

An Unnoticed Rus' Embassy to Constantinople in A.D. 1200

The Novgorodian merchant-boyar Dobrinja Jadrejkovič, later to become Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod, described in his pilgrim tale, «A Pilgrim Book», a miracle that he witnessed in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. He writes that a jewel and pearl encrusted cross taller than two men miraculously rose above the high altar and then miraculously lowered again without the lamps on the ends of the cross being extinguished. In the context of locating this wondrous happening chronologically, he testifies that the event happened «during matins on Sunday, the twenty-first day of the month of May, the feast of the holy emperor Constantine and of Helen, his mother, in the year 6708, while Alexis was emperor, and John was patriarch, on the feast of the Council of the Three Hundred Eighteen Holy Fathers and during the embassy of Tverdjin Ostromirič who came as an embassy from Grand Prince Roman to Emperor Alexios along with Nedan, Dmazhir, Demetrij and Negvar the ambassador».¹

The Byzantine chronological and calendar notices in the text are all consistent. In A.D. 1200 (6708 in the Byzantine reckoning, as the text gives it), the commemoration of Sts. Constantine and Helen, 21 May, fell on the Sunday before Pentecost, that is on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the Council of Nicea. And, in fact, Alexios (III Angelos) was emperor and John (X Kamateros) was Patriarch at Constantinople in that year, as the text says.² The crowd in St. Sophia that would have witnessed this miracle would have been large, for the commemoration of Sts. Constantine and Helen was a major holiday in Constantinople, dedicated, as it was, to the memory of the Christian founder of the city. The main celebrations of this holiday were appointed for the Great Church (that is, St. Sophia), at the Church of the Holy Apostles, and at the nearby Church dedicated to Sts. Constantine and Helen at the Cistern of Bonus. The major celebration seems to have normally been held at Holy Apostles, «where their tombs are», and the service normally involved a procession there by the emperor and Senate.³ In May of 1200,

¹ Kniga Palomnik: Skazanie mest svjatykh vo Caregrade Antonija Archiepiskopa novgorodskogo v 1200 godu / Ed. Ch. M. Loparev // Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik. CII6., 1899. T. 51. P. 13—15.

² See: *Grumel V. La Chronologie*. Paris, 1958. P. 258, 316, 321, 323, 359, 436 (*Traite d'Etudes Byzantines*. T. 1).

³ *Le Typicon de la Grande Eglise* / Ed. J. Mateos. Rome, 1962—1963. T. 1. P. 296—97; *Synaxarion Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* / Ed. H. Delehaye. Brussels, 1902. Cols. 697—700; *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum, Novembris: Constantinus VII Porphirogenitus. De cerimoniis*. Bonn, 1829. P. 532—535.

however, the emperor was not in the capital; he was campaigning against Vlach rebels in the Balkans,⁴ and it is perhaps his absence that might explain Anthony's attendance at St. Sophia that day rather than at the Church of the Holy Apostles. The fact that in 1200, the holiday of Sts. Constantine and Helen fell on the Sunday of the Fathers of the Council of Nicea, a commemoration of some importance in its own right normally held at St. Sophia,⁵ probably also added a reason for holding the major liturgical ceremonies of the day in the Great Church.

But what is this embassy from «Grand Prince Roman» that Anthony talks about as visiting Constantinople in 1200? Roman Mstislavič (Prince of Vladimir-in-Volynia 1170—1205, Prince of Galič 1199—1205) is (irregularly) accorded the title «Grand Prince» (and even «Autocrat of All Rus'»!) in the Galician Chronicle.⁶ The embassy must be from him. Despite the fact that the names of the emissaries listed by Anthony are known from no other sources, the «Domazhirichi» («sons of Domazhir») that he mentions are known as an important boyar clan in Galicia,⁷ one which might well have supplied personnel for diplomatic missions from the principality.

The embassy is certainly to be connected with the negotiations referred to by the Byzantine historian Nicetas Choniates as happening at about this time. According to Choniates, the Metropolitan of Kiev inspired an alliance of sorts between Byzantium and the «hegemon of Galicia» (that is, Prince Roman Mstislavich of Volynia and, recently, of Galicia) against their common enemies, the Pechenegs (Cumans).⁸ These nomads of the west Pontic steppe were harassing travel on the lower Danube, something important to Galicia's trade. They were also attacking Byzantine territory in support of the Bulgaro-Vlach uprising in the Balkans led by Ivanko. As Choniates notes, the alliance was, thus, in the interests of both parties. In allying with Byzantium, Prince Roman was tightening bonds with the traditional enemy of Hungary, the chief threat to his newly acquired territory; Byzantium, on the other hand, was acquiring a potentially useful counterweight to Hungary. During the reign of Alexius III, the Byzantine Empire and Hungary were in very bad relations, with Hungary apparently backing the Bulgaro-Vlachs in their revolt against Byzantine rule. The Hungarians were likely retaliating for Alexius II's blinding of Emperor Isaac, the Hungarian king's brother-in-law.⁹ The alliance was of some effect. Roman (the «hegemon of Galicia») attacked the Pechenegs soon after 1200, although his reasons for doing so were more likely the alliance forged with the Pechenegs by his enemies in Rus', part-

⁴ *Brand C. M. Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180—1204. Cambridge (Mass.), 1968. P. 122, 131.*

⁵ *Le Typicon...* T. 2. P. 130—33.

⁶ See: *Polnoe Sobranie Russkich Letopisej. SPb., 1908. T. 2. Col. 715 et al. (Hypatian manuscript).*

⁷ *Pašuto V. T. Očerki po istorii galicko-volynskoj Rusi. M., 1950. P. 144, 225; cp.: Pašuto V. T. Vnešnjaja politika Drevnej Rusi. M., 1968. P. 201.*

⁸ *Choniates. Historia. Bonn, 1835. P. 691—692. On the Byzantine context of these negotiations: Brand C. M. Byzantium Confronts the West. P. 132—133 (which, however, confuses Anthony of Novgorod [still a layman at this time] with the metropolitan of Rus').*

⁹ *Ibid. On Hungary's threats to Galicia's place in the state system of Rus'. See: Pašuto V. T. Vnešnjaja politika Drevnej Rusi. P. 176—182, 200—201. Perhaps the threat of Roman's Byzantine alliance was responsible for Hungary's lack of interference when Roman took over the neighboring Galicia in 1199.*

icularly the clan of princes he had driven from Kiev, rather than his ties to Byzantium.¹⁰

There is, however, another topic that Grand Prince Roman's emissaries to Constantinople would have wanted to discuss while in the Byzantine capital, perhaps even in conjunction with the alliance. In 1196 Roman had put away his first wife, Predslava, daughter of the Prince of Kiev, and attempted to force her to take the veil; Roman was apparently arranging a second marriage at about this time.¹¹ An important prince divorcing his wife against her will and remarrying would demand intervention at the highest ecclesiastical level, that is to say, at the Patriarchate in Constantinople. This would be the case no matter whether Roman wished to marry a woman of aristocratic Volynian background, as Pašuto argues, or, even more, a bride related to the Byzantine imperial family, as Fennell suggests, namely, a daughter of the deposed Emperor Isaac Comnenus by his first wife (and thus a step-daughter to the sister of the King of Hungary).¹²

There are, then, at least two important reasons why Prince Roman of Volynia and Galicia might have sent an embassy to Constantinople in the year 1200.

¹⁰ Cp.: *Fennell J.* *The Crisis of Medieval Russia, 1200—1304.* New York; London, 1983. P. 25—27.

¹¹ *Ibid.* P. 24—25.

¹² See: *Pašuto V. T.* *Očerki po istorii galicko-volynskoj Rusi.* P. 194; *Fennell J.* *The Crisis of Medieval Russia.* P. 24—25; *Baumgarten N. de.* *Généalogies et mariages occidentaux des Rurikides russes du Xe au XIIIe siècle.* Rome, 1927. Table V, N 47. (*Orientalia Christiana.* 94). Neither identification is convincing. The fact of a Russian princely marriage with the daughter of an emperor would certainly have good documentation in the sources. On the other hand, a non-princely wife would clearly not have had the standing and authority to act successfully as regent for her orphaned sons after Roman's death as happened after 1205. See: *Hrycak P.* *Halyc'ko-Volyns'ka deržava.* New York, 1958. P. 55—56. Another explanation seems more likely, namely that the person who eventually became Roman's wife was a Byzantine woman related in some way to the imperial court.