

The Byzantine Turks 1204-1461

Rustam Shukurov



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Cover illustration: A fragment of a fourteenth-century Byzantine miniature representing a complex mix, Greek and Turkic, in contemporary Byzantine everyday life: the first from the left in the back row is (allegedly) Meletios the Achaemenid – a baptized “Persian” from Anatolia; two persons (presumably Greeks) wear the “Scythian” headdress of *sarāghūch*, while two others wear Byzantine hats; the entire group is placed in an urban (presumably Constantinopolitan) environment as they appeal to Christ, thus symbolizing the common denominator of Byzantine civil and Christian religious affiliation amongst the ethnocultural diversity. (State Historical Museum, GIM 80272, Synodal Gr. 429, fol. 28v; photo courtesy of the State Historical Museum in Moscow).

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In memoriam
Muhammad Shakūrī Bukhārāī
1925–2012



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In the hot spring of 1998, I had the privilege and pleasure to present a paper at the Speros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism in California headed by Professor Speros Vryonis. It was my earliest attempt to discuss the role and place of Asians in Byzantine society using the tools of onomastic study. My paper focused on a rather limited and specific case of the Empire of Trebizond. In the course of discussion, Professor Vryonis suggested in particular that my approach had to be assessed in a much broader historical context. This exchange of ideas, which is so memorable for me, and Professor Vryonis' thoughtful remarks, for which now I have an opportunity to thank him, have become the starting point of the present book.

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FIGURE 5 “Scythian” warriors with obvious Mongoloid features. The Chinese inscriptions on warriors’ helmets, probably, indicate their origin from the Golden Horde. Frescoes in the church of St. John Chrysostom in Geraki, thirteenth–fourteenth c. (after Moutsopoulos, Nikolaos. “Σινικό ιδεόγραμμα σε τοιχογραφία του Γερακιού,” *Byzantiaka* 18 (1998), p. 28, figures 5–6).

Introduction

Throughout most of its history, Byzantium was in a state of permanent struggle with its eastern neighbors for political and cultural supremacy, for the control of the flow of money and goods in the eastern Mediterranean; on occasion this struggle turned into large-scale armed conflict, comparable to the “world wars” of recent history. For many centuries the most dangerous and skilled enemy, in the Byzantine mentality, was located in the East. The empire generally managed to maintain the status quo with Sasanian Iran. The subsequent era of Muslim conquests, however, significantly reduced Byzantium’s territory and greatly weakened its political and economic potential. Byzantium took more than three centuries to recover from the onslaught of the Muslims and to partially restore her position. In the eleventh century, Byzantium suffered another blow from the Turkic peoples who flooded into the Balkans and Anatolia. By the end of the eleventh century, the empire appeared on the verge of annihilation, but in the twelfth century, as in former times, it found the strength to stabilize the situation and restore its prestige. In the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, however, confrontation with the Turkic peoples entered a new phase. By the second half of the fourteenth century, the Byzantines had essentially lost the struggle. This present study is devoted to the final period in the history of the Byzantine empire, a period that ended with its defeat at the hands of the Turkish invaders.

The destruction of the Byzantine world by the Turks is one of the Middle Ages’ most essential phenomena. Why Byzantium was unable to withstand the Turkic invasion and what were the real causes of Byzantium’s historical defeat in the contest with the Turkish Muslim world are fundamental unresolved questions. This book attempts to formulate new ways to answer those questions. To address the major problem, it is necessary to understand how the encounter with the alien Turkic culture affected Byzantine civilization and what the specific features of the Turkic invasion were that made the Turks victorious. These questions cannot be answered by traditional approaches alone.

With the inception of Byzantine studies as a discipline in the seventeenth century, relations with the Turks occupied a central place in the writings of the historians of Byzantium. No generalizing approach to Byzantine history could

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