

# Introduction

This volume is based on the papers presented at the conference of the same name held in Mainz in November 2022. It is dedicated to the various dimensions of the presence of Byzantium at early modern courts. It therefore addresses, among other things, the treatment of artefacts of Byzantine provenance, the reception of Byzantium in the representation of power, and the knowledge of Byzantium available at court. The authors also examine the competition for the Byzantine heritage and the extent to which attempts were made to revive and exploit it.

Byzantium was present at early modern courts in a variety of ways. Not only the classical Roman period, but also the late antiquity and the early Byzantine period, i. e. the era of the Christian Roman emperors, offered many points of reference for the representation of early modern rulership. Emperors such as Constantine the Great or Heraclius, who recovered the Holy Cross from the Persians, as well as women such as the Saint Empress Helena provided such points of reference for early modern monarchs and princesses, for example, but not only in their religious practices or their representations as exemplary Christian rulers<sup>1</sup>.

Byzantine themes were quite present at courts in the fine arts as well as in the court opera<sup>2</sup>. The princely cabinets of art and wonders also contained numerous artefacts of Byzantine provenance – even if this origin was not always recognised. A well-known example is the agate bowl (Achatschale), one of the two inalienable heirlooms of the House of Habsburg since 1564, which was occasionally associated with the Holy Grail. It was almost certainly made in the palace workshops of Constantinople in the fourth century, and it probably reached Western Europe after 1204 as war booty, coming into the possession of the Habsburgs as part of the Burgundian heritage after 1477<sup>3</sup>.

An entirely different area of engagement with the Byzantine heritage was the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, which saw itself as the successor to the Byzantine Empire. The

sultans not only resided in the capital Constantinople from 1453 onwards, they also claimed the imperial rank, which they, in turn, denied to the Habsburgs until the seventeenth century. Instead of being recognized as Roman Emperors, the Habsburgs were occasionally downgraded to »Kings of Vienna«<sup>4</sup>. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, there was a marked shift in military balance of powers. The Ottoman Empire was now in a more defensive position and there were times when the renewal of the Byzantine Empire was envisaged, e. g. with the »Greek project« of Catharine II of Russia in the 1780s. However, the Ottoman Empire was not only a political opponent of the Christian monarchs – and by no means of all of them. It is well known that the French kings cultivated good relations with the Sultans, as they were potential allies against their common enemy, the Habsburgs<sup>5</sup>. But there was not only the political view of the Ottoman Empire and its Byzantine heritage. Scholars and other travellers were also concerned with the legacies of the Byzantine Empire they found in Constantinople and other cities of the Eastern Mediterranean and disseminated their perceptions in publications of different characters<sup>6</sup>.

It is an irrefutable fact that the Orthodox church was firmly rooted in the Byzantine tradition. Early modern rulers also found opportunities and necessities to confront and discuss the Byzantine heritage on this level. The most evident example is the ongoing discussion on the Muscovite Tsars and their claim to a Third Rome based on the *translatio imperii* from a Second to a Third Rome<sup>7</sup>. However, there were also Western European powers ruling over an Orthodox population, such as the Republic of Venice since the thirteenth century<sup>8</sup> and, especially since the 1680s, the Habsburgs<sup>9</sup>. The Patriarch of Constantinople's claim to be an »Ecumenical Patriarch«, imposed a problematic limitation on the papal primacy of the Roman Curia, while Protestant rulers and their theologians might have perceived the Patriarch as an potential ally against Rome<sup>10</sup>.

1 For the reception of Constantine cf. Bonamente/Cracco/Rosen, Costantino; Demandt/Engemann/Binsfeld, Konstantin; Girardet, Kaiser Konstantin; Goltz/Schlange-Schöningen, Konstantin.

2 For Herakleios cf. Scheitler, Metamorphosen.

3 cf. [www.khm.at/de/object/100474/](http://www.khm.at/de/object/100474/) (03.02.2025).

4 cf. Petritsch, Dissimulieren; Strohmeyer, Friede.

5 cf. Duvauchelle, François I.

6 cf. Gruber/Strohmeyer, On the Way; Kranen, Historische Topographien; Melvani, Byzantium.

7 cf. Schaeder, Moskau; Khunchukashvili, Anfänge; Kusber, Autocracy, with further literature.

8 cf. Gullino/Ivetic, Geografie confessionali; Paradoulakis, Loyal to the Republic; Dermizaki, Shrines.

9 cf. Himka/Szabo, Eastern Christians; Ransmayr, Untertanen; for Greek presences in the Holy Roman Empire Saracino, Griechen.

10 cf. Runciman, Patriarchat; for Western perceptions of Post-Byzantine Christians Tudorie/Benga, Manifold Faces.

The present volume seeks to examine the aforementioned aspects, in addition to other dimensions of engagement between early modern courts and Byzantium and its heritage, up to the eighteenth century:

- The various forms (fine arts, opera, literature etc.) of representation of rulership and propaganda
- Knowledge on Byzantium
- Influence of Byzantium-reception on politics

The chapters of the volume take up the above-mentioned thematic fields in different ways and for very different examples, covering a wide space geographically as well as temporally. They have been organized into three sections, each representing large geographical and cultural areas.

The first section is devoted to the presence of Byzantium in early modern Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, areas that were under direct Byzantine rule or at least under Byzantine influence during the existence of the Byzantine Empire. For the Orthodox population, and especially for Orthodox rulers, Byzantium remained a primary point of reference in the early modern period. This is particularly evident in the case of the Russian tsars, who not only claimed to be the legitimate heirs of the Byzantine emperors. Catherine the Great's famous »Greek project« even aimed to resurrect the Byzantine Empire as a Russian secundogeniture. In his article, Jan Kusber discusses the ideas about Greece that existed at the St Petersburg court in the second half of the eighteenth century. In doing so, he sheds new light on the background to the (never realised) Greek project.

However, less powerful Orthodox rulers also sought to place themselves in the succession of the Byzantine *Basileus*, as Hans-Christian Maner points out for the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia. During the period referred to as the »Phanariotic phase« reference to Byzantium played a pivotal role in the legitimization of rulership, for the rulers' relationship to the Church and for the sphere of education.

Yevgeniya Ignatenko's research seeks to evaluate the significance of Byzantium in the cultural and political life of the Orthodox in the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania. In the face of intensifying Catholic pressure towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Orthodox population of Poland-Lithuania turned to the Byzantine religious and cultural heritage, leading to a period of »Greek revival«. The article examines the role of Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi in this context. In particular, it demonstrates that the ideas and activities in Ostrozhs'kyi's residence had a considerable impact on the development of Ukrainian church music.

In the Middle Ages, Italy had already played a prominent role in mediating between Byzantium and Western Europe. It retained this role in the early modern period. The second section is therefore devoted to the peninsula at the centre of the Mediterranean. With Milan, Naples and Rome, three Italian capitals are taken into consideration in order to evaluate their significance for the mediation of the Byzantine heritage in the decades following the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Raf Van Rooy outlines the scholarly perceptions of Byzantium at the Sforza court. In particular, he confronts the perceptions of Byzantium of the migrant refugee Theodore Lascaris and of the Milanese humanist Bonino Mombrizio who translated Lascaris' elementary Greek grammar into Latin verse, constructed an image of the fallen Byzantine Empire, and portrayed the Duke of Milan Francesco Sforza as the saviour of the Greek migrants.

Sonja Schönaauer focuses on the so-called *Chronicon maius*, a compilation of various, mostly Byzantine historiographical sources describing the rise and fall of the Palaeologan dynasty after the reconquest of Constantinople from the Latins (1261) until the conquest of the City by the Ottomans (1453) and the first 25 years of Turcocracy. It was composed during the 70es of the sixteenth century at the instigation of the Metropolitan of Monembasia, Makarios Melissenos, who had found refuge at the court of the Spanish viceroy in Naples. Among other things, Sonja Schönaauer shows how the compilers managed to convey orthodox positions without snubbing the leading Catholic personalities.

Filip Malešević looks at the shaping of the Basilian liturgy within the Roman Curia during the pontificate of Gregory XIII. In particular, he highlights the efforts of the Cardinal Librarian and Prefect of the Congregation of the Index, Guglielmo Sirleto, to ensure that Greek patristic texts were given appropriate weight in the liturgical understanding of the curial ceremony.

The third section deals with the presence of Byzantium in the Holy Roman Empire. Since the German territories had never been under the rule of the Byzantine emperors, in the case of the Holy Roman Empire, a close relationship with the Byzantine Empire was rather based on the fact that both empires claimed to be the heirs of the late antique *Imperium Romanum Christianum*. In other words, they were founded on the same, albeit disputed, basis.

The Burgundian court was an important gateway to the Byzantine heritage and knowledge of Byzantium. As Francesco Monticini points out, the chronicle written by the Florentine merchant Jacopo Tedaldi provided the Burgundian court with many data on the last defence of Constantinople and was transformed into a medium of propaganda against the Turks that was disseminated throughout Europe.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the travel accounts of imperial diplomats provided new knowledge about the Ottoman Empire and its capital. The Late Roman/Byzantine imperial monuments of Constantinople were described thoroughly, as well as depicted in images produced by artists accompanying the delegations. Nicolas Melvani shows how these media contributed to the knowledge and reception of Byzantium in the German-speaking world, and how this knowledge affected the relations between the Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

In his contribution, Ivan Parvev spans a wide chronological arc, from the fall of Constantinople to the end of Emperor Charles VI's Second Ottoman War in 1739. As he points out,

Constantinople was certainly not a vital cornerstone in the Habsburgs' Ottoman policy. At the same time, from the point of view of state ideology, dynastic authority, and also considerations of geopolitics and military necessity, the Viennese court never neglected the former Byzantine capital. It was this ambiguity that allowed the Habsburgs to easily declare the conquest of Constantinople as important strategic goal of the monarchy in the late seventeenth century. However, the idea of a »Habsburg Constantinople« never came close to being realised.

Nevertheless, as Matthias Schnettger points out in his article, references to Byzantium were quite common in representations of the early modern imperial court. While the early modern Habsburg emperors claimed to be the successors of Constantine the Great, several empresses found a role model in his mother Helena. Thus the veneration of the Holy Cross was an important link between the imperial courts of Constantinople and Vienna.

Byzantium was also present on stage. Characters such as Justin I and Theophanu often appeared in court operas. Gwendolyn Döring, instead, focuses on Reinhard Keiser's

Singspiel *Heraclius*, which, although honouring the reigning Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, was first performed not at court but at the Hamburg Oper am Gänsemarkt in 1712.

Far from offering a comprehensive account of the presence of Byzantium at early modern courts, we hope that the contributions in this volume provide a variety of starting points for further research.

We would like to thank the Leibniz ScienceCampus – Byzantium between Orient and Occident – Mainz/Frankfurt for generously supporting not only the conference, but also the printing of the proceedings. We are very pleased that the volume will appear in the series of the Leibniz ScienceCampus. We would also like to thank Lea Milnazik and Julian Münch for their support in editing and proofreading the contributions. And, of course, our sincere thanks go to the authors who submitted their manuscripts.

We were deeply shocked to hear that Sonja Schönauer passed away in October 2023. She had sent us her manuscript a few weeks earlier. We hope that the posthumous publication of her most precious text will be in her spirit.

## Bibliography

Bonamente/Cracco/Rosen, Costantino: G. Bonamente / G. Cracco / K. Rosen (eds), Costantino il Grande tra medioevo ed età moderna (Bologna 2008).

Demandt/Engemann/Binsfeld, Konstantin: A. Demandt / J. Engemann / A. Binsfeld (eds), Konstantin der Große. Geschichte – Archäologie – Rezeption. Schriftenreihe des Rheinischen Landesmuseums Trier 32 (Trier 2007).

Dermitzaki, Shrines: A. Dermitzaki, Shrines in a Fluid Space. The Shaping of New Holy Sites in the Ionian Islands, the Peloponnese and Crete under Venetian Rule (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries). Mediterranean Art Histories 6 (Leiden, Boston 2022).

Duvauchelle, François I: Ch. Duvauchelle, François I. & Soliman le Magnifique. Les voies de la diplomatie à la Renaissance (Paris 2009).

Girardet, Kaiser Konstantin: K. M. Girardet (ed.), Kaiser Konstantin der Große. Historische Leistung und Rezeption in Europa (Bonn 2007).

Goltz/Schlange-Schöningen, Konstantin: A. Goltz / H. Schlange-Schöningen (eds), Konstantin der Große. Das Bild des Kaiser im Wandel der Zeiten. Beihefte des Archivs für Kulturgeschichte 66 (Köln, Weimar, Wien 2008).

Gruber/Strohmeyer, On the Way: D. Gruber / A. Strohmeyer (eds), On the Way to the »(Un)known«? The Ottoman Empire in Travelogues (c. 1450-1900). Studies on Modern Orient 36 (Berlin 2022).

Gullino/Ivetic, Geografie confessionali: G. Gullino / E. Ivetic (eds), Geografie confessionali. Cattolici e ortodossi nel crepuscolo della Repubblica di Venezia (1718-1797). Temi di storia 146 (Milano 2009).

Himka/Szabo, Eastern Christians: J.-P. Himka / F. A. J. Szabo (eds), Eastern Christians in the Habsburg Monarchy (Edmonton 2021).

Khunchukashvili, Anfänge: D. Khunchukashvili, Die Anfänge des letzten Zarentums: politische Eschatologie in der Moskauer Rus' zwischen Byzanz und dem Heiligen Römischen Reich. Europa im Mittelalter 42 (Berlin, Boston 2023).

Kranen, Historische Topographien: A. Kranen, Historische Topographien. Bilder europäischer Reisender im Osmanischen Reich um 1700. Berliner Schriften zur Kunst (Paderborn 2022).

Kusber, Autocracy: J. Kusber, Autocracy as a Form of Political Theology? Ruler and Church in Early Modern Muscovy (1450s-1725). In: M.-D. Grigore / V. N. Makrides (eds), Orthodoxy in the Agora Orthodox Christian Political Theologies Across History (Göttingen 2024) 83-100.

Melvani, Byzantium. N. Melvani (ed.), Byzantium in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: Constantinople and its Afterlife: Topography, Institutions, Reception. BOO 31 (Mainz 2025).

Paradoulakis, Loyal to the Republic: D. Paradoulakis, Loyal to the Republic, Pious to the Church. Aspects of Interconfessionality in the Life and Work of Gerasimos Vlachos (1607-1685). Coexistence and Conciliation between Greek Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in Venice (Göttingen 2022).

Petrish, Dissimulieren: E. D. Petrish, Dissimulieren in den habsburgisch-osmanischen Friedens- und Waffenstillstandsverträgen (16.-17. Jahrhundert): Differenzen und Divergenzen. In: A. Strohmeyer / N. Spannenberger (eds), Frieden und Konfliktmanagement in interkulturellen Räumen. Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie in der Frühen Neuzeit. Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa 45 (Stuttgart 2013) 145-162.

Ransmayr, Untertanen: A. Ransmayr, Untertanen des Sultans oder des Kaisers. Struktur und Organisationsformen der beiden Wiener griechischen Gemeinden von den Anfängen im 18. Jahrhundert bis 1918 (Göttingen 2018).

- Runciman, Patriarchat: S. Runciman, Das Patriarchat von Konstantinopel. Vom Vorabend der türkischen Eroberung bis zum griechischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg (München 1970).
- Saracino, Griechen: S. Saracino, Griechen im Heiligen Römischen Reich. Migration und ihre wissenschaftliche Bedeutung. Wissenskulturen und ihre Praktiken 19 (Berlin, Boston 2024).
- Schaeder, Moskau: H. Schaeder, Moskau das dritte Rom. Studien zur Geschichte der politischen Theorien in der slawischen Welt (Darmstadt 1957).
- Scheitler, Metamorphosen: I. Scheitler, Die Metamorphosen des *Heraclius*. In: D. Martin / K. Vorderstemann (eds), Die europäische Renaissance. Rezeption und Übersetzung eines barocken Bestsellers. Frühe Neuzeit 175 (Berlin 2012) 51-66.
- Strohmeyer, Friede: A. Strohmeyer, Der Friede von Zsitvatorok 1606 und die Friedensschlüsse der Türkenkriege. In: I. Dingel et al. (eds), Handbuch Frieden im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit / Handbook of Peace in Early Modern Europe (Berlin, Boston 2021) 969-983.
- Tudorie/Benga, Manifold Faces: I.-A. Tudorie / D. Benga (eds), The Manifold Faces of the East. Western Images of the Post-Byzantine Christian World in the Age of Reformation. Eastern Church Identities 18 (Paderborn 2024).