought to reflect, by means of his own time, an ancient symbol that was fundamental to both the [Roman] Empire and the Orthodox Church."[144] As for the building's interior, the second part of Hilarion of Kiev's "Sermon on Law and Grace" gives a somewhat vague description. It states: "he [i.e., Yaroslav] has built a great and holy church [i.e., St. Sophia] to honor God's omniscience in order to sanctify your [i.e., Vladimir's] city and has decorated it with all kinds of beautiful things, including gold and silver, precious stones and sacred vessels."[145] Boeck describes the interior as having "site-specific Constantinopolitan topographies of power and iconography that consciously references a *locus sanctus* (holy place), a mosaic of the standing Virgin orant that possibly referenced the church of Blachernai (that has not survived), a Greek inscription of Psalm 46:5, and a fresco of a hippodrome."[146] Boeck furthermore asserts that the Kievan hippodrome "emphasize[d] a topography of imperial control with a focus on the management of the races rather than the antiquarian features that were so important to Byzantine observers."[147]

Thus, St. Sophia's Church in Kiev underscores the theme of a unique Rus' identity with distinctly Roman influences: the church was built by Byzantine architects with help from local labor, was modeled after Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and was constructed to cement Yaroslav's "supremacy after

---

[141] Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture*, 17.

[142] Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture*, 18.

[143] Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture*, 18.

[144] Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture*, 18–19.

[145] Hilarion of Kiev, "Sermon on Law and Grace," in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Dmytryshyn, 46.

[146] Boeck, "Simulating the Hippodrome," 285–286.

[147] Boeck, "Simulating the Hippodrome," 287.

decades of fratricidal wars."[148] Such a grandiose display of power would have undoubtedly suggested legitimacy to the Rus' while they were developing their identity around the Orthodox faith. While scholars emphasize that Yaroslav modeled this church according to his own ideas, he was quite intentionally working within a Roman framework; this makes sense as, in the early eleventh century, the eastern Romans were at the height of their power and influence. This notion is corroborated when one considers St. Sophia's interior which was decorated with precious stones, vessels and mosaics that reference Byzantium's most significant structures. Furthermore, while this language was foreign and largely unknown to the Rus', Yaroslav chose to keep the inscriptions of St. Sophia's in Greek.[149] Lastly, the portrayal of a hippodrome in the church's interior is a blatant display of Roman influence, since a hippodrome otherwise would have carried no meaning for the Rus'. Even though St. Sophia was built in accordance with the grand prince's ideas, its use of "Roman" elements to send a specific message was not unprecedented.

Charlemagne, for example, established the Carolingian dynasty as one of lawgivers by using courthouses known as *laubiae*, which were modeled after Roman city gates.[150] The use of these courthouses became so prevalent that the verb *laubire* (to acquit) became a new term in medieval Latin. Yet, instead of repurposing Roman structures, which did not exist in Rus', or constructing a building similar to one in Rome for a different purpose, Yaroslav chose the most remarkable Roman cathedral (namely, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople) as his model and thereby established himself as a paragon of Orthodox Christianity. This was not simply a bold imitation; it was a form of emulation that would have contributed to shaping Rus' identity in the eleventh century. When added to the fact that Hilarion of Kiev's "Sermon on Law and Grace" was given during this structure's consecration, a larger picture begins to emerge as the Rus' fashioned their religious and political identity and constructed Kiev's St. Sophia in a Roman framework.

Another example of Roman-influenced artistic expression in early Rus' is the eleventh-century *Ostromir Gospel*, the oldest dated Rus' manuscript to survive in its entirety and shelf-marked as National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg), РНБ. Ф.п.I.5.[151] This particular manuscript is a lectionary; it was commissioned by Ostromir, the governor of Novgorod and relative of Kievan Prince Iziaslav Yaroslavich; and it was produced by Deacon Gregory between October 21, 1056,

---

[148] Shvidkovskiĭ, *Russian Architecture*, 18; Boeck, "Simulating the Hippodrome, 283.

[149] There is some debate whether Greek was known by the elite of the Kievan Rus'. See, for example, Simon Franklin, "Greek in Kievan Rus," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 69–81.

[150] Kim Sexton, "Justice Seen: Loggias and Ethnicity in Early Medieval Italy," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 3 (2009): 316.

[151] Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 33. The *Ostromir Gospel* is fully digitized and available online; see National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg), РНБ. Ф.п.I.5, online.

and May 12, 1057.[152] An inscription on the first page mentions that Ostromir then donated the manuscript to St. Sophia's Cathedral in Novgorod.[153] According to the National Library of Russia, there is a gap of about six centuries before the whereabouts of this manuscript can be traced again via documentation, as it is mentioned in a 1701 inventory of the churches and monasteries of the Moscow Kremlin.[154] In 1720, Peter I ("the Great"), Tsar of Russia (r. 1682–1725) and Emperor of Russia (r. 1721–1725), decreed the gathering of information on ancient documents and manuscripts in churches and monasteries,[155] and in the same year, the codex was moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg.[156] In 1805, it resurfaced among the belongings of the late Catherine II ("the Great"), Empress of Russia (r. 1762–1796).[157] Emperor Alexander I (r. 1801–1825) then transferred the *Ostromir Gospel* to the manuscript department of the Public (now National) Library of Russia, where it resides today.[158]

Among its 294 folios, hundreds of ornamented, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic initials, and three full-page miniatures, a particularly striking illumination can be found on the verso of folio 87.[159] This page contains a portrayal of Luke the Evangelist, standing in a pose of supplication, intently looking to the heavens, with his hands raised in prayer. In the top-right corner, a bull, the incorporeal creature that represents Luke, is presenting a scroll on which there is gold writing. According to art historian Olga Popova, the scene is "set in a rectangular frame and surrounded by a wide ornamental border, as was frequent with Byzantine miniatures."[160] Popova further explains that "the saint's robes are covered with a fine web of gold lines, and the shape of the figure and its colors are almost lost to view beneath the bright golden mesh. This type of representation recurs constantly in Byzantine miniatures in the late tenth and into the eleventh centuries."[161] Popova completes her description by stating that a technique known as "cloisonné enamel," which entails creating an outline by bonding metal strips (gold, brass, silver, or copper) to a surface and then filling the spaces with enamel paste, was used on St. Luke's robes and body; this technique was popular in the Byzantine Empire, and was used extensively in Kiev.[162] Art historians Helen C.

---

[152] National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg), *The Ostromir Gospel of 1056–1057 at the National Library of Russia*, online.

[153] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[154] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[155] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[156] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[157] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[158] National Library of Russia, *Ostromir Gospel*.

[159] National Library of Russia, РНБ. F.п.I.5, fol. I. 87.

[160] Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 35.

[161] Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 35.

[162] Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 35.

Evans and William D. Wixom provide further information on the influences shown in the *Ostromir Gospel* when they mention that "while documenting the intimate dialogue between Byzantium and Kievan Rus', the lectionary also attests to the contact maintained between the Slavic state and the countries of the west, as the three miniatures follow the Hieronymic order [i.e., John: 1v; Luke: 87v; Mark 126r] common in Carolingian and Ottonian works, the stylized initials reflect western influences, and the synaxarion [i.e., hagiographic lessons] includes western saints such as Pope Silvester I, John of Mediola, the martyrs Vitus and Modestus, and Apollinaris of Ravenna."[163] Lastly, art historian Elina Gertsman mentions that active trade with the west is partially the reason why the Kievan Rus' acquired western artwork and may have adopted certain techniques.[164] She also offers an explanation for the influences from Carolingian and Ottonian works when she reminds us that "the Rus' were especially connected to the Ottonian dynasty as Vladimir I was married to the granddaughter of Otto I;"[165] in addition, Grand Prince Yaroslav "married Inigerd of Sweden, produced queens in France, Hungary, and Norway, and his brother Mstislav married the Swedish princess Christina, whose daughters wedded the Norwegian kings Sigurd the Crusader, Kanut II, and Erik-Edmund of Denmark."[166] Trade with and marriage into western and Scandinavian dynasties offers a plausible explanation for the ordering of the miniatures according to the teachings of Jerome and other western influences in the *Ostromir Gospel*.

However, while the lectionary's list of saints and martyrs, as well as minor decorations such as the initials, show influences from the west, the overall art style, ornamentation, and use of gold to represent divinity in the full-page miniatures come from tenth and eleventh-century Byzantium. Most meaningfully, the representation of the evangelists, arguably the most significant parts of a lectionary, are portrayed using this Byzantine style. The manuscript was commissioned and created between 1056 and 1057, namely, during the formative stage of a political and religious identity in Rus', and not long after Hilarion of Kiev's "Sermon on Law and Grace," which has already been established as a work that gave the Rus' a unique identity within a Roman framework. Because this is a piece of art that would have been commissioned for a single person, such as a prince, the *Ostromir Gospel* could be seen as an isolated work that does not warrant inclusion as evidence for expressions of *Romanitas*. However, lectionaries from later centuries continue this theme of a Romanized identity in Rus'. For instance,

---

[163] Helen C. Evans, William D. Wixom, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 296.

[164] Elina Gertsman, "All Roads Lead to Rus, Western Influences on the Eleventh-to-Twelfth-Century Manuscript Illumination of Kievan Rus," *Comitatus* 31 (2000): 40–41.

[165] Gertsman, "All Roads Lead to Rus," 41.

[166] Gertsman, "All Roads Lead to Rus," 41.

Popova's monograph provides brief descriptions of manuscripts such as the twelfth-century Mstislav Lectionary from Novgorod, the twelfth/thirteenth-century Liturgy of St. Barlaam of Khutyn from the Principality of Galich-Volhynia, and a fourteenth-century lectionary from Moscow that all show signs of following Byzantine trends; the fact that these manuscripts came from northern, south-western, and western Rus' further shows that this style was not confined to a single Rus' principality or a particular time period.[167] Thus, all things considered, the sense of a Romanized identity in Rus' is reflected in their illuminated manuscripts.

In addition to the Rus' expressing their *Romanitas* in architecture and illuminated manuscripts, there is an instance of a Rus' prince wearing Byzantine regalia in the thirteenth century, during the period known as the "Mongol Yoke." The source for this instance is the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, which is a portion of the larger *Hypatian Codex*. This codex features an account of the south-western Rus' and their history between 1201 and 1292; it has not yet been the subject of extensive critical analysis in English; it is named after the Monastery of St. Hypatius at Kostroma (a historical city in western Russia and administrative center of modern Kostroma Oblast) where it was discovered; and it contains the Primary and Kievan chronicles.[168] Not unlike other Rus' chronicles, the original manuscript for the *Hypatian Codex* from the late thirteenth century has not survived, and the copy that is available today hails from the fifteenth century.[169] The instance in question pertains to the year 1252, for which the codex recounts a meeting between Prince Danilo Romanovych of Galicia and an envoy of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II to discuss an ongoing war between the latter and the former's ally, King Bela IV of Hungary. The chronicle states:

> The [Hungarian] king rode forth with them [i.e., Frederick's envoy] to meet Prince Danilo, and Danilo approached him with all his troops in battle formation. The Germans marveled at [their] Tartar armor: all of the horses had mail over their heads and [their bodies] were covered with leather, and the riders [also] wore armor. And the splendor of his regiments was indeed great due to the luster of their weapons. [Danilo] himself rode at the king's side in accordance with the traditions of Rus'. The horse he rode was wondrous to behold and his saddle was of pure gold. His arrows and sword were adorned with gold and other ornaments, so that one did not cease marveling at them, [while he himself was dressed in] a fur-coat trimmed with Greek *olovir* and gold lace and boots made of green leather stitched together with gold. The Germans

[167] For the Mstislav Lectionary (Historical Museum, Moscow, ms. 1203), see Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 37–42. For the description and an illumination from the Liturgy of St. Barlaam of Khutyn (Historical Museum, Moscow, ms. 604), see Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts,* 47–48. For the lectionary from Moscow (Historical Museum, Moscow, ms. 2), see Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts*, 95–96. Although Popova's monograph contains many more examples of this style and expression of a Romanized Rus' identity in illuminated manuscripts, the ones mentioned here show that the *Ostromir Gospel* was likely the beginning of a trend rather than a singular case.

[168] *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, trans. Perfecky, 7–11.

[169] *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, trans. Perfecky, 11.

> could not cease staring and admiring [all of this] and the king told [Danilo] that his coming [to him dressed] in accordance with the traditions of Rus' and of his forefathers was more important to him than a thousand pieces of silver. Danilo asked for permission to enter the king's camp, because it was extremely hot that day. [The king, i.e., Bela] took his arm and led him into his tent, undressed him, and put his own clothes on him. Such was the [great] honor that the king bestowed upon [Danilo], and he returned home.[170]

This passage recounts a unique situation that requires unpacking. The mentioning of Prince Danilo's troops being marveled at as they wore Tartar armor (a term used to describe people of central Asia such as the Mongols and Turks) shows us that this was likely during the Mongol occupation of the Rus'. According to historian Roman Hautala, the Rus' were in a state of gradual submission to the Mongols between 1237 and 1260, placing this meeting in 1252 toward the end of this period.[171] Among the striking descriptions in this text are those of Danilo's gold-adorned saddle and weapons and his gold-lined coat. By itself, the appearance of gold is not out of the ordinary, as it was a material commonly used to denote royalty, divinity, or high status in general. But the term "Greek olovir" raises some questions about the Rus' prince's regalia, for, despite the chronicle's claim that the change of dress to that of the Hungarian king, was a great honor, there appears to be an issue of protocol. I agree with historian Alexander Maiorov who highlights King Bela's reaction in order to show that Danilo's dress was not common for a prince of Rus'.[172] Against the opinion of historians Sergey M. Solov'ev, Nikolay I. Kostomarov, and Ivan P. Kryp'iakevych, who have argued that the chronicle is describing King Bela's delight at Danilo's attire for being the traditional attire of Rus' and his forefathers, Maiorov maintains that the Hungarian king was "in fact expressing his disapproval of the prince's appearance, which he saw as a breach of not only diplomatic etiquette but also of 'the Rus' tradition'."[173]

Maiorov then turns to the term *olovir*, which only appears in the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, its etymology, and its meaning in Byzantine sources: *olovir* translates to "a special type of silk that was dyed purple and had limited and reserved uses in the empire," and this type of silk likely came into Rus' in the form of military trophies and diplomatic gifts.[174] Maiorov explains that it was not possible to buy this type of silk on the free market, and instead suggests that, while the text does not mention this (since the first portion of the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* has been lost), *olovir* probably referred to clothing given to Danilo's father, Roman Mstislavich, by the Byzantine emperor Alexios III Angelos as a reward for military assistance and in connection with Roman's marriage to Princess Anna-Euphrosyne Angelina, the daughter of Emperor Isaac II

---

[170] *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*, trans. Perfecky, 61–62.

[171] Roman Hautala, "Russian Chronicles on the Submission of the Kievan Rus' to the Mongol Empire," *Golden Horde Review,* no. 1 (2013): 207.

[172] Maiorov, "Byzantine Imperial Purple in Ancient Rus'," 508.

[173] Maiorov, "Byzantine Imperial Purple in Ancient Rus'," 508.

[174] Maiorov, "Byzantine Imperial Purple in Ancient Rus'," 509–516.

Angelos."[175] Due to the Mongol invasions, the absence of source material covering the early Rus' is a common issue. Roman Hautala explains just how destructive the Mongols were when he states that, "for the first time in [their] history, the Russian population faced full-scale extermination with the destruction of chief towns."[176] In the year 1238 alone, "the Mongols destroyed 14 cities in 3 months, with the administrative centers of Chernigov, Kiev, and Halych (the former capital of Galicia) being among them."[177] As a result of this destruction, certain parts of Rus' history are left up to educated guesswork. Yet, despite the unclear specifics of how Prince Danilo came to own this imperial silk, the fact that he possessed and chose to wear it along with his traditional fur-coat and leather garb is a point of intrigue. Since this occurred during a time when the principalities of Rus' were disintegrating and occupied by the Mongols, wearing only the traditional garb of a conquered people would not likely be seen as legitimizing; this would especially be the case in a meeting with the ruler of a powerful entity like the Holy Roman Empire. When added to the backdrop of his soldiers and horses wearing the armor of his Mongol overlords, the Rus' prince could have easily appeared as not sovereign or as a Mongol puppet-ruler. However, since Danilo was the son of a Byzantine princess (Anna-Euphrosyne Angelina) and the grandson of a Roman emperor (Isaac II Angelos), he would have had access to this type of imperial silk, he had an impetus to wear it, and he would have felt a sense of legitimacy via his Roman heritage. Therefore, a possible explanation for this (in the eyes of the Hungarian king) breach of diplomatic protocol might be that the Rus' prince was invoking a sense of *Romanitas* to be taken seriously. Viewed by itself, this wardrobe incident could easily be explained away, but viewed alongside the other evidence from architecture and art, this appears to be yet another case of Romanized identity in medieval Rus' that connects the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

Conclusion

This analysis of medieval Rus' faith, myths, and artistic expressions suggests that their Romanized identity started with their tenth-century baptism and manifested itself in various forms well before Philoteus of Pskov's famous letter to Grand Prince Vasili III, written between 1515 and 1521.[178] The *Laurentian Text* shows us that Vladimir I's marriage to Anna Porphyrogenita and the official baptism of the Rus' in 988 started a trend, as later princes would continue to marry into Roman dynasties and continue to glorify the Orthodox faith. Moreover, the chronicle indicates that comparisons between the great leaders of Rus' and those of the Romans may have started as early as 1015. Later in the eleventh century, Hilarion of Kiev's "Sermon on Law and Grace" portrayed a political and religious identity

[175] Maiorov, "Byzantine Imperial Purple in Ancient Rus'," 524.

[176] Hautala, "Russian Chronicles on the Submission of the Kievan Rus'," 207.

[177] Hautala, "Russian Chronicles on the Submission of the Kievan Rus'," 211.

[178] Editor's comments in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850–1700*, ed. Dmytryshyn, 259.

that placed the Rus' as a separate entity alongside Byzantium, while also working within a Byzantine framework. Lastly, the adoption of military saints, which had begun as a Roman tradition, became a core feature of Rus' liturgy through the veneration of Princes Boris and Gleb, and continued well into the thirteenth century.

Textual myths also demonstrate this *Romanitas*, as the eleventh-century tale of St. Andrew's consecration and prophecy of Kiev's construction gave the city a central status as a Christian and Rome-like "locus." Then, during the rise of Muscovy and after the end of Mongol occupation (1480), this Romanized identity re-emerged with a prophecy that the Russians would liberate and reign in Constantinople, the Second Rome. And the *Tale of the Grand Princes of Vladimir of Great Russia* claimed a lineage for the Rus' that dated back to Augustus, thus providing the rulers of early-modern Russia with legitimacy as the Tsars of the soon-to-be Third Rome.

The Rus' also expressed their Roman-ness via their architecture, art, and garb. Grand Prince Yaroslav Vladimirovich legitimized the Kievan Rus' as an Orthodox Christian entity in the eleventh century by building St. Sophia Church in Kiev, modeling it after Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and decorating it with precious items, Greek inscriptions, and Byzantine mosaics such as that of the hippodrome. The *Ostromir Gospel* of 1056–1057 is the earliest among other illuminated manuscripts that show a unique Rus' identity while incorporating Byzantine trends. Lastly, Prince Danilo's wearing of Byzantine regalia in the thirteenth century shows that *Romanitas* may even have been a means to show legitimacy and continuity during Mongol occupation. While these instances either predate or coincide with the idea of "Moscow as the Third Rome," it is important to emphasize that this idea could not have come to fruition as long as the Byzantines were still clinging to power at the Bosphorus and the Rus' subordinated to the Mongols. Thus, it was the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the Mongol withdrawal after the Battle of the Ugra River (1480) that made it possible for the Russians to become the heirs of this legacy and the self-proclaimed protectors of Orthodoxy; these events gave Philoteus of Pskov's early sixteenth-century proclamation legitimacy and served as a point of departure in the following centuries.

More research can be done on Russia's Romanized identity. For example, Peter the Great, who greatly expanded Russia's territories in the early eighteenth century, held Roman-like triumphs to commemorate great victories, took the title of *imperator* (emperor), and *pater patriae* ("father of the fatherland," a common title given to the emperors of imperial Rome); Catherine the Great, who further expanded Russia's domain, conceived a "Greek Project" that entailed retaking Constantinople, and established Russia as the protector of the Orthodox faith; Alexander I could have invoked this protector role and invaded the Ottoman

Empire to retake Constantinople; and Nicholas I was within striking distance of the Second Rome but decided against taking the city.[179]

Russia's Romanized identity not only aided in establishing the religious and political identity of Rus' and created legitimacy for Russia's Tsars, it became the basis for Russia's imperial doctrine in the modern era. However, scholars have attempted to marginalize this idea as something that sixteenth-century Muscovites did not believe in and only non-experts of Russian history perpetuate.[180] While I do agree with Marshall Poe and Daniel Rowland that the "Moscow as the Third Rome" doctrine has been used to oversimplify the motives behind Russia's expansionist policies, it is also an oversimplification to marginalize it as rhetorical flattery; and hinting at the sixteenth-century idea of Russia as the New Israel misses the point that the Rus' had been working within a Roman-Byzantine frame of reference for centuries. Attempts to disregard the doctrine seem especially harmful now, as the modern era has proven to be more ominous. For instance, in 2010 Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Metropolitan Ilarion took part in a discourse on Russia's current identity and have recently called Russia the Third Rome.[181] They have explained that it is Russia's role to "save the West and all mankind from degradation and from falling under the power of the Antichrist."[182] It was supposedly under this pretense that Patriarch Kirill ventured to Poland in August 2012 to effect reconciliation.[183] The Patriarch has also traveled to the former lands of Kievan Rus' to give sermons and speeches in which he has referred to the lands of Valaam and Moscow as the "holy lands" while others are either "ancient" or "blessed" lands.[184] More significantly, Kirill made a symbolic visit to Ukraine in 2009 to commemorate the day of Holy Prince Vladimir (d. 1015), and this has since become a regular occurrence.[185] The claim that it is Russia's role to save the world

---

[179] For a history of Peter the Great's reign, see Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Peter the Great's triumphs are described in Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). For the reign of Catherine the Great, see de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*. Alexander I faced a quandary when the Patriarch of Constantinople was killed by the Ottomans during the Greek revolt in 1821; see Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy* (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2013), 289–307. For the reign of Nicholas I, see William Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[180] Poe, "Moscow, the Third Rome," 413; Rowland, "Moscow—The Third Rome or the New Israel?," 591.

[181] Natalia Naydenova, "Holy Rus: (Re)construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," *Slavonica* 21, no.1–2 (2016): 37–48.

[182] Mikhail D. Suslov, "'Holy Rus': The Geopolitical Imagination in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church," *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 3 (2015): 51.

[183] Suslov, "'Holy Rus': The Geopolitical Imagination," 52.

[184] Suslov, "'Holy Rus': The Geopolitical Imagination," 55.

[185] Suslov, "'Holy Rus': The Geopolitical Imagination," 52–54.

from the Antichrist echoes the fifteenth-century prophecy that Russia will retake Constantinople and appears to have been morphed here. The fact that the Patriarch has ventured into the lands of the former Russian Empire and Kievan Rus' further shows how Russian identity is still tied to the notion of a single state. Historian Marlène Laruelle eloquently explains the rationale for this need to continue the idea of Russia as the Third Rome when she states: "the collapse of the Soviet Union made it a *post-mortem* emblem of a defunct world that can only be recreated discursively."[186] On the surface, this ideology seems innocuous and even optimistic as the Russian Orthodox Church seems to be making peace with fellow Christians in lands of a shared heritage. Moreover, the ideology provides Russians with a stable identity in the post-Soviet era. However, while the words and actions of Kirill and Ilarion may seem peaceful, Mikhail D. Suslov concludes that their ideology "rejects rational dialogue with the secular world, making it too dangerous a toy for ideological games."[187]

Russian nationalism revolves around the concept of the "Russian idea" which derives from a body of works that includes the doctrine of "Moscow as the Third Rome."[188] Between February and March 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin mobilized his army, annexed the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, and made a speech shortly after.[189] In this address, Putin recalled the shared history of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine as those of the descendants of the Rus', and he rationalized his actions by explaining that the Crimean Peninsula was the location of Grand Prince Vladimir the Great's baptism and ultimately belonged to the Russian people. Historian Grzegorz Przebinda explains that "this vision of [the] shared history of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, originated by Vladimir's baptism in the Crimea, is close to both Putin and most of Moscow-Orthodoxy hierarchs, led by Patriarch Kirill I Gundyayev."[190] Przebinda argues that Putin is "using the Orthodox Church and its Patriarch for military and propaganda actions in Ukraine and for cementing the Russian idea in Russia itself."[191] Another significant factor in this situation are the contradictory ideologies of the Russophile and Ukrainophile schools, which both claim the legacy of Rus';[192] a most pertinent

---

[186] Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 11.

[187] Suslov, "'Holy Rus': The Geopolitical Imagination," 57–58.

[188] Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism*, 127.

[189] Tor Bukkvoll, "Why Putin Went to War: Ideology, Interests and Decision-Making in the Russian Use of Force in Crime and Donbas," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 [Russia, the West, and the Ukraine Crisis] (2016): 267. For Putin's speech shortly after annexing the Crimean Peninsula, see Editor, "Full Text of Putin's Speech on Crimea."

[190] Grzegorz Przebinda, "The Third Baptism of Rus: The Participation of Moscow Orthodox Church in Putin's Expansion in Ukraine," *Przegląd Rusycystyczny* 4, no. 148 (2014): 5.

[191] Przebinda, "Third Baptism of Rus," 6.

[192] Taras Kuzio, "National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers 34,* no. 4 (2006): 409.

point in the Russophile doctrine is the claim that the "Ukrainians only appeared in the mid-seventeenth century with the sole purpose of re-uniting themselves with Russia."[193] This has been a recurring theme in Putin's rhetoric and has resurfaced in recent times. Initial research for this article began in the Spring of 2020, and as of its writing in the Winter of 2021 and early Spring of 2022, Putin's threat to invade Ukraine has become a dark reality. While it is debatable whether Putin actually believes in this doctrine, "Moscow as the Third Rome" has provided a convenient opportunity for him in his religious and nationalistic rhetoric to reclaim lands of the former Soviet Union and, perhaps even more so, of the former Russian Empire—and the idea of "empire" (Russian *импе́рия*, from the Latin *imperium*) is certainly closely associated with *Romanitas*. Since the "Moscow as the Third Rome" doctrine is an extension of an identity that formed over a thousand years ago, continuing to marginalize and underestimate it can only be detrimental to Ukraine, the West, and the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Michael A. Conti of Mission Viejo, California, earned both a B.A. in History with a minor in Political Science (2019) and an M.A. in History (2022) at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), where he is a member of the Theta-Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta (History Honor Society). He served as an editor for volume 49 of "The Welebaethan: A Journal of History" (2022). The article published here is based on his M.A. thesis.*

[193] Kuzio, "National Identity," 409.