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Błażej M. Stanisławski – Konrad K. Szymański, Rusowie w Konstantynopolu "u świętego Mamy". Kraków: Avalon 2023. 448 pp. – ISBN 978-83-7730-625-3

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The question of where the Rus' resided during their stays in Constantinople has occupied Byzantinists, Slavists, and archaeologists for well over a century. The Rus'-Byzantine treaties of the tenth century, preserved in the *Primary Chronicle* (Повѣсть времѧньныхъ лѣтъ), stipulate that Rus' merchants and envoys were to be quartered at or near St. Mamas, outside the city walls. Yet despite this seemingly clear textual indication, the precise location of this monastery – and by extension, of the Rus' quarter – has remained disputed. Stanisławski and Szymański take up this old problem with an interdisciplinary approach that draws on written sources, hagiographic evidence, onomastics, historical topography, and archaeology. The result is a substantial monograph including a rich array of illustrations and maps. Summaries in English, Russian, and Ukrainian make the principal arguments accessible to non-Polish-speaking readers.

The book opens with a substantial prefatory essay by Aleksander Musin, who frames the study within the broader context of Rus'-Byzantine relations and the persistent shadow of the Normanist vs. anti-Normanist debate. Its placement before the authors' own text is somewhat unusual, since Musin's contribution reads less like a conventional foreword than like an independent historiographical intervention. He repeatedly cautions against overly direct identifications, especially where literary testimony, cult topography, and archaeological evidence do not neatly coincide. The authors themselves address the same historiographical field in their introduction, distancing themselves from ideologically motivated positions and declaring their intent to follow the evidence wherever it leads. This programmatic statement is welcome, though the book's conclusions remain, at some points, in discernible tension with the historiographical field from which they seek to distance themselves.

The first two chapters provide the historical and conceptual background of the study. Chapter 1 reconstructs the wider context of contacts between Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and Byzantium and discusses the problem of

Rus' identity against the background of the Normanist and anti-Normanist debate. It surveys the main routes linking the northern world with Byzantium, above all the route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks', and follows the development of Rus'-Byzantine relations from the earliest attestations in the *Annales Bertiniani* (839) and the homilies of Photios (860), through the expeditions and treaties of the tenth century, to Olga's visit to Constantinople, the baptism of Volodimir, military service in Byzantium, and the longer religious and cultural entanglements that connected Rus' with East Rome. Chapter 2 then formulates the actual topographical problem: it examines the treaty references to St. Mamas and St. Elias, surveys the cult of St. Mamas and its sanctuaries in and around Constantinople, discusses the Byzantine administrative framework governing the stay of foreign merchants and envoys in the capital, and reviews the principal localisation hypotheses advanced in earlier scholarship, especially those connected with the Blachernae/Eyüp area, the Bosphorus district of St. Mamas near Beşiktaş, and the monastery of St. Mamas at the Xylokerkos gate.

Chapter 3 turns to the material evidence for contacts between Byzantium and Eastern Europe/Scandinavia. Here the authors catalogue Byzantine imports and other cultural elements attested in Rus' territories and Scandinavia and, conversely, traces of northern presence in Constantinopolitan and wider Byzantine contexts.

Chapter 4, devoted to the cult of St. Mamas, constitutes one of the volume's most substantial contributions. The authors compile a corpus of seventy-three written testimonies and identify three distinct cult sites in and around Constantinople: the suburban district (προάστειον) on the Bosphorus, a monastery at Xylokerkos near the land walls, and the church, perhaps also a monastery, in the τὰ Δαρείου quarter. Their diachronic survey follows the history of these centres from Late Antiquity to the fifteenth century and traces shifts in their prominence across the Byzantine period, from the earliest imperial patronage and the middle Byzantine florescence to the disruptions of the Latin period and the transformations of the Palaiologan and early Ottoman age. Particular attention is given to late evidence, including the Ottoman register entry 'Sivastokrator Mamas', which the authors treat as an important indication for the continued memory, and possibly the continued existence, of a Mamas-related monastic site into the final period of Byzantine Constantinople.

Chapter 5 complements the hagiographic and textual evidence with onomastic and material data. The authors discuss the 'Ayamama Deresi' ('St.

Mamas River') and its documentation in Ottoman registers, historical maps, and modern cartography. They review a series of archaeological remains recorded in the same area, including an ἁγίασμα, bridge remains, inscribed stone stelae, a stone sarcophagus, and traces of a monumental building. Particular attention is given to Byzantine bricks stamped +MA|MA+, especially the largest known concentration from the Firuzköy peninsula near Lake Küçükçekmece. STANISŁAWSKI and SZYMAŃSKI treat these finds as important material markers of a Mamas-related cultic or institutional context, but do not regard them as self-sufficient proof of the monastery itself.

Chapter 6 examines the cult of the prophet Elias in Constantinople and its connection to the Rus', as documented in the treaty of 944, where the baptised Rus' swore their oath in the church of St. Elias. The authors survey eight Elias cult sites in and around Constantinople and ask whether any of them can serve as a secondary topographical clue for locating the Rus' quarters. Particular consideration is given to OLEKSIJ TOLOCHKO's hypothesis that the oath site should be identified with the oratory of St. Elias in Basil I's New Church (Νέα Ἐκκλησία). The authors present this suggestion as plausible and carefully argued, but refrain from accepting it as decisive.

The culminating Chapter 7 brings the preceding lines of argument together and offers the book's synthetic discussion of the localisation problem. The authors approach it from three research perspectives: written sources, material and onomastic evidence, and Byzantine material culture attested on Rus' territory. Within the second of these perspectives, the analysis of the Küçükçekmece lake basin and the Firuzköy peninsula as part of a major extra-mural port complex forms the lynchpin of the argument. The authors reconstruct a broader spatial-settlement structure along the terminal section of the Via Egnatia, running from Küçükçekmece through the Hebdomon toward the Golden Gate and the Xylokerkos area, and treat this zone as a plausible setting for the accommodation and controlled reception of foreign groups, including the Rus'. To support this reconstruction, they draw on institutional analogies from Rome – *scholae*, *diaconiae*, and *xenodochia* – suggesting that comparable forms of reception infrastructure may have existed in the approaches to Constantinople. Archaeological finds from Firuzköy, including +MA|MA+ stamped bricks, imported ceramics, and a small number of artefacts of northern or eastern European provenance, are adduced as supporting evidence. Among them is a small amber cross pendant of a type attested in Eastern European contexts. Its significance lies in the combination of material and distribution: amber points to northern

exchange networks, while comparable cross pendants are particularly well attested in Rus' contexts and are generally associated with the spread of Byzantine Christianity. Together with a bronze belt divider decorated with an intertwined snake motif, this object is used to suggest that the Firuzköy complex may have been frequented by groups connected with the northern and eastern European world.

In section 7.3, the authors shift perspective once more and consider whether the distribution of Byzantine cultural elements on Rus' territory may point back to a more specific urban context in Constantinople. In this connection, they return to the quarter around the Myrelaion in Region VIII, between the Mese and the Sea of Marmara near the Port of Theodosios. This area of the city combined commercial infrastructure, hospitable and charitable institutions, and cult sites associated with both St. Mamas and St. Elias. On that basis, STANISŁAWSKI and SZYMAŃSKI suggest that the wider Myrelaion/τὰ Δαρείου area may have been one of the urban zones through which Byzantine models were mediated to Rus', and possibly also one of the spaces associated with Rus' presence in the capital. At the same time, they acknowledge that this line of argument sits uneasily with the treaty tradition as transmitted in the *Primary Chronicle*, which places the Rus' lodging outside the city walls.

A particularly interesting aspect of Chapter 7 concerns the material evidence for Rus'-Byzantine exchange. The authors argue – drawing in particular on THOMAS NOONAN and KIRYŁ MICHAJŁOW – that the scale of commercial contact between the Rus' and Byzantium in the ninth and especially the tenth century has likely been overstated in modern scholarship, in part under the influence of the treaty narrative and its later historiographical reception. The number of Byzantine coin finds from this period on Rus' territory is strikingly low when set against the very large quantities of oriental silver. The authors therefore suggest that early contacts with Byzantium may often have been diplomatic or symbolic rather than commercial in a strict sense, and that some high-status Byzantine objects, especially textiles, may have reached Rus' as imperial gifts rather than through regular trade. This argument is carefully constructed, even if one might have wished for a fuller engagement with possible objections.

Several strengths of the monograph deserve emphasis. The compilation of seventy-three written testimonies preserved in a wide range of languages, including Greek, Latin, Church Slavonic, Old East Slavic, Syriac, and Arabic for the cult of St. Mamas is a valuable contribution in its own right. The

systematic distinction between three separate cult sites clarifies a confusing topographic situation that has complicated earlier scholarship. The discussion of the Küçükçekmece/Firuzköy complex and of the terminal section of the Via Egnatia opens productive perspectives for further work on those aspects of Constantinople's extra-mural and suburban infrastructure that remain comparatively underexplored,[1] especially the interaction of ports, roads, and reception spaces. Equally stimulating is the authors' reassessment of ninth- and tenth-century Rus'-Byzantine exchange. Their sober reading of the material evidence usefully challenges reconstructions that have relied too directly on the narrative logic of the *Primary Chronicle*. At the same time, it brings into sharper focus the discrepancy between the picture offered by the written sources and that suggested by the material record.

Certain aspects of the argument, however, invite scrutiny. The localisation of the Rus' quarter remains, in the end, a hypothesis supported by converging circumstantial evidence. The +MA|MA+ stamped bricks are suggestive, but do not in themselves prove that the monastery of St. Mamas was located at Firuzköy. The archaeological evidence from Firuzköy is limited, and the northern or eastern European artefacts found there, including the amber cross pendant and the bronze belt divider, may admit of different interpretations. The authors are generally careful in their formulations, but the cumulative force of the overall reconstruction occasionally exceeds the probative value of the individual pieces of evidence.

The relationship between the Küçükçekmece/Firuzköy model and the Myrelaion/Region VIII model remains somewhat difficult to grasp. In the final synthesis, both appear as meaningful spatial contexts for Rus' presence or for the mediation of Byzantine influence, but the book does not fully clarify how these proposals relate to one another, whether chronologically, functionally, or socially. A more explicit discussion of whether the authors envisage a single fixed location, several coexisting loci, or a shifting geography of Rus' accommodation over time would have strengthened the concluding argument. This difficulty becomes especially clear in the case of

1. For the still uneven state of research on the rural and extra-urban landscape of Byzantine Thrace, see Georgios Makris – Fotini Kondyli, The Archaeology of Byzantine Thrace: The State of Research (2015–2025) and Future Directions. Archaeological Reports 71 (2025) pp. 87–104, here 99, 102, who explicitly acknowledge the importance of Stanisławski and Aydingün's work on the Firuzköy/Küçükçekmece complex as a significant contribution to current research on Byzantine port landscapes and waterscapes (94–96).

Anthony of Novgorod, who mentions a cult site of St. Mamas in the southwestern part of the city, but does not specifically identify it with a Rus' quarter. Instead – and in accordance with the Constantinople *Synaxarion*, as STANISŁAWSKI and SZYMAŃSKI mention (p. 219) – he explicitly names a Rus' quarter in 'Ispigas' (Πηγαί) on the opposite side of the Golden Horn (Kasimpaşa). However, his testimony belongs to a period more than two centuries removed from the treaties preserved in the *Primary Chronicle*.[2] By that time, the topography of Rus' presence in Constantinople may have shifted. This does not invalidate the authors' reconstruction, but it does raise the question of how far later cult topography and later Rus' itineraries can be used to reconstruct the spatial arrangements of the tenth century.[3]

Finally, the book's position within the broader historiography could have been articulated more explicitly. Its scepticism towards large-scale ninth- and tenth-century Rus'-Byzantine trade, and its emphasis on diplomatic, symbolic, and episodic forms of contact, clearly distance it from models that assume dense and continuous commercial exchange. This is not in itself a weakness; on the contrary, the material record does justify a more cautious assessment. Even so, the authors might have defined more precisely how their conclusions relate to the wider historiographical spectrum in which the Normanist/anti-Normanist controversy has long shaped discussion of the Rus'.

While I consider it bad form to detain the reader with a catalogue of typographical slips – *de minimis non curat lex* – one bibliographical error ought to be noted, since no obvious correction suggests itself: p. 28n.65 refers to p. 40 of LOPAREV, a page that does not exist in the cited publication. This could perhaps be corrected in a future edition, which I very much hope the authors will have occasion to prepare.

STANISŁAWSKI and SZYMAŃSKI have produced a substantial and meticu-

2. At the same time, however, one is also mindful of MUSIN's caveat, that the *Primary Chronicle* does not, in fact, connect the presence of the Rus' in Constantinople with the cult of St. Mamas, but merely records their stay in the vicinity of the saint's cult site. The link between the place of their accommodation and the veneration of the saint is, as MUSIN argues, a construction found only in the work of modern historians, not a conclusion warranted by the source itself (pp. 33–34).

3. In this connection, one might also have wished for a discussion of the enigmatic Mačuk monastery mentioned by Anthony: see ANNA JOURAVEL, Die *Kniga palomnik* des Antonij von Novgorod (Imagines medii aevi 47). Wiesbaden 2019, pp. 220–221. ALBRECHT BERGER identified it with the St. Mamas monastery in the southwestern part of the city: see his Untersuchungen zu den *Patria Konstantinupoleos* (Poikila Byzantina 8). Bonn 1988, pp. 697, 703.

lously researched contribution to the study of Rus'-Byzantine relations and the historical topography of Constantinople. The book brings together textual, hagiographic, onomastic, and archaeological evidence in a way that advances the discussion considerably, even where the conclusions remain provisional. It yields a more differentiated picture both of Constantinople's topography and of the social, cultural, and economic relations that linked Rus' and Byzantium. By reconstructing a multifaceted field of contacts, it adds a salutary degree of complexity to a problem too often flattened by the search for straightforward answers. It will be of clear value to specialists working on the Rus' presence in Constantinople, the cult of St. Mamas, and the suburban landscape of the Byzantine capital.

Keywords

Rus'-Byzantine relations; Constantinople; St. Mamas; historical topography; Varangians