

POLITICAL APPROACHES TO BYZANTINE LITURGICAL TEXTS

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Byzantium is known as a civilization imbued with the Christian dogma, practices and ethics. Its political ideology and imperial ideology, stable from the establishment of Constantinople as its capital in the fourth century until the fall of the city to the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, is based on the direct relationship between the kingdom of heaven and the empire, the sacred character of the imperial office and the heavenly source and divine provenance of the imperial authority. Christian ideas and ideals influenced not only the society but also the state, even the law. Let us, for example, recall an early Byzantine law declaring that «Our State is sustained more by religion than by official duties and physical toil and sweat».¹

This Christianisation of the imperial ideology, also known as Byzantine political theology or political orthodoxy², was to dominate politics in Byzantium by forging a close relationship between state and church, wrongly styled, even by distinguished Byzantinists, as theocracy.³ This relationship supported, and some times served as a fulcrum for a propaganda that promoted the interests of the state and the church –sometimes unilateral, sometimes common, and in some cases ambivalent.⁴

Although a number of individual studies examine the relationship between Byzantine imperial propaganda on one hand and sanctity,

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¹ *Codex Theodosianus*, xvi.2.16; quoted from CYRIL MANGO, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*, London, Phoenix, 1998, p. 88.

² See, among others, HANS GEORG BECK, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, Munich, 1994/1978, pp. 87–108; FRANCIS DVORNIK, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, vols. I–II, Washington D.C., 1966.

³ See, for example, STEVEN RUNCIMAN, *Byzantine Theocracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

⁴ See APOSTOLOS SPANOS, “Imperial Sanctity and Politico-Ecclesiastical Propaganda in Byzantium (ninth–fifteenth century)”, in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*. Volume III. *State, Power, and Violence*, edited by Axel Michaels (et al.), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, pp. 197–213.

hagiography and ritual on the other,⁵ there is still no specialized study dedicated to the Byzantine liturgical texts⁶ as media and conduits of political messages. This essay does not aim at exploring *the political use* of liturgical texts in Byzantium but rather *political uses* that call for a more comprehensive study on the field. Its main purpose is to highlight something that has not yet received intensive research, namely that a historico-political study of Byzantine liturgical texts may reveal valuable aspects of their composition and function, shedding at the same time light on the political, ecclesiastical and social history of Byzantium. The study focuses on Constantinople, the political centre of the empire, whose control was extremely important for both emperors and pretenders to the throne.⁷

Almost all the hymns referred to in this essay (i.e. except for some of the hymns by Romanos quoted in the third part) were included in the liturgical book *Menaion*, which means that they were performed once a year at least from the ninth century until the end of the Byzantine period.⁸ The study focuses on the content of these texts and the political ideas enshrined in them, considering at the same time their effects on the faithful who attended the ceremonies. It should be made clear from the beginning that it is difficult, if possible at all, to accuse the hymnographers as conscious propagandists of imperial interests. Even so, it is hard to avoid thinking of how the average Byzantine might have understood the content of the hymns, or to forget that in various periods the church had interests that were supported by the

⁵ See GILDERT DAGRON, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; DIMITRI ANGELOV, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium. 1204-1330*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007; NIKOLAS K. GVOSDEV, *An Examination of Church-State Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires with an Emphasis on Ideology and Models of Interaction*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, c2001; *The Byzantine Saint. University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, edited by Sergei Hackel, London, 1981, pp. 37–42, 43–50, 67–87; *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, edited by Henry Maguire, Washington, D.C., Harvard University Press, 1997.

⁶ The term ‘liturgical texts’ refers to hymnographical texts used by the Byzantine Church in the celebration of feasts and saints. One of the case studies considers the use of biblical readings. Most of these texts are still in use by the Greek Orthodox Church.

⁷ See, for example, what E. Tounta writes about the conquest of Constantinople as the final and absolute aim of a successful usurpation; ELENI TOUNTA, “Usurpation, Acceptance and Legitimacy in Mediaeval Europe. An Analysis of the Dynamic Relations between Ritual Structure and Political Power”, in Axel Michaels (et al.), *op. cit.*, pp. 447–473, esp. 463–466.

⁸ *Menaion* appeared in the ninth century and it was, from the tenth century onwards, the main book used by the Byzantine Church for the celebration of feasts and saints in the yearly ritual cycle. The texts contained therein were performed by the choir on the feast-days of saints and/or feasts commemorated on a fixed date. Its most reliable edition is *Μηναια τοῦ ὅλου ἐνιαυτοῦ*, vols. I–VI, Rome, 1888–1902 (henceforth MR). On the book of *Menaion* see APOSTOLOS SPANOS, “Menaion”, in *Byzantine Codices in Liturgical context. A codico-liturgical approach to cataloguing Byzantine Christian manuscripts. I. The Athens CBM Meeting: Biblical, Liturgical and Hymnographical Codices*, edited by Stefan Roye, Turnhout, Brepols, (forthcoming); IDEM, *Codex Lesbiacus Leimonos 11. Annotated Critical Edition of an Unpublished Byzantine Menaion for June*, Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2010 (Byzantinisches Archiv, 23), pp. 1–16.

promotion of the so-called political orthodoxy.

The essay is divided into three sections. The first studies the promotion of political ideology in liturgical texts, while the second is dedicated to the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross as a case-study for such a promotion. The third presents cases of liturgical texts used as means of political propaganda, that is for the support of specific emperors and their political acts and aims.

LITURGICAL PROMOTION OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

The Christianized Byzantine political ideology, formed already in the first half of the fourth century by the bishop of Caesarea Eusebius (ca. 314–339),⁹ was promoted in various ways, both textual and visual.¹⁰ A number of liturgical sources demonstrate that liturgical texts were also used to spread the notion of the special relationship between God and his vice-regent on earth, the emperor, as well as the notion of the Byzantines as the new ‘chosen people’ of God.¹¹ The relationship between God and the emperor, as well as the sacred authority, office and role of the latter could be presented directly or hidden in allusions and metaphors.¹²

A main idea in this ideology was that the establishment of the Roman Empire (that is to say: the Byzantine; Byzantium was the continuation of the Roman Empire, and the Byzantines called themselves Romans until the last day of their existence) was a part of God’s providence for the salvation of mankind. The divine plan was to save the humans at the same time from polyarchy, with the establishment of the Roman Empire, and from polytheism, with the Incarnation of Christ. This idea was expressed by Eusebius in, among other texts, his *Praeparatio Evangelica*.

⁹ As GEORGE T. DENNIS, *Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and reality*, in Henry Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–140, here 132, styled it: «It was Eusebios, in his orations on Constantine the Great, who christianized the imperial ideology and articulated the political orthodoxy that would prevail until the death of the last Constantine».

¹⁰ See NIKOLAS GVOSDEV, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–53 (chapter: The Political Language of Orthodoxy); ANDRÉ GRABAR, *L’empereur dans l’art byzantin*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1971; GEORGE P. MAJESKA, “The Emperor and his Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St Sophia”, in Henry Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–11.

¹¹ “In liturgical and non-liturgical writings of the time, the contrast is often made between Christians, who form a “people” (in Greek, *laos*) as opposed to the non-Christians who remain divided into tribes and nations (*ethnê sic*). Christian Romans are to form a single commonwealth, a single polity, a single realm, and being united in faith should also be united in citizenship, in peace, and in concord. [...] Those outside were linked to the forces of evil” (NIKOLAS GVOSDEV, *op. cit.*, p. 47).

¹² A good example could be Romanos Melodos presenting God as the Lord of Heaven, who, exactly as the emperor on earth, issues documents that distribute privileges and donations, listens to requests and gives to everybody, even to illiterates, the possibility of addressing to Him without the help of professional application-writers; see HERBERT HUNGER, “Romanos Melodos, Dichter, Prediger, Rhetor –und sein Publikum”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 34, 1984, pp. 15–24, here 39–42.

It was the result of divine and ineffable power that, together with his word and along with his teaching of the monarchy of the one God of the Universe, he [God] delivered the human race at one and the same time both from the much-erring, deceitful influence of demons and from the polyarchy of various nations. [...] When Christ-God appeared [...] events followed what have been prophesied. All the polyarchy in the Roman world came to an end, since Augustus had established a monarchy at the same moment that our Savior appeared on earth. Henceforth and until the present, there were no longer seen, as before, cities waging war on other cities, or peoples combating other peoples, or even life exhausting itself in the earlier confusion.¹³

This incorporation of *Pax Romana* in the Christian understanding of History as divine providence is also expressed in Byzantine hymnography. It is, for example, the very subject of the following hymn, composed by Kassia the Nun in the ninth century and performed since then on the eve of Christmas:

“When Augustus reigned alone upon earth, the many kingdoms of men came to end; and when Thou wast made man of the pure Virgin, the many gods of idolatry were destroyed. The cities of the world passed under one single rule, and the nations came to believe in one sovereign Godhead. The peoples were enrolled by decree of Caesar; and we, the faithful, were enrolled in the Name of the Godhead, when Thou, our God, wast made man. Great is Thy mercy; glory to Thee”.¹⁴

¹³ Θείας μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἀπορρήτου δυνάμεως ἦν τὸ ἅμα τῷ αὐτοῦ λόγῳ καὶ σὺν τῇ περιμοναρχίας ἑνὸς τοῦ ἐπὶ πάντων θεοῦ προβεβλημένη διδασκαλία αὐτοῦ ὁμοῦ καὶ τῆς πολυπλανοῦς καὶ δαιμονικῆς ἐνεργείας, ὁμοῦ καὶ τῆς τῶν ἔθνων πολυαρχίας ἐλεύθερον καταστῆναι τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος. [...] Ἐπειδὴ παρῆν ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, [...] ἀκόλουθα ταῖς προρρήσεσιν ἐπηκολούθει τὰ ἔργα. Πᾶσα μὲν αὐτίκα περιηρεῖτο πολυαρχία Ῥωμαίων, Αὐγούστου κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ τῆ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ἐπιφανείᾳ μοναρχήσαντος. Ἐξ ἐκείνου δὲ καὶ εἰς δεῦρο οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις, ὡς τὸ πρὶν, πόλεις πόλεσι πολεμούσας οὐδ' ἔθνος ἔθνει διαμαχόμενον οὐδέ γε τὸν βίον ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ συγχύσει κατατριβόμενον (KARL MRAS, *Eusebius Werke, Band 8: Die Praeparatio evangelica*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1954, 1.4.2–1.4.5; trans. DENO JOHN GEANAKOPOLOS, *Byzantium. Church, Society, and Civilization seen through Contemporary Eyes*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1984, pp. 131–132).

¹⁴ Αὐγούστου μοναρχήσαντος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἡ πολυαρχία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπαύσατο· καὶ σοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος ἐκ τῆς Ἀγνῆς, ἡ πολυθεΐα τῶν εἰδώλων κατήρηται. Ὑπὸ μίαν βασιλείαν ἐγκόσμιον, αἱ πόλεις γεγέννηται· καὶ εἰς μίαν δεσποτείαν Θεότητος, τὰ ἔθνη ἐπίστευσαν. Ἀπεγράφησαν οἱ λαοὶ, τῷ δόγματι τοῦ Καίσαρος· ἐπεγράφημεν οἱ πιστοὶ, ὀνόματι Θεότητος, σοῦ τοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος Θεοῦ ἡμῶν. Μέγα σου τὸ ἔλεος Κύριε, δόξα σοι (MR II, p. 651; translated in *The Festal Menaion translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, with an introduction by Archpriest Georges Florovsky*, London, Faber & Faber, 1969 [henceforth: *Festal Menaion*], p. 254). Cf. NIKOLAS GVOSDEV, *op. cit.*, p. 41, where this hymn is used to illuminate the Byzantine concept of *oecumene* in comparison to the Roman. On the Byzantine concept of *Oecumene* see also *Byzantium as Oecumene*, edited by Evangelos Chrysos, Athens, National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2005.

The idea of the sacral *imperium* is clearly presented in a number of hymns, in which God is asked to protect the empire, or the Byzantines, from all their 'godless' enemies. One example would suffice:

We bring you in intercession the life-giving Cross of your goodness, O Lord, which you have given to the unworthy. Save the Kings and your city, giving them peace through the Mother of God, O only lover of mankind.¹⁵

Here it is not the whole empire that should be protected but only Constantinople, the City, as the Byzantines called it.¹⁶ The principal goal of these hymns was to strengthen the morale of those living in the capital. Let us not forget that the defence of the city was often strengthened metaphysically, with the use of relics and icons as means of divine protection against the enemies.¹⁷

There are, of course, a lot of hymns asking God to protect 'His people'. Furthermore, Byzantine hymnography also refers to the enemies of the empire, or the emperor himself, as enemies of God, who is asked to "wage war on those who war against us".¹⁸

In some hymns these enemies are clearly qualified as external enemies of the empire. More often than not the enemies could not be historically identified, since they are presented generally as godless barbarians, which, according to the Byzantine mentality, could be applied to any non-Christian enemy, as all 'nations' and tribes outside the Byzantine borders were clearly understood as both godless and barbarians. The hymnographers ask God to protect Constantinople or the empire (both are normally presented as God's holy place) from all these enemies. Let us, for example, consider a hymn on the Beginning of the ecclesiastical year (September 1st):

You, O King, Who Are and who abide even to ages without end, accept the supplication of sinners who beg salvation; and grant, O Lover of mankind, abundance to your land, giving it temperate weather; as once with David, fight alongside our faithful King against godless barbarians, for they have entered your tabernacles and defiled your all-holy place, O Saviour. But grant victories, Christ God, at the intercession of the Mother

¹⁵ Τὸν ζωοποιὸν σταυρὸν τῆς σῆς ἀγαθότητος, ὃν ἐδώρησω ἡμῖν τοῖς ἀναξίοις, Κύριε, σοὶ προσάγομεν εἰς πρεσβείαν· Σῶζε τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ τὴν πόλιν σου εἰρηνεύοντας διὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου, μόνε φιλάνθρωπε (MR I, p. 138; trans. by Archimandrite Ephrem at <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/13sep.htm>; last accessed 2 October 2012).

¹⁶ On Constantinople as a God-guarded city see NORMAN HEPBURN BAYNES, "The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople", *Analecta Bollandiana*, 67, 1949, pp. 165–177 (repr. IDEM, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, London, 1974, pp. 248–160).

¹⁷ "The presence of either the relic of the True Cross, or that of the robe of the Theotokos was considered indispensable for the deliverance of Constantinople when under siege" (SOPHIA MERGIALI-SAHAS, "Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics. Use, and misuse, of sanctity and authority", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 51, 2001, pp. 41–60, here 44).

¹⁸ ...πολέμησον τοὺς πολεμοῦντας ἡμᾶς (MR I, p. 151).

of God; for you are the victory and boast of the Orthodox.¹⁹

In other texts, the enemies are clearly defined. In a good number of hymns the Muslims are referred to as the enemies whom God is asked to keep away or destroy.

As the limbs of the Hebrews who truly disobeyed you, the Master of all, were once fittingly strewn across the desert, so now too, O Christ, as the Psalm says, scatter the bones of the impious and unbelieving Hagarenes²⁰ at the mouth of Hell.²¹

In most cases, the enemies of the emperor are external enemies of the empire; but not always. There are hymns, in which it is not clear whether the enemies referred to are internal or external. In such cases, even if not consciously, the hymnographers supported the emperor, as it would be logical to assume that the congregation would identify internal enemies of the emperor, as could be the case with e.g. pretenders to the throne, as the enemies from which God should protect the emperor, or the city. An example:

Christ our God, who created all things with wisdom and brought them from non-being into being, bless the crown of the year and preserve our city unbesieged; make glad our faithful Sovereigns by your power, giving them victories against enemies, through the Mother of God granting the world your great mercy.²²

Hymns of such content are scattered in various Byzantine liturgical books, in texts composed to serve various liturgical purposes. In the following

¹⁹ Σὺ Βασιλεῦ, ὁ ὢν καὶ διαμένων καὶ εἰς αἰῶνας ἀτελευτήτους, δέξαι δυσώπησιν αἰτούντων ἁμαρτωλῶν σωτηρίαν· καὶ παρὰσχου, φιλόανθρωπε, τῇ γῆ σου εὐφορίαν, ἐγκράτους τοὺς ἀέρας χαριζόμενος· τῷ πιστοτάτῳ Βασιλεῖ συμπολέμει κατὰ ἀθέων βαρβάρων, ὡς ποτὲ τῷ Δαβὶδ· ὅτι ἤλθοσαν οὗτοι ἐν σκηναῖς σου, καὶ τὸν πανάγιον τόπον ἐμίαναν, Σῶτερ· ἀλλ' αὐτὸς δώρησαι νίκας, Χριστέ ὁ Θεὸς, τῇ πρεσβείᾳ τῆς Θεοτόκου, νίκη γὰρ σὺ τῶν ὀρθοδόξων καὶ καύχημα (MR I, p. 8; trans. by Archimandrite Ephrem at <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/sep01e.htm>). Let it be noted that the book of *Euchologion*, a formulary for prayers, includes various texts of different types on war or the invasion of barbarians (see *Eὐχολόγιον sive rituale Graecorum...*, edited by Jacobus Goar, Venetiis, 1730 [repr. Graz 1960], pp. 642–647).

²⁰ In Byzantine texts Muslims are usually presented as Hagarenes, or sons of Hagar, Ishmaelites, or sons of Ishmael, and Saracens.

²¹ Ὡς τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰ κῶλα, ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ποτὲ, ἀπειθησάντων ὄντως σοὶ τῷ πάντων Δεσπότῃ, ἀξίως κατεστρώθη, οὕτω καὶ νῦν τὰ ὄστα διασκόρπισον τῶν δυσσεβῶν καὶ ἀπίστων Ἀγαρηνῶν, ψαλμικῶς παρὰ τὸν ἄδην, Χριστέ (MR I, p. 3; trans. by Archimandrite Ephrem at <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/sep01e.htm>; last accessed 2 October 2012).

²² Χριστέ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ ἐν σοφίᾳ τὰ πάντα δημιουργήσας, καὶ ἐκ μὴ ὄντων εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραγαγῶν, εὐλόγησον τὸν στέφανον τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ, καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν φύλαττε ἀπολιόρητον· τοὺς δὲ πιστοὺς Βασιλεῖς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου εὐφρανον, νίκας χορηγῶν αὐτοῖς κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων, διὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου δωρούμενος, τῷ κόσμῳ τὸ μέγα ἔλεος. (MR I, p. 7; trans. by Archimandrite Ephrem at <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/sep01e.htm>; last accessed 2 October 2012)

pages we will consider the hymnology dedicated to the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14), which includes most of the elements of the Byzantine political ideology.

THE IMPERIAL CROSS

The feast of the “Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross”, as it is usually referred to in the sources, is worthy of attention, as it is the only “great feast”²³ of the Byzantine church that was dedicated to a relic.²⁴ To underline its importance I may refer to the liturgical rubrics dictating that when the 14th of September is a Sunday the choir should not perform the usual Sunday-hymns on Resurrection but the hymnography on the Cross, without any other hymnographical interpolation.²⁵ The establishment of the feast²⁶ is based on two events of legendary character related to the emperor Constantine I the Great (324–337): his vision of the Cross and the discovery (*inventio*) of the Holy Cross by his mother Helena in Jerusalem in ca. 327.

A short presentation of these events is necessary before studying the hymnography on the Exaltation. According to Eusebius of Caesarea on the

²³ The Byzantine Church had twelve feasts of major importance, namely the Nativity of the Theotokos (Sept. 8), the Exaltation of the Cross (Sept. 14), the Entry of the Theotokos into the temple (Nov. 21), the Nativity of Christ (Dec. 25), Epiphany (the baptism of Christ, Jan. 6), the Presentation of Christ in the temple (Feb. 2), the Annunciation (Mar. 25), the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), the Ascension of Christ (forty days after Easter), the Pentecost (fifty days after Easter), the Transfiguration of Christ (Aug. 6) and the Dormition of the Theotokos (Aug. 15); see *Festal Menaion*, pp. 41–66.

²⁴ All the other ‘Great feasts’ are dedicated to Christ and the Theotokos, or events related to their lives. Let it be noted that in Byzantium the veneration of relics was in fact the veneration of the saint or saints in question; see JOHN WORTLEY, “The Wood of the Holy Cross”, in Idem, *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, (study VI), pp. 1–19, here 15–16.

²⁵ According to an eleventh-century manuscript of the *Typikon* of Hagia Sophia, the so-called *Typikon Dresdensis* (cod. *Dresden A 104*), “Δεῖ δὲ εἰδέναι ὅτι ἐὰν ἔστι κυριακή, οὔτε ἀναστάσιμα ψάλλομεν οὔτε ἑωθινὸν εὐαγγέλιον ἀναγινώσκειται”; BERNARD FLUSIN, “Les cérémonies de l’Exaltation de la Croix à Constantinople au XI^e siècles d’après le *Dresdensis A 104*”, in *Byzance et les Reliques du Christ*, edited by Jannic Durand, Bernard Flusin, Paris, 2004, pp. 61–89, here 89. Let it be noted here that the Byzantine Church, unlike the Roman Catholic, considers Resurrection as much more important than Crucifixion; thus, the replacement of the Resurrection hymns with the hymns on the Cross symbolises the extraordinary significance of the feast.

²⁶ Describing her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Egeria witnesses to the ritual veneration of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem already in the fourth century (*Itinerarium Egeriae*, ed. Geyer, 88.1–22). The oldest evidence on its celebration in Constantinople is no older than the seventh century. On the Holy Cross and its veneration see JOHN WORTLEY, “The Wood of the Holy Cross”; HOLGER A. KLEIN, “Constantine, Helena, and the Cult of the True Cross in Constantinople”, in Jannic Durand, Bernard Flusin, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–59.

eve of an important battle²⁷ Constantine had a vision of the Cross in the sky, along with the Greek phrase *Τούτῳ νίκα* (*In hoc signo vinces*, or *By this conquer*). The same night Christ appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to use the Cross as a symbol in the battle. By doing so, Constantine was victorious.²⁸ In 324, he decided to transfer the capital of the Roman Empire from the eternal city to Byzantium, which was named, after him, Constantinople. The next year he gathered the first ecumenical council in Nicaea, to solve the Christological problems that threatened the unity of the church, something also important for the empire, as Constantine seems to have had understood Christianity as a means of cohesion for the empire's various peoples and cultures. In 326, his mother Helena embarked on a travel to Jerusalem, where under a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, which she destroyed, she found the Holy Cross along with the crosses of the thieves and other relics from the Crucifixion. The Cross was then most probably placed in the church of the Resurrection she founded, while a portion of it was transferred to the capital as a gift to Constantine.²⁹

The *akolouthia*³⁰ included in the *Menaion* for the celebration of the Exaltation is undoubtedly of political importance, due to its numerous references to the emperors and their special role. The central place of the emperor in the feast is demonstrated in its main hymns, namely the *apolytikion* and the *kontakion*:³¹

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance, granding the kings victory over barbarians, and guarding Thy commonwealth with Thy Cross.³²

²⁷ Eusebius does not identify the battle, while another contemporary historian, Lactantius, speaks of the battle of the Milvian Bridge against Maxentius in 28 October 312 (*De mortibus persecutorum*, 44.5–6).

²⁸ On Constantine's vision and other appearances of the cross in the fourth century see JAN WILLEM DRIJVERS, "The Power of the Cross: Celestial Cross Appearances in the Fourth Century", in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, edited by Andrew Cain, Noel Lenski, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 237–248.

²⁹ On the various legends on the *inventio* of the Cross see JAN WILLEM DRIJVERS, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross*, Leiden, Brill, 1992; STEPHAN BORGEHAMMAR, *How the Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae, 47), 1991.

³⁰ The term *akolouthia* is used throughout the text for an individual total of hymnographical-poetic texts used by the church to celebrate a saint or a feast on his/her/its proper day.

³¹ *Kontakion* and *apolytikion* are central pieces of hymnography in every Byzantine *akolouthia*. Their didactic importance is clear in the fact that they are performed, among other places, right before the readings from the Acts/Epistles and the Gospel in the Divine Liturgy.

³² Σῶσον, Κύριε τὸν λαόν σου, καὶ εὐλόγησον τὴν κληρονομίαν σου, νίκας τοῖς βασιλεῦσι κατὰ βαρβάρων δωρούμενος, καὶ το σὸν φυλάττων διὰ τοῦ Σταυροῦ σου πολιτεύμα (MR I, p. 158; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 141). Let it be noted that the text of this hymn is still a subject of religio-political debates in Greece, since the abolition of monarchy in 1974. In *Festal Menaion* one reads the modern politically correct version: "O Lord, save Thy people and bless

Lifted up of Thine own will upon the Cross, do Thou bestow Thy mercy upon the new commonwealth that bears Thy Name. Make our faithful kings glad in Thy strength, giving them victory over their enemies: may Thy Cross assist them in battle, weapon of peace and unconquerable ensign of victory.³³

In both hymns the idea of God protecting particularly the emperor and the Byzantine state is underlined, along with the concept of Byzantium as the new chosen people. By the following hymn, the faithful are introduced to the idea of the emperor having been elected and anointed by God and his authority being God-given.

Ye faithful Christian kings, forechosen by divine decree, rejoice. Receiving from God the Precious Cross, make this victorious weapon your glory, for by it the tribes of the enemy that rashly seek battle are scattered unto all ages.³⁴

The Cross is also presented as a weapon against barbarian enemies, glorifying the imperial power:

O marvelous wonder! The length and breadth of the Cross is equal to the heavens, for by divine grace it sacrifices the whole world. By the Cross barbarian nations are conquered, by the Cross the sceptres of kings are confirmed. O divine ladder! Ny thee we go up to heaven, exalting Christ the Lord in song.³⁵

In a hymn attributed to the emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912) the cross is hailed for, among other things, having supported the Byzantine emperors to lay down the Muslims:

Thine inheritance, *granding Orthodox Christians victory over their enemies*, and guarding Thy commonwealth with Thy Cross" (emphasis added), accompanied by the footnote: "literally, 'granding the kings victory over barbarians'".

³³ Ὁ ὑψωθεὶς ἐν τῷ Σταυρῷ ἐκουσίως, τῇ ἐπωνύμῳ σου καινῇ πολιτεία τοὺς οἰκτιρομῶς σου δώρησαι, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός. Εὐφρανὼν ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου τοὺς πιστοὺς Βασιλεῖς ἡμῶν, νίκας χορηγῶν αὐτοῖς κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων· τὴν συμμαχίαν ἔχοιεν τὴν σὴν ὄπλον εἰρήνης, ἀήττητον τρόπαιον (MR I, p. 162; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 148, where one reads the modern politically correct version: Lifted up of Thine own will upon the Cross, do Thou bestow Thy mercy upon the new commonwealth that bears Thy Name. Make the Orthodox people glad in Thy strength, giving them victory over their enemies: may Thy Cross assist them in battle, weapon of peace and unconquerable ensign of victory).

³⁴ Οἱ τῇ θεΐᾳ ψήφῳ προκριθέντες, ἀγάλλεσθε, Χριστιανῶν πιστοὶ Βασιλεῖς· καυχᾶσθε, τῷ τροπαιοφόρῳ ὄπλῳ, λαχόντες θεόθεν Σταυρὸν τὸν τίμιον· ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ φύλα πολέμων, θράσος ἐπιζητοῦντα, σκεδάννυνται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας (MR I, p. 163; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 150).

³⁵ Ὡ τοῦ παραδόξου θαύματος! εὖρος καὶ μῆκος Σταυροῦ οὐρανοῦ ἰσοστάσιον, ὅτι θεΐα χάριτι ἀγιάζει τὰ σύμπαντα· ἐν τούτῳ ἔθνη βάρβαρα ἤττηνται· ἐν τούτῳ σκῆπτρα ἀνάκτων ἠδρασταί. Ὡ θεΐας κλίμακος! δι' ἧς ἀνατρέχομεν εἰς οὐρανοὺς, ὑψοῦντας ἐν ἄσμμασι Χριστὸν τὸν Κύριον (MR I, p. 165; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 153).

... Hail. O Cross, complete redemption of fallen Adam. With thee as their boast, our faithful kings laid low by thy might the people of Ishmael.³⁶

All these hymns reflect the military use of the cross by the emperors. It is known from various Byzantine sources that the Byzantine army was escorted by the relic of the True Cross on military campaigns from at least the time of emperor Maurice (582–602) onwards.³⁷ Its function was, of course, to symbolize the divine support to the army and to strengthen the morale of the Byzantine soldiers.

Apart from the abovementioned hymns, there are others where the political messages are presented indirectly, as for example by presenting the Cross as a "divine sceptre",³⁸ "firm foundation of the inhabited earth",³⁹ or "the glory of the faithful, the strength and steadfastness of kings".⁴⁰

Let us now turn to the celebration of the Exaltation itself. The *Typikon of the Great Church*, that is to say the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople,⁴¹ includes in full text the six hymns to be sung just before the highest moment of the ceremony, when the patriarch exalts relics of the True Cross to be venerated by the faithful. Four of them refer to the emperors.⁴² The first hymn includes a petition to God to rescue the emperors and the city (σῶζε τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ τὴν πόλιν), the second is the well-known *O Lord, save Thy people* referred to above, the third asks God to give victories to the

³⁶ ...Χαίροις Σταυρὲ, τοῦ πεσόντος Ἀδάμ ἡ τελεία λύτρωσις· ἐν σοὶ οἱ πιστότατοι Βασιλεῖς ἡμῶν καυχῶνται, ὡς τῇ σῇ δυνάμει Ἰσμαηλίτην λαὸν κραταιῶς ὑποτάττοντες (MR I, p. 167; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 156).

³⁷ See HOLGER A. KLEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁸ Ὡς σκῆπτρον ἔνθεον προσκυνοῦμεν σου σταυρόν, Χριστέ... (MR I, p. 153).

³⁹ Οἰκουμένης ἀσφάλεια (MR I, p. 159; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 144). Let it be noted that the word *oecumene* used here is full of political connotations, as it is related to the ecumenical vision of emperor Justinian I (527–565), which later took the form of what was called by modern scholarship "Byzantine commonwealth"; see, for example, DIMITRI BOLENSKY, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe 500–1453*, London, Phoenix, 2000/1971.

⁴⁰ Πιστῶν γὰρ Σταυρὸς καύχημα, καὶ Βασιλέων κράτος καὶ στερέωμα (MR I, p. 160; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 145). See also: "The Cross is a guardian of the whole earth; the Cross is the beauty of the Church. The Cross is the strength of kings; the Cross is the support of the faithful. The Cross is the glory of angels and the wounder of demons" (Σταυρὸς ὁ φύλαξ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης· Σταυρὸς ἡ ὠραιότης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· Σταυρὸς Βασιλέων τὸ κραταίωμα· Σταυρὸς πιστῶν τὸ στήριγμα. Σταυρὸς Ἀγγέλων ἡ δόξα, καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων τὸ τραῦμα; MR I, p. 164; trans. *Festal Menaion*, p. 152).

⁴¹ The *Typika* (plural for *Typikon*) were calendars of the saints and feasts celebrated all year round, enriched with instructions on what should be performed on their feast days. On the book of *Typikon* and its development see MIGUEL ARRANZ, "Les grandes étapes de la liturgie byzantine: Palestine – Byzance – Russie: Essai d'aperçu historique", in *Liturgie de l'église particu-lière et liturgie de l'église universelle (Conférences Saint-Serge, Paris, 30 juin – 3 juillet 1975)*, Rome, 1976 (Bibliotheca Ephemerides liturgicae, Subsidia 7), pp. 43–72.

⁴² JUAN MATEOS, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église. Ms. Sainte-Croix no 40, Xe siècle. Introduction, Texte critique, traduction et notes. Tome 1. Le cycle des douze mois*, Rome, Pontificium Istitutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1962 (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 165), pp. 28–30.

emperors (νίκας τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου δωρούμενος), while the sixth asks for the emperors to get joy by being victorious over their enemies (εὐφρανον ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου τοὺς πιστοὺς βασιλεῖς ἡμῶν, νίκας χορηγῶν αὐτοῖς κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων). The same ideas are included in the prayer to be read aloud at the very moment of the exaltation.⁴³ This demonstrates that even the liturgical act of the exaltation was coloured by the imperial ideology.

The picture becomes even more interesting if we take into consideration that this is one of the ceremonies that the emperor attended in person. According to the Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies*, a ceremonial protocol composed by the emperor Constantine VII (945–959), and the *Kletorologion of Philotheos*, a treatise on court order and a list of offices composed in 899, the emperors attended the service, escorted by their entourage.⁴⁴ Taking into consideration the love of the Byzantines to relics, symbols and symbolisms, one should hardly avoid to think that this feast was a perfect chance for the imperial propaganda to portray the emperor as a God-chosen ruler by promoting the relationship between him and the most important relic of Christianity.

But why was the Exaltation of the Cross a feast so important for the Byzantine Church in the first place? The answer is probably to be found in the special political importance of the cross as a symbol in Byzantium, where it was seen as “the flag, the standard, the banner, waving over the Christian nation”.⁴⁵ As a symbol, the cross was from the fourth century onwards directly associated with Constantine the Great, mainly because of his vision mentioned above. Constantine, who was immediately after his death recognised as saint, was understood throughout the Byzantine period as the ideal emperor, whom many of his successors tried either to imitate or to associate themselves, or their dynasty, with.⁴⁶

In a hymn on the Cross, the hymnographer Andreas of Crete (ca. 660–740) relates the victory of the emperor(s) to the legend of the divine establishment of the cross as an imperial symbol through Constantine: “Give victory to the Orthodox King as You once gave it to Constantine”.⁴⁷

⁴³ See Jacobus Goar, *op. cit.*, pp. 652–653.

⁴⁴ *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris de cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. J. J. Reiske, vols. I–II, Bonn, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, 1829–1930, p. 782; *Les traités des Philothée*, ed. NICOLAS OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles*, Paris, 1972, pp. 65–235, here 222.17–25. See also HOLGER A. KLEIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–51.

⁴⁵ NIKOLAS GVOSDEV, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ This is discussed in PAUL MAGDALINO (ed.), *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries*, Variorum, Ashgate, 1994. See also GILDERT DAGRON, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–157; ALEXANDER KAZHDAN, “‘Constantin imaginaire’. Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great”, *Byzantion*, 57, 1987, pp. 196–250.

⁴⁷ Δώρησαι τῷ φιλοχρίστῳ Βασιλεῖ τὸ νίκος, ὡς Κωνσταντίνῳ τὸ τρόπαιον (MR I, p. 156). On the cross as a symbol of imperial victory see ERICH DINKLER, *Signum Crucis. Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur Christlichen Aschäologie*, Tübingen, 1967.

The political significance of the Cross is underlined by its use as oath object, as mean of safe conduct, or in imperial ceremonies,⁴⁸ as well as by the fact that from at least the tenth century it was treasured in the palace,⁴⁹ while relics were only kept in the sacristy of the cathedral of Hagia Sophia.⁵⁰ Considering that (at least some) Byzantine emperors used, or tried to do so, politically the influence of relics to their faithful subjects,⁵¹ we have every reason to believe that the Cross did not avoid such a use. There has been, for example, argued that the recovery of the Cross from the Persians was used by the emperor Heraclius (610–641) to counter reactions against his second marriage to his niece Martina.⁵²

The limits of this essay do not allow the discussion of whether this relationship between the Cross and the emperor supported the interests of the church more than those of the emperor, particularly in periods of ecclesiastical turbulence and theological controversies. What should be said here, on the basis of what has been presented above, is that the average Byzantine citizen attending the feast of the Exaltation was melodically introduced to some of the most central ideas of the imperial ideology. Given the religious character of the Byzantine society and the educational level, it is logical to think that his loyalty to the emperor was affected by that.

POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN LITURGICAL TEXTS

A closer study of Byzantine historical, hagiographical and liturgical sources shows that emperors and usurpers of the throne tried to either legitimize or strengthen their, and their dynasty's, authority by getting a member of their family canonized or by promoting themselves and their families as directly chosen and protected by God. The aim was of course to exploit the influence of the Christian rite over the Byzantine society, not only by the prestige that the canonization would bring, or by the icons and the hagiographical texts devoted to the new saints, but also through the liturgical texts that would be used to celebrate them.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere some preliminary ideas on imperial sanctity,⁵³ I confine here myself to just one, but very characteristic, example of the importance of liturgical texts in politics. The emperor Basil I (867–886),

⁴⁸ See SOPHIA MERGIALI-SAHAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–55.

⁴⁹ JOHN WORTLEY, "The Wood of the Holy Cross", 14, argues that "there is strong evidence that from at least the tenth century until 1204 the Holy Wood was conserved in the Sacred Palace, at the 'Lighthouse' church".

⁵⁰ See JOHN WORTLEY, "Relics in the Great Church", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 99, 2006, pp. 631–647.

⁵¹ See SOPHIA MERGIALI-SAHAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–46.

⁵² ANATOLE FROLOW, "La Vraie Croix et les expéditions d'Heraclius en Perse", *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 11, 1953, pp. 88–105, here 104.

⁵³ See APOSTOLOS SPANOS, "Imperial Sanctity".

founder of the Macedonian dynasty, murdered his patron Michael III (842–867), who had named him co-emperor one year earlier. Being of humble origin and as the shadow of the murder followed him, Basil –with the support of the patriarch of Constantinople Photios (858–867 and 877–886)– sought to establish a connection between his family and Constantine the Great and to promote, in various ways, the message that his family was beloved to God. After an abortive effort to sanctify Basil’s son Constantine, who died in premature age, the Macedonian dynasty reached sainthood through Basil’s daughter-in-law Theophano, who died in 893.⁵⁴ What is importance for us is that the anonymous author who wrote her Life was also asked to compose two laudatory *kanons* (this in reality means to compose an *akolouthia* on her), which he himself admits was a difficult task, as she did not have the typical virtues of a saint.⁵⁵ The order of a composition of both a Life and an *akolouthia* on Theophano demonstrates the significance of the liturgical texts in the promotion of a canonization, in this case a canonization of political interest.

Unlike Western Europe,⁵⁶ the number of emperors and royals recognized as saints in Byzantium is surprisingly low,⁵⁷ which leads to the conclusion that the church was unwilling to participate in the political games and intrigues of the emperors⁵⁸. Even though, it seems that elements of imperial propaganda entered the Byzantine ritual. For the purpose of this essay, it should suffice to highlight two examples: a *kontakion* composed by Romanos Melodos in the sixth century and the political use of the Epistle and Gospel readings in the wedding ceremony of the emperor Manuel II in 1392.

The first case is a hymn that discriminates internal enemies of the emperor Justinian presenting at the same time an imperial violent act in a positive way. It is the *kontakion* “On Earthquakes and Conflagration”, composed by the famous hymnographer Romanos Melodos (d. ca 560).⁵⁹ The composition of

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.

⁵⁵ See GILDERT DAGRON, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–203.

⁵⁶ On royal sainthood in mediaeval Western Europe see, among others, GÁBOR CLANICZAY, *Holy rulers and blessed princesses: dynastic cults in medieval Central Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁵⁷ See APOSTOLOS SPANOS, “Imperial Sanctity”, pp. 197–198; APOSTOLOS SPANOS, NEKTARIOS ZARRAS, “Representations of Emperors as Saints in Byzantine Virtual and Textual Sources”, in *Hybrid Cultures in Medieval Europe. Papers and Workshops of an International Spring School, (Europa im Mittelalter. Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik 15)*, edited by M. Borgolte, B. Schneidmüller, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, pp. 63–78.

⁵⁸ This is also shown in the case of the emperor Nikephoros II Phocas (963–969) who, entering a war against the Arabs, tried in a synod to issue a decree that those who fell during wars would be celebrated as martyrs of the Church; his proposal was refused by the patriarch and the bishops; see APOSTOLOS SPANOS, “Imperial Sanctity”, pp. 200–201.

⁵⁹ See JOHANNES KODER, “Imperial Propaganda in the Kontakia of Romanos the Melode”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 62, 2008, pp. 275–291; EVA CATAFYGIOTU TOPPING, “On Earthquakes and Fires: Romanos’ Encomium to Justinian”, in *Eadem, Sacred Songs: Studies in Byzantine Hymnography*, Minneapolis, Light & Life Publishing, 1997, pp. 125–138 (originally published in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 71, 1978, pp. 22–35).

this hymn is directly related to the Nika riot⁶⁰. The riot, which took place in 11th–19th January 532, was a reaction of the society to the high taxation of Justinian, who needed extra revenues to finance his military campaigns in both the East and the West. A good number of government and public buildings were burned through the riot, which ended in a bloodbath of the rioters in the Hippodrome.

The *kontakion* “On Earthquakes and Conflagration” was commissioned by the emperor Justinian for the reconstruction of the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, which had been burned during the riot. In this hymn Romanos presents the deeds of the rioters as a punishment of God to the Constantinopolitans. Due to the latter’s sins, says Romanos, God sent them first an earthquake, then a famine and finally the Nika riot:

The Creator delivered a first blow, and a second, but he did not find that men were becoming better –rather, progressively worse. So, he placed despair on the very altar of grace and allowed to burn the hallowed precincts of the churches, just as he once handed the sacred Ark over to the foreigners. The wails of the mob poured out in the city’s streets and churches, for fire would have destroyed everything, if God had not come and given to us all eternal life.⁶¹

As Romanos styles it, when the inhabitants of the city realized that these ‘plagues’ were the result of their sins, they started praying. The emperor, along with his wife, prayed as well and finally God showed his mercy: the riot, and thus the conflagration, came to an end.⁶² Then Justinian started rebuilding the church of Hagia Sophia, which was originally built by the saint-emperor Constantine the Great. In a number of passages Romanos speaks about punishment as a pedagogical means of God for the penance of the faithful;⁶³ it is hard to avoid thinking that this functions indirectly as an argument for the harshness in which Justinian suppressed the Nika riot.

The content of the hymn studied here could be easily understood by the congregation as follows: If necessary, God punishes us to lead us back to the way of salvation. Due to our sins we were punished with a senseless riot against the emperor. With our prayers –and, of course, those of the emperor and his wife– God showed his mercy through all that was necessary to be

⁶⁰ The riot was named after the cry of the rioters ‘Nika!’, Greek for ‘Win!’; see GEOFFREY GREATREX, “The Nika Riot: A Reappraisal”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 117, 1997, pp. 60–86.

⁶¹ Μίαν, δευτέραν τὴν πληγὴν ὁ κτίστης ἐπιφέρει, ἀνθρώπους δὲ εὐρίσκων κρείττους μὴ γινομένους, ἀλλὰ καὶ χεῖρους ἑαυτῶν, τότε ἀθυμίαν ἐπιφέρει εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν τράπεζαν τῆς χάριτος, καυθῆναι συγχωρήσας τὰ ἅγια τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὡς καὶ πρῶην ἀλλοφύλοις ἐκδέδωκε κιβωτὸν τὴν θεῖαν· καὶ ἐξεχέετο ὁ θρηνησθεὶς τοῦ πλήθους ἐν πλατείαις τε ὁμοῦ καὶ ἐκκλησίαις· τὰ πάντα γὰρ πῦρ διέφθειρεν, εἰ μὴ ἔσχον +Θεὸν τὸν παρέχοντα πᾶσιν+ ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον (Romanos, H. 54.14, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications in JOHANNES KODER, *op. cit.*, p. 281).

⁶² See JOHANNES KODER, *op. cit.*, pp. 281–282.

⁶³ See EVA CATAFYGIOTU TOPPING, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

done by the emperor to stop the punishment, that is the riot. Even the bloodbath of the Hippodrome, where some 30,000 to 35,000 people died, is thus presented as a part of God's providence and mercy. The emperor Justinian builds again the church of Hagia Sophia, getting this way related to the exemplary emperor-saint Constantine the Great, the founder of Constantinople and the first church dedicated to Hagia Sophia.

There are more hymns by Romanos including, directly or not, political ideas.⁶⁴ The fact that in these hymns Romanos "wrote at a linguistic level that was close to the vernacular language of the sixth century"⁶⁵ probably shows a willing to influence as many as possible among the faithful. Given that the popularity of Justinian had reached its nadir during the riot, such texts would undoubtedly support the rebuilding of his imperial image.

Let us now turn to the use of Epistle and Gospel readings for political purposes. Stephen W. Reinert studies such a case in an article dedicated to the political dimensions of the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos' (1391–1425) wedding ceremony in 1392.⁶⁶ As he points out, the choice of the readings that were performed at the ceremony was, most probably, based on the need for what Reinert calls "broadcasting the desired political message".

This message was directly related to the political turbulence that preceded Manuel's ascension to the throne. Although he was the second son of the emperor John V (1341–1391), Manuel was named co-emperor in 1373, due to a rebellion by his older brother Andronikos against their father. Three years later Andronikos rebelled again and imprisoned both his father and his two brothers. In 1379 John recaptured his throne but two years later he was forced to recognize Andronikos as his heir. When Andronikos died in 1385, his son John VII claimed the throne. Manuel supported his father who finally prevailed. John V died in 1391 being succeeded by Manuel. As John VII kept claiming that he was the legitimate heir of the throne, Manuel seems to have used his wedding ceremony in 1392 to promote political messages on his legitimacy.

This is how Reinert explains the fact that the readings performed at the ceremony were not those dictated by the *Typikon* but, instead, two readings full of political connotations. The Epistle reading (Hebrews 12.28–13.8) opens with the phrase "We have been given possession of an unshakable kingdom",⁶⁷ which could be easily understood by those present as referring to Manuel having taken possession of the Byzantine empire. The Gospel reading, on the other hand, begins with "He who does not enter the sheepfold

⁶⁴ JOHANNES KODER, *op. cit.*, pp. 282–285.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶⁶ STEPHEN W. REINERT, "Political Dimensions of Manuel II Palaiologos' 1392 Marriage and Coronation: Some New Evidence", in C. Sode – S. Takács (eds.), *Novum Millenium. Studies on Byzantine History and Culture dedicated to Paul Speck*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001, pp. 291–303.

⁶⁷ Βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες (Heb. 12.28; the *Jerusalemite Bible* translation, quoted from STEPHEN W. REINERT, *op. cit.*, p. 296).

by the door but climbs in another way, that man is a thief and a robber"⁶⁸, which could be understood as referring to John VII. Thus, it is logical agree with the conclusion that

“the epistle and gospel readings were carefully manipulated to stylize Manuel as John V’s legitimate and worthy successor, and John VII as a malevolent pretender whose ambitions were not only illicit, but universally apparent”.⁶⁹

CONCLUSIONS

In the short compass of this essay it was not possible to study neither more liturgical texts of political interest nor more aspects of the subject, as for example: the political sides of the so-called hymns of hate;⁷⁰ hymnography presenting the Byzantine principle of interdependence (*synallelia*) between state and church;⁷¹ the feast for the ‘Triumph of Orthodoxy’ (including the study of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*);⁷² hymnography on the Byzantine ‘political saints’;⁷³ the political usage of the liturgy by the church for its own purposes; the anti-Jewish liturgical texts, particularly those of the week before Easter, and their political effects; the relationship of liturgical texts to rhetoric, church history and hagiography.

The aim of the essay has been to lay the groundwork for a more elaborate study of the Byzantine liturgical texts from a political perspective. The cases studied here demonstrate that at least in some periods hymnographers subtly transformed, consciously or not, the liturgical gatherings into political audiences, by composing texts that strengthened the identity and the morale of their audience, and promoted, even if this was not the original purpose, the imperial image and the ideal of trust and obedience to the emperor. There

⁶⁸ Ὁ μὴ εἰσερχόμενος διὰ τῆς θύρας εἰς τὴν αὐλὴν τῶν προβάτων ἀλλὰ ἀναβαίνων ἀλλαχόθεν ἐκεῖνος κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής (John 10.1; trans. John Marsh, quoted from STEPHEN W. REINERT, *op. cit.*, p. 296).

⁶⁹ STEPHEN W. REINERT, “Political Dimensions”, p. 295.

⁷⁰ These are hymns where pagans, members of other religions and heretics are discriminated in a way that strengthens the Byzantine identity. See ARCHIMANDRITE EPHREM (LASH), “Byzantine Hymns of Hate”, in *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23–25 March 2002*, edited by Andrew Louth & Augustine Casiday, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 151–164.

⁷¹ See, for example, SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH, “Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephrem’s Hymns against Heresies”, in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, edited by William E. Klingshirn & Mark Vessey, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp. 97–114, here 110–112.

⁷² See JEAN GOUILLARD, “Le Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie. Édition et Commentaire”, *Travaux et Memoires*, 2, 1967, pp. 1–313.

⁷³ See SUSAN ASHBROOK HARVEY, “The Politicisation of the Byzantine Saint”, in Sergei Hackel, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–42; ROSEMARY MORRIS, “The Political Saint of the Eleventh Century”, *Ibid.*, pp. 43–50.

were also liturgical texts that spread ideas in favour of imperial policies.⁷⁴

The texts considered above confirm that “no later than the lifetime of Romanos Melodos, the potential for using the *kontakion* as a means of mass propaganda was realized by the emperor(s) and the ‘ruling class’”⁷⁵. This realization was used not only in the sixth century but also in later periods, when new forms of liturgical poetry were invented, mainly those of the *kanon*, the *stichera*, the *kathisma*, the *exaposteilarion* and the *apolytikion*. It may be said that these forms were even more suitable for such a use, due to their easier language, understandable to the majority and not only to an educated elite.⁷⁶

The political use of texts included in *akolouthiai* on saints and feasts is probably not unrelated to two important changes that occurred in the beginning of the eighth century, that is to say just before the crystallization of the liturgical-poetic content of the fixed liturgical cycle: the first is the reduce of public processions and the second the reduction of the significance of the homily as a mode of public speech.⁷⁷ Even though this should be examined on the basis of original sources, we could probably assume that the devaluation of these two means of communication, very suitable for propaganda, created a vacuum that new *akolouthiai* came to fill. A strengthening argument may be found in the tendency of the Byzantines to understand –even identify– themselves, both individually and collectively, through religion.

A deeper analysis of the content and the composition of liturgical texts of political content and importance, which will also take into consideration political sides of canonization, hagiography, and cult of icons and relics,⁷⁸ will

⁷⁴ There are also cases of hymns having the opposite content and result. Let us recall a number of hymns composed during or right after Iconoclasm (726–843), which indirectly present the iconoclast emperors as ‘illegal’ or ‘impious’. In a hymn dedicated to the iconophile saint Theophanes Graptos, for example, the anonymous hymnographer uses a very common means of political devaluation by presenting the iconoclast emperor as a *tyrannos*: “through your teaching, O sung by all, you defeated the tyrant” (Ταῖς διδασκαίς ταῖς σαῖς, Παναοιδίμει, ἐτροπώσω τὸν τύραννον...; MR I, p. 387).

⁷⁵ JOHANNES KODER, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ On the poetry of the *kontakion* and the *kanon* see KARIOFILIS MITSAKIS, *Βυζαντινὴ ὕμνογραφία. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης ἕως τὴν Εἰκονομαχία*, Athens, Grigoris, 1986², pp. 171–329, 465–482; KARIOFILIS MITSAKIS, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist*, München, Beck, 1967 (Byzantinischen Archiv, 11); ALEXANDER KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–860)*, in collaboration with Lee. F. Sherry – Christine Angelidi, Athens, The National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1999, pp. 384–407; CHRISTIAN HANNICK, “Exégèse, typologie et rhétorique dans l’hymnographie byzantine”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 53, 1999, pp. 207–218; THEOCHARIS E. DETORAKIS, “Κλασσικαὶ ἀπηχήσεις εἰς τὴν Βυζαντινὴν Ὑμνογραφίαν”, *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐταρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 39–40, 1972–1973, pp. 148–161 (repr. in Idem, *Βυζαντινὴ θρησκευτικὴ ποίηση καὶ ὕμνογραφία*, Rethymno 1997², pp. 184–197); NIKOLAOS B. TOMADAKIS, Ἡ γλῶσσα Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ὑμνογράφου, *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν*, 23, 1972–1973, pp. 21–42.

⁷⁷ See ALEXANDER KAZHDAN, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies*, Washington D.C., 1982, p. 88.

⁷⁸ See for example APOSTOLOS SPANOS, “Imperial Sanctity”; APOSTOLOS SPANOS, NEKTARIOS ZARRAS, *op. cit.*; SERGEI HACKEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–105; IOLI KALAVREZOU, “Helping Hands for the

demonstrate the extend of the use of liturgy as a political arena in Byzantium. Apart from shedding light into an area of Byzantine hymnography and liturgy that has not been studied carefully, such a political approach to liturgical texts will afford us the opportunity to get a better picture of the relationship between state and church in Byzantium, the operation of imperial and ecclesiastical propaganda, as well as the official political ideology in comparison, or in juxtaposition, to ecclesiastical or independent political thought.

Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of Relics in the Byzantine Court”, in Henry Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–79.