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The idea of dedicating a supplement of the *Opuscula Historiae Artium* to such a fundamental issue for the medieval world as the relations between the East and the West came from a very exact cultural context: that of the Bohemian and Moravian lands. It's undeniable, in fact, that the history of this border land, crossroads between the East and West, led to this writer's desire to rethink, once again, the crucial question *Orient oder Rom?*, although with a different sense than Joseph Strzygowski intended in 1901.[1] The East as intended here includes not only Asia Minor but also, and above all, the Byzantine Empire. As the title – *Byzantium, Russia, and Europe* – suggests, however, a third player has entered into the debate. It is Russia, which continues to be present in the Czech situation (and not only Czech) as a possible – and feared – alternative to the Western model. It's difficult to determine how much is atavistic fear, which is the part of a political propaganda – the fear of Russia is one of the arguments used by right-wing parties – and how much is this question still relevant today. It is, however, undeniable that, at least in the rhetorical reality, the country seems to construct its own identity, whether we like it or not, between Russia and the West, ever since its inception in 1918 when the question *Rusko nebo Západ?* was posed by the founding fathers of the Republic Karel Kramář and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.[2] Furthermore, we cannot forget those 40 years in which the country was directly part of the zone of Soviet influence, especially with the events of August 1968 and the subsequent occupation.

The Czech context seems, in this sense, an ideal starting point for reflecting on the construction of the myth that divides the world into East and West, thanks to the "filter" of Russia. To be clear, the space given to Russia in this volume will be relatively marginal, at least in appearance, since only one essay is dedicated entirely to it. Despite this, its significance is essential to the economy of this book because it introduces into the debate the idea of a historiographical filter, of a mental space, that determines our view into the past. Since the 19th century, when art history was established as a modern discipline, Russia would be by choice (or by calling, as Slavophiles may say) and by tradition perceived as the direct and undisputed heir to the Byzantine world and bridge to East Asia.[3] In all probability Russia would therefore always be the principal filter through which Europe will look to Byzantium, in a tangle of political and dynastic interests. It would also ultimately be from the country of the Czar that the passion for the expressive and essential images painted on wood, that would be called in the Russian way "icons", would come to the West in the first decades of the 20th century.[4] Byzantine art would be thus perceived, in a more or less conscious way, as a space unthinkable without Russian mediation.

Following political and social reforms – from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 to the transformation of the autocratic state into a constitutional monarchy in 1905[5] – a slow and unrelenting transformation began in Russia, which shortly before the war presaged that the country would progressively be "integrated" into a "greater Europe".[6] The year 1917, this essential junction of history, dragged the country into the Bolshevik utopia[7] that turned Russia into the image of an East to be feared, dangerous but fascinating for some.[8]

After the partial change of perspective in the years of the Second World War, the Cold War would canonize this negative view of the Soviet empire. Despite years of thaw and, more importantly, the fall of the wall, this view has changed little. The Russia of Yeltsin and especially of Putin have continued to inspire fear in the Western viewer, as well as a feeling of diversity and the sensation of being confronted with an Eastern entity that can never really be understood.[9] I don't want to evaluate the legitimacy of this 20th century perception here, nor do I want to enter into the debate regarding the current Russian situation – even if my view of policy and respect for human rights in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia is anything but positive – I would like, instead, to underline the close relationship formed in the West between the fear of an Eastern power, in the end little-known, and the perception of the East *tout court*.

I think this feeling of a break, or essential difference, to this day identifies an important part of studies of the East and its interactions with the West. The East continues to perplex; however, an imaginary iron curtain is the base of a view on the past identified by division. The consequences of this are seen clearly, for example, when it is projected onto the perception of the universe of late antiquity where, long before this really happened, some have tried to split Roman unity around the fateful line that separated the Greek and Latin worlds.[10] In the description of the following centuries, the division of the Italian peninsula between Byzantines and "Westerners" is reflected on maps where – almost as if images of the Cold War were projected – zones are established as being under the influence of one or the other side. The concrete contacts between workshops, which by every account circulated with relative ease in Italy and the empire, were transformed into "Byzantine influences", a vague term that in the end closes the debate without actually giving an answer.[11] And if the birth of the 13th century koinè leaves no

room for doubt as to incessant and fundamental exchanges, we remain often with the idea of a "Byzantinized" West.

On the other side, from Jules Labart to Otto Demus, in order to outline it on the *longue durée* only in broad terms, the magic and marvelous Byzantium becomes the principal and most perfect source of inspiration for the fallen West, where all that is good is basically only a reflection of the one true capital of the medieval Mediterranean, Constantinople.[12] Also in this case, however, the myth of the two worlds endures, of two opposite, if at times complementary, realities.

I am almost tempted to say that, thanks to Moscow, Rome and Constantinople are opposed to each other as, if the reader will pardon the comparison, *Minas Tirith* and *Minas Morgul* of J. R. R. Tolkien's epic, two cities conceived as twins but steadily distanced from one another.

The historiographical reality is obviously much more complex than this basic dichotomy, but I remain nevertheless convinced that the frame of reference is that of a bipolar world, despite the fact that since the "end of history", with the collapse of the USSR, paradigms are changing.[13] One of the most direct indicators of this is the constantly growing interest in the Islamic world and a certain tendency to abandon Byzantium as if, with the decline of Soviet power, even its "natural ancestor" had lost its importance. This doesn't seem to change anything in the basic paradigm: it's as if the West needed a second side in order to be able to construct itself. And so it matters little whether we speak of Byzantium or of Islam, the process put in place is that of inventing an historical (and therefore current) identity in constant opposition to the Other. As Marcello Rotili demonstrated recently, no different were the constructive mechanisms of the *Gens langobarda* that, to create unity and to endure in the midst of the natives, had to construct and reconstruct a common past made of myths and especially of opposition to the local identifying traditions.[14]

This volume starts from the desire to reflect on a traditional and important question by proposing a different paradigm: not of looking at the past as a reality composed of blocks – which at times come in contact or collide – but of focusing on the tension formed between cultural transfer and local identity. The idea of exchange, of relationship, which is the basis of this volume – whether it be cultural, commercial or military – thus contributes to building a vision of the past made by a dense network of complex contacts. The panorama that emerges from this analysis is therefore that of the East's and West's, that meet and clash, but with no iron curtains.

The first three essays in this volume, which concentrate on the period of the birth of Christian art, propose to construct a more complex vision of the late antique and high medieval space. In his excellent essay, Jean-Michel Spieser points out how, freed from the forest of historiographical prejudices, the foundation of Constantinople, officially presented as the twin city of Rome, should instead be seen as a choice of modernity. Long prepared by "history" – Spieser speaks of deep roots – it is expressed in the person of Constantine. The East and the West are complementary entities that, in the course of the 1st centuries of our era, changed roles. Above all, however, despite some local differences, it is the unifying element that has a key role in the construction of the empire of Constantine and of its capitals in the 4th century.

A much more united and synergistic 4th century is also what is profiled in the essay by Ivan Foletti and Irene Quadri. From Georgia passing through Thessaloniki to Rome, similar figurative schemes appear, schemes that are effective and decidedly innovative for the nascent Christian art. The opposition identified very early on – that would then have a great following – was that between Rome and "the others", in the sense of an antiquary attitude of the Urbs that, once the advances of the 4th century were integrated, would transform them into immobile identifying standards. Rome would certainly remain receptive even in the following centuries to *input* coming from outside worlds, for the full duration of the Middle Ages, however, it would make systematic use of its own patrimony of late antiquity in the image of that conservatism that, according to Spieser, had pushed Constantine to search for a new capital, more dynamic and open to modernity.

The essay of Vladimir Ivanovici, on the other hand, aims to reflect on the manner in which the great theological centers developed different sensibilities that ended up creating sacred spaces that were clearly different in their perception of light. After an initial phase of unity, the theological discourse begins to describe – around Constantinople and in various Western hubs – totally different visions of light. Expression of divine presence in the great Eastern centers became a secondary element compared to the true light of sacred spaces that in the West came from the presence of relics.

The second part of this volume – made up of the essays of Maria Raffaella Menna, Zuzana Frantová and Kristýna Pecinová and Denise Zaru – focuses on the mutual contacts between the East and West in the course of the 13th century, but also on the manner in which the Eastern identity of the empire is perceived in the following century. With Maria Raffaella Menna we see the fascinating saga of the Franciscans, true cultural mediators between the conquered Constantinople, the Latin kingdoms and Rome. Under their influence, the Kalenderhane Camii of Constantinople is "Italianized", while from the meeting with artists from Constantinople grow up in Rome the figure of Jacopo Torriti. From the same tangle of incessant exchanges between Italy, Cyprus, Constantinople and the Holy Land, some images were created for which it is nearly impossible to determine a certain origin. This is the case of

the *Madonna of San Tommaso*, held today in Brno, whose provenance Frantová and Pecinová recognize, after decades of nationalistic historiography, to be of the south and, very probably, from Apulia. The image is, however, so "international" that it cannot be attributed with absolute certainty to anywhere other than to the "united" Mediterranean of the 13th century. Still unknown is the reason this image ended up, probably as early as in the 14th century, in Brno. Likely a gift from Charles IV to his brother Jan Jindřich, the image demonstrates the emperor's undoubted interest in all that came from Italy. The essay of Denise Zaru, however, poses the question in an even more complex way. The scholar demonstrates in a convincing way that the famous chapel of the Reggia Carrarese was decorated by Guariento with motifs typical of imperial Byzantine manuscripts. Zaru's careful analysis indicates how the choice of such a prestigious model should be read in connection with the Carraras' desire to join the imperial party of Charles IV. The choice of a lexicon near to the Macedonian manuscripts – expressed furthermore with continuous narration – is therefore the conscious claim to an imperial nature of Byzantine origin, a true guarantor of the *traslatio*. It is a fact that becomes even more convincing when we consider the chapel of the Apocalypse of Karlštejn, or the staircase of the same castle where continuous narration appears yet again – an evident sign of imperial identity. In this sense, we come to wonder how much, for Charles IV, objects of Roman, southern and Byzantine provenance were part of a same space of the tradition, heirs of the empire, no matter if they were from the East or West. Even the icons brought from Italy would assume then a new and more complex meaning.

The image that arises from these writings is one of a dialogue between two worlds. In the Empire, however, perhaps following the Ottonian experience, the art of Constantinople appears as one of the elements of an imaginary past. Here, despite the distance, an Eastern object contributes to the construction of imperial prestige as much as Roman *spolia*.

The second, shorter part of this volume opens with an essay from the historian Pavel Rakitin, whose work is dedicated to the perception that Russia had of itself as undisputed heir of Byzantium. The writings of the Russian scholar show how much this construction, first of all political and doctrinal, penetrated even the widest sphere of intelligentsia during the 19th century. In this way, whatever the real knowledge of the Eastern Empire was, Byzantine heritage became a factor of national identity in Russia. The essay of Chiara Croci describes a phenomenon very similar to that studied by Rakitin; however, she comes to a conclusion diametrically opposed to those formulated in Russia. It regards the way in which the mosaics of the baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte in Naples were studied: in Naples, where the proud city wanted to demonstrate its belonging to the earliest Christian sites of Italy, the term "Byzantine" became, in a fully Vasarian perspective, synonymous with decadence and disdain. Through almost identical mechanisms – those of nationalistic construction – the same concept can assume opposite values according to political necessity. To conclude this volume there is, finally, the essay of Valentina Cantone and Silvia Pedone. Built around a historiographical reflection on the pseudo-kufic as cultural mediator between Byzantium and Islam, this essay allows the measurement of the impact of all stages of the development of the Western culture in its view of the East. At the same time, the article of Cantone and Pedone in this volume opens the discussion by indicating how much each historical reality – the empire of the East in this case – cannot exist without the other. In the Macedonian era syncretic cultural elements were born that express the conscious and visible dialogue between the empire and Islamic culture.

As a special issue of a journal, this volume certainly doesn't have the ambition, nor the material space, to provide a complete look at everything with such a complex reality. Its desire is therefore rather to be a stimulus to continue and reflect on the realities made by exchanges, interferences and contamination with a look more careful at the impact of our historicity on the writing of History.

Ivan Foletti

Notes

1 Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1901. For Strzygowski cf. Jaś Elsner, The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901, *Art History* 25, 2002, pp. 358–379.

2 See the position of Kramář and of Masaryk cf. Tomáš G. Masaryk, Pomoc Rusku Evropou a Amerikou [Aid to Russia, through Europe and America] (1922), in: Věra Olivová (ed.), *Otevřít Rusko Evropě. Dvě stati k ruské otázce v roce 1922* [*Open Russia to Europe. Two written about the Russian question in the year 1922*], Praha 1992, pp 8–21. – Tomáš G. Masaryk, *La Russia e l'Europa. Studi sulle correnti spirituali in Russia*, ed. Ettore Lo Gatto, Bologna 1971 [1913], 2v. – Elena Chinyaeva, *Russian outside Russia. The Émigré Community in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938*, München 2001, pp. 46–50. – Martina Lustigová, *Karel Kramář. První československý premiér* [*Karel Kramář. The first prime minister of Czechoslovakia*], Praha 2007.

3 See Xenia Muratova, La riscoperta delle icone russe e il 'revival' bizantino, in: Enrico Castelnuovo – Giuseppe Sergi (edd.), *Arti e storia del Medioevo. Volume quarto: Il Medioevo al passato e al presente*, Torino 2004, pp. 589–606. – Ivan Foletti, *Da Bisanzio alla Santa Russia. Nikodim Kondakov e la nascita della storia dell'arte in Russia*, Roma 2011.

4 For the historiography of the "icon" and his arrival in the West see François Boespflug, La redécouverte de l'icône chez les catholiques. Le cas français, in: Jean-Michel Spieser (ed.), *Présence de Byzance*, En Crausaz 2007, pp. 31–54. – Foletti (note 3), pp. 85–172. – Michele Bacci, *Vieux clichés et nouveaux mythes: Constantinople, les icônes et la Méditerranée, Perspective*, 2, 2012, pp. 347–364, 419–421.

5 See the summary of Michel Heller, *La Russie et son empire*, Paris 1997.

6 See Ivan Foletti (ed.), *La Russie et l'Occident. Relations intellectuelles et artistiques au temps des révolutions russes.* Université de Lausanne 20–21 mars 2009, Roma 2010.

7 The term "utopia" for the power of the USSR is of Michel Heller and Aleksandr Nekritch, *L'utopie au pouvoir. Histoire de l'Union sovietique de 1917 à nos jours*, Paris 1982.

8 For the fear and fascination inspired by the USSR compare the example of the reception of Soviet cinema in Switzerland see Gianni Haver, Merveilles en quarantaine: l'arrivée du cinéma soviétique en Suisse, in: *La Russie et l'Occident* (note 6), pp. 197–204.

9 I use the term "Putin's Russia" as a tribute to Anna Politkovskaya (Anna Politkovkaja, *Putin's Russia*, Milan 2005).

10 In this regard see Jean-Michel Spieser, En guise d'introduction: Byzance et l'Europe, in *Présence de Byzance*, Jean-Michel Spieser éd., Gollion 2007, pp. 7–29.

11 For the exchanges between the various cultures in Italy in the early Middle ages compare Chris Wickham, *Framing the early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean: 400–800*, Oxford 2007.

12 Jules Labarte, *Histoire des arts industriels au Moyen Âge et à l'époque de la Renaissance*, 3 vol., Paris 1864–1866. – Otto Demus, *Byzantine art and the West*, New York 1970.

13 I borrow the term of "end of history" from Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1992.

14 Marcello Rotili, I Longobardi: migrazioni, etnogenesi, insediamento, in: Giuseppe Roma (ed.), *Il Longobardi del Sud*, Roma 2010, pp. 1–77.