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**Recent Studies on  
Past and Present  
IV.  
Tradition and Invention**

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Edited by

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# Contents

• <b>Editors' Note</b>	5
• <b>I. Heritage and Innovation</b>	7
<b>I.1. Legacies, Images and Expectations</b>	
Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals Bogdan-Petru Maleon	9
The Scenes of the Apocalypse of Sucevitza Monastery Arcadie M. Bodale	33
La personnalité et l'époque de Sigismond de Luxembourg à travers les ouvrages des historiens germaniques de Transylvanie du XIX <sup>e</sup> siècle Loránd Mádly	65
The Holy See and the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church during the Years of Austrian Neo-Liberalism Ana Victoria Sima	73
<b>I.2. Concepts, Patterns and Representations</b>	
Histoire, vérité et dialectique. L'Identité et l'Autre Horațiu-Marius Trif	93
Philosophy of History Issues in the Work of J. G. Herder Vlad Mureșan	105
L'Autre dans l'hypostase de l'Américain Elena-Andreea Trif-Boia	115
Balkan Didactic Literature in the Post-Communist Era Adriana Cupcea	127
• <b>II. Change and Continuity</b>	139
<b>II.1. Modern Cultural and Political Evolutions</b>	
Considerations concerning the Typography of Buda and the Culture from Wallachia and Moldavia Anca Tatay	141
Les Élités Politiques de la Roumanie et la Diplomatie Française: le cas de Ion C. Brătianu Anamaria Vele	157
The Representatives of the Oradea Vicarage in the Eparchial Synod of Arad between 1900 and 1918 Marius Eppel	165



The Bells and the “Great War“, or about the Action of the Requisition of Bells Belonging to the Romanian Transylvanian Community Elena Crinela Holom	175
A “Nightingale” of the Literary Pages Magazine (Turda 1934-1943): Yvonne Rossignon Nicoleta Botezatu	187
<b>II.2. Constructing and Surviving Identity</b>	
The Jews from Cluj in September 1940 Artur Lakatos	197
La communauté macédo-roumaine dans la politique étrangère de la Roumanie Ionuț Nistor	205
The 1972 Bucharest Meeting between Nicolae Ceaușescu and János Kádár László Wellmann	219
The USSR and the process of de-Stalinization Mihai Croitor, Sanda Borșa	229
<b>• III. Border Concepts and Border Affairs</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>III.1. Expansion and Regression</b>	
From Comitatus Confinium to the Border Mark Ioan Marian Țiplic	245
Il notaio anonimo del re Béla di Ungheria e la schola episcopale di Vercelli Tudor Sălăgean	263
Venetian and Habsburg Coordinates of Anti-Ottoman Crusading in the Mid 1470s Alexandru Simon	269
<b>III.2. Trade, Profit and Land</b>	
Handel und Händler im siebenbürgischen Osthandel de 16. Jahrhunderts Mária Pakucs–Willcocks	299
Greek and Aromanian merchants, protagonists of the trade relations between Transylvania, Wallachia, Moldavia and the Northern Italian Peninsula Cristian Luca	313
The Danube Navigation in the Making of David Urquhart’s Russophobia Constantin Ardeleanu	337
<b>• List of Authors</b>	<b>353</b>

# Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals

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BOGDAN-PETRU MALEON

**T**HE TESTIMONIES of Byzantine chroniclers suggest that the number of emperors facing a violent death was greater than those whose end occurred as a result of natural causes. According to statistics, among the 88 sovereigns who ruled, as main monarchs or associates, 37 went in silence, 3 lost their lives in accidents, 5 perished in battles, 30 died due to other forms of violence and 13 were forced to retreat to monasteries<sup>1</sup>.

The brutal death of the sovereigns was a reality that must be analyzed starting from the specific ways of ending life in Middle Ages and namely in Byzantium.

**I**N THE urban world, such as that of the city on the banks of the Bosphorus, most often death took violent forms, which had had diverse causes, from the common domestic aggressions to the suppressing of life as a result of various crimes or political unrest<sup>2</sup>. From the latter perspective it must be said that the population in Constantinople was particularly active on the political level in some of the most critical moments in the history of the Christian Eastern Empire. The citizens of the New Rome had a major constitutional role as they represented one of the courts called to decide upon the succession to the imperial throne<sup>3</sup>. By virtue of that power the metropolitan residents often sanctioned governmental abuses, sometimes pushing the challenging spirit to opposing some emperors<sup>4</sup>.

**H**OWEVER, MOST of the violent deaths occurred, in a legal framework, as a consequence of capital punishment imposed by court decisions. It should be mentioned that the Byzantine world dealt numerous

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abuses, due to the principle according to which the legal system was part of the imperial administration and the officials had judicial powers in their area of administrative competence<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the involvement of sovereigns in dispensing justice, one can say that there were real executions, deliberate and ritual inflictions of death after legal trials and sentences, and that there were deaths arbitrarily ordered by emperors, without real processes, especially in case of suspicion of treason<sup>6</sup>. This direct way of intervening in giving sentences is to be explained by the fact that, along with the establishment of the principality, the sovereign's legal role greatly increased on the expense of public and impersonal nature of justice<sup>7</sup>.

For establishing the penalty after rigorous organized trials, the social conditionings were taken into account when sentencing to death. Within the Roman Empire there was a distinction among different categories of convicts, with a preference for the exile in case of representatives of upper classes<sup>8</sup>. Thus, although over the imperial pre-Christian period violence on the body was commonly used, it was applied according to the social status of the convict<sup>9</sup>. For example, beheading was not applied to all those sentenced to death, but it was reserved only for citizens<sup>10</sup>. Individuals with such a status were decapitated<sup>11</sup> outside the cities, while those with inferior status were crucified<sup>12</sup> or burned alive<sup>13</sup> thus offering real public shows<sup>14</sup>. In Roman thinking, the main reasons for the punishment of crimes were *correction and reformation, maintenance of social stability, prevention of future crimes by other persons*, the latter being an exemplary dimension of the punishment<sup>15</sup>. For the last reason, the ruling class in Rome encouraged the population to massively take part in public bloodshed, enhancing social solidarity among the citizen body by putting to death non-persons such as prisoners of war, insolent slaves and rebellious subjects<sup>16</sup>.

During the transition period from paganism to Christianity the main methods of executions, were beheading and burning on the pyre, but the Christian imperial legislation did not link the nature of the punishment with the social status of the guilty one<sup>17</sup>. The *Codex Theodosianus* did not differentiate between the capital punishments applied to the upper classes and those used for the lesser ones. Though the trend was to limit the number of capital punishments, several patricians, accused of treason, were burnt on the pyre during that period<sup>18</sup>. After the formalization of Christianity, emperors showed clemency by releasing prisoners on the occasion of religious holidays, especially on Easter<sup>19</sup>, in agreement with the concept of *humanitas*<sup>20</sup>. It must be said that the Byzantine society's attitude towards the capital punishment differed from other contemporary ones<sup>2</sup>, as exile or monastic confinement and/or mutilation was preferred rather than sentencing to death.

NONETHELESS, WHEN capital punishments were enforced, the executions were organized to emphasize the exemplary nature of the punitive act<sup>21</sup>. Brown noted one paradox: once Christianity was adopted, the physical body became object of compassion, especially for the poor, and subject to cruel punishments such as mutilation, through which the society emphasized the indelible traces of punishment<sup>22</sup>. That contradiction was an apparent one, as the phenomenon of multiplication of such corporal punishment can be explained just by changing the attitude towards the body, which, from the Christian perspective, should have been punished but not suppressed. Just from the point of view of religious morality, it is understandable why the Isaurian *Ekloga* cancelled the social distinctions related to the types of capital punishment and provided a large number of mutilations<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, the distinctions, in terms of areas of executions, were preserved. Representatives of the elite were sent to death outside the walls of the city, unlike the less honorable individuals who found their end within the city, during real public performances<sup>24</sup>.

Dangerous criminals and rebels were beheaded, hanged, impaled, and sometimes burned on the pyre in public places, with the authorities struggling to popularize such events<sup>25</sup>. The open nature of these punitive moments is closely linked to the fact that power mainly manifested itself during public shows, whether they were chariot races, triumphal parades or religious processions, where the subjects interacted with the emperor in a ritualized manner and saw him as a guarantor of social order based on law. In this respect, the publicity around the executions was intended to symbolically restore or fortify the monarch's prestige and authority.

The competitors defeated in the struggle for power were considered usurpers<sup>26</sup> and the celebration of victories against them became more elaborate during the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>27</sup>. In classic antiquity, the punitive procedure included infamous procession on the city streets of those guilty of political crimes and exposure of their corpses for several days. The public ordeal represented a show which involved intense participation, for the convict's humiliation was an essential part of the scenario of executing the penalty<sup>28</sup>. When the ones who had reached for supreme power were being punished, the crowd gathered on both sides of the road and launched various nauseating jokes and insults<sup>29</sup>. The executions performed in the arena suggested the idea of solidarity, as if the whole community was punishing those who had disturbed the social order<sup>30</sup>.

In Rome, the corpses of those guilty of serious crimes, especially those who had conspired against the power, had to be as visible as possible. Sometimes only the heads were exposed, after their removal from the body. In the cases of some leaders of riots they were carried through the city while the corpses were thrown into the Tiber. In the Byzantine Empire the scenario of punishing the pre-



tenders to the throne was in fact a ritual of inversion, during which the false emperor was subject to public disapproval. They were the opposite of triumphal ceremonies held at Constantinople, which caused a massive participation of the population and were organized in an almost liturgical manner. The scenario included the introducing to the public of the prisoners and the prey, and cheers in honor of the emperors who defended Orthodoxy<sup>31</sup>. Those guilty of political crimes were subject to public denigration, being forced to parade riding a beast of burden, and the public was allowed to take part in the flagellation preceding the execution. Some spectators even attacked the convicts by beating them, by snatching the hair, by splashing hot water or by maculating them with various residues<sup>32</sup>. Exposure of nudity gave the people the opportunity to exercise its dominance over the convict, both symbolically and actually.

A new vision on the nudity, which differentiated the Christian Middle Age from classic antiquity, had arisen<sup>33</sup>. After the adoption of Christianity, the naked body in general and the male one in particular were seen in terms of body depreciation, especially with the transformation of the original sin into a sexual one<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the antique positive conception on physical beauty and the concerns about finding the ideal forms of representation<sup>35</sup> gave way to a negative attitude on body exposure. It is known that, according to medieval thinking, the male nude signified the destruction of a condition based on an order guaranteed by clothing. The clothes had an important symbolic role, especially in the context of some ritual moments when their main purpose was to testify the authority of those who received them, while their taking off equaled the dispossession of power, the downgrading<sup>36</sup> (according to Theophylact Simocata, when preparing to take refuge in Asia under the pressure of the rebellion led by the centurion Phocas, Mauricius took off the imperial insignia and abandoned the purple mantle<sup>37</sup>, which equaled to giving up the elements that confirmed him as holder of power<sup>38</sup>). In cases of dishonorable processions, the body's exposure was accompanied by a gestural disorder, which made the male nude be seen as an expression of a breaking from the previous condition.

The typological correlation between the scenario of the triumph and that of lowering the position of false rulers has a twofold explanation. On one hand, all adversaries, whether foreign or domestic, were considered enemies of the imperial order, by virtue of the concept of universal monarchy. On the other hand, there was a special relationship between rulers and subjects, provided by the punitive spectacle. It gained a highly ritualized aspect that determined an extremely effective way of expressing the people's social dependence<sup>39</sup>. In addition, one can speak of an irrepressible and self-amplified tendency of the crowd to watch the putting into practice of punishments, as the individuals were invariably potential persecutors, eager to cleanse the community of its impure elements, usually identified in traitors who opposed the traditional order.



WHEREAS IN classic antiquity, individuals were unequal on the social level from birth to death<sup>40</sup>, Christianity established a new hierarchy among the dead, based on their belonging to the sacred dimension<sup>41</sup>. Both the way in which one died and the ritual aspects that symbolically marked the departure from this world thus mattered. In the Byzantine world, figures of power received impressive public funerals, whereas the funerals of common individuals took place in an intimate framework<sup>42</sup>.

THE RITUALS held for the transition of the emperors to the world beyond exceeded in splendor those organized for any other representatives of the imperial family. They were comparable only to the cheers on the occasion of enthronement; and, just like them, were performed by and for the people<sup>43</sup>. Solemn evocations of the personal virtues of the deceased ruler and celebrations of the imperial power were staged. The sovereigns had only temporarily held the supreme dignity. Therefore, beyond the perishable body, the absolute idea of *basileia* had to be exalted<sup>44</sup>.

In Eastern Christendom, the concern for the great passing marked, in fact, a Christian's entire life, but, in the moments following death, a strong ritual condensation occurred. The funerals were divided into three phases. The first phase took place in the house and consisted in washing and dressing the body. The second was represented by the funerals in the church. The last one was held in the cemetery, where the burial was performed<sup>45</sup>. For the individuals who died in a violent way, as a result of a capital punishment handed down by courts or emanating from the sovereign's will, those moments were seriously disturbed, and the whole funeral scenario could have been perverted.

In an excellent study on the funeral ceremony of the Byzantine emperors, Patricia Karlin-Hayter related the dual nature of the rituals held on that occasion to an antithesis between the typically official organized funerals and the so-called *funérailles impériales négatives*, held for the emperors deposed in a brutal manner<sup>46</sup>. The latter topic has not yet received a monograph, though it was approached in studies on political ideology and of thanatologic nature. Both the funerals organized for the emperors ending their lives while still on the throne and those for the deposed emperors were held in Constantinople, the theatre for all public ceremonies since the beginnings of the Byzantine Empire. Both types of events emphasized the fact that inequality before death was also a consequence of the manner death had occurred and determined the way the rituals held on that occasion were organized. From this point of view the comprehensive approach of the *negative funerals* should start from the model of the *official funerals*.



THE BYZANTINE ruler's death was preceded by the so-called *pre-funeral rites*<sup>47</sup>. These rites began as early as the enthronement and continued throughout the reign, with the mortal nature of the holder of supreme dignity being signified by *akakia*. The Roman people were the main censor of the imperial power. Their mission was to constantly remind the sovereign of the fleeting nature of his power and life. The rulers periodically ascertained the support they enjoyed by the way they interacted with their subjects during various public shows. Among these, a good opportunity was presented by the chariot races on the Hippodrome, that were more ceremonies of power meant to establish a special bond between sovereign and his subjects, than mere sporting competitions<sup>48</sup>.

Death itself was announced by *agony* during which religious and aulic rites were organized<sup>49</sup>. For emperors charged with tyranny and usurpers who had failed in the struggle for power, the final end came with extreme suffering, caused by the violence applied on the body<sup>50</sup>. It is known that in premodern thinking the body was a key vehicle of communication. Its destruction signified the cancellation of personal identity<sup>51</sup>. According to the Christian concept, there was a strict correlation between the carnal existence and the committed sins, which involved punishing the body and even dismembering it. Fragmentation of the bodies had a positive connotation only for saints<sup>52</sup> and the most hallowed relics were their skulls and right hands<sup>53</sup>. This applied also for different parts of the bodies of Christian Western emperors<sup>54</sup>. While these segmentations had pious incentives and took place after the funeral ritual, the dismantling of the convicts' bodies equaled the eternal damnation and in these cases the lack of integrity was interpreted as a reversal of the perspective of resurrection<sup>55</sup>.

The Christian thinking adopted and interpreted, according to its rigor, the ancient concept that body symmetry was an expression of the inside perfection<sup>56</sup>. An illustrative example in this regard was provided by Eusebius of Caesarea, for whom Constantine the Great's natural beauty and exceptional bodily capacities illustrated his spiritual qualities<sup>57</sup>. More-over, the very bodily integrity was meant to reflect the power unit and vice versa, so that during his thirty-two year reign the emperor's body was not challenged by any disease or weakness. It remained that of an athlete<sup>58</sup>.

An indissoluble link between the appearance of carnal cover and the manifestation of any form of power had been established, due to the correlation between physical form and the virtues allowing the emperor to exercise control over the people. These facts may provide us with an explanation for why Byzantine authors paid special attention to the manner in which they portrayed their emperors, attempting to connect physical to princely features<sup>59</sup>. One may even say that any interference with the rulers' bodies led to a serious disruption or even



canceling of their abilities to perform tasks, especially when parts of the body, which symbolized the exercise of power (such as the right hand or the eyes) were targeted.

**I**N EXCEPTIONAL cases, summary execution of emperors accused of tyranny took place. They involved compressing agony. Those who ordered such measures took care that the victims suffered intensely before death. A striking example in this respect comes from November 602, after Mauricius (580-602) was overthrown by Phocas (602-610)<sup>60</sup>. According to Theophylact Simocatta<sup>61</sup>, the new ruler first had the former emperor's two sons beheaded by the sword in his presence. Then, Mauricius was also decapitated<sup>62</sup>. The Byzantine chronicler explained that scenario as *the murderers inflicted advance punished on Maurice through the death of his children, but accepting the misfortune philosophically, called on the supreme God and repeatedly uttered «Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgment is just»*<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, the source showed that the former ruler refused that one of his children's nurse replace him with another child she was taking care of<sup>64</sup>, so that the former sovereign *became superior even to natural laws* before stepping into the life beyond<sup>65</sup>.

Violent death came by means of short-term, but extremely brutal, pain and, in many cases, illustrated the violent measures taken by the victims while in power. When emperor Leo V's (812-820) punitive appetite became unbearable, several conspiracies came to life. One of them, initiated in the capital, was disclosed to the emperor in 820. After a brief trial, some plotters were blinded, others were mutilated, their hands and legs were cut off. Then, they were exposed on the streets to frighten the potential fans of similar actions<sup>66</sup>. However, those who had escaped disguised themselves as clerics and attacked the emperor at the dawn of Christmas day, when he was attending service at the Chapel of St. Stephen in the Great Palace. Despite his resistance, Leo's arms, legs and head were cut off (he died at 4.15 on a Tuesday morning)<sup>67</sup>.

Michael III (842-867)<sup>68</sup> was killed in the imperial bedroom, at 3 o'clock in the night of September 23-24, 867<sup>69</sup>, by the conspirators led by Basil the Macedonian<sup>70</sup>. Co-emperor Nikephoros II Phocas (963-969) was assassinated on the night of December, 10, 969<sup>71</sup>, in the resting room that he had specially arranged in the Great Palace<sup>72</sup>. He had assumed an austere way of living and used to sleep on the floor of the room, which initially confused the ones who came to kill him, but, once found, the emperor was reprimanded and then slaughtered, while he resigned himself to raise a prayer<sup>73</sup>. All these examples have in common the speed they were performed with and the cover of secrecy provided by the night.

**T**HE TYRANTS overthrown after popular movements ended their lives in real public ordeals. Some of them had a highly developed form, intended to emphasize the political and social fall of the former sovereign. Such a terrifying agony was destined for emperor Phocas (602-610), regarded by Byzantine chronicles as one of the cruelest tyrants ever to rule in Constantinople. He had seized power in the uprising of 602 and continued to summarily execute his opponents, causing discontent throughout the entire Empire. The end of his reign came as a result of a riot in the capital (the demes of Greens played an important role in it), which occurred simultaneously with an insurrection started in Africa under the command of Heraclius, son of the homonymous exarch<sup>74</sup>. He took advantage of the chaos in the Empire during the last years of Phocas' reign and organized fleet in order to seize the Byzantine capital<sup>75</sup>. As the Western fleet approached, the leaders of the riot arrested Phocas in the palace (October, 5, 610) and dragged him towards the harbor, where the insurgents' ships had been accosted for two days<sup>76</sup>. Immediately after Phocas was captured, the imperial insignia were confiscated. The purple robe and the crown were replaced with chains and an iron necklace around his neck. According to Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, on brief dialogue took place on board Heraclios' ship. Phocas was accused of bad governance. Then, the new ruler ordered that Phocas' right arm be amputated at the shoulder joint, his genitals cut off and be affixed to poles<sup>77</sup>.

Another sophisticated execution was the one ordered by Michael II (820-829), the beneficiary of Leo V's violent overthrow in 820. He faced a large-scale rebellion led by Thomas the Slave, who had been crowned in the territory controlled by Arabs<sup>78</sup>. In mid-October 823 the rebellion was crushed. Thomas was subjected to an exemplary torture. The emperor stepped on his neck and had his arms and legs being cut off and the body impaled, while Thomas was howling: *Spare me, you who are the true Emperor*<sup>79</sup>. The failure of Thomas' wide insurrection had a great significance for the Empire, as it was the last major revolt of the themes in Asia Minor<sup>80</sup>.

From the point of view of physical suppressions resulted in the dismantling of bodies, the public humiliation tended to replace the death penalty. Michael II himself decided that, after his rival's the exemplary punishment of Thomas, the humiliating exposure in Michael's triumph and exile were sufficient penalties for Thomas' supporters<sup>81</sup>. The rise to the throne of the Macedonians was followed by the introduction of some new principles meant to secure the succession to the throne. Thus, although the Byzantine monarchy did not become a hereditary one, extremely violent executions can seldom be found in this process of political transition<sup>82</sup>.

Even before the mid 800s, the ritualization of the punitive act was sometimes preferred to the destruction of the body, as the former was thought to provide



a better image of the symbolic distance between winners and losers. After Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) returned to the throne in spring 705<sup>83</sup>, he snatched Leontios (695-698) out of his monastic confinement (the latter had overthrown Justinian and inflicted nasal mutilation upon him) and captured Leontios' successor Tiberius Apsimarus (698-705)<sup>84</sup>. On February 15, 706, Justinian organized the public execution of the former rulers, now considered usurpers<sup>85</sup>. Leontios and Tiberius were chained and carried through city streets in a parade aimed to provide an exemplary punishment and to insult them before the eyes of the people<sup>86</sup>. At the same time, Justinian scored in his subjects' eyes his restoration through the celebration of the triumph from the imperial lodge in the Hippodrome. He waited here for the two convicts who were dragged to the throne of the emperor, who trampled their necks, while the people was psalmodizing *You have set your foot on the asp and the basilisk, and you have trodden on the lion and the serpent!*<sup>87</sup>, thus forecasting the fate of the two. The emperor held them in this humiliating position during the first race, after which they were sent to Kynegion to be executed, as the ruler did not want to risk their returning in the struggle for power, if left alive<sup>88</sup>. Through this public 'triumphal liturgy' Justinian II stressed out his own legitimacy and the sacrilege committed by the two usurpers who had fraudulently occupied the imperial throne<sup>89</sup>.

All the symbolic elements of the defamatory procession and extreme suffering combined in Andronicos I (1183-1185)'s removal, as his ordeal was not a strictly organized execution, but the gross manifestation of his subjects. A character with a legendary aura, he had reached the throne as co-emperor. Afterwards, he had taken advantage of the aversion of the citizen's of the capital towards the Italian settlers, which led to a real massacre in April 1182<sup>90</sup>. He became full-fledged emperor in September 1183, when he ordered Alexios II (1180-1183), the legitimate successor to the throne, to be strangled<sup>91</sup>. After great violence (his opponents were executed or mutilated and their goods were confiscated), broad categories of the population became hostile to Andronicos<sup>92</sup>. The the population of capital rediscovered its major role in limiting the power of the monarch<sup>93</sup>. This change of attitude worked in Isaac Anghelos' favor (1185-1195; 1203-1204), one of those targeted by the emperor's executions. Isaac took advantage of the ruler's absence from the capital and conquered the throne<sup>94</sup>. The last Comnenos on the Byzantine throne was arrested and carried in an infamous parade before his successor's eyes, while the crowd mocked at him. His right hand was cut off and then he was thrown into the prison and left to suffer of thirst<sup>95</sup>. After a few days one of his eyes was taken out. Andronicos was then sited on a mangy camel and thus carried on the city streets with the body covered in rags. To Niketas Choniates, the main narrator of these events, the view offered a chance to reflect on the passing nature of power, as the body, so muti-

lated and mocked at, did not keep any of the imperial dignity shown just a few days before<sup>96</sup>. Eventually, the former sovereign was brought in the Hippodrome. There he was left to the mercy of the Latin mercenaries who put an end to this long ordeal<sup>97</sup> (the dismantling of the bodies that took place on the occasion of many of the abovementioned executions would have been impossible without the experience provided by the practice, throughout the entire Byzantine history, of dissecting the bodies of the executed criminals<sup>98</sup>, facts which also imply the existence of a specialized staff, able to perform such amputations with great precision<sup>99</sup>).

**T**HE DEATH of the emperor was followed by a ritual stage consisting of two phases that ran in parallel: the *mortuary toilet* of the deceased and the public *announcement of death* to various social strata<sup>100</sup>. The first one paid a special attention to the body of the late emperor<sup>101</sup>, while the official announcement of his death to the people was most often a matter of routine which preceded the acclamation of his successor<sup>102</sup>. These parts of the funeral ceremony were extremely important in relation to the actual succession as well.

The period between the sovereign's death and his funeral was a critical one, because during this period social life was suspended<sup>103</sup>. The interregnum could have led to a temporary censure of laws, which would have further determined an outbreak of violence, such as the urban riots, considered the most obvious threats for the stability of the Byzantine state<sup>104</sup>. These risks explain the special concern of officials to avoid moments of imperial vacuum, which is why the presence of lifeless bodies in the Sacred Palace (considered the centre of government<sup>105</sup>) was regarded as an expression of power continuity, given also the belief that the physical body of the emperor was deemed an element of social cohesion strong enough to extend prolong the deceased's power after his death<sup>106</sup> (Eusebius's statement, according to which Constantine the Great *reigned even after death, and the customs were maintained just as if he were alive*<sup>107</sup>, should be interpreted from this perspective).

In return, it should be stressed out that Byzantium did not share the concept of *rex qui nunquam moritur* (which prevailed in the Latin medieval world). The political body of the monarch did not live after the physical disappearance of the monarch<sup>108</sup>. Some authors even believe that Ernst Kantorowicz exaggerated the importance of the king's *two bodies* in the Western world, as the contemporaries, in particular the clergy, had a more concrete representation of their sovereigns' bodies<sup>109</sup>. Still, although Byzantine emperors did not have 'two bodies', their officials tried to avoid political complications. Usually the announcement of the emperor's death was made only after his successor had ascended to the throne<sup>110</sup>.



In case the transition was peaceful, the sovereign was crowned on the basis of a succession agreement (i.e. while still alive, the emperor appointed a co-emperor), unlike in the cases where the emperor was accused of tyranny and deposed.<sup>111</sup> The major difference between the two 'models' of access to the throne was inextricably linked with the manner in which the monarchs ended their mundane existence and were led on the last journey. An associate-basileus automatically became the sole holder of the power at the death of his predecessor, because he had risen to power while the main emperor was still alive, with the approval of the senate, people, army, and had been crowned by the patriarch. The 'inauguration' of the 'new' emperor was generally determined by the way in which the successor managed to present himself in antithesis with the deceased emperor, during the imperial funeral<sup>112</sup>. In case of a violent dethronement, the adversaries of the former monarch took care that their candidate was immediately proclaimed and crowned emperor (the ceremony assured the access to the whole imperial power<sup>113</sup>).

This is why Phocas was quickly acclaimed emperor and then crowned emperor by the patriarch in the church of St. John in Hebdomon<sup>114</sup>. He immediately rushed to capture and kill Mauricius, scared by the warning the factions launched in the Hippodrome, which had reminded him that the former sovereign was still alive<sup>115</sup>. The same perspective also explains why Heraclius was proclaimed emperor while still on his ship in the harbor. Patriarch Sergios then crowned him in the St. Stephen chapel in the Sacred Palace, on October 5, 610<sup>116</sup>, before his predecessor had been disposed of. Genesis's chronicle reads that, after Leo V's murder, the sailors heard a voice announcing the emperor's death, which reveals the plotters' concern to publicize the disappearance of the former emperor<sup>117</sup> (Leo's body was deposited in the sewage receptacle of the courtyard, while, Michael Amorean, the leader of the conspirators, was released from prison). The length of the imperial vacancy played against the plotters. Thus, still according to Genesis, they hurried to proclaim their favorite *sole Emperor to all the people so that he could put in order the most urgent aspects of the situation, as they needed to secure their safety*<sup>118</sup>.

In order to avoid hostile reaction from the supporters of the slain sovereign and to speed up the recognition as successor of the one who had been behind the murder, John I Tzimiskes (969-976), Nikephoros Phokas' killers immediately showed the head of the late ruler to the imperial guard<sup>119</sup>. Though he quickly put on the purple shoes and was proclaimed emperor by his followers<sup>120</sup>, John I was refused entry into the Hagia Sophia (where he should have been crowned) by patriarch Polyeuctos (956-870)<sup>121</sup>. Eventually, the patriarch agreed to give him the crown in return for penitence and the promise to exile empress Theophano, accused of plotting for the assassination of her late husband<sup>122</sup>. This case and

the other abovementioned examples indicate that during the political upheavals in the Byzantine Empire, the publicizing of the emperor's death was essential for the acceptance as successor of his victorious rival.

**T**HE FUNERAL announcement was always followed by the *exposure of the corpse*<sup>123</sup>. While the late emperor had been alive, the whole court had revolved around his *cubiculum*. The aulic hierarchy was constructed in relation to the distance from the physical presence of the monarch. The interaction with the sovereign was strictly regulated and the subjects were not allowed to look straight into his eyes or to address him directly<sup>124</sup>. After his death, although only representatives of the people were allowed to see the deceased emperor<sup>125</sup>, the impact of the dead body expanded to the entire system and the late emperor was mourned in consequence (in particular if his rule had been beneficial for his subject, even though clergymen criticized excessive mourning as being incompatible with the faith in resurrection<sup>126</sup>). The *Life of Constantine* provides us with an impressive description of the reactions caused by the emperor's death. The soldiers in the imperial guard tore their clothes off<sup>127</sup>, while the people in the capital fell prey to pain, some even *expressing their inward anguish of soul with groans and cries while others were thrown into a sort of daze, as each one mourned personally and smote himself, as if their life had been deprived of the common good of all*<sup>128</sup>.

The bodies of tyrants and usurpers were exposed in a dishonorable manner in the aim of generating strong negative feelings. When political changes were the result of some conspirators acting in secret (and not as representatives of popular movements), the physical destruction of the bodies of the murdered emperors and public display of certain parts of their bodies was essential for the success of the defamations.

Phocas' mutilated body was carried through the city<sup>129</sup>, starting from the Augusteum Forum<sup>130</sup>, on Mese (the capital's main road, used for triumphal processions<sup>131</sup>). Known for his harshness, Leo V had previously punished even those convicted of petty crimes, by amputating their hands or feet or other parts of the bodies, which he then often used to expose in the streets, causing the dissatisfaction of his subject<sup>132</sup>. Eventually, the emperor himself posthumously received a treatment similar. The conspirators dragged his mutilated body out of the Great Palace and into the Hippodrome, through the Skyla gate<sup>133</sup>. Leo's body was carried naked along the way by a donkey<sup>134</sup>. In the Hippodrome, the assistance (most probably provided by the crowd already gathered for the Christmas service in the Hagia Sophia<sup>135</sup>) could see the former emperor's naked and mutilated body as a visible expression of his fall from office as a result of his arbitrary leadership. After the show in the Hippodrome, the horribly mutilated body was hanged by harness and carried in the streets<sup>136</sup>. Although the assassination of



Nikephoros II Phokas was not viewed by all Byzantines as a legitimate act, the ensuing confusion led to the abandonment, for an entire day, of the beheaded body of the soldier-emperor in the snow covering one of the courtyards of the Great Palace<sup>137</sup>.

The most frequently exposed parts of the imperial bodies were the skulls of the beheaded<sup>138</sup>. On one hand, the head signified the whole body. On the other, the faith in the supernatural powers of the skull (as the chamber of the soul) was still live. The latter belief lasted for several centuries, generating the desire to take over the opponents' heads as talismans, as means of controlling their souls<sup>139</sup>. Throughout Byzantine history, the possession of skulls illustrated full victory over the defeated.

During the battle of Abydos (April, 13, 989<sup>140</sup>), Bardas Phocas died of a heart attack. The supporters of Basil II (976-1025) cut off his head and then his body, into pieces. The head was taken to Basil<sup>141</sup>. Removed from his office of strategos of the Italian tagmata, Georgios Maniakes rebelled. In late 1042 (or in early 1043), Maniakes proclaimed himself emperor in Italy<sup>142</sup>. He was killed in the battle of Ostrovo. His opponents cut off his head and took it to their commander as a trophy<sup>143</sup>. Before the return of the army, Maniakes' head was sent to Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055), who had it *impaled at the top of the Great Theatre [Hippodrome], suspended in mid-air for all men to see, even at a distance*<sup>144</sup>. Such was the fate of many other heads of fallen emperors dethroned or defeated.

The heads of Mauricius and his five sons were brought to Phocas to convince him that they were dead<sup>145</sup>. Theophanes Confessor shows that they were exposed for several days on a stand in Hebdomon where *the inhabitants of the City would go forth and view them until they began to smell*<sup>146</sup>. Phocas' execution too ended with his decapitation. His head was stuck in a spear and exposed to public view<sup>147</sup>. After the final victory of Constantine V (741-775) over the usurper Artavasdos, the triumphal entry into Constantinople of the former (November 2, 743) was marked by the summary execution or mutilation of the leaders of the defeated party<sup>148</sup>. Theophanes Confessor claims that the emperor killed many such leaders, blinded a numberless crowd, and cut off the arms and legs of several other rebels. In order to show the people of the capital that the revolt was really over, the head of the main leader of Artabasdos' supporters was hung for three days by the Million<sup>149</sup>. 'During' the negative funerals, the exposure of the mutilated bodies of the dethroned emperors or of parts of them (namely the skulls) was the main way to underline the evil nature of their reign and to generate solidarity around the new ruler.

THE POWER of the sovereigns in Constantinople manifested itself mainly through public shows: imperial processions that crossed the city on a new ruler's enthronement, celebrations of triumph over the enemies, pilgrimages to shrines and during the ceremonies involved by the most important holidays<sup>150</sup>. Until they were separated from the imperial insignia and exited their ceremonial framework that was meant to celebrate supreme power, the political life of the monarchs went on. From this point of view *leaving the imperial palace*<sup>151</sup> symbolized the transition from the sphere of power to the place of eternal rest. The emperors deposed in a violent manner were, however, quickly evacuated from the sacred area of the imperial palace and rapidly dispossessed of the insignia of power.

During the official funerals, *the procession to the area of eternal rest* was magnificent<sup>152</sup>. All the factors that had decided the emperor's rise were present at the end: the demes (cheering the ruler's corpse), the members of the senate members (in the forefront of the participants<sup>153</sup>, together with the successor to the throne<sup>154</sup>) and the army (represented by the imperial guard<sup>155</sup>). According to Byzantine thinking, the connection between body and soul was so strong that, after death occurred, the soul remained sympathetically linked to the physical remains of its former partner<sup>156</sup>. It can be said that the body was not a prison of the soul, but that the latter was in exile beyond the carnal cover. All these considerations explain why the actual transfer of power took place with the entry into the place of eternal rest and with the laying down of the body into the grave<sup>157</sup>. Violent death meant a break with the state of dignity given by the *basileia* and the reason for which some suppressed rules were buried anonymously, in the night (e.g. the case of Nikephoros II Phokas<sup>158</sup>).

For the monarchs that had ended their existence at the head of the empire, *the rites inside the mausoleum* and the *laying of the corpse* into sarcophagus marked the end of the process of transmission of power<sup>159</sup>. From Constantine the Great up to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century almost all emperors who died while still on the throne were buried in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople<sup>160</sup>. Since the 10<sup>th</sup> century the sovereigns and their families' members often preferred other places for burial<sup>161</sup>, in the sanctuaries they had founded. During the last period of the empire this tendency generalized<sup>162</sup>. Constantine the Great and his heir endowed the church of the Holy Apostles with the relics of the apostles Timothy, Luke and Andrew. The founder and his successors were buried in the mausoleum that he had built within the cruciform church<sup>163</sup>. Since the beginning, the joining of the two spaces, the place of worship that housed the precious relics and the imperial necropolis, symbolically suggested the symbiosis of Roman ideology and Christian faith, exemplified by the title of *isapostolos* assigned to the rulers of the Byzantine State.



This necropolis became the point of reference in the sacred geography of the Christian monarchy, so that the emperors who died far from the capital were also brought here. Theodosius I (379-395) died on January 17, 395, in Milan, where his proper funerals were held, but his body was taken to Constantinople and interred in the mausoleum of Constantine at the Apostoleion on November 9, the same year<sup>164</sup>. Theodosius's successor, Arcadius (395-408), built a separate funerary structure at the church of the Holy Apostles, the so-called *South Stoa*, a cruciform building attached to the south transept of the church. Theodosius I, Arcadius and Theodosius II (408-450) were buried in this new construction<sup>165</sup> (Theodosius I's other son, Honorius (395-423), emperor of the West, founded a mausoleum, near the tomb of the first of the Apostles, attached to the church of St. Peter in Rome, built also by Constantine the Great<sup>166</sup>).

Until the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the custom was to dispose of the bodies of tyrants and usurpers in water or fire, elements that had both a purifying and an evil role. From the Christian perspective, the meaning was to annihilate the bodies by entrusting them to the gloomy sea abyss or the consuming fire. Such measures were taken at certain critical moments in the history of Byzantium, when the entire state edifice of the state was threatened.

The Nika riot in 532<sup>167</sup> led to the destruction of a large part of the city and caused a great number of dead<sup>168</sup>. The apogee of the rebellion was reached when the crowd proclaimed of the nephews of the former emperor Anastasius I (491-518), the patricians Hypatius and Pompeius, as legitimate successors to the throne and Hypatius received the imperial insignia<sup>169</sup>. Justinian I (527-565) turned to the army<sup>170</sup>. The interventions of Belisarius and Mundus in the Hippodrome defeated the rebellion<sup>171</sup>. After the victory, Hypatius and Pompeius were arrested and beheaded. Their bodies were thrown into the sea<sup>172</sup>. The corpse of the proclaimed emperor was brought back by the tide to the sea shore. Justinian ordered its burial among other executed rebels and putting on this grave an inscription which marked Hypatius as usurper. After a few days, Justinian allowed Hypatius' sons to take his body and bury it in the Martyrium of St. Maura<sup>173</sup>.

After Mauricius and his five sons were decapitated, their corpses were thrown into the sea, According to Theophylact Simocatta, the streams *now bestowing the newly slain bodies upon the dry land, now enfolding them with eagerly returning counter-thrusts towards the receptive sea*<sup>174</sup>. During this time the crowd watched the disaster of the imperial family. It was a funeral show<sup>175</sup>. The heads were exposed in the Hebdomon, but, after a while, Phocas allowed their burial in the monastery of St. Mamas<sup>176</sup>. When Phocas fell, it was decided that his body should receive the treatment reserved for the most dangerous criminals. His body and those of his associates were taken to the Forum Bovis<sup>177</sup> and thrown into fire<sup>178</sup>.

During the following period, decapitation and the throwing of the bodies into the sea remained the standard procedure for *usurpers* or *tyrants*. This was also the fate of Leontius and Tiberius Apsimarus after Justinian II's restoration<sup>179</sup>. Justinian II was overthrown on November 4, 711 by Philippikos Vardan (711-713), who had him beheaded. His body was thrown into the sea and head was sent to be exposed in Rome and Ravenna<sup>180</sup>.

The practice of the body's total destruction was a pagan reminiscence and ceased to be used in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Even Leo V's horribly mutilated body was placed in a boat, together with his wife and four children, and sent to the island of Prote<sup>181</sup>, in Propontida, commonly destined for princely exile, where it was given a Christian burial<sup>182</sup>. Basil I (867-886) chose a final resting place, away from the public gaze, for his former protector, Michael III. Michael was buried in the monastery in Chrysopolis, near Constantinople, built by Philippikos, the brother-in-law of emperor Mauricius<sup>183</sup>. Isaac II Anghelos did not allow the burial of his rival, Andronicos I in the monastery of the Holy Forty Martyrs which the latter had restored<sup>184</sup>. After Andronicos' long ordeal, his body was pitched into one of the vaults of the Hippodrome, from where he was taken out of compassion by some citizens in the capital and buried in the Monastery of Ephoros<sup>185</sup>.

A special case was that of Nikephoros II Phokas. The assassinated emperor was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles, in the night, with no official funerals<sup>186</sup>. This was the compromise reached for the body of an emperor who had taken a series of controversial measures and whose image in the sources is a mixture of lights and shadows<sup>187</sup>. Sources and tradition did not recall him as rightfully punished tyrant, but rather as the victim his wife Theophano, who wanted to give the throne to her lover, John Tzimiskes<sup>188</sup>. Shortly after the assassination, Nikephoros' physical representations were destroyed. This *damnatio memoriae*<sup>189</sup> of the great general was however received by the posterity as a wrongful act<sup>190</sup>.

Despite this exception, usurpers and tyrants apparently never found their eternal peace *ad Sanctos* in Constantine the Great's mausoleum or in any major monastery in the capital. Their imperial victors took care to blacken their image and to keep their burial place as unknown as possible.

**A**T THE end of this study, which has aimed to provide an ideological lecture of the imperial death in Byzantium, the interdependence between the funeral ritual and the succession to the throne (two crossing moments whose meanings interfered and were transferred) is more than noticeable. The imperial funerals were the ultimate meeting of the monarchs with their people, who had the opportunity to express its feelings towards the late rulers<sup>191</sup>. Just



as these funerals had a typical format, which sought to exalt imperial power and its peaceful continuity, so there was an order of negative funeral rites (the feeling of chaos was only apparent). In such cases, however, every moment was an opposite progress of the formal ritual, as this reversal meant to impose an insurmountable barrier between subjects and the deceased emperors. At the same time, the non-legitimation of the former leaders by means of placing them on lowest rank of social organization, among criminals, created the impression of a gap between the former and the new monarch. From this point of view, the ritual of execution could have been seen as a sacrament by which the rulers strengthened their position by the symbolic rebirth of the state.

□

## Notes

1. George T. Dennis, 'Death in Byzantium', *DOP*, LV (2001), p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
3. Milton V. Anastos, 'Vox populi voluntas Dei and the election of Byzantine Emperor', in *Idem, Studies in Byzantine Intellectual History* (London), 1979, pp. 182-183.
4. Timothy E. Gregory, *Vox populi. A Popular Opinion and Violence in the Religious Controversies of the Fifth Century A.D.* (Columbus, 1979), pp. 220-223.
5. Helen Saradi, 'The Byzantine Tribunals: Problems in the Application of Justice and State Policy (9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> c.)', *REB*, LIII (1995), p. 70.
6. Jane Bishop, 'The Death Penalty in the Byzantine Empire', *ACIEB*, XVIII (1991 [1996]), 1, pp. 51-52.
7. O.E. Robinson, *Penal Practice and Penal Policy in Ancient Rome* (London-New York, 2007), p. 188.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-190.
9. Melissa Barden Dowling, *Clemency & Cruelty in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor, 2006), pp. 224-225.
10. Yann Rivière, *Le cachot et les fers. Détention et coercition à Rome* (Paris, 2004), pp. 141-142.
11. On the beheadings in Rome: Eva Cantarella, *Il supplizi capitali in Grecia e a Roma* (Milan, 1991), pp. 154-159.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-198. On crucifixion see also Cinzia Vismard, *Il supplizio come spettacolo* (Rome, 1990), pp. 21-25.
13. Cantarella, *Il supplizi capitali*, pp. 223-236.
14. Bishop, 'The Death Penalty', p. 52.
15. Robinson, *Penal Practice and Penal Policy*, p. 181.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
17. Bishop, 'The Death Penalty', pp. 53-54.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
19. Rivière, *Le cachot et les fers*, pp. 242-244.

20. Ibid., p. 245.
21. Dennis, 'Death in Byzantium', p. 7.
22. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London-Boston, 1991), p. 441.
23. Bishop, 'The Death Penalty', p. 54.
24. Ibid., p. 55-56.
25. Dennis, 'Death in Byzantium', p. 6.
26. The usurpers were those who used to pretend for themselves the signs of official power and the right to use seals and even issue money (Jean-Claude Cheynet, 'Official Power and Non-Official Power', in Idem, *Byzantine Aristocracy and its Military Function* (London, 2006), pp. 141-143).
27. Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity. Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 80-91.
28. Vismard, *Il supplizio come spettacolo*, p. 43.
29. Rivière, *Le cachot et les fers*, pp. 86-88.
30. Vismard, *Il supplizio come spettacolo*, p. 71.
31. John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London, 1999), p. 252.
32. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 186.
33. Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 137-138.
34. Jacques Le Goff, Nicolas Truong, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2003), pp. 56-60.
35. Giampiera Raina, 'Fisiognomica e bellezza nella cultura antica', in *Il corpo e lo sguardo. Tredici studi sulla visualità e la bellezza del corpo nella cultura antica (atti del seminario, Bologna 20-21 Novembre 2003)*, edited by Valerio Neri (Bologna, 2005), p. 53-65.
36. David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, politics, and power* (New Haven, 1989) (we have used the 2002 Romanian translation, here p. 17). On the importance of the ceremonial costume: Maria G. Parani, 'Cultural Identity and Dress: The Case of Late Byzantine Ceremonial Costume', *JÖB*, LVII (2007), pp. 95-134.
37. [Theophylact Simocatta], *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, edited by Michael and Mary Whitby (Oxford, 1986), VIII, 9/7, p. 223.
38. Pierre Goubert, 'Autour de la révolution de 602', *OCP*, XXXIII (1967), 2, p. 611.
39. Kertzer, *Ritual, politics, and power*, pp. 21-22.
40. Jean-Pierre Mohen, *Les rites de L'au-delà* (Paris, 1995), pp. 221-222.
41. Le Goff-Truong, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Âge*, pp. 144-145.
42. Panagiotis A. Agapitos, 'Public and private death in Psellos: Maria Skleraina and Styliane Psellaina', *BZ*, CI (2008), 2, pp. 556-607.
43. Patricia Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', *Byzantion*, LXI (1991), 1, p. 112.
44. Ibid., p. 113.
45. Elena Velkovska, 'Funeral Rites according to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources', *DOP*, LV (2001), p. 37.
46. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', p. 114.



47. Ibid., pp. 121-126.
48. Sergio Bertelli, *The King's body: sacred rituals of power in medieval and early modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 143. See also Giorgio Vespignani, 'Il cerimoniale imperial nel circo (secoli IV-VI). La iconografia nei dittici eburnei', *Bizantinistica*, NS, IV (2002), pp. 13-15.
49. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', p. 126.
50. A basileus could have been taken for a tyrant both by his opponents and the common people, as this status was perceived as opposed to the imperial legitimacy (J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)*, (Paris, 1990), p. 177). The violent mutiny was justified against those breaking legality by arbitrary government, but the opponents of imperial power had to prove that the ruler's actions also displeased God, as it was known that the supreme instance had an essential role in keeping the sovereignty (Ibid., p. 181).
51. David Le Breton, *Des visages. Essai d'anthropologie* (Paris, 2003), pp. 100-101.
52. Mohen, *Les rites de L'au-delà*, pp. 232-234.
53. Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 194-218.
54. Bertelli, *The King's body*, pp. 31-34.
55. Dawn Marie Hayes, *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe, 1100-1389* (New York-London, 2003), p. 21.
56. Raina, 'Fisiognomica e bellezza', pp. 62-63.
57. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, edited by Averil Cameron, Stuart G. Hall (Oxford, 1999), I, 19/2, p. 77, and III, 10/4, p. 125.
58. Ibid., IV, 53, p. 174.
59. Constance Head, 'Physical Descriptions of the Emperors in Byzantine Historical Writing', *Byzantion*, L (1980), 1, pp. 226-240.
60. For the whole progress of the events, see Andreas N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century, I (602-634)* (Amsterdam, 1968), pp. 40-53; Walter Emil Kaegi Jr., *Byzantine Military Unrest (471-843). An Interpretation* (Amsterdam, 1981), pp. 101-114; Franziska E. Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios (582-602). A Reassessment* (Athens, 1994), pp. 70-78.
61. Theophylact Simocatta is the most important source for Mauricius' reign, both because of the quality of the used sources it uses and because of the details of the narration. Theophanes used Theophylact for Mauricius' reign in an abridged form (L.M. Whitby, 'Theophanes' Chronicle source for the Reigns of Justin II, Tiberius and Maurice (A.D. 565-602)', *Byzantion*, III (1983), 1, pp. 314-319).
62. *Theophylact Simocatta*, VIII, 11/3-4, p. 227.
63. Ibid., 11/3.
64. Ibid., 11/5.
65. Ibid., 11/6.
66. Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival (780-842)* (Stanford, 1988), p. 223.
67. Ibid., p. 224.
68. P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Etudes sur les deux histoires du règne de Michel III', *Byzantion*, XLI (1971), pp. 452-496.

69. Jean Skylitzès, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, edited by Bernard Flusin, J.-C. Cheynet (Paris, 2003), 24, p. 100.
70. Albert Vogt, *Basile Ier empereur de Byzance (867-886) et la civilisation byzantine à la fin du IXe siècle* (Paris, 1908), pp. 41-42. See also Romilly Jenkins, *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries (AD 610-1071)* (London, 1966), p. 166.
71. Gustave Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin au dixième siècle: Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris, 1923<sup>2</sup>), pp. 624-627. On Nicephor II's assassination, see Jakov Ljubarskij, 'Nikephoros Phokas in Byzantine Historical Writings. Trace of the Secular Biography in Byzantium', *BSL*, LIV (1993), 2, pp. 245-253.
72. Rodolphe Guiland, 'Le Palais du Boukoléon. L'assassinat de Nicéphore II Phocas', *BSL*, XIII (1952-1953), pp. 133-136. See also Idem, 'Études sur le Grand Palais de Constantinople', *Byzantion*, XXXIV (1964), pp. 349-356.
73. Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin*, p. 627.
74. W.E. Kaegi, *Heraclios: Emperor of the Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 38-45.
75. Ibid., pp. 45-49.
76. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
77. Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short history*, edited by Cyril Mango (Washington, DC, 1990), 1, p. 37.
78. On Thomas the Slave's personality, see John Bagnell Bury, 'The identity of Thomas the Slavonian', *BZ*, I (1892), 1, pp. 55-60, and on his riot see Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, pp. 228-242.
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105. Gilbert Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974), pp. 93-95.
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107. *Eusebius*, IV, 67/3, p. 180.
108. Ernst Kantorowicz, *Les deux corps du roi*, in Idem, *Œuvres* (Paris, 2000), p. 867-880.
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110. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', p. 129.
111. Alain Ducellier, *La drame de Byzance. Idéal et échec ? une société chrétienne* (Paris, 1976), p. 152-160.
112. Janet L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in early medieval Europe* (London, 1986), p. 260.
113. Peter Charanis, 'Coronation and its Constitutional Significance in the Later Roman Empire', *Byzantion*, XV (1940-1941), p. 54.
114. *Chronicon Pascale (284-628 AD)*, edited by M. and M. Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), p. 142.
115. Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*, p. 75.
116. *Theophanes*, p. 428. According to one tradition, Heraclios had initially refused the imperial dignity, as Phocas had done before him. Apparently, this seems to have been a rather standardized gesture (*refusatio imperii*), turned into a ritual since the first century A.D. Acceptance only came after prolonged pressure (Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 90-91; Kaegi, *Heraclios*, p. 52).
117. *Genesios*, 1, 20, pp. 22-23.
118. Ibid., p. 23.
119. Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin*, p. 628.

120. *John Skylitzès*, 23, p. 236.
121. *Ibid.*, 2, p. 240.
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123. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', pp. 130-132.
124. Bertelli, *The King's body*, pp. 28-29.
125. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', p. 130.
126. Julia Burman, 'Death and Grief in Early Byzantine World', *Acta Byzantina Fennica*, I (2002), pp. 91-92; 96-97.
127. *Eusebius*, IV, 65/1, p. 179.
128. *Ibid.*, 65/3.
129. *Chronicon Pascale*, p. 152.
130. R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine. Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris, 1964<sup>2</sup>), pp. 59-62.
131. C. Mango, 'The Triumphal Way of Constantinople and the Golden Gate', *DOP*, LIV (2000), pp. 173-186.
132. *Genesios*, 1/13, pp. 16-17.
133. The Skyla gate was preferred because it connected the Sacred Palace to the Hippodrome. In fact, the Skyla gate was the main exit from the Great Palace, to the west side, towards the Hippodrome (Guilland, 'Études sur le Grand Palais', pp. 151-164).
134. *Genesios*, 1/21, p. 23.
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140. Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford, 2005), p. 246.
141. [Michael Psellos], *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers. The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, edited by E.R.A. Sewter (London, 1966), I/17, p. 37.
142. Michel Attaliatés, *Histoire*, translated into French by Henri Grégoire, in *Byzantion*, XXVIII (1958), VIII pp. 335-336.
143. *Michael Psellos*, VI/85, p. 197.
144. *Ibid.*, 86, p. 101.
145. Siméon Vailhé, 'Exécution de l'empereur Maurice a Calimach en 602', *EdO*, XIII (1910), p. 207.
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148. Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V with particular attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain, 1977), p. 20.
149. *Theophanes*, p. 581; Guilland, 'Études sur le Grand Palais', pp. 510-514.
150. R. Janin, 'Les processions religieuses a Byzance', *REB*, XXIV (1966), pp. 69-88.
151. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', pp. 132-134.
152. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-139.



153. Ibid., p. 134.
154. Ibid., p. 135.
155. Ibid., p. 136.
156. Nicholas Constatas, 'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream: The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature', *DOP*, LV (2001), p. 98.
157. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', pp. 137-139.
158. *John Skylitzès*, 23, p. 236.
159. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', pp. 141-142.
160. Glanville Downey, 'The Tombs of the Byzantine Emperors at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople', *JHS*, LXXIX (1959), pp. 27-51.
161. Empress Theophano, the first wife of emperor Leo VI (886-912), chose to found her own necropolis (P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La mort de Théophano (10. 11. 896 ou 895)', *BZ*, LXII (1969), 1, pp. 13-19; Georg P. Majeska, 'The Body of St. Theophano the Empress and Convent of St. Constantine', *BSL*, XXXVIII (1977), 1, pp. 14-21).
162. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', pp. 118-119.
163. C. Mango, 'Constantine's Mausoleum and Translation of Relics' *BZ*, LX XXIII (1990), 1, pp. 56-60.
164. Mark J. Johnson, 'On the Burial Places of the Theodosian Dynasty', *Byzantion*, LXI (1991), 2, p. 330.
165. Ibid., pp. 332-333.
166. Ibid., p. 334.
167. Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 278-280. See also A.S. Fotiou, 'Byzantine Circus Factions and their Riots', *JOB*, XXVII (1978), pp. 6-9.
168. Brian Croke, *Justinian's Constantinople*, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Vaas (Cambridge, 2007), p. 66.
169. Alan Cameron, 'The House of Anastasius', *GRBS*, XIX (1978), 3, pp. 259-263.
170. Procopius of Caesarea spread the idea that, urged by his wife Theodora, the emperor decided to take action against the Nika riot, but this episode remains controversial (J.A.S. Evans, 'The Nika Rebellion and the Empress Theodora', *Byzantion*, LIV (1984), 1, pp. 380-382).
171. Gregory, *Vox populi*, p. 30.
172. [Evagrius Scholasticus], *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, edited by Michael Whitby (Liverpool, 2000), IV/13, p. 213.
173. *Chronicon Pascale*, p. 126.
174. *Theophylact Simocatta*, VIII, 12/1, p. 228.
175. Ibid., 12/2.
176. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, p. 53.
177. On this public place, reserved for the executions of criminals by burning at the stake, see R. Janin, 'Du Forum Bovis au Forum Tauri. Étude de topographie', *REB*, XIII (1955), pp. 85-108.
178. *Nikephoros*, 1, p. 37.
179. *Theophanes*, p. 523.

180. Head, *Justinian II of Byzantium*, p. 148. See also Graham V. Summer, 'Philippicus, Anastasius II and Theodosius III', *GRBS*, XVII (1976), 3, p. 287; Treadgold, *Seven Byzantine Revolutions*, p. 216.
181. On this island and its use as a place of exile place, see R. Janin, 'Les Iles des Princes. Étude historique et topographie', *EdO*, XXIII (1924), p. 416.
182. *Genesios*, 1/21, p. 23.
183. Downey, 'The Tombs of the Byzantine Emperors', p. 34.
184. Rudolf H. W. Stichel, 'Ein Byzantinischer Kaiser als Sensenmann? Kaiser Andronikos I. Komnenos und die Kirche der 40 Märtyrer in Konstantinopel', *BZ*, XCIII (2000), 2, pp. 586-608.
185. *Niketas Choniates*, p. 194.
186. *John Skylitzès*, 23, p. 236.
187. See, in detail, Rosemary Morris, 'The two faces of Nikephoros Phocas', *BMGS*, XII (1988), pp. 83-111.
188. *Ibid.*, p. 93 (note 37).
189. Calliope A. Bourdara, 'Quelques cas de *damnatio memoriae* à l'époque de la dynastie Macédonienne', *JÖB*, XXXII (1982), 2 (= *ACIEB*, XVI (1981), 2), pp. 338-339.
190. See the echoes of this image in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Slavonic poem *Le dit de l'empereur Nicéphore II Phocas et de son épouse Théophano*, edited by Emil Turdeanu (Thessalonique, 1976).
191. Karlin-Hayter, 'L'adieu à l'empereur', p. 114.

### **Abstract**

#### Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals

The testimonies of Byzantine chroniclers suggest that the number of emperors facing a violent death was greater than those whose end occurred as a result of natural causes. According to statistics, among the 88 sovereigns who ruled, as main monarchs or associates, 37 went in silence, 3 lost their lives in accidents, 5 perished in battles, 30 died due to other forms of violence and 13 were forced to retreat to monasteries. The brutal death of the sovereigns was a reality that must be analyzed starting from the specific ways of ending life in Middle Ages and namely in Byzantium.

### **Keywords**

Byzantium, imperial death, negative funerals, violent deaths, East